

# DON GUTTERIDGE'S MYTHIC TETRALOGY

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THREE PARTS OF DON GUTTERIDGE'S tetralogy appeared in the seventies, so there is no analysis of them in John Moss's *Patterns Of Isolation*, Doug Jones's *Butterfly On Rock*, or Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden*. Nor is there any particular comment in Frank Davey's *From There To Here*, Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey*, or *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature*. Gutteridge does get worked into Margaret Atwood's victimization thesis in *Survival*, but the insistent generalization, blatant oversimplifications, and flippant humour of that book would hardly tempt a critic to examine Gutteridge's poetry for something other than thesis fodder. Gutteridge's historical tetralogy — *Riel* (1968), *Coppermine* (1973), *Borderlands* (1975), and *Tecumseh* (1976) — is a relatively recent corpus, but right from *Riel* it is apparent to a perceptive critic that Gutteridge is more than a journeyman poet.

Superficially, Gutteridge appears to be a documentary poet along the lines drawn by Dorothy Livesay in a celebrated paper presented at York University, June 12, 1969.<sup>1</sup> His tetralogy — where each work can stand impressively by itself — does not follow the strict narrative pattern in Browning's or Tennyson's manner; nor does it place its chief emphasis on historical perspective — despite all its debts to such eminent sources as Samuel Hearne, Louis Riel, John Jewitt, and David Thompson. Unlike American epics such as *Leaves Of Grass* or *The Bridge*, Gutteridge's tetralogy does not seem to create a single national myth, but reads very much like a group of long poems that are "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements." Gutteridge's poems — especially *Riel* (subtitled "a poem for voices") — are meant to be read aloud; thus they join the ranks of other Canadian long documentary poems such as Marriott's *The Wind Our Enemy*, Birney's *Trial of a City*, Pratt's *The Titanic*, and Livesay's *Call My People Home*.

The most recent preoccupations with the documentary form in Canadian poetry — Andrew Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems*, Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid*, Milton Acorn's *The Island Means Minago* — try to be more than either simple reportage or skillful didacticism. They attempt myth-making on a national scale, beginning with locale and extending, like Yeats's

famous gloved hand, past the cobwebs of history to universal themes and myths. Always there is an insistence on symbolic significance beyond the mere themes or didactic force. Indeed, all the parts of the tetralogy tell real stories — factually documented in fundamentals — for a myth's sake; and this myth is nothing if not that of a psycho-spatial man — doomed redeemer, freely adventuring explorer, or shocked captive-initiate.

Gutteridge — like Pratt — begins with historical data, but inevitably moves to create a poetic meaning for his stories. If we were to stand back from each of his four narratives, we would find four types of myth with their languages of symbolic translation. *Riel*, for instance, could be interpreted as a salvation-history, a story of a redeemer and his martyrdom. The symbolist *Coppermine* is in the old tradition of the quest. *Borderlands* is a myth of psychic integration and uses the motifs of captivity and cruelty. Finally, *Tecumseh* aligns with *Riel* in becoming an explicit myth of translation with Osirian analogies. In each case, there is an obsessive intensity of theme, but the entire form of *mythos* is clarified by Gutteridge's skillful deployment of language. The lyrical mode holds sway over all other styles, and diction and image show Gutteridge's preoccupation with transformations, with writing a language capable of expressing states of being.

**R**IEL DRAMATIZES ANTITHETICAL responses to land and life: the Métis response (personified and intensified by a neurotic Riel), and the white, colonial response. The first response is expressed through symbolism, lyrical and dramatic rhythm, while the second response is made explicit by flat prose.

At the beginning of this five act drama, we do not hear Riel's own voice, though we feel his spirit — especially as this vibrates in the act of his walking with his father in Pembina in 1858. The Métis, we are told, find “in walking a togetherness of spirit,” and the image of legs dominates the whole first section of Part One — particularly the first five lines, which use words like “walking,” “legs,” “steady stride,” “lean-muscled,” and “striding.” The second sentence begins with a verb and (because of the omitted, but implied, connecting pronoun “they,” i.e., Riel and his father) we have the emphasis on a verb that becomes the principle of continuity, the dynamic essence of the joining and separating imagery and the evocation of a linguistic characteristic of Cree (one of Riel's tongues) which can render a whole sentence or idea by a single word. A scholar has called the Cree language “one gigantic verb” because it often achieves through alterations in verbs what other languages achieve through declension or addition of nouns,<sup>2</sup> and the unmistakable impression we get from the third-person narrative opening is of one gigantic verb — the act of walking in togetherness before space and event intervene and separate the two walkers.

The preponderance of prepositional phrases — two in almost every line — creates a density of detail and modification; and a concreteness derives from the several dozen nouns. As the fellow-feeling between father and son is built up, it becomes increasingly clear that Gutteridge is aiming for a tribal sense in the rhythm, imagery, and event:

They were walking: as a Métis always walked  
 Because a man could feel the Mother Earth through the palms  
 Of his feet, and know the firmness of her flesh  
 And the great unturning heart at the centre of her,  
 Were walking because walking told in every stride  
 Of man's moving over the earth in a passing as brief  
 As a footprint, and because a Métis found  
 In walking a togetherness of spirit,  
 Of flesh knowing the same earth at the same turning  
 Of the sun or the season, and a man moving  
 Was like the wind's loving of the deep grasses,  
 And did not stand like the rocks and die with stillness  
 In the bones, and because walking made spring  
 Out of muscle and limb, and a man could feel  
 His body lean as a willow in its long greenness,  
 And because there was joy in a Métis walking  
 With himself or his brother. These things had been told  
 To him by his elders, and he had felt them.

Gutteridge's technical virtuosity is impressive. There is a taut quality in the buffalo hunt episode; a dream quality during the homeward journey, with slowly stretching syllables languorously and softly pronounced; a surrealistic overlapping of Thomas Scott's hysterical, sadistic laughter with the thundering noise of the stampeding buffalo; complex modifiers and descriptions from nature that (like the Cree tongue) are expressive and dramatically rhythmic in their rich vowel sounds, strongly aspirated consonants, verbal insistence, and varied tempo. Gutteridge is a prime synecdochist, for he takes the half wagon-half man configuration of the nomadic *Bois-Brulés*, and makes the wheel and circle emerge as dominant images during great colourful moments such as the gathering at Pembina.

But Gutteridge retains control over his language and his subject. Immediately following the opening section on the fellowship of walking, there is a prose letter by Charles Mair to *The Globe* in which the possession of land is made a bourgeois theme. An irony is obtained from the sharp contrast between young Riel's appreciation of the "great unturning heart" at the centre of Mother Earth and Mair's utilitarian approach to the question of prairie settlement:

But who should come in and possess this land? The question is easily answered. Any farmer who has £300 of capital and provisions to subsist his family for at least one year. He should also bring his seed-grain, a Pittsburgh plough, harrow teeth and a separate mower. And he would have no difficulty in selecting a farm. There

is no Stobson's choice about it, 'this or none.' The cake is 700 miles long and 400 miles wide — and plenty of elbow room. Here at the western terminus of the proposed route from Canada are the three prime desiderata of the husbandman: land, wood and water. Land upon whose bosom has withered the enriching and procreant vegetation of centuries — land which drops fatness, as if in the fulfillment of prophecy: at once generous and abundant, and more durable than its tiller.

Mair, in an extremely ironic way because he is a poet writing so mundanely, suggests that he himself is much of a bourgeois materialist, seeking to convert raw land into productive landscape.

The rift between man and land, western landscape and colonial encroachment, is further dramatized by the image of the railroad. Here geometry and language are the twin nuances of meaning, for the railroad is a "straight line" to "horizon's roundness" and its "steel tongue" intones "its single word into empty western-sky." From the beginning, then, of European expansion farther west, there is a drama and difference in viewpoint and language. Where the Métis, because they are native to the prairie, commune with the dusty plains and the ghostly winds and lights of the aurora borealis (*chepuyuk*), the white colonizers impose their shapes on the land via their technology, and show off "brick towers," "stone spires," and "square roads." The names of concrete objects contrast with images of hands, feet, and heart, sometimes allied to and consecrated by Métis religious connotations: "he was happy just to feel his father's strides / Coincide with his own"; "liking the feel of current pulling at his feet"; "twin-spires of the love / He learned at the altar of his mother's voice and arms / And hands." The community of feeling is intensified via the brief family-history of the Lagimodières and the repetition of the joining and separating images of feet, hands, and waters.

Though Gutteridge keeps his eye on event and connection, his dramatic evocations of personality and motive are strong. He shapes mundane, detailed portraits of such figures as Schultz, Scott, and Sir John A., which contrast vividly with an impressionistic, abstract rendering of Riel. Schultz, the western archetype of a political physician, is sketched as a staunchly respectable bourgeois, a freemason with Orange sympathies, bureaucratic, scheming, dyspeptic, arrogant, hostile to Catholics and Métis, and the prairie landscape. When he is first introduced to us, we take note of the strong patterns in his rhetoric. There are several adverbial phrases and clauses of concession that serve to make Schultz seem an archly sly conciliator who balances limitation against achievement, handicap against advantage.

Sir John A. comes off no less ironically. He is placed in a concrete world of objects, textures, and material values, and it is altogether a comfortable, elitist setting with its sideboard of American mahogany, its French port, crystal, scraps of parchment, quill, desk, stuffed chair, cigar-box, cut-glass decanter. With all the accoutrements of material comfort, Sir John A. entertains his distaste for the

Catholics, and seems intolerant of anyone else. His character and Schultz's show that the new Northwest was to be an extension of Protestant Ontario. In the archetypal mode of a nation-builder, he is represented as an architect toying with building blocks of the country's future as his alcoholism weaves its dark river in his blood.

In contrast with his white antagonists, Riel is represented through emotion-charged symbols. Many key periods of his life are suggested — his "miracle" in 1874, his wooing of Evelina, his madness, exile, and trial — but, in general, there is little attempt at a direct revelation of character and certainly no explicit conjuration of what Kinsey Howard calls his "paranoid schizophrenia": wherein he was prone to grandiose illusions, egotistical spells of morbid introspection, mental excitability, a sense of persecution, and a conviction of divine mission. This is not to suggest that these traits or symptoms are not present in the poem. Gutteridge does not take license with history; he merely departs from it in order to create something quite different.

If (as A. R. M. Lower argues) there is a point when history becomes myth, then Gutteridge's Riel is less a historical figure than a mythic one. He is not a rebel or insurrectionist but a line of resistance — a core of anarchic defiance. Yet Riel is not simply a symbol. If he were only this, then Gutteridge would have ironically repeated a historical mistake which once caused Riel to cease existing as a credible man. Though he is dramatized in opposition to Scott, Schultz, and Sir John A., Riel is an eloquent mystic, but here again irony prevails; for unlike the mysticism of orthodox Catholics, Riel's mysticism contains little or no joy. Instead, Riel's mysticism is based on certain magical superstitions, and expresses the transports of one who has not been estranged from his "primitive," native self. It is the root and delimitation of his messianic obsession, and leads to dreams and visions that are lyrically intense and totally alien to the minds and hearts of the colonizers.

There is another problem with Riel's characterization, and this probably arises out of the lyrical compression in the verse. To begin with, we do not have enough of the priestly rhetoric that often drenches the historical Riel's letters and sermons. And because of this deficiency, we do not obtain an effective contrast between the religious musings of a man obsessed with his self and the political writings of the same person where there is scant attention paid to personal fate. Nor is there enough ambiguity surrounding Riel's sanity. In Gutteridge's poem, we feel some of the soul-magnifying and mind-splitting force of his sense of destiny, but there is no sense of bizarre, anthropomorphic eccentricity, no grotesque distortions of the ego and religious belief that could possibly arouse solid doubts about his mental equilibrium. He is very realistically a David, awaiting the moment of his victory over Goliath: "David: fondling a / smooth stone, fingers seeking / The spring of its power." He is also very credibly a historical Messiah-*manqué*, "Moses confronted by a burning bush / That made the sky around it only blacker," and even,

spiritually, a Christ among men. But he is not a madman, even in passing flights of uncontrol. His flashes of apocalyptic imagery (such as allusions to moving mountains, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the Second Coming) make him an intense mystic, but they do not suggest he is hallucinating like one who has lost all distinction between the actual and the imagined.

THE ENDING OF *Riel* RENDERS the poem apocalyptic in its symbolism and meaning, and this revelatory impulse links it to *Coppermine*, which, however, expresses a very different myth in a different style. The period of *Coppermine* occurs roughly a century before Riel's story, and now we are in the North rather than in the West. If *Riel* can be seen as a would-be Messiah's quest for his people's salvation, *Coppermine* can be interpreted as a Canadian version of the El Dorado myth.

Though Matonabee, Chief of the Northern Indians, is the most striking character in this poem, it is the figure of Samuel Hearne who projects (through Gutteridge's poetic refractions) the white man's quest for the golden (read copper) one:

Matonabee speaking

'Where the mouth of the grand river opens  
To swallow the sea, lies the Copper-mine:  
And they say the metal sits there in chunks  
As big as a bison's flank, and that once  
When the dogs long ago dwelt there, they built  
Giant fires out of the burning Aurora  
And ate the copper flesh to make their  
Blood hard, and what you now see there are bones  
The gods have left behind in the daylong  
Darkness, with only the Boreal light  
Flickering on their nakedness like pale  
Shadows of flame from some far-off dying  
Hearth-fire of the Manitou.'

As Matonabee tells this legend of the coppermine, he seems to be enjoying the myth possibly because he gauges its special enchantment for Samuel Hearne and company. And the copper symbol is portentous from the start — sinisterly so, for it is present in "gold visions" rejected by Midas whose gold-lust would normally not exclude anything golden.

Gutteridge projects through Matonabee the sort of terror sprung out of the land and described by Frye in the *Literary History of Canada*: "It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest." In *Coppermine* the terror is

temporarily attenuated as the Copper Woman myth enlarges. Geography is internalized and reprojected in lines that describe this mythic creature:

Because she was a magic god-woman —  
 Brown, like us, only her skin glowed as if  
 Tiny fires burned in her flesh and shone through  
 So you could see the rivers and runlets  
 Her blood made, her whole body like a map  
 With its own lakes and streams, and dark patches  
 Where the land lay, and she had no deerskins  
 On her, though the cold made the tent-poles snap,  
 And snow melted on the flesh of her breasts,  
 Buttocks and unlit cave of her thighs.  
 They followed her over the treeless Barrens  
 Through the darkness of night and day, their eyes  
 On the north, which was the darkest part of  
 The sky, and on the crevasse of those deep  
 Woman-thighs, till they came to the place of  
 The copper, and found her vision was true.

Everything is transmuted surreally into copper. Even the sexual sadism (just as strong in *Borderlands* and *Tecumseh*) is converted into something like a picture by Salvador Dali whose surface exoticism or polished strangeness does not obscure the psychological portent. The purpose of the surreal is not simply to excite the senses with a flow of apparently discrete images and colours, but to create a field of association that could develop into an integration of meaning. Though at first the surreal seems only unlikely or purely imaginative, its symbolism has an important psychic import. The surreal allows the poet the opportunity to indulge his artistic imagery, dispense with linear narrative, and — provided his synecdoche is clear enough — to build up a special significance for his motifs.

The method of *Coppermine* is largely symbolic and abstract — unlike that of *Riel* where meanings and symbols are connected through events that can be verified historically. Not that *Coppermine* is not based on history, but its composition appears to rely less on documented experiences — though its depiction of the Eskimo slaughter is thoroughly accurate — and more on Gutteridge's power of lyric projection. Because the poet is interested in determining "what the eyes / won't tell," "what kind of mind" feeds on certain legends, he uses history as a point of departure or, at least, a core of radiation. The core is, of course, Hearne's obsession with discovering the source of copper, and the separate rays are the moments (scenes) of energy where the characters and the poet think "copper." There are accordingly periods of powerfully evocative symbols, moments when the struggle of the inarticulate seems to be overwhelming, phases of unresolved enigma, but the total work ultimately creates a significant story that, in using the archetypal quest form, finds analogues of being and types of knowledge that radiate from Hearne's adventure of exploration and discovery.

External and internal worlds converge in *Coppermine*, and the mouth image becomes the chief expression of this phenomenon. Even in his fantasies, Hearne imagines himself being swallowed by the mouth of the mine, and his brain, the seat of reason and animal spirits, becomes metaphorically contracted to the mouth as space, light, and knowledge enter it.

This particular metaphorical alliance is especially significant, for it is an important detail in Gutteridge's synecdoche of psychic integration. Even space is represented as a "polar mouth / mind eaten / with its own appetite" and then, even more explicitly (but repetitively), its "magnetized teeth / nibble my brains / like copper meat."

The poetic voice of Hearne the explorer develops the drama of quest wherein the spirit seeks unity in the material world. In this regard, the geometric images (especially those of circles) are particularly effective. The first circle is, perhaps, the explorer's own eye, which besides throwing its focus on the sun (a cosmic eye) and the lines of vision measured by the quadrant (Hearne's third eye), also looks at itself in a sort of Plotinian reflexiveness. For Plotinus, the eye would not be able to see the sun if the eye itself were not the sun. Hence we have traditional representations of the sun as an eye, or of Osiris and Christian God as a divine eye.

With his quadrant, Hearne acquires a third eye which is of dual significance. On the positive side, it symbolizes superhuman or divine awareness — much in the manner of Shiva's powerful third eye. However, on the negative side, a third eye is useless and is cast in darkness. In symbolist theory, the multiplicity is a sign of inferiority or psychic decomposition. It is the negative aspect which is stressed rather comically when Hearne breaks the quadrant:

That day on my  
first journey when I  
broke my quadrant;  
they found it funny  
to see a blind man  
with three eyes.

The broken quadrant itself has an interesting significance, for the symbolism of quaternality implies the idea of a perfect order, the idea of the four natural elements that compose the universe in ancient Greek philosophy. Elsewhere in the poem, there is a moment imagined by Hearne when the square is circled: "Circles in a / squared eye: / earth affirmed. . . ." Here the squaring of the circle (or the circling of the square — the order is reversible) is a geometric metaphor for stability, order, and materialized energy.

The point of Hearne's quest in this poem is not simply a geographical adventure or a colonial enterprise. It is abstracted into a quest for self-transformation. Matonabbee indicates as much by his own self-translation, when in dance he becomes a man recovering his sense of the eternal:



Matonabbee as  
 leader of the band  
 conducts the  
 supplicatory dance,  
 and for an encore  
 swallows whole  
 (like a slithering adder)  
 a ten-inch rancid penis,  
 then, puffed as a bullfinch  
 struts and prances  
 till we almost believe  
 those antlers sprouting  
 from his skull!

The energetic verbs and participles (“puffed,” “struts,” “prances,” “sprouting”) align with the slithering adder and penis to signify both an inner spiritual and an external material strength — potential for the propagation of cosmic forces. The rising force is developed in the swelling dance where the verse follows the ascent of Matonabbee’s force, moving upward from the sexual organ to the skull or realm of thought, at which point Matonabbee becomes a horned god or motif of eternity.

Samuel Hearne, however, never attains this height of self-transformation, though he experiences intensely an implosion of energy and consciousness: “the caves in the / brain flame inward / like igloos of / transfused light.” Hearne is always uncertain of his direction:

I am here, I know,  
 was there, and there  
 but  
 if I lose this  
 book map page  
 where have I been?  
 where do *I* go?

Despite his confusion, Hearne experiences an upward movement. This is catalyzed by Matonabbee’s ritualistic dances, priogenitive prophecies, and symbolic references. It is Matonabbee who suggests the unity in multiplicity, although Hearne does not confine his images and symbols to Indian myth. He conjures up psychic significances from the Bible and Egyptian myth, and just as he sees in Matonabbee’s slithering adder dance a spiritual ascent, he also intimates through his reference to Osiris rising, an evolving ascent; the very name Osiris means “he who is at the top of the steps.”

Matonabbee, nevertheless, becomes the prime reference for Hearne as Gutteridge carefully represents the chief as a symbol of supreme spiritualization. There

is a section, for instance, where Hearne observes, at first hand, the strange art of the medicine man-cum-conjurer:

See Matonabee the conjurer  
swallow a four-foot sword  
with his two-inch tongue!  
No tricks here  
no sleight-of-hand,  
naked as a bird he's  
plucked from tuft to toe!

Old man in his death-throes  
waits for the magic to come:  
I watch his face, see  
death growing there  
like a masque of  
plaster bone,  
eyes adazzle with  
the glitter of dying:  
last radiance of  
mysteries not known  
magic unredeemed.

But see how the  
conjurer plunges the  
healing wand into his  
living throat, four feet  
down to the blood and bone  
to the heart of the mystery,  
see him pull the cord  
to draw the magic out:  
glittering sword  
adazzle in the darkness,  
bloody tongue  
of radiance.

The sword has obvious magic power — linked as it is to steel and hence to transcendent toughness or an all-conquering spirit. It is a symbol of spiritual evolution<sup>3</sup> and in the context above, its association with light and fire (“glittering,” “adazzle,” “radiance”) intensifies the spiritualization.

The “old man” is not a decoration or self-evident symbol. Besides being obviously a personification of age-old wisdom, he is the symbol of what Jung calls the “mana” personality — that is, the spirituality of personality caused when consciousness is over-burdened with matter from the unconscious — death, in this context.<sup>4</sup>

It is Matonabee who activates the magic of the sword, who releases the magic spirit welcomed by the old man awaiting death, and who (an hour later) takes

on the crooked grin of a slightly ruffled bird — another symbol of spiritualization — as the old man is returned to life.

**F**OR ALL THEIR STRANGE BEAUTY (a beauty coupled often with the obscene cruelty of violence), their intensity of imagery, their technical skill, Gutteridge's poems move inevitably towards the theme of death. *Riel* ends with the eponymous figure's abrupt hanging, with the cold "gray towers" of Ottawa dominating the fadeout. *Coppermine* charts its quest pattern surrealistically, but moves to the subject of a material death. Yet, this time the end is dualistic, for while Hearne begins his "long walk," he moves "back," i.e., returns his spirit to its cosmic source.

*Borderlands*, the next poem in the tetralogy, does not suggest a positive aspect to the death theme, for it shows John Jewitt, its protagonist-initiate, preparing for death without any spiritual translation. *Borderlands*, however, continues to show Gutteridge's variations on patterns. Unlike *Riel*, it is not about an ambivalent historical figure. Unlike *Coppermine*, it is not abstract in its method; nor is it a quest narrative. It is what could be called a story of initiation,<sup>5</sup> where the chief narrator is primarily concerned with self-preservation. The difference between quest literature and initiation literature is that between free exploration and captivity, or between ultimate purpose and a sense of immediacy.

Ostensibly based on Jewitt's account of life among the Nootka, *Borderlands* substantiates Frye's claim that "literature is conscious mythology" where its mythical stories "become habits of metaphorical thought."<sup>6</sup> This symbolic aspect crystallizes early as Maquina, the Nootka chief, articulates the perimeter of his geographical knowledge:

Looking out is West  
 where Ocean begins  
 Looking in is East  
 where Forest has his root  
 We have no North:  
 sun is always  
 South of this coast  
 North of here  
 is nothing,  
 nothing I  
 want to know.

The primeval setting is radically different from the prairie in *Riel* and the surreal locale in *Coppermine*. Here myth grows out of "immense ranges of mountains or impenetrable forests" and "the pain of constant / distance" in the ocean. It is

the myth of the captive-artisan, the blacksmith who is almost broken on the forge of his experience in an alien world. Jewitt, whose blacksmith-father wanted to be “Christ’s armourer,” discovers that his craft has dual significance: it is both his salvation and his weakness, for it permits him Maquina’s favours but also keeps him the chief’s captive. Maquina intends to be the strong hammer that strikes the metal of white man’s flesh.

Here, as in *Riel*, Gutteridge develops a dialectic out of two contrasted ways of life — each apparently extravagant to the other. Where Mozino’s Journal refers to a “barbarous sacrifice,” Captain Gray and his crew take sadistic delight in murdering and committing outrages on the Indians: “we giggled as the / little puddings of their / brains dribbled out, / we took turns pissing / on their last smiles.” The two tribes — Nootka and European — are closer in their instincts than they realize, for there is no difference between Maquina’s lyrical description of the slaughter of the crew and Captain Gray’s sadism — except one: Maquina is coldly detached while Gray is emotionally and psychologically involved.

In other aspects, too, Nootka and European resemble one another closely. Maquina is ruthless in sex and war: he hacks his wife to death just as brutally as he assaults the *Boston*’s crew. Jewitt, by the same token, becomes pure animal in his lust, and though some whites have objected that his idiom is too modern for the setting, we should remember that animal nature lies under the accretions of time and culture.

The shared savage instincts are set apart by contrasted languages which attest to distinctions in background, sensibility, and objective. Maquina asserts that the white man’s way of fixing and cataloguing reality by rigid, unchanging names contrasts with the aboriginal proclivity towards multiplicity:

My daughter has had three  
names and many more to come,  
when I have reached my  
last name on earth  
I shall already be dead,  
when my tribe runs out of words  
this coast will be blowing sand.

Maquina calls the white man’s words hard, many-edged, angular, and sharp, but destructive. The irony is that while the white characters often struggle to give names to feelings and experiences, Maquina is an eloquent primitive. There is a strong clipped quality to Jewitt’s diction, as though speech were being wrenched out of him.

The only time Jewitt becomes lyrical is when he describes his smith’s craft. Here Jewitt is released from the burden of his coarse, ungraceful aspects and exults in the grace of his craft. Maquina, by contrast, consistently sounds a raw music that attests to the tactility of his being — a drum on which the universe sounds itself.

This eloquence is a crafty device which does not simply serve Gutteridge's lyrical impulse; it is a valid, *psychologically* correct product of passion and a human nature attuned to its setting. Gutteridge, perhaps anticipating critical queries or objections, quotes Mozino's view on native eloquence and rhetoric:

Since eloquence has always been considered the child of vivid passions, and since these are capable of firing even the imagination of these savages, it should not seem strange that I affirm its existence among these islanders, and in passing forestall those critics who are quick to claim that the speeches placed in the mouths of these savages by certain writers are false, as if in order to speak with enthusiasm, making use of the most moving figures of speech, it is necessary to attend universities, to read books entitled 'Rhetoric,' and be ridiculous mimics of Marcus Tullius. To be eloquent, it is enough to follow freely the impulse of nature, whose mastery created the most celebrated orators of Greece.

What *Borderlands* amounts to, then, is a literary documentary where the desire to impress by a cumulative piling of effects diminishes its intrinsic dichotomous nature. At once direct, immediate, colourful, and powerful, *Borderlands* does not move deeply enough into realms of the archetype. We see that Maquina intuitively grasps the symbolism of salmon as the fish of wisdom; we know that the Bear ceremony has a significance beyond the merely sensational enigma impressed upon Jewitt; but the symbols do not amount to much in the general scheme of the poem. What we tend to remember best are the sexual sadism, certain exotic ceremonies — documented in Jewitt's original journal — and Maquina, who despite an impressive theatricality, integrity, and strength, does not overwhelm Jewitt.

The fundamental problem might be in Gutteridge's tendency to oversimplify the captivity story. His poem misses the motive for the chief's slaughter of the crew; it also misses the striking indignity suffered by Maquina, following Captain Salter's reproach. The poem fails to become the tragedy it could have been, and becomes a melodramatic narrative where Jewitt prepares for death and Maquina reasserts his "sea-dream" mortality.

THE FINAL PART OF Gutteridge's tetralogy returns us to cosmos and epiphanic translation after exploring the borderland between history and myth. *Tecumseh* is, like *Riel*, an example of conscious mythologizing, and like *Riel*, extends from historical circumscription to a psychic internalization of the land and its various impulses.

The first part of *Tecumseh* provides us with pioneer dreams in French Quebec. There are various dreams projected in this section — that of a seigneur who is full of alcohol, blood lust, sex, and tawdry religiosity; one by a young woman and her mother — for both of whom reality is paradoxically an *illusion* of security and permanence; and two dreams by pioneer father and son who struggle to make the

land fit their dreams of colonization and prosperity. These dreams are counterpointed by Tecumseh's in Part Two, where the Indian strives to find a language appropriate and powerful enough to free the figures of dream: "my tribe's history / the necessary nightmare." There are several other elements as well — interludes, commentaries, historical expositions, meditations, a proclamation by General A. P. Hull, letters, and orations — but the predominance of dream renders this poem apocalyptic, and when we view it in the total context of the tetralogy, we see how the apocalyptic is a frame around Gutteridge's mythic mode.

As in all major works of prose and poetry about colonial Canada, it is the white man's dream of imposing himself upon the land that degenerates into a horrible nightmare wherein the external is internalized. Just as with Margaret Atwood's pioneer, who grows progressively insane as the land invades his resisting mind, the Quebec *habitants* are imprisoned in "cages" of their own making and become victims to their own paranoid delusions of security and permanence.

The colonial dream of civilization is protected assiduously by the various emigrants, but no dream remains inviolate:

The dream of civilization  
I carried with me  
over the borderless ocean  
kept pure in the stink  
and rabble of the ship,  
have guarded here  
against all enemies —  
needs room to breathe,  
as well, will soon be  
feeding on itself.

No matter how zealously the bishop attempts to assert pioneer endeavour and instruments of colonization, his apology is a weak resistance to the inevitable power of the land which compels the pioneers to admit that their log-walls are only an illusion of a home, "a domestic fiction" which ineluctably becomes a squelched dream.

Pioneer effort becomes grotesquely obsessive, but even the most grotesque human aspiration cannot match nature's grotesqueries. Father and son, both full of harsh labour, cannot force the land into a Procrustean adaptation to their ambitions:

But the big  
trees remain  
beyond the clearing  
beyond the arc  
of hand or axe,  
nightmare or dream:  
in the coldest day

they etch their grotesquerie  
across the whitest sky.

In the end, the son wants freedom from both his father and the land, the father is swallowed by his own dream, and there is an overwhelming sense of defeat despite the advent of nationalism and territorial protectionism.

Tecumseh's dream is to reclaim the land his people have surrendered to the white man. What justifies this dream is not simply a moral right of re-appropriation, but a fundamental understanding of nature that is resisted by the white colonizers to whom land is simply property or a possession that is without numinousness.

As in *Riel*, the political element is strong — particularly with the genocidal charge laid against the Canadians, and the subtle American strategy of exploiting Tecumseh as an agent for their own imperial expansionism. But the controlling dialectic (as in *Riel* and *Borderlands*) is expressed by a clash of symbols and values in the white colonial language of steel (the railroad a “steel tongue intoning / Its single word into empty western sky”) and the Métis language of spiritual brotherhood. In *Borderlands* this clash is polarized in two modes of language — the rigid tongue-sounds of the whites and the perennially recreated language of the Nootka's never-depleted supply of words. Now in *Tecumseh* we have language that suggests a primeval myth, and the images (as in Scott's Laurentian poems and many sections of Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*) spring out of the elemental landscape — of rock older than first bone, “seamed with myth / with hieroglyphic runings / sealed by a silence / that stilled / the first and vital Word.” We have the aggressive, destructive language of the western colonizer whose speech, like his pioneer activity, testifies to a ruined dream feeding on itself, and is expressed with energy but without love or understanding. And we have the second language — the self-conscious, visionary utterances of Tecumseh, chief of the Shawnee, who tries to unite different tribes against the U.S. and save them from extinction.

Gutteridge generally finds the right sensuous lyric form to vitalize his narrative and absorb the prosaic ironies of miscellaneous documentation. His diction is powerful but beautifully simple except when he tries to express a character's intuitive intelligence by means of sophisticated abstraction. At these points, Gutteridge's imagery becomes obtrusive and anachronistic, especially when it issues from Tecumseh in moments of intense lyric self-consciousness. With Tecumseh, Gutteridge too often strains western diction into expressing an acute anguish and sensitivity whose pain is older than language.

But there is achievement even in this failure, for *Tecumseh* is an impressive drama of translation. Despite his mutilated corpse, Tecumseh remains the unstilled voice of conscience in a land that has the scattered pieces of his body. His Osirian dismemberment is a deliberate mythic reference, and when his resurrected spirit is said to enter all things and speak to us in a way that “humiliates the air” and

breaks the chronology of his people's despair, we know explicitly that Gutteridge is exploring the borderland between history and myth.

With Riel and Tecumseh, Gutteridge finds two historical figures who indulge in conscious mythologizing. Riel cultivates tenaciously his self-images of prophet and messiah where Tecumseh's oratorical power, while asserting the catastrophe and pacifying powers of language, enlarges his own vision of a personal myth that will be both strong and liberating:

I want to fashion good words forever,  
stretch my body into a continuous sentence,  
humiliate the air with speech, break  
the chronology of my people's despair,  
sew them green stories, chronicles of hope,  
weave a new history from our twin beginnings:  
we shall see our own shame and the  
white man his — he will smile and  
give up his books, his bellicose  
reading of the world's working-out,  
my myths will eat him, page by page,  
into silence — decoded, he will be free  
at last to utter those poems that have  
no need for the curvature of words. . . .

At the end, of course, Tecumseh becomes the spirit in all things, the historical hero, prophet, and mythopoeist.

In sum, Gutteridge's tetralogy crystallizes his sympathy for underdogs — whether they exist in western society or outside it, sinister or disturbed. This produces — for all the sophisticated symbolism — a worldly vision of a human struggle for power. But this power is not simply the power of politics or technology. It is, instead, the power to evolve spiritually, and it is a mystery treated with sensitivity. Clearly, the heroes in Gutteridge's landscapes are not the bourgeois proponents of planning, technical efficiency, regimentation, and social convention. When his men become heroic — and it is always *in extremis* — they do so in circumstances that do not afford the protection of social order.

What this produces is a sentimentalization of the primitive ethos, and such an effect is yet another demonstration that the romantic age of Canadian poetry is not really over. From Purdy to Cohen, from Gutteridge to Atwood, there is still a fascination with masks — with gestures and expressions of the primitive, as if that element were the residue of a civilization purer than our own. All these poets are concerned with visions of destruction which may or may not be translated into a psyche-enlarging apocalypse, but the combination of brutal sex, physical violence, and psychic confusion is metaphysical in its attempt to yield a transcendental value as art. The danger inherent in this position, as Sandra Djwa has pointed out in a piece on Cohen's black romanticism, is "the temptation it offers to mistake



catalogued sensation for new revelation.”<sup>7</sup> I think, however, Gutteridge generally succeeds admirably in resisting this temptation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre,” in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 267-81.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire* (Toronto: Swan Publishing, 1965), pp. 44-45.
- <sup>3</sup> J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary Of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 308.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- <sup>5</sup> See Maurice Hodgson, “Initiation And Quest: Early Canadian Journals,” *Canadian Literature*, No. 38 (Autumn 1968), pp. 29-40.
- <sup>6</sup> Northrop Frye, “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*,” in *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 232.
- <sup>7</sup> Sandra Djwa, “Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic,” in *Poets and Critics*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 183.

## THE BLOOD-ORANGE MOON

*Fraser Sutherland*

A lonely hanging sun, the moon is full of itself.  
In Bethel Cemetery the corpses take their Sunday stroll.  
Why should we living wake?

In the several darknesses the leaves are fronds,  
oarmen of the outer river.  
Our lives are cryptocrystalline.

But we have more neighbours than we thought,  
in the opaque passages.  
They are making deliveries. Calling cards.

Yet that moon, a rutted pippin,  
a swollen bitter tangerine  
is picked out of darkness.