

THE MASKS OF D. G. JONES

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"Pour se reconnaître, il faut se traduire"

PUBLIC SILENCE surrounding the work of D. G. Jones in Canada is inexorable but not inexplicable. His three books of poetry have emerged and disappeared apparently without complaint against the more strident and ephemeral appeals of the poetry of the past decade in this country. Beside the meteoric flash of such writers as Leonard Cohen and, now, Margaret Atwood, Jones's subtle brilliance seems a pale fire indeed. This is because Jones is a poet who is penetrating with care and delicate concern many of Canada's more troubling æsthetic preoccupations. He is a poet of courage whose surfacing is always deceptive and often misleading in a country where the search for self and heritage can be so exhausting that most poets would prefer to settle for any mode of irony that would both expose the mysterious folly of self-discovery and, also, prevent whatever fulfillment of exploration might be possible.

This is the poetry of an imagination that was early formed, and such changes as occur are those of a style deepened only by tragic events.¹ It should be remarked, nevertheless, how the centre of Jones's circles of radiation is placed in his first book. As a poet who seems only minimally ready for statement, he enunciated an almost consuming passion in his first poem in *Frost On The Sun*² entitled "John Marin". Jones's passion is for art, form and the artist's ambiguous relation to the world present to the eye. Every volume of his poetry has, in fact, begun with meditations on this problem. *The Sun Is Axeman*³ opens reflecting upon Anne Hébert; *Phrases From Orpheus*⁴ moves confidently into the same kind of æsthetic dimension. By the third book, however, the self is no longer a spectator of a simple other; there the spatial order of his early work yields to an interplay, suggested in the course of the second book, of kinds of perceptual events where

The cries of children come on the wind
 And are gone. The wild bees come,
 And the clouds.

And the mind is not
 A place at all,
 But a harmony of now,

The necessary angel, slapping
 Flies in its own sweat.

The transmutation of "place", which was so much a part of design for the poet to whom Jones here almost to his undoing boldly alludes, is where the ambiguity of speech and its mode of visual revelation focus in his poetry. But Jones, unlike Stevens, never teaches explicitly, never *tells* it "As it is, in the intricate evasions of as." The Canadian poet's persona is every part, no part, a picture and absence: as he remarked once, "In order to recognize yourself, you have to be translated."⁵ He is Hamlet's voice and his father's ghost. He would be present to disappear, as he indicated in his first book:

I would eliminate this bombast, this
 Detail of type, and leave an image,
 And a space — in which the birds or trees
 Find all their palpable relations with the earth.
 ("A Problem of Space")

Conjoined, finally, to a love for art and the world seen as theatre, is a need for masks, either tragic or Edenic, whose rôle is to reflect upon how the place of tragedy — a disharmony of then — is at once present, illusory and quick with death.

If it is true that an exceedingly refined notion of art resides at the centre of Jones's consciousness, it is the sense of the visual relations of things and their deceptions that shades both the imagery and form of the poems. In its approximation to visual art, his poetry in fact illuminates imagery which is by its nature and in its effect illusory and deceptive. Similar to any image cast upon a screen, the "place" where it reflects is a blank, a reminder and menace of absence. The mechanics of beaming light is complicated *a fortiori* by the poet's ability to blend images. Jones's arrival at such æsthetic positions does not seem to be through an interest in film but rather *via* an obsession with photographs and painters, not only Marin, but also Klee, Chagall, the Hour Books of the Duke of Berry, Cézanne, Matisse, Hokusai and Chinese art in general. Such an interest may be

attributed to the fact that the poet is himself an amateur artist, and that he had once considered becoming an architect. These interests are more likely only aspects of an intensely visual imagination, and a peculiar bent for the way things come and go before the eye. The eye, as he suggests in "Phrases From Orpheus", is a kind of cosmic organ of nutrition:

We are fed
in the eye of God
in solitary, albeit blind
and intimate

Eye, as he notes elsewhere, is the reflector of all things:

The universe spins in a golden eye
And summer shrinks in four black claws.
(*"The Osprey"*)

As he exhorts in *"The River: North of Guelph"*:

O thin stream
if you must be the image of my mind
let me be that glass through which the light
shines — O mind,
be nothing, be
that translucent glass:
A crow, grown tired of cawing,
lights
on a dead branch;
he folds his wings; the sun
gleams black.
A fallen leaf
drifts and catches on a twig.
A tin
funnel,
pitched into the middle of the stream,
catches the light
and sends it back.

The poem stops almost thoughtlessly short of the Emersonian order of identities, for the final desire is dialectical and like a game of ball played with light against the modulating dark of things. Hence, while he may observe that "the general/ Identification/Leads us to love,"⁶ the sense of the phrase seems to derive its meaning from the following:

I am always your lover: walls

and the fences of time,
or the night, but discover
the world has been joined

indivisible, everywhere, ever.

(“Nocturne: in the Way of a Love Song”)

While walls, as the same poem makes clear, are “merely façades,” their face is sufficient to blur into ambiguity and prevent all things from being one; and like certain styles of painting, they prevent finalities such as vanishing points. In a stanza redolent of epanaleptic elegy, the poet suggests how much is possible:

I am the light where you find shadows,
I am the night in which you shine.
To your extension I am time.

(“A Place for ‘P’ ”)

Of shorter poems that demonstrate succinctly what I have been saying, I would choose “Antibes: Variations on a Theme” from the second book, from which I cite the concluding six stanzas:

“Night Fishing at Antibes”

(Picasso: August, 1939)

Introduces

The town and castle of Antibes

In violet tones.

In the exhausted harbour, two

Grotesque youth, spearing

Fish in the lamplight,

Register a degeneration.

Even the girls, standing

On the antique quai, one

Eating an ice-cream cone suggest

Necrosis. They watch

Under fallen stars, while the town

Corrupts in silence.

Antibes: there are

Places whose very emptiness

Mirrors our betrayal.

It has been remarked that this is a kind of nineteenth-century travel poem. Among its few faults, this need not be numbered. Its faults are more technical: an occasional failure of cadence, an unnecessary use of "very" in the next to last line. Its virtues, emerging like flotsam in many of the stanza's final lines, should suggest that little is being described in this poem, but much is thrust delicately into our purview and then removed. The poem has no background other than the repetition of the word "Antibes". The speaker is a demonstrator; his rôle is to thin out the three or four dimensional world to a screen where action is naught, where, "under fallen stars", gods are aligned with "trivial flesh", creation becomes "reproduction", and where all process is a silent corruption. The strength of the poem is not the apparent idea, but the skill with which emptiness becomes a mirror against the reader's eye. The action of the poem has nothing to do with either the speaker or the figures he indicates. The action depends upon a random superimposition of accidentally related images. But the modulation of imagery relentlessly urges upon us the fact that fantasy, memory, noon, night, Nicolas de Staël's suicide, an older painting of Picasso — that all these show us how the world becomes picture steadily emptying itself of centre and depth: time, deceptions of memory, fallen gods, necrosis become positions and azimuths of the visual world.

As a paradox working against the persuasive order of the poem's stanzas, we are urged to believe in the momentary and exclusive validity of every point of reference. In an article on D. B. Milne, Northrop Frye speaks of a similar effect in Oriental and medieval painting:

... it is absurd to say that Oriental or medieval painting is flat ... or that it has no perspective. The perspective is there all right, but it is a convex perspective which rolls up on the observer instead of running away from him. In some Oriental pictures the observer's eye seems to be at the circumference of the picture, so that it opens inward into the mind. Perspective in this kind of painting is not a mechanical handling of distance, but a proportioning of visual interest, which makes a man look smaller when further away because he is then pictorially less important.⁷

To proportion visual interest is precisely Jones's rôle in the poem. Against the depth-creating properties of line, colour and form, the poet juxtaposes time, plays with the irony of language, remembers the images of other men and, without any suggestion of continuity, allows Antibes to die at noon, at evening and at night, while somebody eats ice-cream. And where is Cap d'Antibes if not a projected fantasy?

My reference to the work of Milne is neither casual nor fortuitous. Jones himself wrote a poem on Milne with the evocative title "A Garland of Milne". Turn after turn of the poem summons up images of the painter's haunting canvases and exhibits a brief and allusive anthology. In many ways, Jones's Milne is an archetypal Canadian, the man who made a garden of the bush, for whom

All space came out in flowers
miraculous, erupting from a void or mouth.

But what is admired in Milne can also be admired in Jones for whom the form of a poem, particularly a longer one, is a spatial composition in which the tonalities of margins, masks and fragmentary implosions create an interplay of voices whose perspectives mix "background" and "foreground" which, for the unwary, seems inhuman.⁸ The persona of these poems may indeed have no precise outline, but the effort to project a shape, to cast a "profile in the birdless air",⁹ to shadow forth the labyrinth of the human spirit in the formal design of the poem is what distinguishes Jones from the unexamined romanticism of his contemporaries. The persona, finally, is a creation of a poem's design.

WHAT ALWAYS CHARACTERIZES Jones's levelled manner of speech is its reflective pitch. It is at once a meditation and an argument; it surrounds the world witnessed over the shoulders of both Narcissus and Li Po, the Chinese and the classical ("more practical and more/Frequented"¹⁰) pool of the mind playing one reply against another. Sometimes the poet's attitude emerges dry and pure, as in the image chosen as the title for his recent study of themes and images in Canadian literature, *Butterfly On Rock*. But the larger poems brood almost bizarrely over the water illusions of Narcissus's pool, a place of expected dissolution in expansion, and unforeseen restoration into depth:

So neither swim nor float. Relax.
The void is not so bleak.

Conclude: desire is but an ache,
An absence. It creates
A dream of limits

And it grows in gravity as that takes shape.

("I Thought There Were Limits")

Thus limit as a screen returns as an accepted illusion turning upon the grave. Such limits are wall-façades: they are interstitial, and so conjoin while seeming to divide. While the butterfly is not rock, he illuminates inertia and is defined by being there.

Of façades, the simplest is the mask. But the pathos of masks, as the poet asserts in the form of most of his poems, is their totally amorphous capability: they droop from branches like Dali's dead time-pieces. So in a poem dedicated to Michèle Lalonde:¹¹

Here you know nothing.
You are a rag, blown by the wind,

A negligee of sunlight on some twigs.
Here the Beast

Lifts you like a broken bush —
Old nests

Tumbling from your hair. The Beast
Snuffs your flesh,

Your limbs, smelling of summer . . .
Like a dead child's

Broken to the wind . . . like tears
Dried in his hands.

(“Les Masques de l'âme”)

Mask is modulation — it is in the same order of phenomena as a visual proportion. Hence their adoption by Jones is neither classical nor archetypal in Northrop Frye's sense. They are less disturbing than the mask borne at the conclusion of *The Story of O*, but they are equally attuned to the mortal and transitory. The woman is often Eve and often Persephone; and the speaker, when not Orpheus, Orestes, Odysseus, Phosphor, can assume even the guise of Michael the archangel in a curious peripheral allusion to the dissolution of his first marriage (“To Eve In Bitterness”). The paradox of Jones's use of the mask is such that, while it evokes some of the playfulness of Cocteau and Giraudoux posing past against present (the foreground and background of time), he seems to have abandoned the stability that past can provide in the mask. The past seems totally over in Jones, a blurred background. Yeats would recreate past; Jones's touch

seems to make it more remote. To that extent the past belongs to the visual presence of time:

The osprey disappears, dissolves,
As suddenly returns, his wing
Banked at another angle on the wind. And so
all things

Deliquesce, arrange, and rearrange in field.

(“Mr Wilson, The World”)

As I have suggested, to find in these poems, even when no mask is employed, a unified voice similar to a unified vision, is not necessary. Jones’s strategy is field composition. In the first section of “Soliloquy to Absent Friends” the speaker’s voice comes only from the vast solitudes of northern winters:

Micheline,
the winds dissolve our towns; the streets
where once we played, bound each to each, even
in solitude to others yet unknown
twist like mirrors in the twisting wind
and are dissolved.

Micheline,
the world is a leafless wood; we stare
abruptly upon tundra and the sky —
soul’s frontiers where we meet,
knowing ourselves only
capacities for loneliness,
solitudes wherein the barrens sound.

The second section addresses Quixote and cites W. C. Williams’ poem on the red wheel barrow. The third evokes Quixote again, now announcing that

Quixote, only your hands,
their unproductive gestures on the air, *welcome*
or *goodbye*, root us in the vast
silence, the abyss where otherwise all things drift,
a rain of fragments falling into death.

As a kind of gathering and fourth act, the next section is a surprising and intricately structured panel description of the month of February in the *Très riches heures* of the Duke of Berry. Everything is there, the magpies who “drop sounds like barley in the muted yard,” haystack, wood, axeman and drover, village and

cold that "has cast a greenish glow/On the dissolving hills." Even in late mediaeval France, dissolution stood upon the margins, but within the frame there is "No distance, no abyss". Here art plays the rôle of the monitory mask and screen, reminding us of that we have lost. The fact that it is ancient art transformed to word only underscores the elegaic character of the image. It is a poignant intrusion of the Ptolemaic order upon a world where "abyss is infinite." Its only consolation is the scant cheer of a pictorial presence:

And so bound round is the abyss,
By winter void, by battle and by labour and by love,
By homely comfort that will warm the thighs,
That in the Duke of Berry's *Book of Hours*
You and I, and old Quixote, Micheline,
And men and women whom we never knew,
And others whom we shall never know,
May find one bed together against cold.

But no one can live in or by an illuminated book, and the poet's advice is only sufficient for that poem. We may, in fact, consider the didactic hortations of the last section ("Let us be bare,/Let us be poor") is simply a shift of mood to suggest a variation of proportion. It is for Jones a new resolution of the dilemma of "Antibes: Variations on a Theme". Within the whole order of shifts employed to seize and release evasions of as, a parainesis, a poised margin, the appeal to art and Quixote and Williams, all these are aspects of an attitude toward life that Jones admires in Archibald Lampman. He observes that "at the centre of [Lampman's] poetry we find a celebration of the abundant well of universal energy and of its embodiment or epiphany in the manifold variety of life."¹² Jones, with more technical variety, aims at such successive epiphanies of visual variation.

OF THE LONGER POEMS, the most achieved is the title poem from *Phrases From Orpheus*, whose stature and originality arise at once against the kind of technical tradition in which Jones participates and the modern treatment of the Orpheus story as it has developed in Europe.¹³ In this poem the poet plays off in a disturbing manner Eliot's "voices" of soliloquy and direct address. It is disturbing for he adopts, among others, the mask and mythological hints of Orpheus; he then speaks across the mask in another voice, more modern, approaching probably his own, and this voice speaks to its own, and not the mate of Orpheus, Euridice. Weaving through these voices is heard the voice of

literary allusion; and that voice speaks contrapuntally against a kind of voice of no time and no body, which can be considered a parody of what Eliot calls the impersonal voice. This final voice gives shape to the modern drive to make the world an image and then to seize it as image. It is the voice of illusion, despair and loss *made visual*. Taken together, the four dimensions of the poem turn with varied response and intensity upon the several descents that the ancient myth evokes, and as the poem proceeds, its profoundly self-reflective character reminds us that Orpheus's need as a singer was intimately involved with the loss of the substantive world. He falls into the pool of Narcissus. Jones stamps his understanding of the fluid tangent of word and thing by an almost terrified response to the visual dissolution of things in time, such as one observes — and there are a number of poems that contain this mystery — in the punctuation of the “present” through an old photograph. Hence, Jones puts on the mask of Orpheus not to return the reader to a mythic past where there will be “no distance [and] no abyss”, but rather to open into the shared abyss because it is more courageous, as he suggests, to embrace mortality than to embrace the image which is beautiful only. The poem becomes Jones's most sustained effort to probe his consuming passion for art and the dark it aims to lighten.

This poem, to an extraordinary degree, employs margins to define masks, and the technique exemplifies in verse the proportioned play of visual interest. Part of the speaker's loss (in his first voice) is his brother's death, and the visit to the morgue runs through a remembered sentence from de Maupassant while the speaker broods on the problem of language at death:

et la bête saignante, le sang sur les plumes,
le sang sur mes mains, me crispent le coeur à
le faire défaillir

It

is

silence

when the great
trays
are

pulled out

speaks

the cold
cadavre gives up
the word

as if

love

speech

were but a hollow cup
drinking fills

Language, of course, participates in the normal curve of the Orphic story: it is a katabasis of recessive backgrounds. It should also be observed that, going beyond Eliot, Jones has split his voice to play off the problem of the gnomic (and, hence, suggestively Orphic) against the blankness of death. It is a technique characteristic of the whole. Its function is to point the central attitude that the gnomic must partake of an awareness of death. To seek the substance of gnomic realities dissociated from mortality is to court a kind of total dissolution. Such, I take it, is the point of one reminiscence that arrives and departs in the poem without echo except for its suggestion of desperate illusion:

I remember a girl like a blonde
wolf eyes
straight from the forest and made up a

lioness she wanted

nothing but music and
the elegant sadness of

garde-moi la dernière danse

there by the highway (her
mother could pitch logs, drive
cattle or deliver a calf) the young men

didn't exist

a Tartar, in love
with rumours of the Byzantine Court
wanting

nothing
but what she could not have

Here the abyss is infinite: she strikes into the poem like a vision choked with visions. Her centre is nowhere. As Antony perceives himself dying, she is a shapeless apparition. The necessary centre is grave; it combines gravity and shadow. As the first voice asks later, briefly adopting the mask of Orpheus but clearly suggesting the modern world of photography and image-making:

Is that flesh
hangs in the darkness?

I have passed
those lovers withered,
crucified

upon the beam of sight

The distinction that emerges, assisted by the unusual word-play, is that the House of Hades is not the camera oscura we would imagine it to be. To win the assurance of mortality, which is the assurance of what we are, the apparent tricks of the visual world must be faced and endured, as if an Antonioni movie were really a form of infernal purgatory, "upon the beam of sight." The descent continues:

Without
death honour is

perilous

a bright plaque

and beautiful

in Plato's vision

Descend
in the dark house

and not unlike
the
promiscuity of gods

embrace

the cold clay, the dirty
plaster

Disorder after death
appals

My love is not among them

My
love is in your midst

bitten by the snake
she is not

there in Hell

a shy
animal in grass

nor yet
exposed and like the glare
rock

but dark

her captured flesh (her flowers
are moonflowers

more the negative
of that

posed photograph
and tan
girl in sunlight

The gradations of descent, measured by recessive margins, step first into an allusion to John Crowe Ransom's "The Equilibrists" from which the italicized words are displaced. The allusion fits: Ransom's world is the pure world where lovers tease like ideal photographs —

And rigid as two painful stars, and twirled
About the clustered night their prison world,
They burned with fierce love always to come near,
But honor beat them back and kept them clear.

The place that Jones evokes is equally prison but of several superimposed dimensions deliberately unfocused, as opposed to “clear”. The epigraph to the Canadian poem — “each in his prison/We think of the key”¹⁴ — points directly to this fact; and so also the poem’s shape and central metaphor bear upon the closure of prison and death. But if our existence is a *huis clos*, some prisons are better for us than others, hence the dialectic employed between illusion and mortality. At the core of death the new life is possible. In that regard, Jones is paradoxically Dantesque, despite his efforts in *Butterfly* to persuade us otherwise. The dialogue beginning “My/love is in . . .” is emblematic of the central argument: love is only where death is, not posed and tempting as “a shy animal” (which refers to the imaged girl at the beginning of the poem). Incapable of being Platonic, she does not participate in “the promiscuity of the gods”, an image strongly suggestive of the third stanza of “Antibes”. The necrosis of Antibes, one might add, is made to sustain precarious and limited existence.

Most modern poetry runs the risk of becoming merely cosmopolitan. This poem runs not only that risk, but also that of being rooted in a sensibility that is normally taken for granted between the contending views of British and American writing. Canadians have made a virtue of remaining parochial within the blown universe. This poem’s particular risk is that it assumes that the Orpheus myth, contrary to the usual assumption, is not a pattern for Gnostic modes of salvation. It is enough simply to hang on through death’s winter that “descends like a glacier into the soul.”¹⁵ By suggesting that literary allusion and image-making are metaphors for sterility, a kind of life without the definition of death, Jones is then able to persuade us that the Orpheus story, a major monument of our literary tradition, participates in illusion as well. Thus the myth subserves the poet’s central preoccupation with visual art whose eye-play is the place of our awareness of mortality. Pure perception against a screen of non-death would be otherwise senseless. By so envisioning the myth as a dramatization of illusion and death, he strips the myth of its general character as a pattern or order. The myth’s ambiguity is displayed everywhere in the poem’s ambiguity. It projects deception as the only place where the self can be identified as an event capable of death. Along with other major modern views of the pattern, “Phrases For Orpheus” constitutes an important revision. Jones’s burden is not that there is immortality in song, despite the ironies of language, but that survival is a visual craft.¹⁶ But such a burden is fundamental to his art, apparent from the poem that opens *Frost On The Sun*, and traceable through all the kinds of *trompe-l’oeil* that his poems hit upon.

A COMPLETE APPRAISAL of the work of D. G. Jones cannot overlook the art of his short poems. It is these poems that distil the kinds of technique I have pointed to. They are not simply lyrical; they press carefully against their form at the edge of evanescence. These poems, to modify slightly the subject of "On a Picture of Your House", often seem to be

no place. And I confess
 what I protect is your
 capacity for loss,

 your freedom to be no one, look
 so naked from that window
 you are lost in light.

So to protect art, by allowing it the freedom to disappear and to return as Jones's notion of the poet does, is, on a small scale, to suggest the amorphous character of the artist in consonance with his art. From the outset, from *Frost On The Sun*, Jones has sought a voice and a persona that without becoming cosmic would dramatize the problem of the world's conflicting claims. In "Phrases From Orpheus" a kind of resolution occurs in which the persona plays against other voices. The risk of the persona has less to do with language and silence than with the visual and non-visual presence of background and foreground. Absence in Jones is not silence but disappearance. Hence, as he remarks in "For Françoise Adnet", "Time is space, it glows." The longer poems seek such a spatialization of event; the best of the shorter poems employ such a technique by superimposing imagery in a manner suggestive of theatre.

Sometimes the movement is syllogistic:

The grey hills, like whales,
 Journey in the winter sea;

 I hardly know if I'm alive,
 Or shall ever love again —
 Unless I journey with the whales
 To where the hills rise up: green.

("Winter Hills")

The strength of the poem is probably thematic: the arena from colourless to green can be called the landscape of Jones's persona. In "Phrases" it is a similar

dialectic from the image as illusion to death as substance that draws the speaker apart. A more exquisite care for the demand of form is manifest in "Washed Up" from his last book:

The rock
 rising from water,

 cedars
 twisting from rock,

 clouds
 and a single birch —

 Nausicaa
 playing in the wind.

The technique is painterly; and Nausicaa, a kind of mask for the speaker's Odysseus, has nothing of a Homeric past, but is a psychological dimension of the Laurentian Shield. And Nausicaa, "playing in the wind," is a desire as evanescent as the act of becoming green. The figure is merely a mask; she belongs to wind; her rôle is to provide visual ambiguity, for Odysseus was not made for that child.

Some objects lose substance by being seen too much. Or, to put it another way, a frequency of modified images suggests the same kind of ambiguity as several voices emerging from different levels of awareness. So "Devil's Paint Brush" —

After the rain
 They are rust upon the field,

 They are suns
 Burning in a spider's space,

 They are
 Nipples by Matisse — One

 White daisy
 Is a virgin or a saint,
 A vestal in a host of flames.

 Musk is their smell,
 Like sunlight on a girl's face.

The paradox of the poem is that all the things the flower becomes are “flat”, brilliantly coloured and totally non-tactile. They are not nipples but “Nipples by Matisse”. These things are as painful visually as a Nausicaa of wind, and they are things whose deceptiveness belong to the vision of mortality.

To seize mortality in the form of art — it can only fail as an endeavour. Had Orpheus been a painter, many things would have been “lost in light” and dark. Jones seems haunted by this: if art cannot possess anything by illusion, what can? “Where do they go?” he asks of snow buntings. And he enjoins:

You must think of the birds

And make them as you will:
Wood or stone or broken clay
With a brown glaze.

You must lie down in the dark
In the naked fields.
You must think of the birds

And make them as you will.

In an unpublished poem entitled merely 13/3/72 he speaks of the effort to make art mortal so as to overcome death:

Je tourne vers toi
à travers l'effritement des âges
pour n'être que ta pierre fine

pour n'être enfin
que ta chair

Jones is rarely so spare: art is simply fine stone; mortality, thy flesh, with all the ambiguity that demands. Loss is broadly spatialized into a crumbling field. As in “Phrases”, the action of actualization is dialectical for the speaker moves “à travers” as if to foil absence by becoming its foreground, by becoming finally, the act of art, and so dramatizing an illusion played against the eye of death, “pour ‘naître’ enfin”.

I would avoid any conclusion that would call Jones a romantic. I would say rather that I have been endeavoring to sketch aspects of a Canadian, of a classical Canadian, poetry. James Reaney has remarked that

the Canadian poet has to stay in the country and at the same time act as if he weren't in it. It looks as if I'm saying that the Canadian poet has to be some sort of poltergeist.¹⁷

I see Doug Jones so, shuffling in his Northern American attic, brooding upon Anchises and another Lavinia. But it is a past that has become untimed and makes the present difficult to perceive. It is an ambiguity peculiar to Canada, and Jones has observed it as well in public papers in which the American that explodes from Whitman to Ginsberg is welcomed as a continental possession, but the Pentagon is condemned as simply "European". Jones's response to the predicament is natively elusive, but it is as centrally Canadian as the work of Lampman to whom I have referred, and to Lampman's contemporary Charles G. D. Roberts, who provides an image that captures the harshly beautiful sense of "butterfly on rock". While Layton's butterfly is precariously near its own death, the butterfly at the end of "The Sentry Of The Sedge Flats" illuminates the pitiless character of death. It is a brilliant image cast upon a mortal ground through which illusion endures:

... a splendid butterfly, all glowing orange and maroon, came and settled on the back of the dead heron, and waved its radiant wings in the tranquil light.¹⁸

From such situations, Jones's poetry and the best of Canadian literature arise, full of sidelong glances forth into the world and back into itself.

NOTES

- ¹ See the long poem, "Sequence of Night," *Tamarack Review*, 50 (1969), 104-26 which endeavours to illuminate the familial aspects of such tragedy.
- ² Toronto: Contact Press, 1957.
- ³ Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961.
- ⁴ Toronto: Oxford, 1967.
- ⁵ Cp. Ann Hébert's letter to Frank Scott in *Dialogue sur la traduction* (Montréal, 1970), pp. 47-48. I am grateful to Barbara Belyea for drawing my attention to this and other kinds of similarities that exist between "Le tombeau des rois" and "Phrases From Orpheus."
- ⁶ "De Profundis Conjugii Vox Et Responsum" from *Phrases From Orpheus*.
- ⁷ "David Milne: An Appreciation," *Here and Now* 2, (1948), rep. *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1971), p. 204.
- ⁸ See David Helwig "Poetry East, West and Centre," *Queen's Quarterly*, 75 (1968), 533.
- ⁹ "A Danger of Birds," *The Canadian Forum*, June 1972, p. 15.

- ¹⁰ "Li Revived" from *Frost On The Sun*.
- ¹¹ A useful introduction for the English reader to her work may be found in *Ellipse*, 3, (1970), 4-41, ed. chiefly by D. G. Jones.
- ¹² *Butterfly On Rock*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 99.
- ¹³ See Walter A. Strauss, *Descent And Return—The Orphic Theme In Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) for an extended discussion of the myth's European development from Novalis.
- ¹⁴ An inversion of T. S. Eliot, "The Wasteland," 413.
- ¹⁵ "Soliloquy to Absent Friends."
- ¹⁶ Strauss remarks, p. 249, that song is the basis of the myth, and that the poet's rôle is one of unifying the cosmos, but nowhere does he elaborate upon the fact that Orpheus lost Eurydice because of looking.
- ¹⁷ "The Canadian Poet's Predicament," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 26 (1956-7), 284-95. rep. in *Masks of Poetry*, ed. A. J. M. Smith (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 120.
- ¹⁸ *Neighbours Unknown*, (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Ward, Lock & Co., 1911), p. 63.