

# Dissolves: *Terra Lucida* IV-VIII

## Joseph Donahue

(Talisman House, 2012)



*Mark Scroggins*

“Dissolves” is of course a verb, what the Alka-Seltzer does in the glass of water, releasing its dancing effervescence; but, as we might be reminded by director Stanley Kubrick’s brief walk-on in Joseph Donahue’s latest book, it’s also a noun: a kind of cinematic transition—from image to image, scene to scene, perspective to perspective. One’s grounds are continually dissolving & reforming in this latest installment of Donahue’s serial poem *Terra Lucida* (serial: think Duncan’s *Passages*, Mackey’s *Song of the Andoumboulou*, Finkelstein’s *Track*); we find our surroundings & perspectives anew from poem to poem, from one section of a poem to the next.

What is constant, as we move among the gnostic glitterings of the poem—for it is gnosis, in the end, that renders Donahue’s world lucid—moving between religious vocabularies, treasure-houses of scripture & ritual—Islamic, Jewish, Roman Catholic—moving from waking lucidity to keenly-etched dreamspace (there are number of dream-poems here, aislings as it were)—what is constant is Donahue’s 2-line form, a kind of ground-bass of plangent music, here evoking Mackey, there evoking Taggart, always paying homage to H.D.

The sheer material here is hard for me to take: among other things, the death of a mother (still) touches me too close for

commentary. But the magnificent image that follows the moment of that death, the drowned cathedral drawn from Debussy's *C athedral engloutie*, is nothing short of mesmerizing, haunting, especially in its climax, when the waters rise to the level of the ciborium and the Host itself is—yes—dissolved. It is dissolved, a post-gnostic might say, into countless shards & atoms of bright divinity, embedded in each of us—making the world in which we live, move, & read, one terra lucida.