

# ATTIC SHAPES AND EMPTY ATTICS

*Patrick Anderson — A Memoir*

*Patrick Campbell*

“I rose politely in the club  
And said, ‘I feel a little bored  
Will someone take me to . . . a pub?’”

**T**HE SPEAKER IS G. K. CHESTERTON, not P. Anderson. Yet it reminds me irresistibly of Patrick. Not just because pubs were, for him, indispensable institutions but because we first met socially in a Bloomsbury hostelry called “The Duke of Marlborough” where he had asked me to join him. It was the winter of 1962. Patrick was only an occasional migrant there, preferring the nearby watering holes of a Fitzrovia still haunted by the ghost of Dylan Thomas. But “The Marlborough” was a convenient rendezvous — apparently within walking distance for Patrick and just down the road from the British Museum where I was embattled with a thesis.

I was keen to meet him informally not because I knew much about his books — I didn’t — but because I had just secured a lecturing post at Trent Park College where Patrick was deputy head of the English Department. There someone had confidentially ventured the opinion that Patrick could be “unpredictable,” and I was in vigorous agreement after an interview in which he asked me, with much arching of bushy eyebrows, what I understood by “baroque.” Over the years I learnt that “baroque” was one of his “buzz” words, embracing everything from Rococo architecture, Bach concertos, grandiloquent lectures and highly ornamented prose. But in the interrogation cell of the interview room the word had come like a bolt from the blue and panicked me into jibbering confusion. Anyway, here he was “at home” surrounded by clouds of smoke and an audience of actors and students; holding forth in an elegant upper-class drawl punctuated by the odd short vowel that hinted at a transatlantic experience. Everyone took turns to buy

Patrick a pint of bitter — that seemed to be an unspoken house rule — and his own final ritualistic gesture before “Time, Gentlemen Please” was to ask the barman to fill a large willow-pattern jug with draught beer so selected invitees could continue the conviviality at his place.

There the compulsive process of self-exposure was enacted for the first of many times, warts and all. It didn’t seem to matter that we had only just met. The talk was of his beloved mother, so convinced of her son’s genius she had written to headmasters declaring with utter conviction “my son is a poet”; his sadistic beatings from one such sinister and lisping head (“Anderson, take your twousers down”); his gilded youth at Oxford where as an undergraduate he had reached the heights of President of the Union (“with Ted Heath my unpaid secretary”), just missed the Newdigate Prize for poetry, spent an evening as host to Winston Churchill, flirted with left-wing politics, been awarded a Commonwealth Fellowship at Columbia University, and helped found two influential literary magazines in Canada. He also regaled us with details of last summer’s cataclysmic trip to Greece with the Grand Dame of Movement Studies at college, a lady of Wagnerian proportions and voice who had deserted the cultural caravanserai for a village post-master in Thessaloniki. There were tales of lethal riots and narrow escapes in Singapore, a near-arrest for innocent exposure in Montreal. Dark undertones pervaded stories of boys in Alexandria and gypsies in Granada, scandal about Maurice Forster, Wystan Auden, Dylan Thomas, and the painter Francis Bacon, with all of whom Patrick was apparently on first-name terms. These Rabelaisian confessions reverberated round a basement flat “on the fringes of Soho” with walls the colour of tobacco stained fingers and whose impedimenta is catalogued in *The Character Ball*’s opening tale: “. . . the brocaded curtains . . . the studio couch untidy with cushions . . . the Regency chair, mirrors and ornaments, the papers on the table where I had been writing . . . the marquetry table stranded between the electric fire and the studio couch.”<sup>1</sup> On that same couch cross-legged and bare-footed, sat Patrick’s companion, Orlando, impassive and Buddha-like, only interrupting in a gravelly voice when Patrick’s flights of fancy left “terra firma” far behind.

I have probably amalgamated a number of Andersonian soirées in this description. Twenty-five years can play tricks on the memory. But even if these stories had a habit of resurfacing on different occasions, such was the skill of the raconteur that we always greeted them like old friends.

**M**ANY OF THESE VERBAL SALLIES were about his adventures abroad. Stories of Greece predominated but he could wax equally eloquent about the “menus gastronomiques” of France or El Greco’s Toledo. This apparently insatiable appetite for travel and for writing about it was a life-long preoccu-

pation, and perhaps in the final analysis Patrick's accounts of these perambulations may stand as his major literary achievement. In *Snake Wine* he had already written about Malaya, and as he was later to say he would be "almost ritualistically putting passages about Canada into every prose book where they were at all possible."<sup>2</sup> That very year, 1962, had seen the publication of *Dolphin Days*, a "sun-drunk book" about a physical and literary journey from Venice to Athens. It focused on the contrasting personalities of Ruskin and Byron and as the prefatory note states, "was written on a wave of excitement after my second summer in Greece in 1958, and re-written hardly less excitedly during the next two years after further visits."<sup>3</sup> *A Literary Companion to Greek Travel* was in galleys and was to appear in 1964 as *The Smile of Apollo*, a work in which he had been "careful, sober and formally academic."<sup>4</sup> Certainly the range of literary allusion was vast. I know because I handled the copyright clearances.

In a very real sense Patrick undertook these European sojourns in the spirit of "The Grand Tour," an Englishman's response to the Mediterranean "genius loci." He felt that in recording his experiences, exploring his own personality and digging up literary cadavers "en route" he was continuing the tradition of those celebrated forebears. Indeed later Patrick was to write *Over the Alps* (1969) in celebration of the peregrinations of Boswell, Beckford, and Byron. It is a typically rich blend of erudition and personal soul-searching, but his emerging capacity to empathize with his subjects is in evidence from the initial skirmish when he takes us back to Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray as they embark in "The Grand Tour" in 1739. Not that Patrick's own personality is long absent from the action. Travel was for him not just a procedure for getting from place to place, or from present to past; it was a means and a metaphor for self-discovery. Everywhere the book is illuminated by passages in which a twentieth-century sensibility confronts its own obsession with the quest:

Travel can be a kind of second life freed from routine and the compromises it necessitates, having shed a good deal of responsibility and perhaps acquired rather grander spending-habits than are normal at home, the traveller assumes a less inhibited and even a hazardously free personality. He is, after all, out for experience, which can scarcely be said of his daily trips to the office; and the experience he lays himself open to may contain elements rarely present in his ordinary life.<sup>5</sup>

In a conscious autobiographical aside on the same topic Patrick averred that

Travel has, I think influenced most of the stages of my life, for I have spent something like sixteen years away from England, in Russia as a baby, in the United States and Canada at the beginning of manhood, in the Far East in my early thirties, and exploring Southern Europe, especially Greece, with approaching middle age. . . . I go towards and across the Alps in search of the beautiful, curious and diverting. . . . I enjoy looking at buildings and their embellishments of sculpture and painting, although I prefer my works of art in an organic setting (church or palace, courtyards, gardens, townscape) rather than in an [*sic*] museum or art gallery. . . . I do like,

above all, to be hammered and dazed and intoxicated into sensuous animal life by a really strong sun.<sup>6</sup>

Less dramatic but more enduring, Patrick had, in 1964, undertaken a shorter but more significant journey — this time on a one-way ticket. He and Orlando had decided to forsake the Gosfield Street basement for what they hoped would be the bucolic pleasures of a home in the East Anglian countryside. For weeks they went on reconnaissance patrols in his ancient blue Bedford van to the “green belt” beyond the metropolis and every Monday brought new tales of desirable properties and not so desirable estate agents. It is worth speculating why this complex man decided on such a drastic step. Certainly, Orlando’s love of gardening (“a passionate but frustrated gardener”) had rubbed off on Patrick. And Orlando’s enthusiasm had run not only to stealing “old suitcases of soil from Fitzroy Square” but, even more improbably, to scampering from the van to scoop up horse droppings, dust-pan style, in *The Guardian* newspaper, all in an effort to turn “the grey-black area outside the kitchen” in that Soho basement “into a nest of green.”<sup>7</sup> Orlando’s talents needed to burgeon away from the sour soil and polluted air of canyon-like Gosfield Street.

There were other more personal if less paraded reasons. It was at this age that Patrick’s hero-poet Yeats had purchased his only piece of real estate, Thoor Ballylee, and in like fashion Patrick saw some symbolic and mythic significance in an artist’s acquisition of a rural fortress. Yeats’s rather grand feelings on the subject might have been secretly shared by our hero. “I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible by the passers-by. As you know, all my art theories depend upon just this — rooting of mythology in the earth.”<sup>8</sup> More obviously Patrick undoubtedly fancied playing the part of the country squire, all tweeds and bonhomie as he visualized himself quaffing pints with admiring farmhands in his local pub. And, at the very least, such a permanent dwelling would provide a dignified retreat for approaching old age, a quiet place for study and a repository for all those “objets d’art.”

Twenty-three houses later he chose a small and somewhat unprepossessing cottage in mid-Essex, remote by the standards of our tight little island and fully four hours’ drive out and back from London. It was on sale for the princely sum of £600. By a strange irony, the name of the village was Gosfield — the same name as the London street he was about to leave. To stave off the prospect of an irksome journey by decrepit van, he bought an Austin Mini.

Once installed Patrick started to stamp his image on the interior with his customary enthusiasm, while Orlando tackled the tangle of roses and thickets of elder in “that battlefield of a garden.” But it is through Patrick’s prose that the house leaps into view both before and after its transformation, at first a near derelict cottage of white painted lath and plaster, “like the ideogram of a house, three

windows on top, two below with a door between them very small and upright, very taut and even prim. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

Eight years on when Patrick had created his own little Arcadia, he described the transformation of man and mansion in loving detail as he concluded. There was, he said, now an “incredulous joy of possession” for a man “who never had a proper bedroom upstairs from 1938 to 1963.” How, he asked, could

such a houseless, rootless, stairless creature — slave of the bedsitter, occupant of the promiscuous studio couch — actually own this small sedate-seeming house which on entrance turns out to have its share of curiosities and extravagances, strange colours (doors recently of violet smoke), exotic objects (fetishes, cherubs), intriguing, bewildering and shameless smells, not to speak of walls of books, a few fair paintings, some furniture of classical austerity.<sup>10</sup>

Of course the tone *is* a bit smug, as Patrick admitted when describing his “self-satisfaction” at tending a garden of nearly one thousand varieties of plant. But the passage demonstrates his catholicity of taste; his absorption in all the senses (especially, like Orwell, in smells) and his magpie instincts for collecting bizarre bric-à-brac. Here Patrick was “at home” in a fuller sense than before, nurturing the late flowering of both garden and talent. Titles of poems such as “On Buying London Paving Stones For The Garden,” “The Cupboard” with its reference to “my house so precise and thin,” “Advice to Visitors” and “An Essex Lake” would later announce themselves as products of his Essex maturity.

But one aspect of this rural idyll could not have been predicted — a sudden consuming interest in wild animals. Those “intriguing, bewildering and shameless smells” emanated from a menagerie of creatures, owls, a rabbit, hedgehogs and jackdaws, in temporary residence, but above all from the more or less permanent inmates — two ferrets and, at different times, three foxes. If they rarely put in an appearance, they certainly let you know they were there! In the distant past, Patrick had kept a pet gibbon “like a fur pear”<sup>11</sup> in Malaya and a magpie in Dudley, but the scale of this enthusiasm made one speculate that these new friendships were born of a growing disenchantment with humankind. It was undeniable that Patrick now sometimes wore the new mask of recluse and as he lurched towards his sixtieth year, those four arduous hours of stop-start driving cramped into a Mini increased his reluctance to continue in the ranks of Auden’s “dense commuters.”

So while *Foxed* is replete with fresh observations about the countryside, a naïve townie’s response to the natural world, it is also clear that the book hints at a deliberate policy of splendid isolation, a conscious withdrawal into a world of plants, animals and one trusted human being.

If I have referred to *Foxed* in some detail, it is also because I warm to its homely charms, because it became the quarry for quite a lot of late poems and because it was conceived, gestated and born during the years of our academic co-operation

and friendship. The book was in fact published by Chatto and Windus a mere three-and-a-half years before Patrick retired from Trent Park.

I HAVE BARELY MENTIONED Patrick's Trent Park role as teacher and educator, but that does not imply that it was in any way unremarkable. Until he grew disillusioned, he ran his show with great *éclat*, especially once he became Head of Department. Impatient of the minutiae of administration or the tedium of committees, he conceived his role as that of leader by example, inspirer and enspiriter. He was the head prefect, we were the sub-prefects and the students school boys and girls of varying levels of maturity and promise. Some disciples were worth saving, others emphatically were not. Written exhortations were delivered like salvos when he sensed morale was slipping, or we just needed a kick up the backside. The analogy with Auden and his acolytes in the thirties — Spender, Day Lewis and company — is hard to resist. I am sure it occurred to Patrick, whose manners were becoming increasingly Audenesque and whose face was developing a striking resemblance to that “wedding cake left out in the rain.”

One manifestation of this paternalism was an oft-expressed wish to listen to and join in other tutor's seminars. Surprise arrivals in class were not unknown. I recall glancing up one day while delivering an obviously tedious lecture on Conrad to see Patrick, head on desk and conspicuously asleep in the back row. He could upstage people unmercifully. Lead-off man in a joint lecturing enterprise with me, he repeatedly referred, in passing, to matters which he assured his audience I would be dealing with expertly and exhaustively. Needless to say, I was not expecting to deal with these points at all. He was capable of withering one-liners and short, sharp character assassinations. A world-famous professor who incurred Patrick's disdain by confiding that “footnotes were his favourite reading” became “that little Sealyham of a man”; one colleague was “corduroyed and colourless.” It is a pity that this sardonic wit does not sparkle more often in the poetry. “Among the Progressives,”<sup>12</sup> a trenchant satire on the jargon-ridden conversation of his fellow educators was about as far as he would venture in this direction.

More often the written cannonades took the form of confidential instructions to the troops. One such salvo was fired across the bows on 1 July 1970. It was entitled “A Message to My Colleagues” and encapsulated most of Patrick's aims and achievements as a teacher of literature. One of his own verdicts on himself, it began: “I have always wanted us to be open and copious in our discussion of books, plays, poems and the ways of teaching them.” This, from first to last remained a cardinal point of the Anderson creed and in my view an utterly laudable one. Literature was Patrick's life — or most of it — and he expected us to be voracious readers, writers and talkers. In this he led by example, but it was a hard act to

follow. He went on to urge the development of “written focal points for discussion,” a department document “where we should be challenged to set down our ideas on language, poetry and so on, and to attempt practical criticism like our students.”<sup>13</sup>

In this last context, I still possess a whole series of critical analyses of unattributed poems which we wrote and discussed à la I. A. Richards at departmental meetings. He was invariably keen to generate an atmosphere of intellectual enquiry and was anxious that the rest of the institution should be aware of it. Under the heading “The Department and the College,” he referred to two Anderson-inspired displays in the foyer — one on “The Greeks,” one on “Autobiography” — and the promotion of successful meetings with such writers as the playwright Arnold Wesker and the poet Ted Hughes. Elsewhere he spoke of his influence on a college magazine and the appearance of *New Obelisk* poetry “with its quite unusual mingling of the work of staff and students and the real seriousness and scholarship of some of its contributions.”<sup>14</sup> Self-congratulation apart, Patrick’s influence on the creative life of the place was profound. There were “Writers Workshops” every week, poetry readings and visits to galleries, pubs, and museums. During this fecund period Trent Park produced at least one dramatist of note (Peter Nichols) and any number of published poets. There’s no doubting the catalyst in all this activity. Not that Patrick needed encouragement as a self-publicist. His “Humane Values in a College of Education” certainly struck a sonorous Andersonian chord with its thesis that “education should be having life and having it abundantly.” But the conclusion reverberates with another and discordant note, that of the tension and alienation experienced by that Janus figure, “the Writer Head”:

... the practice of literature sometimes seems very different from the practices of an English Department. The one intensely personal and emotional, maybe tremulously quiet, a listening upon silence, often concerned with the subtlest discriminations in character, scene and atmosphere, and frequently, I am afraid enormously self-absorbed; and the other a bluff, outward-going relatively crude if kindly huggemugger and rubbing along of eagerness and busyness, schedules to complete, papers to mark, committees to attend and students to jolly along. No wonder that hybrid, the Writer-Head, sometimes winces — what a nag he feels as he looms in the S.C.R. trying to catch someone’s eye, with his message to deliver or his form to fill in.<sup>15</sup>

I have quoted the conclusion verbatim for it shines the spotlight directly on Patrick, with its eloquent idiosyncracies of language and its growing preoccupation with what he saw as his schizoid life-style, a sensitive artist trapped in an environment of agendas and memoranda. One of the magi, he was conscious that there were now all too many “alien people clutching their gods.”<sup>16</sup>

On mature reflection I believe that Patrick was at this time in the throes of an artistic crisis. It was doubtless convenient to blame extraneous factors but not entirely convincing. The “visionary gleam” had apparently deserted him. And even the prose source — and prose unlike poetry could “hesitate, qualify, try again” —

was drying up. Could some new stimulus spur him into song? On cue, Canada re-entered his consciousness. "America's Attic," "the empty room," was tenanted by people beckoning to him across the water and the years.

**T**O RECAPITULATE FOR A MOMENT. If Greece had been the epicentre of Patrick's old world, rediscovered in the fifties long after the ritual steeping in the classics at Sherborne and Oxford, then Canada had previously occupied that position during the forties. But Canada had suffered usurpation; for many years Patrick had gone through the motions of erasing Montreal from the memory, aware, I suspect, that the *Preview* moment could never be recaptured. Now in 1970, however, things began to change. During our chats over a pint in the college bar, I sensed his need to confront the Canadian experience again. He wanted to hear my enthusiastic reminiscences of UBC and Vancouver once more. This resolution was fuelled if not sparked off by good vibrations from those distant shores. Baffled for so many years by what Patrick felt was Canadian critical indifference to his work, he was discovering that his reputation as a Canadian poet was not so moribund as he had feared.

Excitedly, he showed me letters from McGill and elsewhere — research students and professors were on the *Preview* trail. He was to be the subject of an M.A. thesis at the University of Alberta; he heard somewhere on the grapevine that Northrop Frye had long since been favourably impressed by *The Colour As Naked*. Halls of Academe were showing an interest in his manuscripts.

That kind of academic respectability appealed to Patrick (he was, for example, to mention *The Bush Garden* review by Frye many times subsequently), especially in view of the fact that most of his prose memoirs were out of print or had been remaindered by publishers. There was melancholy evidence of that in the English library at college where rows of pristine copies stood on the shelves accumulating dust. However, flattery and fame were always the spurs that pricked the sides of Patrick's intent. Now he was aware that "there were still Canadians, both old and young, interested in my work."<sup>17</sup> Such recognition stimulated in him a sudden appetite for things Canadian — as though he had regained the taste for sockeye salmon. As he observed in the preface to his last collection of poems, "the turning point — the start of much examination, reinterpretation and revision — was my discovery not only of this Canadian interest but also of the new Canada itself."<sup>18</sup> Now he wanted to write poetry again. Canada was there to provide not only the impetus and incentive, but also the subject matter — a rediscovered "country of the mind."

True he had never stopped writing what he called "occasional verses" during a period he now felt was imaginatively fallow, but his last collection, with that



Thomas-like title of *The Colour As Naked*, was a distance behind him. Now the interminable wrestle with words was to be fought once more on the canvas of poetry. And poetry and Canada were together again in a close embrace. Later, in interview, he confided: "I figured I should cultivate again a sort of country of the mind" which had released my imagination and which was still, especially after I had re-visited it, a place I was glad to have adopted. I mean I genuinely like, even love Canada, and I have never felt especially English."<sup>19</sup>

Patrick's colleagues and students were made abundantly aware of this rekindled enthusiasm for poetry. Why, he hectored, weren't we all writing verse? Duplicated sheets of newly minted offerings appeared; sometimes he would try out a piece on students without admitting he had written it. I still have stapled photocopies of "Selected Poems" which appeared in three typed instalments. Part Three, containing "several new or newer" pieces, opens with "On First Getting Reading Glasses." It is a revealing piece both in terms of a characteristic language that combines a studied elegance and a conscious modernity, and in its neat encapsulation of Anderson the teacher. He comes before me as I read:

They brought me a new manner  
 a hint of lecturer's baroque  
 as I dangled them from my finger  
 to stir a hiatus up  
 or pushed them into my hair  
 with the bright bewildered look  
 of someone glad to be back  
 from a ton-up round literature.<sup>20</sup>

Getting reading glasses was for Patrick quite a step, an acceptance that the ageing process was taking its toll. He no longer resembled that slender, I imagine rather dandified, figure of his youth, with a Wildean sense of the sartorially outré. Now he cut a homespun figure in his baggy trousers and Harris tweed jackets. The face was dew-lapped and creased, a sedentary life-time of saloon bars and tobacco had left him leaden-footed and squeezed for breath. Yet the blue eyes were still curious and searching, and the desire to find compensation for physical decline drove his new-found muse ever harder. Yeats, the supreme poet of old age, became Patrick's oft-quoted protagonist and anti-mask as he dragged his own "battered kettle at the heel"<sup>21</sup> along the corridors of Trent Park. The gyres of time were moving outward and upward and the ascending staircases drained his strength as he reached his attic office, and gave him an air of frailty. But was there not "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Tower" to trumpet the triumph of art over decay?

Such a preoccupation with the late poetry of Yeats was, I suggest, also instrumental in his desire to revisit old poems and old places. Just as Yeats did the poetic round of youthful haunts, so Patrick's late flowering was in part the result of a profound longing for a country he had at worst forgotten, at best neglected. Should

he get the chance to return, he felt he could do poetic justice to the landscape of Canada, especially now he had served a rural apprenticeship in the “agricultural limbo” of Essex, an experience he later explained had “helped freshen my eyes” and allowed him “to draw strength from nature.”<sup>22</sup> It is significant that one of these anticipatory poems, “My Lady of Canada” (c. 1970), about the love-hate relationship of the poet and his muse and taking its central metaphor of “immoderate snow” from the Canadian winterscape, reverberates with echoes of “The Circus Animal’s Desertion.” Like Yeats, Patrick was taking a long if recollected look at the sources of his earlier poetic inspiration.

In 1971, Patrick finally made up his mind to return to Canada after a twenty-year self-imposed exile. I recall his intense, school-boyish enthusiasm at the delicious prospect of meeting old friends. He had already renewed acquaintance with Frank Scott on 5 September 1970, the exact date derived from a letter Patrick sent me at the time:

At 11.30 Frank Scott arrived from Canada — all thirteen honorary degrees of him, spry and witty at seventy — to beguile me with his plans that I should go over there this term and lecture over the resurrected corpse of my poetic reputation. I drove him to luncheon here (Essex) and the immediate past fell away.<sup>23</sup>

Frank Scott gave Patrick the impetus he needed and in October of the following year he set sail on the QE2 with an invitation in his pocket from the Canada Council. He was determined to do the thing in style, to wring the last drop of nostalgia from the visit. Hence the sea voyage. We sent him a telegram “en route.” He replied from the McGill Faculty Club.

I was pleased and really very touched to get your splendid Greetings Telegram on the QE2.

The crossing was at times very rough — odd for that opulent and garish hotel to be dashing through the waves at 28/9 knots aided by 110 thousand horses.

The bus trip thru’ Catskills and Adirondacks lovely and scarcely too long. Montreal greatly changed: soaring with skyscrapers, enormously sophisticated, all restaurants and boutiques, the capital of a French state. But the Faculty Club is Gothick gloom, like the Oxford Union.

Have given two readings — one on the eighteenth floor of a tower near Ottawa — and been wined and dined most nights.

Hope all goes well with you and your broods,

love,

Patrick

P.S. I am trying to avoid a Dylan Thomas by mostly drinking Molson’s beer in taverns.<sup>24</sup>

The Dylan Thomas connection was still dogging his progress but of course we

knew what he meant — he was avoiding the “hard stuff” and the prospect of self-destruction.

One month later, Patrick returned, still agog with excitement. He had been fêted and lionized, “the new Canada” had been all he hoped for, he wanted to return and put down still deeper roots by researching modern Canadian literature. From now on, poetry was the obsessive centre of his consciousness. He began systematically to revise the poems of the *Preview* days, to edit out the rhetoric, and more important, to write afresh about his new-found land. As colleagues we were the privileged first readers of these efforts. The titles tell their own story of a Canada both ancient and modern, subsequently published under the headings “Notes from An Old Montreal Wartime” and “An Expanding Neighbourhood.” The last section would consist of poems “of my post-Montreal, exiled, ruralised and now ageing self”;<sup>25</sup> the early section, apart from “Whistle Stop: Vermont” — and it is only a whistle stop in New England — would contain the poems about Montreal and its environs.

THE MUSE HAD PATRICK “in thrall” and in 1972, he handed over the reins of office to me in order to concentrate on his poetry. More specifically, he was gathering together a body of poems that he liked (and some of the early ones he clearly did not) for a *Selected Poems* of some fifty preferred pieces and a *Collected* “magnum opus” of about one hundred and fifty. What eventually emerged was the seventy-one poems of *A Visiting Distance* published by Borealis Press in 1976 and the fifty-five of *Return to Canada* put out under the imprint of McClelland & Stewart a year later. Patrick called them “parallel selections from a considerably larger body of work” but it is hard to resist the impression that *Return to Canada* contains most of his favourites. It is not my brief to offer any steady criticism of the poetry but the new verse is generally less self-conscious, the baroque preciousness of much of the forties’ stuff replaced by a style striving for greater clarity and directness. As Patrick says in the *Inscape* interview, “I have been pruning my rhetoric. . . . I’ve been inclined more and more to what I think the Germans call the ‘Dinglich.’ I like things; I like objects. . . . I prefer . . . nowadays accurate descriptions with their own maybe austere magic, to rather loose and wordy romanticism.”<sup>26</sup>

“Remembering Baie St. Paul,” an account of a traumatic summer centred on a “propagandist marriage” that went right against Patrick’s sexual proclivities, not only has great honesty but even offers a retrospective critique of “the one poem that might have come off that summer.” More matter, fewer words — or at least fewer pyrotechnics — that was now a conscious endeavour. If the early poetry had invited comparisons with Dylan Thomas — “a tea-drinking Dylan Thomas” at that — the mature gaze looks frequently in the direction of Yeats and Auden. “Advice to

Visitors,” for example, derives inspiration from “In Praise of Limestone.” The metaphorical treatment of the natural world, the tone, cadences and rhythms echo Auden’s celebrated topographical poem. And Auden’s preoccupation with familiar places and objects in *About the House*, his volume of 1965, finds a parallel in all the familiar references to paintings, trees and things in the final section of *Return to Canada*.

Patrick’s second and extended visit to Canada took place two years after the first, in 1973. We heard little from him during that year, assuming that his research into Canadian literature was proving totally absorbing. But when he did come back from his sabbatical he was clearly unhappy at the prospect of rejoining an institution with which he was losing contact. The tensions, earlier enumerated between his creative self and his role as administrator, were very much on his mind. In a letter to me that summer of 1973, he wrote, “As the angst-ridden prospect of another academic year looms nearer and nearer, I have nonetheless the greatest hopes of our collaboration.”<sup>27</sup> To make matters worse, the world of Trent Park was in a state of turmoil that mirrored his own unease. These were anxious times for all of us. Our little campus was now the potential victim of a takeover bid, soon to be engorged by a large, amorphous and impersonal predator. A natural maverick (Patrick preferred the word “bohemian”), the student unrest of the sixties had merely intrigued him. But this was more sinister. And by the end of another “angst-ridden” year, he felt he couldn’t hang in there much longer. There were now two lynchpins in his world, rural Essex where he could continue to write and relax with his pets and plants, and Canada where he hoped to return every summer to lecture, research and write. Already Patrick had managed to squeeze all his teaching into two days each week. Closeted in his tutorial room, surrounded by memorabilia, an enormous jade plant on his desk, he conducted seminars with chosen groups of mature students. Afterwards, I would see him taking his little mongrel dog for a walk round the estate before whizzing off down “Snakes Lane” and out to Essex. Trent Park had become dispensable. It had to go.

We planned a royal send-off. As usual Patrick featured prominently in “Subject Week,” that peculiarly English Department activity he had done so much to promote during his years of stewardship. There was a picnic by the lake, a poetry reading in the Orangery, a pilgrimage to the old amphitheatre in the woods, a treasure hunt and a literary quiz. I still have the programme of events. Patrick presided over a Dionysian ceremony in the New Hall, bedecked with a laurel wreath from his own garden, and recited a Pindaric Ode composed for the occasion. Not to be outdone, a visiting poet got very drunk, dived into the shallow end of the pool and, in a state of semi-consciousness or inebriation or both, surfaced with hand to bleeding head. Muttering about “this precious cargo” in apparent remorse, he then vanished into the suburban terraces of Hampstead with a woman student, and despite frantic phone calls from his wife, failed to surface for several days.

These junketings were followed by a departmental evening at which Patrick shamed us into silence by confessing how lonely and unappreciated he felt. Mellowed by wine, I made a speech which celebrated his manifold virtues in the most baroque and effusive prose I could muster. Patrick was, I think, nonplussed, but returned the next day, the final day of his nineteen-year sojourn at Trent Park, to deliver the grand valedictory address. All his books were on display in the Senior Common Room, monuments to the talent we had failed adequately to acknowledge. It was a sad occasion in more ways than one. Perhaps Patrick was right. At least I have often thought so since. He needed to be appreciated — no, more — to be loved all the time, even if his sarcastic sallies sometimes made one forget his vulnerability. And all in all he had given so much. At his best he was, quite simply, one of the two finest lecturers I have ever heard.

To garble Garrick's impromptu epitaph, "he wrote like an angel but did not talk like Poor Poll." Students loved him or merely endured him, but they always respected his knowledge. He was a wordsmith who could tap ringing phrases and new-minted coinages from the same inexhaustible fount as "Mr. P. Jones, Teacher," surely a poetic persona for himself. He introduced me to a host of writers — such modern Europeans as Proust and Rilke, the Americans Hart Crane and John Crowe Ransom and minor English talents like Denton Welsh and Cyril Connolly. His knowledge of the modern movement was as profound as his immersion in the world of Attic grace. By the time he began flirting with the muse again, his poetry had acquired the strength that comes from empathizing with the minds of others; his research into other writers had alerted him to the need to subvert his constitutional narcissism, to focus on subjects and issues beyond the Romantic self.

He realized too that, despite his late-won love of rural Essex, he was a poet who needed a profounder sense of place, of roots. For all his quintessentially English manners, Patrick never felt himself a dyed-in-the-wool Englishman. Canadian was, finally, what he felt he was. The "New Canada" gave him a subject, a poetic "raison d'être," a sense of identity. The last line of his "Inscape" interview avers, "I guess I *am* a Montrealer." What a pity then that "My Lady of Canada"<sup>28</sup> had played host to Patrick only during an extended spring and a golden autumn. Had his "partially Canadian sensibility" (Anderson's phrase) had a chance to make a permanent home in "America's attic,"<sup>29</sup> much of the prose with its strongly European emphases and experiences would have been forfeited, but the poetry would have found a subject-matter, a conviction and a power it achieved too fitfully and too late. None knew that better than Patrick.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Character Ball* (Norton: Chatto & Windus, 1963), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Inscape*, II, no. 3 (1974), 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Dolphin Days* (London: Gollancz, 1963), prefatory note.

- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> *Over the Alps* (London: Hart-Davis, 1967), p. 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 38.
- <sup>7</sup> *Foxed* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Letter to Sturge Moore*, 21 September 1926.
- <sup>9</sup> *Foxed*, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., Preface viii.
- <sup>11</sup> "A Monkey in Malaya," *Return to Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), p. 26.
- <sup>12</sup> *A Visiting Distance* (Ottawa: Borealis, 1976), p. 48.
- <sup>13</sup> *A Message to My Colleagues* (unpublished).
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> *Humane Values in a College of Education* (unpublished).
- <sup>16</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi."
- <sup>17</sup> *Return to Canada*, Preface.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> *Inscape*, p. 72.
- <sup>20</sup> *Return to Canada*, p. 106.
- <sup>21</sup> W. B. Yeats, "The Tower."
- <sup>22</sup> *Inscape*, p. 74.
- <sup>23</sup> *Unpublished Letter to Patrick Campbell*, 5 September 1971.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., October 1971.
- <sup>25</sup> *Return to Canada*, Preface.
- <sup>26</sup> *Inscape*, p. 71.
- <sup>27</sup> *Unpublished Letter to Patrick Campbell*, August 1973.
- <sup>28</sup> *Return to Canada*, p. 110.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.

