E. J. PRATT:
Rationalist Technician

Frank Davey

LITTLE HAS BEEN WRITTEN about E. J. Pratt's handling of language and poetic form. His early reviewers and critics (Brown, Pierce, Norwood, and Collin) noted mainly his "vivid rhetoric", "surge and swing", "muscular lines", "energy and clamour", plus the epic point of view of his narrative poems. Later critics (Sutherland, Dudek, Sharman, Frye, Buitenhuis, Smith) have become overwhelmingly preoccupied with the thematic implications of his work. Even Frye's recent comments on Pratt's use of the epic mode have been directed more toward explaining certain limitations in the intellectual content of the poetry than toward illuminating its craft.[1]

Only A. J. M. Smith has attempted any detailed examination of Pratt's imagery. Although he too is more concerned with implication or content than with technique, his few technical comments are illuminating. At one point he tells us, "The qualities of the writing are speed, tautness, objectivity, and sharpness."[2] At another, "This is the poetry of wit."[3] As most students of Canadian poetry know, wit, objectivity, tautness are all qualities Smith has sought in his own poetry. Smith has, of course, found similar qualities in the work of many poets he admires. Nevertheless, in Pratt's case I believe he is extremely close to the truth. In fact, I suggest that Pratt's concepts of poetic form and language are precisely of that rationalist kind most familiar to Canadian readers in the work of A. J. M. Smith.

An examination of Pratt's work reveals that he shares Smith's concept of the poet as a detached, dispassionate observer, that he believes in the myth of poetic objectivity. He appears to view the universe as rationally ordered, and to see the poet's task as consciously imparting a similar order to the creative work. Above all, Pratt, like Smith, can be seen to stand outside rather than inside his poetic materials, shaping them through sensibility and intelligence, rationally confronting "problems" of convention, language, and form.

Pratt's shorter poems readily betray these beliefs. They are nearly all fitted smoothly into received verse patterns. The point of view is that of the essayist or commentator.

> The snarl Neanderthal is worn
> Close to the smiling Aryan lips.
> The civil polish of the horn
> Gleams from our praying finger tips.
> ("From Stone to Steel")

> Let the mind rest awhile, lower the eyes,
> Relieve the spirit of its Faustian clamour:
> An atom holds more secrets than the skies,
> Be patient with the earth and do not cram her
>
> With seed beyond the wisdom of her soil.
> ("The Good Earth")

There is little sense of subjectivity in them, even when the pronouns "I" and "my" replace the usual "we" and "our". The pronouncements are made as ones of fact rather than feeling.

> His [death's] medieval grace is gone —
> Gone with the flame of the capitals
> And the leisure turn of the thumb
> Leafing the manuscripts.
> ("Come Away Death")

A number of these "essay" poems are made to appear "poetic" through ornamentation with imagery and metaphor.

> Where do you bank such fires as can transmute
> This granite-fact intransigence of life,
> Such proud irenic faith as can refute
> The upstart logic of this world of strife —
> ("The Mystic")

The imagery here is not endemic to the thought; it is applied arbitrarily by an authoritarian craftsman deliberately forging a specific effect. In some "essay" poems, such as "The Baritone", a portrait of Adolf Hitler, Pratt creates elaborate analogies which provide a synthetic interpretive framework for the burden of the work. The result is clearly a poetry of the performing intelligence, of wit; it presents what is technically propaganda — subjectivity masquerading as objectivity.

He ascended the rostrum after the fashion of the Caesars:
His arm, a baton raised oblique,
Answering the salute of the thunder,
Imposed a silence on the Square.
For three hours
A wind-theme swept his laryngeal reeds,
Pounded on the diaphragm of a microphone,
Entered, veered, ran round a coil,
Emerged, to storm the passes of the ether,
Until, impinging on a hundred million ear-drums,
It grew into the fugue of Europe.

Such decorative and argumentative use of metaphor also becomes one of the principal devices of the long narratives.

A few of these short poems achieve the economy, the impersonality, and the fascination with pattern of Smith himself — notably "The Shark", "The Drag Irons", and "Frost" — although in most of them lapses into conventional abstractions and rhetorical syntax give a most uneconomical appearance. Nevertheless, even these lapses betray a form of rationalism. The rhetoric is another sort of received form, the superimposing of an intellectualized structure on reality in the faith that such a structure will fit. The abstractions show a mind convinced of the objective reality of classification and generalization, a belief very important to a poet who also writes epic narratives. In the epic such formulaic classification ("Hector of the shining helm") and abstraction ("*eorlic ellen*") allow for quick identification by the poet and instant recognition by the reader, so that both can pursue the narrative line without interruption by anything like literary ambiguity. In Pratt's early lyrics they suggest only a sentimental belief in a regularized universe.

Here the tides flow,
. . . . . .
. . . with a lusty stroke of life
. . . . . .
That they might run
Within the sluices of men's hearts,
Leap under throb of pulse and nerve,
And teach the sea's strong voice
To learn the harmonies of new floods,
The peal of cataract.
("Newfoundland")

Beneath the facade of cliché, metaphor, and rhetoric are certain large assump-

tions: that life is struggle ("lusty stroke"), that man is mechanical ("the sluices of men's hearts"), that the universe is possessed of increasing order ("to learn the harmonies of new floods").

THE FACT THAT many of Pratt's "lyrics" are actually short narrative poems again points out his rationalist stance. There are two approaches possible in the narrative: the subjective, in which the narrator can be within the story (*The Seafarer*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, or in prose Richardson's archtypical *Pamela*) or the objective, in which he is excluded from it (*Beowulf*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Rape of the Lock*, or Fielding's equally archtypical *Tom Jones*). Of all of Pratt's narratives only "The Iron Door" is of the former type, and even in it Pratt casts himself as a passive observer and focusses the narration on what happens before him rather than on what happens within him. The remainder of Pratt's narratives are of the objective kind, that in which the writer stands apart from his materials and in which he aspires toward Smith's ideals of impersonality and detachment. These narratives, like all of Pratt's shorter poetry, have very little explicit emotional content. There are no intimate relationships between characters, just as there are no expressions of intimate emotion in the lyrics. These characters are viewed from a distance, given identity only by their roles in the plot — a hero dog, an anonymous life-saver, a recalcitrant "truant". All become generic — the dog standing for its "breed", the truant for mankind.

It is not surprising that when attempting longer poems Pratt turned to the epic mode. In longer poetry the epic is the natural correlative to the impersonal lyric. The epic poet is totally detached from the story he is telling. He deals with it from a god-like stance — impersonally, making little attempt to involve the reader emotionally with its characters. The plot of the poem (comparable to the "pattern" of the lyric) is more important than its characters. The latter, in fact, are usually kept from having any large personal significance by a studied avoidance of psychological verisimilitude in their characterizations. They are viewed externally, superficially, and identified usually by formulaic, synecdochic, or metonymic tags ("Apollo of the silver bow"; "Diomede of the great war cry"). Or they are characterized by their birth and genealogy, the process involving that essential of rationalism, deductive logic.

In the epic, the myth of objectivity which possesses the impersonal lyricist is joined by the myth of omniscience: the poet must appear to know the story in

its *absolute* form. The poet becomes an authority, responsible for his culture's history and obligated to maintain at least a pose of infallibility. The epic world is orderly and one-dimensional; it is conscious of few enigmas about its own character. It is rationalist to the point of believing that men are identifiable by tags and banners, that there is only one story implied by any one event, and, above all, that this story is knowable by man. The fact that the most that any so-called "objective" writer can achieve is subjectivity in the guise of objectivity is simply overlooked.

Two of Pratt's first three long narrative poems are mock-epic ("The Witches' Brew" and "The Great Feud"); the third ("The Cachalot") has a number of mock-epic elements. The mock-epic is even further removed from objective reality than the epic itself. As in the epic, its conventions are fixed and dominant, and bear no necessary relationship to the actual materials of the poem, but outside the conventions the poet is free to manipulate the materials into whatever shape best serves his personal and formal conceptions. The form requires no material, historical, or psychological realities. It is witty, fanciful, wilful, and synthetic. It possesses a reality fabricated in the human mind as opposed to a reality discovered in the circumstantial world. Described phenomenologically, the mock-epic offers a forged consciousness.

In each case Pratt presents reportorially scenes no human could observe — "The Great Feud" is set in the Pleiocene; "The Witches' Brew" and "The Cachalot" are set for the most part underwater. The reportorial mode is total. Despite "The Great Feud" being subtitled "A Dream of a Pleiocene Armageddon", neither it nor its companions contain any suggestion of authentic dream consciousness. The octosyllabics are terse, direct, and mechanically rhythmic. The point of view is clearly objective.

> And thus it was throughout the whole
> Sea-range of the Australian zone
> The fear of racial doom was thrown
> Heavily upon the piscine soul.
> A futile anger like a curse
> Only made confusion worse.
> ("The Great Feud")

The imagery of these poems is the imagery of the inventive intelligence:

> The bellows of his lungs might sail
> A herring-skiff — such was the gale
> Along the wind-pipe; and so large

> The lymph-flow of his active liver
> One might believe a fair-sized barge
> Could navigate along the river;
> ("The Cachalot")

As long as Pratt is dealing with mythological creatures and arbitrary plots, and a deliberately superficial poetic mode, his manipulativeness can be delighting despite the resultant inconsequentiality. But in the documentary narratives Pratt's synthesizing habits are more troublesome. Their subjects are historical events; their agents are individual human beings with separate and complex identities which cannot be summed up in a deft image or a clever analogy.

Pratt appears to have done considerable research on the events of all these documentary narratives. Carl Klinck tells of Pratt's sailing on a Canadian destroyer in preparation for writing *Behind the Log*.[4] A number of sources, including Klinck and Dorothy Livesay,[5] report his spending at least several days aboard the United States Lines' *Roosevelt* before beginning *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*. Klinck remarks that "he examined, with the technique of a detective, every deck, every log and barometric reading, and every person available where the liner docked in New York."[6] *Brébeuf and his Brethren* is based on the thirty-volume *Jesuit Relations*; *Towards the Last Spike* on newspaper and other records of the CPR's construction. In all this research Pratt seems to have been prepossessed with the material and technical aspects of his subjects. Northrop Frye recounts:

> In search of a monosyllable that would convey the hardness of rock, he ransacked a department of geology until he extracted the word "schist." While he was working on *Behind the Log*, anyone in a naval uniform he met would be backed into a corner and forced to reveal what he knew (or, more frequently, did not know) about the anatomy of a ship.[7]

Pratt shows no corresponding interest in non-quantifiable or non-factual information. The only reality which interests him is the knowable one — that of miles, tonnage, names, quotations, that which can be weighed, cited, documented, or otherwise rationalized. There is no mystery or ambiguity in these documentary narratives. "This strangely reasonable poet," as Klinck terms him,[8] writes as if personality can be summarized in a few phrases, moral qualities in a genealogical metaphor, motivation in a single analogy. His research into his characters appears to stop on the threshold — with, in the case of Captain Smith of the *Titanic*, a list of ships commanded, misadventures encountered, and commands issued. Material reality is assumed to contain, if not be, the whole.

The Titanic and *Towards the Last Spike* are excellent examples of Pratt's rationalist method in action. In each case the point of view is that of the detached, omniscient observer. In *The Titanic* he ranges throughout and around the ship, seeing the birth of the iceberg, knowing the contents of the ship's hold, overhearing conversations in the saloon, witnessing physical combat in the gymnasium, a poker game in a lounge, the officers' activities on the bridge. In *Towards the Last Spike* he pretends to oversee Parliament, the construction sites, John A. Macdonald's thoughts, William Van Horne's dreams. The poet's private responses to these various events are concealed. In actual fact the majority of these events have been fabricated by the poet and passed off as actual. Klinck's account of Pratt's "reasoning concerning the poker game in *The Titanic*"[9] makes clear the shrewd calculations involved in such a fabricating process. Pratt's rule seems to be that if an event is not totally knowable (and no event is), one must fake total knowledge. The existence of ignorance, ambiguity, or mystery is not to be admitted.

In both works Pratt's diction reinforces the overwhelming tone of confidence established by the omniscient point of view. The standard Pratt theme that nothing need be impossible to reasoning man is paralleled by an implicit assumption that nothing need be impossible to the careful poet. He can appear to know his subject absolutely. Research can give his diction two certainties: concrete detail and numerical exactitude. Invention can give it a third: dogmatic metaphor. The poet who can witness every event on a ship sinking ten years in the past is thus also one who need only declare a modifier or announce a metaphor to have these become arbitrarily, through his own authority, "true". This boldness of diction, metaphor, and analogy was suitable to the crafted gaiety of the mock-epics, and inspired his early critics to those comments about "infinite gusto", "boisterous writing", "energy and clamour." But in later poems such as *Towards the Last Spike*, where the reader can use his own experience of literal reality as a partial check on the fitness of the poet's figures, this temerity can lead to the inappropriate impression of extravagance and whimsy.

The most obvious characteristic of the diction of both these poems is that it is overwhelmingly specific — an important quality for a poet in creating the impression that he is totally in control of the substance of his narrative. Pratt's research has been scrupulous in gathering together the physical trappings of his subject: the *Titanic*'s "tungsten chandeliers", "Chinese lanterns", "columned smoke", "burnished tile", "fiddleys", "bunkers", and "boiler rooms"; the CPR's origin in "rolling mills and the saws that shaped "poles and sleepers", its prairie roadbed of "black alluvial mould", its "shovel gangs", "spiking gangs",

"fish plates", and "double jacks". Where his research could not have sufficed, he has synthesized details and presented them as document. In *The Titanic* the wrestling holds and boxing blows demonstrated in the gymnasium ("Russian Hammerlock", "Polish scissors", "German crotch", "left hook", "right uppercut which Jeffries took from Johnson") are probably of this kind; the numerous passages of dialogue undoubtedly are. In *Towards the Last Spike* the thoughts attributed to George Stephen, the passage telling of Van Horne's scraping at a frosty window with his jackknife, the passage in which Macdonald seizes a telescope, and the passage beginning "Van Horne took off/ His Coat" appear of dubious authenticity. A historian could probably find many more.

The second important characteristic of Pratt's diction in these poems is that it is consistently enumerating — again a characteristic which helps the poet toward a tone of confidence and knowledgeability. We are told that the *Titanic*'s funnels have "thirty feet of bore", that her length is "from gudgeon to the stem nine hundred feet", that her engineering staff number "thirty-five", that her captain has "thirty years of service", that she has "seven decks of steel", "three electric lifts", that her tonnage is "sixty thousand tons of sheer flotation", "fifty thousand gross". Just before the collision, Pratt writes,

> The ocean sinuous, half-past eleven;
> A silence broken only by the seven
> Bells and the look-out calls, the log-book showing
> Knots forty-five within two hours. . . .

When the ship is sinking, we are told that number three boat, with "sixty-five capacity", is launched with only twenty-four aboard, that number one, "her space is forty", is launched with only twelve, that number ten is launched with a "load of sixty" who collectively weigh "four tons" and takes "sixty seconds of descent" from davits to water.

In *Towards the Last Spike* Pratt uses diction of a similar numerical specificity. Dollars, miles, the duration of speeches, the length of work shifts, the age of rocks, the thickness of strata are all given precise quantity or measure. Although Macdonald, Van Horne, Smith, and Stephen, the major figures of the poem, are cast as romantic visionaries who make their dreams dominate the obstinate weights and dimensions of material reality, it is to a large extent by relying himself on these weights and measures that Pratt attempts to make both dream and dreamer tangible to his readers. Thus Macdonald and his fellow railway builders appear to succeed despite measurable reality; Pratt as poet succeeds because of it.

Even when attempting to characterize these dreamers directly, Pratt resorts to a rationalizing technique: metaphor — which is the third and most outstanding characteristic of his diction. Metaphor in Pratt's work tends to be a restricting device. The subject of the metaphor is compared to a term or set of terms either less complex than the subject itself, or possessing a complexity irrelevant to the subject. The effect is to simplify or rationalize the subject, to make it appear definable and comprehensible when it has been neither defined nor comprehended. The subject is presented as if "dealt with" when in fact its own particularity and individuality have been totally avoided.

The most striking example of Pratt's presenting metaphoric whimsy in the guise of historic understanding is the well-known "oatmeal" passage of *Towards the Last Spike* — one of several metaphors by which the poet pretends to understand his CPR dreamers.

> Oatmeal was in their blood and in their names.
> Thrift was the title of their catechism.
> It governed all things but their mess of porridge
> Which, when it struck the hydrochloric acid
> With treacle and skim-milk, became a mash.
> Entering the duodenum, it broke up
> Into amino acids: then the liver
> Took on its natural job as carpenter:
> Foreheads grew into cliffs, jaws into juts.
> The meal, so changed, engaged the follicles:
> Eyebrows came out as gorse, the beards as thistles,
> And the chest-hair the fell of Grampian rams.
> It stretched and vulcanized the human span:
> Nonagenarians worked and thrived upon it.
> Out of such chemistry run through by genes,
> The food released its fearsome racial products:—
> The power to strike a bargain like a foe,
> To win an argument upon a burr,
> Invest the language with a Bannockburn,
> Culloden or the warnings of Lochiel,
> Weave loyalties and rivalries in tartans,
> Present for the amazement of the world
> Kilts and the civilized barbaric Fling,
> And pipes which, when they acted on the mash,
> Fermented Lullabies to *Scots wha hae.*

Critics may delight in the wit of such a passage, yet it remains despite all its

intrinsic qualities a sentimental and spurious treatment of its subject. Elsewhere Macdonald is metaphorically portrayed as the merchant wooer of British Columbia, which is in turn portrayed as an aging maiden. Van Horne is usually painted as a military conqueror, although also variously compared to a bobcat, Paul Bunyan, and the Flying Dutchman. Donald Smith is compared to "Moses, Marco-Polo, Paracelsus," in addition to being characterized as

> A Scot with smoke of peat fire on his breath —
> Smith? Yes: but christened Donald Alexander
> And loined through issue from the Grants and Stuarts.

All such metaphorical and genealogical characterizations are merely referential to the reality of the man characterized. They substitute a rational concept in the place of that more difficult thing, actuality. The characterizations of *The Titanic* are similarly oversimplified by the use of metaphor. The various financiers aboard are summed up as "Gray-templed Caesars of the world's Exchange". A young boy who surrenders his place in a lifeboat is said to pile

> The inches on his stature as he gave
> Place to a Magyar woman and her child.

The immigrants aboard are given a particularly prejudicial image by Pratt's use of metaphor:

> In steerage — seven hundred immigrants!
> Smith thought of panic clutching at their throats,
> And feared that Balkan scramble for the boats.

In each case the subject has been unfairly treated; the metaphor has said far less than needed to be said while pretending to say all.

ALL OF THESE CASES of characterizing metaphor can be loosely grouped with a larger species of metaphor in Pratt: interpretive metaphor. In the narrative poems such metaphor is Pratt's usual way of dealing with difficult aspects of actuality. We find such a metaphor at the beginning of *Brébeuf*:

> The winds of God were blowing over France,
> . . . . . .
> The air was charged with song beyond the range
> Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.
> Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists
> And there was laughter on the seas.

Here the simplifying images of soaring nature enable Pratt to avoid dealing directly with the potentially troublesome topic of religious inspiration. *Towards the Last Spike* contains the most spectacular such metaphor in his work: the reptile image he gives to the Laurentian Shield. Pratt appears to become more fascinated with this metaphor than he is with the actual building of the railroad. As a result the reader is shown very little of this part of the railroad's construction. Instead he reads of a reptile sleeping, folding, curling, drowsing, and stirring; reads of its "rock and mineral mattress", its "spotty carboniferous hair", its "scales", its "drowsing coils", its "higher vertebrae", its "deep layers and arteries", its "table-clothes of sphagnum moss", its "counterpane of leather-leaf and slime". Most important, he never does see this section of the railroad completed, or learn how Van Horne overcomes the final barrier of muskeg. The metaphor causes Pratt to evade the literal building. Despite his usual show of numbers and particulars — shovels, pick-axes, black powder, abutments, trestles, "three engines", "seven tracks" — he has in fact substituted an interpretive rationalization in the place of the actual event. The struggle between the lizard and man may be Pratt's interpretation of the event, but it is not, as Pratt pretends, objectively *the* event. The event was both the metaphor and much more.

What is typical of this metaphor is that it is tangential to actuality. It represents a movement by the poet away from the matter of the poem (which would have its own rigid requirements) toward an intellectual fabrication which can be almost as arbitrary as the poet wills. It imposes on the matter of the poem an interpretation preconceived by the poet which may or may not be a property of that matter. Pratt is thus enabled to create his own Van Horne, his own Macdonald, or his own Captain Smith under the cover of presenting historical fact. Further, the non-metaphoric aspects of his diction, its enumerating and specifying qualities, as well as providing the poet with a non-mysterious and intelligible working surface, serve to mask his metaphoric caprices with a veneer of factuality.

Metaphor is such a ubiquitous property of Pratt's diction that throughout his work it appears as an entrenched writing habit. Many of these metaphors are of the casual or colloquial sort that one is hardly aware of when writing or reading.

> Water was swirling up the slanted floor
> Around the chair and sucking at his feet.
> (*The Titanic*)

More developed kinds appear as habitual means in Pratt for avoiding the delineation of human personality. Military metaphors are especially frequent. Passengers

on the *Titanic* are said to rally from flight "as if [stiffened by] the rattle of a drum." Her diners mass before the saloon "like storm troops before a citadel." In *Towards the Last Spike* almost every participant is characterized at some time in military terms.

> But here this was a theme less vulnerable
> To fire, Macdonald thought, to Blake's gunfire,
> And yet. . . .
>
> Here he [Van Horne] could clap the future on the shoulder
> And order Fate about as his lieutenant. . . .
>
> The men were fighting foes which had themselves
> Waged elemental civil war. . . .
>
> Into this scrimmage came the fighting men. . . .
>
> . . . their weapons were their hands
> And backs, pickaxes, shovels, hammers, drills,
> And dynamite. . . .

Still other metaphors appear to be attempts to make physical reality more colourful and interesting than it might otherwise appear. The reptile metaphor for the Laurentian Shield certainly appears touched by this motive. In the following passage in which Macdonald reflects on the task of building the CPR, several metaphors appear chiefly decorative:

> But this would be a longer tug
> Of war which needed for his team thick wrists
> And calloused fingers, heavy heels to dig
> Into the earth and hold — men with bull's beef
> Upon their ribs. Had he himself the wind,
> The anchor-waist to peg at the rope's end?
> 'Twas had [*sic*] enough to have these questions hit
> The waking mind: 'twas much worse when he dozed;
> For goblins had a way of pinching him,
> Slapping a nightmare on to dwindling snoozes.

Occasionally Pratt's fondness for such decoration causes the metaphors to become badly mixed. Here the *Titanic*'s adversary iceberg is transmogrified from calf, to ship, to island within six lines.

> Calved from a glacier near Godhaven coast,
> It left the fiord from the sea — a host
> Of white flotillas gathering in its wake,
> And joined by fragments from a Behring floe,

Had circumnavigated it to make
It centre of an archipelago.

Later a *Titanic* distress rocket is an arrow, a spire, and a parasol within three.

An arrow of fire,
A fourth sped toward the sky, its bursting spire
Topping the foremast like a parasol
With fringe of fuschia, . . .

In these instances Pratt's inventiveness has overreached itself. Had he confined himself to perceptual responses to actuality, no such confusion could have occurred. Instead, by responding intellectually, he departs from actuality's inherent order, and enters the separate world of human invention — a world which is not only separate and arbitrary but fallible.

I believe it unquestionable that throughout his career, in both lyrics and narratives, Pratt was an impersonal, manipulative, synthesizing, rationalist craftsman. He is certainly not an anomaly in Canadian poetry, and not, as Earle Birney once suggested, "old-fashioned".[10] He is squarely in the cosmopolitan-traditionalist stream of A. J. M. Smith, Robert Finch, P. K. Page, James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, and Eli Mandel — a stream guarded since the fifties by the criticism of Northrop Frye. It should be seen as no accident that among the most enthusiastic of Pratt's later commentators have been Reaney, Smith, and Frye. Reaney's defence of Pratt's narrative methods is a simple statement of a poet's authority and license — "The poet . . . can take imaginative leaps that the historian does not have to take." "The poet is allowed a view of another reality."[11] Of course a poet can do these things, but not, as Pratt does, in order to pass such leaps and views off as objective fact. Later, Reaney praises Pratt for "purposeful distortions"[12] of history, for exaggerating it "sky high",[13] for creating scenes which "ring true poetically".[14] All these are praises of the fabricating consciousness which superimposes its own structure on reality and decorates that reality with synthesized effects.

There is, it should be noted, a remarkable congruity between Pratt's themes and his techniques. As I have argued in an earlier article,[15] he is throughout his work an apologist for the Pelagian view of man — that view in which mankind can, by social co-operation, discipline, vigilance, the application of reason, and the suppression of individualism, overcome any difficulty. That is, corporate man can be the rationalist craftsman of his own destiny. In his writing Pratt adopts the point of view of the impersonal spokesman for mankind, adopts group values,

and writes social epics. He represses overt statements of individual sensibility, masking these as objective statements of fact. In technique he regards his materials as impersonally as the Pelagian regards the universe — as things to be specified, counted, or altered as the intellect requires. As a result, more so than the work of any other Canadian poet, Pratt's poetry becomes dedicated to the celebration of human ingenuity and craftsmanship. Its themes honour rationalist hopes, its form exemplifies rationalist methodologies. Even its limitations are faithful to the character of the Pelagian/humanist dream.

NOTES

[1] "Silence in the Sea," in David G. Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), pp. 124-138.
[2] "Some Poems of E. J. Pratt: Aspects of Imagery and Theme," in Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt*, p. 142.
[3] P. 148.
[4] Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, *Edwin J. Pratt* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 52.
[5] "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in Eli Mandel (ed.), *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 278.
[6] *Edwin J. Pratt*, p. 52.
[7] "Editor's Introduction," *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp. xvi-xvii.
[8] *Edwin J. Pratt*, p. 52.
[9] P. 46.
[10] "E. J. Pratt and his Critics," in A. J. M. Smith (ed.), *Masks of Poetry* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 94.
[11] "Towards the Last Spike: the Treatment of a Western Subject," in Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt*, p. 76.
[12] P. 78.
[13] P. 77.
[14] P. 79.
[15] "E. J. Pratt: Apostle of Corporate Man," *Canadian Literature* 43 (1970), 54-66.