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A POETRY MISCELLANY

Articles

BY E. A. POPHAM, ELIZABETH BREWSTER, ROSEMARY SULLIVAN, WENDY KEITNER, SUNITI NAMJOSHI, DENNIS BROWN

Poems

BY P. K. PAGE, TOM WAYMAN, DOROTHY LIVESAY, PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, PATRICK LANE, CLAIRE E. HARRISON

Reviews, Opinions, and Notes

BY ROY DANIELLS, D. G. JONES, ROWLAND LORIMER, STEPHEN SCOBIE, D. M. R. BENTLEY, ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ, PETER STEVENS, ROBERT JAMES MERRETT, MARY JANE EDWARDS, ROBIN SKELTON, KATHY MEZEI, FRED COGSWELL, DONALD PRECOSKY, RON GRAHAM, ESTHER SAFER FISHER, ANTS REIGO

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contents

Editorial: Bureaucratic Management 2

ARTICLES

E. A. POPHAM
A. M. Klein: The Impulse to Define 5

ELIZABETH BREWSTER
The I of the Observer 23

ROSEMARY SULLIVAN
A Size Larger than Seeing 32

WENDY KEITNER
Gustafson's Double Hook 44

SUNITI NAMJOSHI
In the Whale's Belly 54

DENNIS BROWN
Susan Musgrave: The Self and the Other 60

POEMS

BY P. K. PAGE (4, 31), TOM WAYMAN (18), DOROTHY LIVESAY (21), PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO (22), PATRICK LANE (43), CLAIRE E. HARRISON (53)

REVIEW ARTICLES

ROY DANIELLS
Fringe Benefit 74

D. G. JONES
Born of the Landscape 77

ROWLAND LORIMER
Communications in Context 82

BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY STEPHEN SCOBIE (89), D. M. R. BENTLEY (90), ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ (92), PETER STEVENS (94), ROBERT JAMES MERRETT (96), MARY JANE EDWARDS (99), ROBIN SKELTON (101), KATHY MEZEI (103), FRED COGSWELL (106)

OPINIONS AND NOTES

DONALD PRECOSKY
Louise Morey Bowman 108

RON GRAHAM
New Provinces 111

ESTHER SAFER FISHER
A. M. Klein: Portrait of the Poet as Jew 121

ANTS REIGO
The Purdy Poem 127

editorial

BUREAUCRATIC MANAGEMENT

THE PETER PRINCIPLE RIGHTLY DESERVES its reputation. But the cruellest irony associated with the book — one which Laurence Peter and Raymond Hull might themselves have predicted — has been its total inability to change the procedures it exposes. Bureaucracies abound, subdivide without pause, and multiply without being fruitful. People continue to ascend power structures to their level of incompetence and to wield power incompetently. And despite the many talented people in government, business, education and other institutional organizations, the institutions themselves increasingly appear to reward the institutionally predictable.

The "good" principals and presidents and power brokers — by which one means those individuals whose talent for efficiency has not come at the expense of imagination or intelligence or human insight — repeatedly assert their individuality against the systems they must contend with. Perhaps because it is individuality they value, and individuality which gives them value, they have not been able to impose *their* character upon the systems. To sacrifice the individuality is little answer, for the value would disappear whatever organization took it over. And the confrontative politics which bureaucratic organization engenders are merely elaborate war games engineered by would-be generals who lack any other kind of war to manage. Faced with this play of power, most people are cast in the audience's role, but in the process they also accept a reversal of character models. On the stage are the puppeteers, and in the audience are the puppets. And appreciating the Peter Principle does not cut the strings. It expresses an ironic defence of sorts against power, an indictment which asserts a perennial independence of attitude, whatever the appearance of behavioural control might suggest to the contrary. But this independence, too, may be an illusion. As bureaucracies increase in anonymity, they can rely more and more successfully on apathy and fear to increase their power. The power to deny independence is not then a distant step for them to take, and

the fact that it is taken daily in the name of stability does not make it any the more laudable. But how to combat the anonymity? and how to combat the fear?

The problem with fear is that, because "bad" administrators are always unwilling to admit to their terminal level in the Peter-principle hierarchy — and hence are afraid of being caught out by those above them — fear is self-perpetuating. The powerless are afraid for their security of the powerful, who in turn are afraid of the responsibility which their position implies. So they defer authority upwards. They take no decisions without higher approval, which the higher authority — interpreting any application for the approval of something novel as an administrative escape mechanism rather than the birth of a valid idea — seldom if ever gives. So no ideas move up from the imaginative and intelligent, because there's an unimaginative and unintelligent barrier between such originators and anyone with both authority and wit to appreciate them. Characteristically the people who act as that barrier cannot laugh, cannot listen, do not hear, and will never admit to a mistake. Without power they would be pitiable; with power they are intrinsically dangerous. Already empty themselves, they deny their particular society of its life's blood. And much of the time they even do so unknowingly. Relying on an inherited structure, they cannot see that it continues to live only if actual individual people continue to animate it. Declaring themselves for stability and order, they cannot appreciate how necessary a little disorder is if human lives are to continue to be creative. Wielding power rigidly, they cannot distinguish between authority and autocracy, nor allow options and opportunities to others lest these in some way undermine their own fragile hold on security, whether political or moral or whatever.

Anyone who has encountered classically bureaucratic acts will recognize the coupled fear and ambition in the people who perform them. Government's impulse to centralize — to centralize everything — is like nothing so much as an American wagon-train encircling more and more tightly round Confederation Square in defence of a set of mind it has never allowed to be refreshened. And the centrifugal impulse of Canada's regions seems to emerge from a series of confrontations between aspiring centralists, each with his own definition of centre and power and truth. Opposition counter-impulses to regionalize everything would set up miniwagon trains all across the country, all denying the flexibility that comes from open and inter-regional communication. The possibilities Canada has repeatedly represented — the possibilities that derive from co-ordinated individual options — can only prosper in a more open atmosphere: a climate open to imagination and ideas among the recent and the junior and the mobile as well as the established and the senior and the fixed. To set up controls over imaginative possibilities is to deny the options that people ought to have by right.

Literature and the other arts are not as free from such management as many humanists would like to believe. When Jack McClelland, speaking of publishing,

distinguishes diametrically between "Toronto" and "the regions," he draws apparently unquestioningly on an acceptance of a centralism of his own definition — shared by many, perhaps, but not by the nation at large. Yet it affects the publishing industry, the possibilities of communication, and the fact of book distribution, not to mention other kinds of imaginative enterprise. When the Canada Council defines in advance that it will support only modern dance in Vancouver and only ballet in Winnipeg, it looks at a centralized master plan rather than at the talent or enterprise it could be fostering. Yet it affects individual human beings. When most of the morally outraged who rail publicly against vice choose language and books as their target rather than violence and the barrenness of administrative imagination, they betray their own insecurity about themselves and their transparent political ambition. Yet they cause nervous bureaucrats to run at once in protective circles. When paper matters more than people, and the ease of access to a target more than the justifiability of reaching it, a society is in a precarious state. To help it, the imaginative and creative and intelligent have to stop running from the fear of being called elitist; they have to stop minimizing their talent; they have to stop suffering the mediocre when their society needs able people and sound ideas; they have to assert the rights of the creative and intelligent to a stimulating public education; they have to start reassessing what are problems and what are solutions in Canada, and they have to do so unafraid of their own and their country's future.

W.H.N.

PRISONERS

P. K. Page

One can spot them at once
although not
as one might suppose
by their handcuffs, which of course, they wear
or by their rage
their air of guilt
their wounded pride
but by the sharp-nosed
clean-shaven man in drip-dries
who sits indifferent
invisibly shackled
at their side.

A. M. KLEIN

The Impulse To Define

E. A. Popham

THE POETRY OF A. M. KLEIN seems to lend itself to the critical tendency to categorize, to separate and to label strains of thought and areas of thematic concentration. Critics have consistently divided his poetic canon into three major categories: the "Radical" poems, which exemplify Klein's Marxist leanings in the 1930's; the "Jewish" group (probably written in the late 1920's and in the 1930's), which includes two volumes of poems selected by the poet, *Hath Not a Jew* (1940) and *Poems* (1944), and the verse satire of the Nazi regime, *The Hitleriad* (1944); and the "Canadian" group, which is best represented in *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948), a volume composed of poems written in the middle and late 1940's and selected for volume publication. Perhaps the sole ground for dispute in the critical pigeon-holing of his work is *The Second Scroll*, Klein's novel-travelogue published in 1951. Some critics, placing their emphasis on the historical context of the novel, declare that it is Zionist in orientation; others claim that the Zionist theme is universalized, and that the state of Israel becomes "a symbolic expression of every man's imagined home."[1]

That Klein's work underwent several shifts in subject-matter is undeniable. There is an obvious progression in his poetry from Velvel Kleinburger and Barricade Smith with their poker and protests in the Radical poems; through Childe Harold, Reb Zadoc and Solomon Warshawer, and the homeless wanderings, ghetto mentality, and persecution which form so much of Jewish history; to the rocking chairs and Roman Catholicism of French Canada. Indeed, without too much danger of contradiction, one can summarize Klein's basic themes as: (i) the need for social reform; (ii) the suppressed potential of the Jewish people; (iii) the nature of the French-Canadian milieu.

Furthermore, Klein's poetry exhibits major technical changes which correspond closely with his transition from "Radical" and "Jewish" to "Canadian" subjects. A prime example of the method dominant in his early poetry is "Design For a Medieval Tapestry" (*Hath Not a Jew*), a series of portraits introduced by the poet's sketch of a Jewish ghetto in medieval Germany. In this sequence we hear

from: Reb Zadoc, a modern version of the Zadoc who had anointed Solomon in Israel's golden age; figures reminiscent of victims of biblical persecutions, but here deprived of the eventual triumph accorded their predecessors — Job, Esther, Daniel; biblical prophets of promise or warning, here compromised by fear — Nahum, Isaiah, Ezekiel. The situation evoked in the poem is distanced from Klein's audience by hundreds of years, and, by shaping his characters on biblical models, Klein forces his readers still further into the past; yet the refrain of the first of his portraits ("Reb Zadoc Has Memories") pointedly finds application in the year of the poem's publication — 1940:

> Reb Zadoc's brain is a torture-dungeon;
> Reb Zadoc's brain is a German town.

In Klein's last book of poetry the approach is decidedly unlike that of the early poetry. In *The Rocking Chair*, an object, a rocking chair or a grain elevator, takes on new and complex connotations under the poet's stringent analysis: the rocking chair becomes "act and symbol" of French Canada; the grain elevator gains mythic stature because "bread is its theme, an absolute."

However, despite the seemingly disparate nature of thematic concern and technique in his poetry, an essential element in virtually all of Klein's work is his attempt simultaneously to present and to define his subject. While the early poems take a tradition and create around it a defining situation, the later poems take an object and create for it a defining tradition. The difference between the early and the later poetry is owing to a shift in emphasis rather than any great revelation in poetic vision. Subject and technique may, and do, change somewhat, but the impetus behind Klein's work remains the same. Paradoxically, it is largely because of this compulsion for definition that the thematic concerns of his poetry are in one sense so limited and, at the same time, so fully developed. Within the extremely general divisions of "Radical," "Jewish," or "Canadian," he demonstrates an extraordinary talent for the examination of minute detail; a character, an object, or a moment in time is magnified and expanded into a universal statement which is eventually fitted into the larger, defining pattern of a series of related poems or even a volume of poetry.

Though the impulse to define is apparent throughout Klein's poetic career, it is in his novel, *The Second Scroll*, that he provides what may be his most comprehensive statement of the poetic theory that both grew out of, and served to direct, that impulse. *The Second Scroll* has generally been viewed as a work which sheds some light on the movement in Klein's poetry from "Jewish" to "Canadian" subjects. Perhaps the most extreme example of this interpretation of the novel is put forward by John Matthews, who has suggested that the life of the character Melech Davidson may be taken as an autobiographical gloss, a vehicle by means of which Klein defines and assesses his own ideological development:

> There is what one might call a trichotomy of parallels throughout: the ancient tribulations of the Jewish people, their modern re-enactment, the spiritual Odyssey of Klein himself.[2]

This statement may be extended still further, for the novel seems also to stand as an autobiographical survey of poetic technique. In *The Second Scroll*, Klein has provided his reader with an examination of the pros and cons of various types of poetry, an examination which, as it was made not long after his own thematic and technical transition in *The Rocking Chair*, may be considered in part as a statement of his own poetic alternatives.

The novel presents a double but interlocking plot: the search by the narrator for his uncle, Melech Davidson, and the narrator's professional commission to find and define the poetry of the new state of Israel. This first plot, through the narrator's accounts of the life of his uncle Melech, provides a basis for a survey of the Jewish experience in twentieth-century Europe; the second plot provides Klein with a forum for an examination of the nature of poetry in a period of accelerated cultural change. From various angles, Klein considers the messianic potential of the return of the Jews from exile, the rebuilding of the state, and the reunion of the dispersed tribes to form a people. However, the tinge of Zionist fervour is also present in his search for a distinctive Israeli poetry, a search which becomes an expectation of prophecy — the great creative "fiat." Significantly, the critical discussion of poetry in the novel is presented in conjunction with the resolution of the political situation which for approximately fifteen years had been Klein's own major thematic focal point.

In the novel, as the narrator sits in a plane bound for Israel, he strikes up a conversation with an American "assimilated" Jew. His acquaintance, maintaining that the founding of the Jewish state is "our version of the Incarnation," concludes about the nation in exile:

> It was true, that the Jews qua Jews — the tatters of that original divine vestment, the shreds of the flesh that once showed forth the Lord — had recognizably remained. But not as of yore: they no longer served in their first role, they were not any more the Idea's style and title. They had been reduced to but a single function: mnemonic of the past. . . .
>
> Jewry had ceased as Existence. Among the nations it constituted an anomaly, in speech it was a solecism; the verb *to be* confined to the passive mood!

The state of Israel in Diaspora is described in terms of an "Idea" imperfectly communicated, an incomplete or distorting definition. Significantly, the charge of "mnemonic of the past" has also frequently been levelled at Klein's own poetry, particularly the *Hath Not a Jew* collection. This definition of the state of the nation is offered in terms of modes of thought and expression — "anomaly," "solecism," and "passive mood," terms which could be, and indeed have been, applied to the major part of Klein's poetic canon to the 1940's.

ALTHOUGH KLEIN WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED in the Zionist movement in Canada,[3] his poetry did not, for the most part, deal directly with the horror confronting the European Jew in the 1930's and 40's. Instead, he appeared to retreat in many of his poems to the Middle Ages and the archaisms of the King James Bible. Denunciation was distanced by time and diction, and was thus, some critics claim, made less effective.[4] It is perhaps that E. J. Pratt's review of *The Hitleriad*, Klein's violent satiric attack on Hitler, was favourable, not because of its poetic expertise,[5] but because

> The subject has pulled the threnodist away from the wall of lamentation and placed the satirist in a colosseum with a grenade in his hand and a good round curse on his lips.[6]

The Rocking Chair was hailed as a correction of Klein's "nose-dive into antiquity"[7] and as a movement away from the parochial vision created by his concentration on Jewish culture and tradition.

Yet in the majority of the poems in *Hath Not a Jew* and *Poems*, the evocation of past events and continuing traditions is not made for its own sake, but as a commentary on, or symbolic definition of, the present situation. These two volumes, which may be seen as part of a single process of definition, were apparently the product of careful selection and organization on Klein's part. He opens *Hath Not a Jew* by establishing the nature and the limitations of his subject-matter ("Ave Atque Vale"). In the second poem of the volume, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," he proceeds to outline through the person of "Harold," who under Klein's direction becomes the archetypal "Jew," the historical and psychological context of his "Jewish" poetry: the history of persecution, the now-present threat of Naziism, and the alternatives for present action. The remainder of the poems in *Hath Not a Jew* and in *Poems*, ranging freely in time and situation from the biblical to the contemporary, fit into the framework provided in these first two poems. As a result, they may be taken to be an organic, if somewhat disconnected, whole — a jigsaw portrait of the threatened Jewish culture.

However, if the early poetry does not entirely warrant the reductive charge of "mnemonic of the past" levelled at Jews in general by the travelling companion of Klein's narrator in *The Second Scroll*, it does offer a statement almost totally in terms of Jewish culture. Klein's novel, continuing this association between the socio-political state of Judaism and the concerns of the early poetry, proclaims with the political release provided with the defeat of Germany and the subsequent formation of the Jewish state an expectation of the fulfillment of the nation's stifled potential. Israel should provide the Jewish people with the long awaited opportunity for "existence" in an "active mood" and for the articulation of a more universal statement.

The narrator's quest for a new poetry is initially disappointing. He seeks prophecy, a definition of a new spiritual state, and finds only a number of factional and incompletely communicated visions. The first of these is the insular vision of the radical, of which the narrator says:

> It would vanish, it did not belong to the essential thoughtways of our people . . . ; it surged up only as an answer to contemporary history. It was Israel's retort to Europe, couched in Europe's language.

The second of the new trends is more positive in the narrator's eyes — the poetry of the settlements. Though derivative, this poetry provides the pastoral "names," the "adamic intimacy," which had been lacking in the urban literature of the "ghetto-gotten Rashi":

> One sensed a groping towards the phrase, the line, the sentence that would gather in its sweep the sky above and the earth below and set new constellations in each. But the word did not come.

Next, he encounters the poetry of "the schools," political and religious manifestos, of which:

> Only the orthodox *paytanim* dispensed with program notes for their platform did not have to be set up, it was already there, a table prepared, a *Schulchan Aruch*. Their theme was a continual backward-glancing to the past and their technique a pedantry of allusiveness, their work was of Moses mosaic, a liturgy, God's poetry, which is to say poetry for the Most Merciful of Readers.

As Klein's narrator comments: "I had the originals; I was seeking the tone which might yet again re-echo, not the faint echo of the long since sounded." Lastly,

> There was also the vogue of the young and very wise Nathan, an agile craftsman who moulded the ancient speech to modern use, whose rhymes were in themselves witty, and whose wit had but one target, the iniquity of the gentiles.

Unlike the original Nathan, the prophet through whom the plans for the Temple and the messianic promise of the Davidic covenant were communicated to David, these poets "referred to" and "did not make, Occasion."

Significantly, a measure of these evaluations may well be self-critical. Several of these unsatisfactory modes of poetry may be credited to Klein himself at some point in his career, for he has amply exhibited his radical, traditional, and satiric tendencies. By the same token, his narrator's expression of a poetic ideal may also offer a definition of the type of poetry towards which he saw himself to be moving. Although he never does find a modern-day prophet, the "consolation prize" in the narrator's search is a poet who at least shares none of the negative aspects of the various trends which have, to this point, been rejected. The unsatisfactory poets are derivative; they grope towards some philosophical, political, or artistic statement which they either fail to attain, or degrade by transforming it into

polemic. The narrator finds a poet whose aim is to reduce derivativeness to a minimum.

Fortunately, Klein also makes this poet a theorist, and is thus able to accompany examples of this "underivative" poetry with a critical analysis by the poet himself:

> a poem is not a destination, it is a point of departure. The destination is determined by the reader. The poet's function is but to point direction. A poem is not the conflagration complete, it is the first kindling. From this premise it follows that poems should be brief, laconic. Sparks. I write, therefore, poems that do not exceed one line. Sometimes, of course, it is such a difficult art — I have to extend myself to a line and a half, even two lines. It is a prolixity which leaves me discontented.

One of the examples of this poetry provided by the narrator is equally eloquent in its communication of these principles — (No. 17) "Literature":

> Out of that chambered pyramid the triliteral verb
> The mummies rise. . . .

This is, in skeleton form, the poetry of definition: underivative, not because it is totally original in its thought, but because it states its case in an extreme of precision. While Klein did not limit his later poetry to one or two lines, *The Rocking Chair* demonstrates his own growing tendency toward certain elements of this last type of poetry. For the most part, his later work is underivative, complete in its own internal statement; its component parts are often "tri-" or multi- "literal."

Something even closer to the narrator's poetic ideal is found outside the poetic circles of the new nation, in the physical reconstruction of Israel:

> And then — it was after I had returned from Tiberias to Tel Aviv to attend a literary soiree — then the creative activity, archetypal, all-embracing, that hitherto I had sought in vain, at last manifested itself. Not at the soiree. In the streets, in the shops, everywhere about me. I had looked, but had not seen. It was there all the time — the fashioning folk, anonymous and unobserved, creative word by word, phrase by phrase, the total work that when completed would stand as epic revealed!

In what amounts almost to a defence of "found" poetry, Klein's narrator acclaims the poetic potential of the commonplace, the poetry of signs. Tel Aviv's commercial centre has been dubbed *Sneh*, the burning bush, "which had burned and burned but had not been consumed"; a dry-cleaning firm becomes *Kesheth*, "the rainbow, symbol of the cessation of floods." Of principal importance to the narrator is the source of these metaphors: "born not of the honoured laureate, but of some actuary, a man of prose!"

The poetic theory of the narrator's "consolation prize" is realized in the self-definition of the Israeli people. In their signs, simultaneously "archetypal" and newly created "word by word," tradition is remolded, reinterpreted, and is given new and contemporary application in the "sparks" of these one word analogies. While in a sense derivative, the movement of both the poetic and physical recon-

structions of Israel is also seen as prophetic, for its images are redefined and directed to new use. The novel itself partakes in this movement, for it is a "second scroll," a new Torah for a new age. The poetic quest of the narrator, so closely linked with the new Exodus of Israel, is completed only when he feels he has found a definition of the physical development of the state:

> The fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of recaptured time, was now evident. The password was heard everywhere — the miracle!
>
> I had found the key image.

On one level, *The Second Scroll* traces the emergence of the Jewish nation from the limbo of incomplete definition and frustrated potential. As Israel begins to achieve self-definition, however, the task of reaffirming the threatened identity of the "Jew" which Klein had assumed in the 1930's and early 1940's is rendered obsolete. His last book of poetry, *The Rocking Chair*, has been lauded critically as a movement towards a more realistic, less confining stance, but the change in Klein's subject-matter and technical presentation may not be evidence of a redirection of poetic vision so much as an indication of changing times. The "Jewish" poetry, while ethnic, was also extremely topical; Shakespeare and Marlowe are consciously set aside for more immediate considerations. Now, with *The Rocking Chair*, Klein moves once again to new considerations, and new techniques are required for their explication.

KLEIN WAS ABLE, IN THE EARLY POEMS, to appeal for his terminology to an exhaustive fund of cultural tradition. The concentration of his later poems, to a certain extent, necessitated the poet's adoption of an expository stance. In order to define, or to move towards a definition of, Canadian subjects, Klein had first to establish the existence of some sort of cultural identity. As a result, as Miriam Waddington observes:

> Folkloric objects become important; we are in a world of spinning wheels, Montreal meeting halls, Catholic hospitals, and Quebec liquor stores. It is as though Klein were seeing his real surroundings for the first time without allowing either literary or religious traditions mediate his vision.[8]

Nonetheless, if the poet is, for the most part, unable to draw on any established "literary or religious tradition" in these poems, the objects, the situations, even the language with which he is working, do have definite if not immediately obvious historical, social, or philological traditions behind them. Klein's ability to capitalize on these untapped traditions forms the basis of his presentation in *The Rocking Chair.*

In "Political Meeting," the issue of conscription, tremendously controversial in

French Canada, is emblematically presented in the counterpoint of the poem's two "political meetings": one in the school auditorium, the other in the street outside. The essential nature of this division, and the problem at its source, are given definition in the last three lines of the poem:

> The whole street wears one face,
> shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
> the body-odour of race.

Klein's exposition, appealing to the negative "tradition" of French/English distrust, reveals a problem much more deep-seated than the political issue with which the poem is nominally concerned.

In "Pawnshop," Klein appeals to socio-economic and biblical tradition to construct a complicated web of association. The pawnshop, innocent enough in itself, grows to ominous proportions under the accumulated weight of the poet's thematic expansion towards a final statement. From a place where people sell their valuables, it becomes a place where the people themselves are weighed and ticketed. It houses an inventory of objects displaced from their proper setting and deprived of their proper emotional significance. Gradually, the shop and the despair, poverty, and social injustice it represents become in Klein's expanded vision a threat to society as a whole. The instigator of the problem, in the process of universalization, is identified not as some villain who consciously created the time-bomb situation, but as the prototype of humanity:

> The architect is rusted from his plaque.
> Was his name Adam?

The Fall, after all, consisted of trading an ideal for a negative reality. At the same time, Klein cites as the culprit Adam Smith, theorist of "laissez-faire" economics:

> Was his trade a smith
> Who thought a mansion to erect of wealth
> that houses now the bankrupt bricabrac,
> his pleasure-dome made myth
> his let-do hospitality made stealth?

The dream is contrasted with the "bankrupt," insolvent reality; the fledgling Kubla Khan is left with a distortion of the dream.

The final universalization of the symbol is made in literary terms:

> Synonym
> of all building, our house, it owns us; even
> when free from it, our dialectic grave.
> Shall one not curse it therefore, as the cause,
> type, and exemplar of our social guilt?
> Our own gomorrah house,
> the sodom that merely to look makes one salt?

The Klein of the Radical and Jewish poems with his concern with social guilt is evident here, but the statement goes beyond social criticism. The mentality of the pawnshop is his subject; it is, therefore, human nature which is "cause, type, and exemplar." The final biblical allusion to "sodom" and "gomorrah" is to a type of human iniquity: Lot's wife became a pillar of salt because of her inability to escape the "gomorrah" mentality.

In "Political Meeting" and "Pawnshop," we have seen how Klein, in the process of defining a situation or an object, manipulates established traditions in such a way as to give his "Canadian" subject more universal application, and, simultaneously, to create around it a sense of a new and autonomous tradition. Another, more basic, manipulation of tradition is evident in his use of language in *The Rocking Chair* poems.

In his earlier poetry, Klein's language, his mode of expression, was extremely important in the communication of the spirit of the Jewish people. What so often has been criticized as undue use of archaism was, in fact, a species of imitative form.[9] This significance of language is made explicit in *The Second Scroll* with Uncle Melech's purposeful assignment of certain subjects to the language appropriate to their expression. In the letter in which Melech re-establishes communication with his family, the narrator notes the abandonment of Marxist jargon. The letter ends with a series of commentaries, each in the language or type of diction appropriate to its thought: "language biblic," a "Mishna," a Talmudic commentary, a reference to the Cabbal. In the same vein, the narrator-critic in his search for the poetry of New Israel searches primarily for the "word," the mode of expression which will reflect the creative impulse evident in the state's physical reconstruction.

The biblical echoes of *Hath Not a Jew*, *Poems*, and *The Hitleriad* serve primarily to universalize the particular, to equate, for example, Nazi Germany or the pogroms of the 1930's and 40's with other times and events in a long history of persecution. Klein's mode of expression in this poetry is inseparable from the message conveyed. In *The Rocking Chair*, a variation of this concern is apparent in the bilingual expression of such poems as "Montreal," in which the people of Quebec are given their appropriate voice. As Klein himself explained the mechanics of the poem:

> the following verse . . . is written in a vocabulary which is not exactly English. It is written so that any Englishman who knows no French, and any Frenchman who knows no English . . . can read it. . . . It contains not a word . . . which is not either similar to, derivative from, or akin to a French word of like import; in short, a bilingual poem.[10]

This exploitation of the origins, the etymologies, of words also appears in *The Rocking Chair* in Klein's unilingual poems. Miriam Waddington provides what may be an illuminating commentary on Klein's later poetry when she observes

that these poems evidence a movement away from the "archaism" of the Jewish poetry to "metaphor," which also "doubles, condenses."[11] Once again, subject seems to determine mode, as the essence of this change is from a tendency to "double" time perspective in the early poetry to a tendency to "double" connotation in *The Rocking Chair*.

Perhaps the most successful example of this type of expression is "Lone Bather" in which Klein demonstrates his ability to manipulate even the smallest significant units of expression. This poem comes the closest of any of Klein's work to putting into operation the poetic theory of the "consolation prize" poet in *The Second Scroll*: it is not a "destination" but a "point of departure"; the basis of its presentation is the "tri-literal" connotation of words.

The first two lines of the poem serve as a definition of its contents, a defence of its internal validity, and a prime example of the poet's linguistic juggling act. Individual words are made to function as images in their own right as the reader is included in the imaginative self-definition of the bather/poet:

> Upon the ecstatic diving board the diver,
> poised for parabolas, lets go. . . .

The "diving board" is "ecstatic" — subject to, or, more fitting here, producing ecstacies. "Ecstacy," in turn, may be defined as "an exalted state of feeling, rapture" or as "trance, poetic frenzy." The diver is "poised" — balanced or suspended — in preparation for "parabolas." The term "parabolas" not only refers to the physical shape of the dive, but also carries resonance of the Greek words from which it is formed: hence, parabolic, of the nature of parable. As the diver "lets go," he releases not only the physical motion of the poem, but also springs into the "ecstatic," parabolic frame of mind which allows its imaginative equations:

> lets go his manshape to become bird.
> Is bird, and topsy-turvy
> the pool floats overhead, and the white tiles snow
> their crazy hexagons.

The poem inventories a series of states of being — bird, dolphin, plant, merman — as the diver constantly redefines himself according to his element. Yet these are, finally, relinquished, "rubbed" away as the bather becomes "personable plain" — himself.

This ability of the poet/bather constantly to redefine his status, and thus to recreate his world, is the theme of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." This poem, the last in *The Rocking Chair* collection, serves also to some extent as Klein's statement of the type of poetic definition attempted in the volume, a statement which is echoed three years later in the critical discussion in *The Second Scroll*.

Here, as in *The Second Scroll*, the relationship of the poet to the society he serves

has been altered in some way. The poet's traditional role involves the definition of that society; he is defined as

> he who unrolled our culture from his scroll —
> the prince's quote, the rostrum-rounding roar —
> who under one name made articulate
> heaven, and under another the seven-circled air.

Society, however, has found new media of self-definition in its editors, actresses, and broadcasters. The poet is assumed "dead," and though he is potentially useful, he is not really missed:

> like the mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow
> that shine with the guilt of their unnoticed world.

The "forgotten" poet is confronted with a number of alternative roles which correspond roughly with the poetic stances which are to be declared inadequate by the narrator of *The Second Scroll.* The ideal, exemplified by our poet in the moments in which his vocation is reaffirmed, is the perception of poetry as valuable in its own right, without any artificially constructed social application: language becomes a physical thing to the poet, a lover:

> Then he will remember his travels over that body —
> the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun,
> and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries!
> A first love it was, the recognition of his own.
> Dear limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective,
> dimple and dip of conjugation!

The poets who have succumbed to the pressures of their anonymity, in searching for an audience, forfeit this relation to their art:

> Thus, having lost the bevel in the ear,
> they know neither up nor down, mistake the part
> for the whole, curl themselves in a comma,
> talk technics, make a colon their eyes. They distort —
> such is the pain of their frustration — truth
> to something convolute and cerebral.

Some lend themselves to propaganda, "the multiplying word," and lose their autonomy; others, searching in their own minds or in religion or sex for subject-matter, disconnect themselves and their art from reality:

> O schizoid solitudes! O purities
> curdling upon themselves! Who live for themselves,
> or for each other, but nobody else;
> desire affection, private and public loves;
> are friendly, and then quarrel and surmise
> the secret perversions of each other's lives.

For the true poet it is "infelicity" rather than "fame" or "private or public loves" that proves to be the creative stimulus. His social displacement serves as the basis for the creation of a personal universe:

> Therefore he seeds illusions. Look, he is
> the nth Adam taking a green inventory
> in world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising,
> the flowering fiats in the meadow, the
> sabled fur, stars aspirate, the pollen
> whose sweet collusion sounds eternally.
> For to praise
>
> the world — he solitary man — is breath
> to him. Until it has been praised, that part
> has not been. Item by exciting item —
> air to his lungs, and pressured blood to his heart —
> they are pulsated, and breathed, until they map,
> not the world's, but his own body's chart.

This world is sentient because it is a reflection of the artist who "names" it; the "pollen" of the "flowering fiats" is in "collusion" both with creation and creator. The poet, assumed dead at the beginning of the poem, undergoes, through the act of creation, a vital physical regeneration, for that same "body" of words which previously confirmed his sense of poetic vocation now enables the process of "fiat." Simultaneously object and subject, world and creator, the poet is able to negate the "schizoid solitudes" which plague poets of less comprehensive concerns.

In *The Second Scroll*, Klein looks to the poets of the Israel of a second Exodus to provide a new Torah. The ideal poet, although he is never really discovered, would be a poet of "the miracle," a new Moses. In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Klein's poet partakes in the archetypal act of Adam: as the "nth Adam," his art approximates as closely as possible the divine act of Creation. In re-defining, and thus recreating, the world in their poetry these ideal poets move away from the traditional stance of the poet as definer/preserver, a stance which has either been rejected by a modern technological society, or as in *The Second Scroll*, been made obsolete by political circumstance. They become instead definers/creators who seek to accomplish by their creative redefinition of the world around them something that the "distorting" poets, with their propaganda or self-absorption, cannot:

> To find a new function for the *déclassé* craft
> archaic like the fletcher's; to make a new thing;
> to say the word that will become sixth sense;
> perhaps by necessity and indirection bring
> new forms, anonymously, new creeds —
> O somehow pay back the daily larcenies of the lung!

This passage could ultimately qualify as Klein's own poetic creed in the 1940's. His attempt to "make a new thing" is evident in the transition from the "Jewish" concerns of the 1930's and early 1940's to the "Canadian" subjects of *The Rocking Chair*. His craft made *"déclassé"* by contemporary history, he moved from close adherence to tradition and traditional modes of expression to the consideration of new areas, and a culture which was in need of creative definition.

NOTES

[1] Tom Marshall, "Theorems Made Flesh," in his ed., *A. M. Klein* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 159.

[2] John Matthews, "Abraham Klein and the Problem of Synthesis," *A. M. Klein*, p. 147.

[3] Klein was a member of B'nai Brith Youth and the Labour Zionist Organization. He also edited *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* from 1939-1955 in which time he became a prominent spokesman for Canadian Jews.

[4] Louis Dudek raises what may be the most extreme of the critical objections to Klein's use of archaism: "this language experiment of Klein's — really a private language — cannot be called a success. It is when he accidentally quits his turgid rhetoric that he is most successful. Some words one feels, are seen in print for the first and last time: 'farewelled,' 'nihility,' 'insignificantest,' 'maieutically.' As for 'beautified,' which occurs in *Poems*, Shakespeare himself called that 'an ill phrase, a vile phrase, "beautifies" is a vile phrase'." ("A. M. Klein," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 70.) Even one of Klein's chief supporters expresses some doubts on this account. Miriam Waddington comments: "Klein's use of archaisms has always puzzled me. If he were a bad poet who used archaism to make prosaic language poetical, there would be no problem. But a poet with an ear as fine and as clever as Klein's and with a skill that Thomas Mann calls 'the visible accoustic' would never mar his poems with archaic words unless their use had a deeper significance." *A. M. Klein* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970), p. 111.

[5] Klein himself denied that *The Hitleriad* was of any great value as poetry. However, as he wrote to James Laughlin, his publisher (New Directions Press): "I do think that apart from poetic merit, perhaps because of poetic demerit, *The Hitleriad* has great potentialities for large-scale distribution." (As reported by Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, p. 81)

[6] E. J. Pratt, "Review of *The Hitleriad*," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 21.

[7] John Sutherland, "Canadian Comment," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 59.

[8] Waddington, p. 92.

[9] As Tom Marshall observes in his introduction to the Ryerson collection of essays on Klein, Klein's use of "his private pseudo-biblical or Elizabethan English" followed "the example of Spenser who sought to re-affirm tradition with deliberate archaism." (*A. M. Klein*, p. xxiii.)

[10] A. M. Klein, *Preview* (September 1944), as reported by Miriam Waddington, p. 110.

[11] Waddington, p. 113.

THE WHITEWOOD ELEGIES

Tom Wayman

i A light, far off
seen through a window of the house at night.

A light.

ii Sandy wrote: "On November 16
Pat committed suicide. He used
that stupid 8 mm. Mauser he bought in Vancouver,
if you remember. You know
he has been severely troubled; he has been in psychiatric centers
here in Saskatchewan and on medication, etc., at times
but he wasn't on any now.
He had come to live with me and the baby in Limerick,
then gone to the coast, when you last saw him,
and returned in the Spring.
He was under care and seemed to be real good.
He got himself a job in Regina
which he held down right until the last.
He would phone up and tell me he loved me, etc.,
and even come down, but
he was really tortured with his mind.

"He had just been down to see me that Sunday
and seemed to realize that he needed help again
but never made it. I was nice to him, thank God,
or I'd never be able to survive now. He is buried
in the churchyard near the farm, if you remember,
or perhaps he never took you there?"

iii Rage in the darkness
on the dirt roads
around Whitewood: 1972.
Pat at the wheel
as the tires churn through the summer dust
talking about his life
— his parents' farm again, and working maintenance
for the Highways, what he misses
of Vancouver, his few friends here.
Beside us on the seat, a bottle of rye,
"Saskatchewan acid" he calls it,

and we finally turn up the driveway of a farm
and stop under the sleeping house:

"Naw. They know me. They won't mind."

We open the whisky, while the radio
brings in Winnipeg loud in the night
— rock and roll. "Quit worrying.
If they look out they'll recognize the car.
We can't drink on the roads
because what the Mountie does Saturday night
is drive around looking for people like us
killing a bottle in comfort.
That's crime in Whitewood
— that and using farm gas in your car.
Here we're okay: this is private property."

And later, through the windshield
a light travelling a distant road:

"Must be him. Nobody else would be out this way
at this hour."

We watch the light pass.

iv Now, driving in the late afternoon
with a strong south-west wind
and a white sky
perhaps rain later.
The utility poles
head past, measuring the highway;
the wide fields grown green
the first June after his death.

From the road, the land pulls back
in slow, subtle hills
of wheat, barley,
flax, sunflower
or the intense yellow of rapeseed.
Trees stand in long groves on the horizons
or close by the shoulder;
low poplar and birch scrub.

On the highway through Whitewood,
the Esso station that is also a restaurant

and the Greyhound stop
where Steve, coming from Vancouver one winter
to see Pat, unannounced and broke,
got off in the cold to phone the farm
and found him gone, working in the north.

The farm sold three years now, bought by a cousin.

And the wind along the road
pushing before it
the heads of the high green embankment grasses;
tall stalks
of yellow clover and wolf willow
nod again and again

It is his name
he gets remembered by — what it means
to whoever knew him,
and also the name of the land
of which he was one more
who drew in like a moving lamp:
a white man, a wagon,
a railroad, then the steady flow
of the highway traffic — another
of those planting the land
and paving it

with a name
and a light

v In the lounge of the Vancouver Island ferry
the next month, his head against the window,
coast sunshine
across the remembered, unexpected face.
He sleeps as the huge engines
heave the vessel forward through the Strait.

Perhaps in a moment he will awaken:
confused as always for an instant
then ready to laugh at himself for falling asleep
but bristly, too: staring round
in case anyone is mocking him.
Now his hands
lie in his lap:

the thick fingers, stained with nicotine,
placed there like ten familiar tools
ready to be picked up to get back to the job.

Beyond him
the steel deck
and the green fields of the sea
with their distant mountain rim.
An hour out of Tsawwassen, he sleeps
with his old Pontiac aboard
with the other vehicles,
his hair against the glass, and his face,
the face of a dead man
and the face of a stranger
soft and bathed now
in the whole light.

SURREAL

Dorothy Livesay

I am in a dream
within a wood
not able to move,
become a watcher.

But you throw the ball of fire
look!
I become a catcher,
hold in my gnarled hand
the key to nature.
Turn it over
and winter flowers
on the jack-frost pane.
Turn it twice
and a green rain falls
dissolving all your fears.
Turn it thrice
and you pound the earth
with your body
demanding, demanding
the green forces of summer.

In the fourth season
you walk through fire
eternally turn
into the flames, driven

out of this drouth
find haven,
heaven.

THE EMPTY SLEEVE

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

Love dies down. Love opens the window, breaks its legs going
out, comes scratching at the door at xmas, wanting wingtips.
Love sits on the roof of my tongue asking swallows. Love is
so far away, I'm going to send it roses in remembrance of
a snowfall. Love says *remember me remember me*, I was that honey
thing
that made you whole, I was that woman with scarlet legs and a coat
of mail.
I met love as I was taking a walk the other night, it had one word
for the moon and one for a star; between the two, I forgot it.

Love came back, and its dead wood met it. Love asked itself for food
and lost appetite.

One day, I was sitting on the grass with one foot in a hammock
of spring. Love came by, a little boy I waved off. I was smoking
the air. Love came

back and wept, and I felt sorry, tomorrow I will buy a store
and sell all the bones back. I will sell everything,
and sail through the rooms of grass, where two ships are waiting for
me,
one with flags for the other.

THE I OF THE OBSERVER

The Poetry of F. R. Scott

Elizabeth Brewster

BOTH EYES AND I'S ARE IMPORTANT in the poetry of F. R. Scott. The eye sometimes seems remarkably detached, the "needle" through which "long filaments" of vision flow (as in the poem "Vision"). The "wires" with which it is equipped seem almost mechanical. One might be tempted to think the "I" behind the "eye" rather a chilly one except for the reminder that these wires "vibrate with song/ When it is the heart that sees."

In the early poems "we" is almost more common than "I." *Overture* (1945) is full of poems in the first person plural: "Dedication," "Flux," "Armageddon," "Recovery," "Spring: 1941," "Spain: 1937," "War News," "Resurrection," "Enemies," "The Barons," "Villanelle." These are public, didactic, hortatory poems, often calls to action, expressing a kind of solidarity with the human race and a faith in a new socialist world. In this period of change and conflict, as the author says in "Flux," "There's naught for me and you, only for us." Yet, as he says in the same poem, it is "the ultimate I, the inner mind," which is "The only shelter proof against attack."

"I," when he appears in some of the poems in *Overture*, is close to the didactic "we." The seeing "I" of "Conflict" could be changed to "we" without much change in mood or meaning. In the title poem itself the speaker watches (the word seems more exact than listens to) a Mozart sonata, detaching himself from the "pretty" performance because this "perfection" seems trivial when placed beside the "world crescendo" outside the room. Yet his feelings are not as contemptuous as he pretends. He is obviously delighted to see "The bright/ Clear notes fly like sparks through the air," tracing their "flickering pattern." These sounds are strikingly visual, and their visual and tactual nature is emphasized when the author speaks of "harmonies as sharp as stars."

Sometimes the speaker shifts back and forth between "I" and "We." In "Examiner" Scott writes from the point of view of the teacher watching the "hot

and discouraged" students write the examination he has set. He also looks out from a window onto the natural world of trees and grass, contrasting with "the narrow frames of our text-book schools." Because the "I" of this poem is a public personality, an educator speaking in anger at the kind of education he is obliged to give, it is easy for him to shift to "we" when he asks,

> Shall we open the whole skylight of thought
> To these tiptoe minds, bring them our frontier worlds
> And the boundless uplands of art for their field of growth?

Scott's eye likes a wide space, we notice. He likes to gaze out beyond the windows to "boundless uplands," whether actual or metaphorical.

The same sort of wide-ranging eye is at work in "Trans Canada," where "we" rise from Regina in "the plane, our planet," travelling "into a wider prairie." Because of the triumph of science involved, "every country below is an I land" (a curious change of the "No man an island" allusion, since the "I land" in Scott's poem is "common to man and man" and therefore indicates, or appears to indicate, community rather than isolation).

In the final five lines of the poem, there is a startling shift from "we" to "I" (though perhaps prepared for by the "I land" line). The narrator recalls other nights, on land instead of in the air, when he has "sat by night beside a cold lake/ And touched things smoother than moonlight on still water." We are suddenly — and effectively — made aware of the jar between the public, didactic "we," making comments on man and science, and the personal "I," who remembers making love down there on the earth and is now rather afraid of the inhumanity of moon on cloud, although he also exults in this spacious coldness.

It is chiefly in love poems ("Autumnal") or poems about the natural world ("Laurentian") that the personal enters these early Scott poems; yet the love poems are certainly not confessional, and the poet is acutely conscious that the experience he writes about is a "literary" experience:

> Leaves curl and die:
> All has been said of them that need be said
> By the old poets, and all has been said
> Of you and me long years ago. . . .

PERHAPS THE BEST OF SCOTT'S POEMS are contained in two books published in the middle of his poetic development: *Events and Signals* (1954) and *Signature* (1964).

A. J. M. Smith, in his well-known article "F. R. Scott and Some of his Poems," speaks of "the sensuous mind that is the protagonist of so many of Scott's poems" while discussing "Lakeshore," from *Events and Signals*, a poem which he recog-

nizes as central to Scott's non-satirical work. Smith recognizes also in this poem and others "the identification of the poet's Self with Man." As in "Trans Canada," the self in this poem is detached and observant; and at the end of the poem the narrator says of himself, "Watching the whole creation drown/ I muse, alone, on Ararat." There is exultation in this conclusion, in the narrator's ability to reach back in time to Noah, to see the passage of centuries in a moment of time. And there is something godlike (if also mildly frightening) about this "I" who watches "creation drown" from the top of a mountain, as the "I" of the later "Mount Royal" seems to derive a grim pleasure from warning the "quarrelsome ephemera" of Montreal that their city may in time be overwhelmed by ice or oceans. Although Scott does frequently identify "Self with Man" (and perhaps therefore can frequently merge the "I" in the "We") he not infrequently separates Self out from other men and places it in pleasurable solitude on a mountain top or in the air. The individual cannot always be social, fraternal, public-spirited, and benevolent. Some of the best of Scott's poems (such as "Incident at May Pond") derive their peculiar effectiveness from the clash between the benevolent social self and the solitary, sardonic, observant "I."

"We" is less common in *Events and Signals* than in *Overture*. It occurs in "Lesson," a poem which speaks for the collective conscience, and in "A l'Ange Avantgardien," where Scott exhorts his fellow poets on their journey into the unknown country of new poetry. In "Picnic" the "we" is genuinely personal, as the poet speaks for a group on an outing into the country. It is a group which worships with "ceremonial bread" and the "ancient blaze" of fire; yet the high moment of the day comes when each member of the group is touched by the land's quiet, and "As the failing sun goes down/ Each one is left alone." In "A Grain of Rice" there is a movement back and forth between the "We" and the "I" and also between a microcosmic and a macrocosmic vision. The speaker is conscious of the "majestic rhythms" of the universe:

> The frame of our human house rests on the motion
> Of earth and moon, the rise of continents,
> Invasion of deserts, erosion of hills,
> The capping of ice.

He is also conscious of the "tiny disturbances," human and natural, which the eye of the individual observer can see — the appearance from its cocoon, for instance, of "a great Asian moth, radiant, fragile." The voice of the poet is meditative, almost Wordsworthian, explicit in its statement, but expressing wonder and worship rather than making any call to action:

> Religions build walls round our love, and science
> Is equal of error and truth. Yet always we find
> Such ordered purpose in cell and in galaxy,

So great a glory in life-thrust and mind-range,
Such widening frontiers to draw out our language
We grow to one world through
Enlargement of wonder.

Although the speaker is aware of the flaws in both religion and science, he is a partial believer in both. The universe, with its "ordered purpose" and "widening frontiers" is a miracle to him. Not for nothing is F. R. Scott the son of the late Archdeacon Scott, devout Christian, socially conscious citizen, and amateur astronomer.

The "I" of "Bangkok" is conscious of both the universality of religion and the differences in its forms. Outside a Bangkok temple he reflects:

I had been here before
But never to this place
Which seemed so nearly home
Yet was so far away
I was not here at all.

The wind in the temple bells is almost able to create a "continent of love" within the temple; but the narrator's own "lack of love" prevents the miracle.

The serious, meditative "I" of such poems as "Lakeshore," "A Grain of Rice," and "Bangkok" may be contrasted with the comic party-goer of "Martinigram" and the role-playing "I" of "I am Employed." The comic is not without its serious overtones in these poems:

How hard to strike against this management,
picket one's habits, unionise dreams,
down tools and march into the thoroughfares
holding the banner high: UNFAIR TO MYSELF.

The discontent with the "management" of the Self comes out more seriously in "Ann Frank." The poet, with his typical fondness for wordplay, points out that he and Ann Frank "share a common name." Yet the name is not the chief bond between them, nor has he "stared into the dark" while waiting "the Nazi knock." What they share is imprisonment and hunger, hers literal, his in "the prison of the self," with the food of the emotions beyond reach though not beyond sight.

"Ann Frank" is placed directly after a group of love poems. (Maybe it is itself a sort of love poem to the unknown girl.) The love poems here seem more personal, less "literary," than those in *Overture*. Yet the beloved is usually seen in terms of cold landscape, or, incidentally, of battle, as in "Signature." The image in "Departure" is typical of the view of the beloved as part of landscape:

Always I shall remember you, as my car moved
Away from the station and left you alone by the gate
Utterly and forever frozen in time and solitude
Like a tree on the north shore of Lake Superior.

How much of the loneliness of the woman-as-tree is a reflection of the inner solitude of the eye that observes her?

One of the poems about love which has the air of being intensely personal is not in the first person at all, but in the third person. This is "Invert." Here the poet writes about a man who so yearns for love that each minor "conversion" causes him to pour forth "a whole cathedral of worship and prayer" to the lady who caused it. Disillusionment always follows, however.

> Always he came away with his own lost soul
> Wrapped round the cold stone fact he would not face
> Till, lonely amid the flux, his ego turned
> And creeping back upon its source was left
> Beside his own true love, himself, in the crypt of his heart.

The poem may not be a self-revelation, but, placed as it is near the end of the group of love poems, it seems dramatically to make an ironic or bitter comment on their authenticity. Yet it is followed by "Caring" — which is in turn followed by "Ann Frank."

Signature (1964) contains some interesting appearances of the "I" and the "eye." Scott's fondness for the godlike vision appears in "Incident at May Pond," "A Hill for Leopardi," and "Eclipse," as well as in "Mount Royal." In "Incident at May Pond" the narrator tells of an incident in which he plays God (or perhaps experimental scientist) to an ant, which he places on a stick that he then puts on the waters of the pond. The narrator's feelings are divided. He identifies in part with the ant "(And straightway I was captive too)," but clearly he is also fascinated by this opportunity to see how the ant will act in its frightening predicament. The stick, after some misadventures, comes to rest beside a log which could act as a dock to the little ship and lead it to ground; but the perverse ant decides to swim. Astonishingly, he manages to swim six out of the ten feet to land:

> I was enchanted by his skill,
> His canny sense of where to go.
> I felt exempted from the guilt
> Of playing God with someone's life. . . .

But both ant and poet are surprised by a minnow "lurking furtive underneath." And underneath the "swirl" created by the minnow there is "A second swirl, a splash, a plop." Nature is as full of hidden dangers as it is in a Pratt poem; but they are comic here because of the smallness of the scale. The comedy is half frightening, however. This narrator is clearly the same as the god-like narrator of "Lakeshore," who watches "the whole creation drown," not without some pleasure.

The microcosmic vision of "Incident at May Pond" complements the macrocosmic vision of "Hill for Leopardi." This poem takes off from a poem by Giacomo Leopardi, "L' infinito." In Leopardi's poem, the narrator on his lonely hill imagines "vaster space" and "unfathomed peace" beyond it; listening to the wind, he says,

> I match that infinite calm unto this sound
> And with my mind embrace eternity,
> The vivid, speaking present and dead past;
> In such immensity my spirit drowns,
> And sweet to me is shipwreck in this sea.

Presumably it is Leopardi's sense of infinity of space and time which appeals to Scott, resembling as it does the feeling of his own narrator of "Lakeshore." The "I" of "A Hill for Leopardi" is a sort of astronaut of the mind:

> The traffic and all the trivial sounds
> Fade far away. I mount
> Swiftly, for time is short, flight beckons
> Out where the world becomes worlds, suns pass, distances
> Curve into light, time bends, and motion
> A sweep of laws
> Rolls up all my strength and all
> Into one marvel.

The poem voices effectively the religious-scientific awe of the human mind observing the "sweep of laws" of the universe; it also hints, by the allusion to Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and by the suggestiveness of the word "mount" (and later "thrust"), at the sexual ecstasy which is akin to this sense of the marvellous. But Scott's narrator (unlike the narrator of Leopardi's poem) comes back to earth.

> A loved voice, a touch
> A phone ringing, and the thrust dies.
> Another journey ends where it began
> Shipwrecked on ground we tread a little while.

The narrator is brought back to ordinary reality by voice or touch; he is "shipwrecked" at the point where the journey began. (There is an interesting contrast with Leopardi, who also experiences shipwreck, but on the sea in which he drowns with happiness. Scott's narrator is shipwrecked on dry ground; his spirit is not drowned in the experience of eternity.)

Scott's fondness for the godlike vision comes out more amusingly in the two-line poem "Eclipse":

> I looked the sun straight in the eye.
> He put on dark glasses.

One sees the "I" of the poem, even though jokingly, assuming a godlike equality with the sun — even a superiority to him. Pratt's "Truant," asserting his superiority to the "Great Panjandrum," comes to mind.

One of the most interesting poems of *Signature* is "Vision," which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Here the "I" talks about the "eye" and in the final stanza addresses it directly. If "I" and "eye" are not identical, at least the "eye" does much to create the "I," for "I am clothed in what eye sees." "Mind" bends its appearance to the colours it sees. The physical nature of vision is emphasized in a statement such as "I am fastened to the rose / When it takes me by surprise." The self is intensified by the "stars and stones" which it observes. Yet it is when the heart sees that the "wires" of the "tireless eye" are made to "vibrate with song." Poetry is the creation of an "I" in which "eye," "mind," and "heart" combine. "Eye" does, however, seem rather to dominate.

More uses of "I" and "eye" might be noted in *The Dance Is One* (1973) but they would probably not be significantly different from earlier examples. The "I" of *The Dance Is One* is generally (as in "On Saying Good-Bye to my Room in Chancellor Day Hall" or "Orangerie") more casual and conversational than the "I" in *Overture*. In "On the Terrace, Quebec," he gives us a rare nostalgic glimpse into his childhood:

> By Valcartier, three Laurentian hills.
> Many years ago, as children
> looking north from the Rectory window
> on the longest day of each year
> we saw the sun set
> in the second dip.

In "Counter-Signs," he jokingly takes on the persona of Irving Layton. In "Dancing," the separateness of the "I" from others, including the beloved, is seen not as loss but as gain:

> we are two
> not one
> the dance
> is one

Finally, in "Signal," two lovers are isolated (as the sacrament is isolated from worshippers in a monstrance above the altar) by

> the screen of me
> and the screen of you
> the inside and outside
> of a window

In a typical Scott metaphor, which contains suggestions of winter, wide vision, sunlight, and religious and sexual experience, he concludes:

I scratch the frosted pane
with nails of love and faith
and the crystalled white opens
a tiny eye
reveals
the wide, the shining country.

I have largely ignored Scott's satires, the productions of his "needle eye," not because I do not admire them but because I wanted to concentrate on other aspects of his vision. I have also omitted discussion of his translations and found poems. Certainly when an author chooses to adopt the "I" of another author he is in some measure revealing his own vision; but the revelation is not as direct as that made in the poems that are entirely his own.

What appears in the poems I have discussed is an "I" ("We") of considerable complexity, sometimes witty, sometimes didactic, sometimes reflective, angry or loving, revealing itself obliquely rather than directly. It is not as confessional or overtly autobiographical an "I" as that of Alden Nowlan or Al Purdy, for example, although of course the confessional "I" of Purdy or Nowlan may have its own kind of self-protection. Scott's "I" is greatly concerned with his "eye," with the way he sees things, whether physically or mentally with his "vision." His vision may be microcosmic or macrocosmic, but he especially enjoys a broad view, a view of suns, stars, space, unknown frontiers, "boundless uplands," and "the wide, the shining country." It is in some ways a lonely vision in which the self is isolated and separate, except on those rare occasions when one world pulls another into its "field of force" (as the little girl in "Girl running Down Hill," from *Signature*, pulls the man). But it is also a vision of unity in separateness. Worlds, suns, nations, lovers, insects, all take part in a cosmic dance, and "the dance is one."

MINIATURES

P. K. Page

i

A stone
in a clenched fist

it hurts just
to look
at her

ii

Her eyes like tacks
prick everywhere they look.
The smiling mouth
does not undo their smart.
White teeth —
unproffered band-aid
for your hurt.

iii

Is it the smaller eye —
that shining auger —
that bores into everything it sees?
The little eye that glints like tiny gristle?

Or is it skyscape eye —
wide-angle lens —
which clicks its shutter silently and thieves
shot after accurate shot?

A SIZE LARGER THAN SEEING

*The Poetry of P. K. Page**

Rosemary Sullivan

A POET'S IDENTITY MAY BE FOUND in the habits of feeling and insight that are particularly, almost obsessively, her own and which distinguish her poetry from that of other writers. Occasionally an individual poem can be found which defines a poet's sensibility. The poem "After Rain" provides such a focus in P. K. Page's poetry. With a remarkable acuity, she explores the dimensions of her own poetic temperament, exposing both the strengths and the potential vulnerability of her art. Like so many of Page's poems, "After Rain" describes a simple domestic occurrence (in this case a woman and a gardener examining a garden) pushed to a level of hallucinatory intensity where insight becomes possible. Here, the poet describes her mind as a woman's wardrobe of female whimsy and there follows a brilliant complex of images, propelled by fantastic associative leaps:

> I none too sober slipping in the mud
> where rigged with guys of rain
> the clothes-reel gauche
> as the rangey skeleton of some
> gaunt delicate spidery mute
> is pitched as if
> listening;
> while hung from one thin rib
> a silver web —
> its infant, skeletal, diminutive,
> now sagged with sequins, pulled ellipsoid,
> glistening.[1]

Page is a kind of conjuror playing her own private linguistic game and she could seemingly go on indefinitely manipulating images with this dexterity. Rarely

* In view of recent publications, *Canadian Literature* wishes to state that this article was accepted in March 1976.

has one so complete a sense of a poet luxuriating in language. Yet the whole momentum of the poem is reversed with the remarkable line: "I suffer shame in all these images." This line, with its powerful anguish, is the pivot of Page's poetics, for here she articulates one of the deepest impulses of her work. She has such a remarkable verbal gift that the image-making process can become almost too seductive. In her hands, images are self-generating, and multiply and reproduce in a kind of literary osmosis. Thus one has the sense in her early poetry of images taking over and sidetracking the poem into perspectives that the theme does not suggest. "After Rain" is an extraordinary poem in that Page senses not only the technical, but also the theoretical implications of her susceptibility to image.

Perhaps this can be clarified through an exploration of Page's attitude toward metaphor. She recognizes metaphor as the poet's most perfect instrument. She writes in an essay on A. M. Klein that metaphor is a way of seeing; it " 'gives two for one' — gives two *in* one. Two or more separate ideas, objects, images, fuse. In so doing generate energy. Illuminate."[2] Yet there is a danger in this for the kind of poet Page is, and she herself seems to intuit it: the danger that the energy generated can be illusory. The condition where metaphor can be made to reverberate indefinitely, where everything can be seen in terms of everything else, can lead language away from insight and make it an autonomous game, an evasion of clarity. The emphasis must be on *meaning.*

Page is an almost entirely visual poet. Her imagistic dexterity is based on a sensibility that is sensual and, in fact, her sensitivity to physical image is so extreme that it is as if the sensory perceptors had been stripped bare. In moments of fantasy, word free-fall, nature and its particulars appear in her poetry as generative, life-energizing, and there is a peculiar empathic intensity in her response to it. There is a negative counterpart to such moments, however, in poems of vertigo which describe the visual world as aggressively assaulting the perceiver; poems like "Vegetable Island," where the individual is invaded and infected by the sensual world, "has no strength to meet a tree / debauched with blossoms" and must seek to erase "the touch and scent of flowers."

In 1945 P. K. Page published her first and only novel, *The Sun and the Moon,* under the pseudonym Judith Cape.[3] In a curious way it encapsulates these two alternative responses to the natural world. Its heroine, born during a lunar eclipse, has a devastating capacity for empathic response to nature. In seemingly neurotic states, she is able to identify so completely with nature that she becomes inanimate rock, or tree. Throughout the book, there is a curious sense of reciprocity, of fluid interchange between the human and the natural. The heroine's empathic gift permits her to perceive the static reality of inanimate things; chameleon-like, she can know "the still sweet ecstasy of a change in kind." The author is ambiguous in her attitude toward her heroine; on the one hand, her protean gift of self-effacement gives her access to ecstatic moments of identification with nature. There are con-

vincing passages where the metamorphosis is outward — the heroine becomes a rock, a chair, a tree, experiencing these forms of existence in moments of identity. But there is an alternative rhythm where the self is invaded, and becomes the receptacle of external objects. In fact the heroine becomes succubus; not only her identity, but also the identity of the other is destroyed by her chameleon presence. To my mind comes the analogue of Keats' "Camelion Poet": "When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated."[4] To control this invasion an extraordinary exertion of will is necessary. For the poet, this means a control through technique, verbal dexterity. But P. K. Page's greatest dilemma is to ensure that this control is not sterile, that language is explored as experience, not evasion.

This, then, is the concern of the persona in "After Rain." With a baroque extravagance, the poet's mind builds from the visual assault of nature an exotic web of fragmentary images. They seem to metamorphose spontaneously and any attempt to hold the poet to an emotional or visual consistency is futile. Yet the incompleteness of the poet's private image world is focused suddenly by the presence of the other, the gardener. The poet is trapped by her remarkable responsiveness to nature. Images of rim and hub define the private space which circumscribes her, making her fantasy exclusive, self-involved. The poet asks to break from self-involvement to another kind of seeing, and this appeal is at the centre of Page's work:

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still —
> do what I will — encumber its pure line.

Here is the paradox: a sensibility so richly susceptible to sensual detail, to "each bright glimpse of beauty," that even the sense of self, of separateness from the physical world, seems threatened. To the poet this means an almost unlimited store of image and metaphor, but without a controlling principle. Page recognizes the dilemma at the core of her imagistic suggestibility and she would be "unseduced" by the myriad images which seem to assault the eye in "After Rain." She has sensed the need to convert image into symbol, that painful ritual which the poet must impose on himself. She must seek a poetic order or rationale for the myriad details. The whole she seeks is another order of perception altogether, "larger than seeing." The *eye* becomes the most potent image in her work. It is through the visionary eye of the imagination that the marvelous involution takes

place: from the multiplicity of sensual detail to the controlling principle of symbol: "The eye altering, alters all."

P. K. PAGE SEEMS TO HAVE INTUITED HER SUBJECT from the beginning, but it has taken her time to bring her full capacities to bear on it. It is fascinating to read through her entire work, watching as she ferrets out the metaphoric world that corresponded to the needs of her sensibility. She is an intuitive poet, one of the empathizers, and reading her *Poems Selected and New* the image comes to mind of the exotic "animal" entitled "And You, What do you Seek?" which illustrates the cover of her 1967 *Cry Ararat!*[5] It is a perfect image for the poet: ornate and beautiful. Its thin sensory projectile extended, the animal seems propelled by a blind empathic energy that depends upon another order of intuitive vision in its infinitely patient probing.

Page has published four volumes of poetry — a total of 114 poems, not including poems published in magazines and never collected. *Poems Selected and New* is her definitive volume to date. It is not, however, ordered chronologically, and to have a sense of her development one must revert to earlier books. She began her poetic career with a reputation as a poet of social commitment and is probably still best known for the poems of the 1940's written while she was a member of the Montreal *Preview* group of poets. This is unfortunate because her "socialist" poems are, to my mind, her least successful. In fact few subjects could have done more to distract Page from her finest gifts. Like Wallace Stevens, she is almost entirely a poet of the imagination; her poetry has more to do with folklore, myth, and archetype than with objective time, history, and social fact. A fear of egocentricity may have led her to seek the supposed objectivity of the socialist theme, but it was a direction that led to a deep split at the core of those early poems. Many of the best of them describe the dilemmas of office girls, with an obviously genuine compassion. Yet even the good poems like "The Stenographers" are oddly unsatisfying because the poet's verbal facility betrays her. The attention she gives to metaphor distracts from the human dilemma that is her theme. Images seem self-conscious, even flippant: "handkerchiefs between the breasts, alive / flutter like pallid bats" or "the pin men of madness in marathon trim / race round the track of the stadium pupil." We tire of the surrealistic brilliance of metaphor. The poems, as John Sutherland once wrote, suffer from monotony of form; for even excessive variety is eventually repetitious.[6] It is the personal poems from among the early ones that are most powerful. The disjunction that mars the others is not present either because metaphor is subordinated to subject or the spontaneous exfoliation of metaphor is itself the poem's theme.

Many critics have been puzzled by the incipient terror under the smooth,

urbane surface of the early poems, betrayed by the hallucinatory intensity of images like "the pool brims like a crying eye," or in poems such as "Some There Are Fearless" and "Element," a fantasy of escape in a dream of emersion into the anonymous dark. The cause of this pervasive sense of fear is unlocated in any specific way, but it does seem to be metaphysical in implication. One of the best of the early poems is "If It Were You," which describes the approach of madness and details the physical sensation of vertigo with terrifying precision. The poem's impact comes from the immediacy of the personal address and from throwaway lines like "If it were you . . . not me this time," which buckle against the tight control of the imagery. The experience described is one of entrapment in the blind circle of self with the mind held in "walls of air," "single and directionless in space." It is as if the spinning world of "After Rain" has suddenly solidified. A recurring image of stasis in a metaphoric garden, "the spinning world . . . stuck upon its poles" is Page's private image of hell:

> And there you might stay forever, mechanically
> occupied, but if you raised your head
> madness would rush at you from the shrubbery
> or the great sun, stampeding through the sky
> would stop and drop —
> a football in your hands
> and shrink as you watched it
> to a small dark dot
> forever escaping focus.

The verbal dexterity that propels the images through several involutions here perfectly transcribes the sense of diminishing focus that the poet wants to convey; and there is a rhythmic precision that keeps everything under control and leads inexorably to the final couplet: "as all the exquisite unborns of your dreams / deserted you to snigger behind their hands?" Page has written in an essay on A. M. Klein that she was struck by the way in which, "for all his acceptance of ideological and psychological theory, he seemed to reach beyond both to a larger reality. And this, though I comprehended it only vaguely, I recognized as real."[7] Many have tried to account for the anguished sense of loss in the early poetry as a longing to return to the pristine innocence of childhood, but, of course, this is only a metaphor. Deeper at core is this reaching beyond to a larger reality, intuited in a poem like "If It Were You," and articulated with a growing assurance throughout her work. The discrepancy between the ideal world of the imagination, the potent world of dream, and the real world of the senses becomes one of her most obsessive subjects. Her finest early poem, "Stories of Snow," describes this with exquisite precision. It is one of those rare things, a perfect poem, in which language and metaphor have a compelling inevitability and rightness. The poem is a kind of parable. In countries of lush vegetation, the imagination seeks

the opposite, the stark imagery of snow; as if the imagination, never satisfied with the real, must seek the fantasy, the ideal, impossible other. And any attempt to match the made to the sensed always falls short of the dream; the dreamer of snow is left with one of those bizzare glass globes enclosing a winter scene, familiar from everyone's childhood, now locked safely in a teakwood cabinet — a poignant image of the atrophied imagination. To lose the dream causes anguish; finding himself mistaken in his expectations that the dream has been actualized, the dreamer "lies back weeping." Histrionic, except that the poem makes us believe in snow as symbolic of imaginative vision, and believe that vision is the only means to Ararat, the paradise regained. The poem has an extraordinary surreal quality as images devolve into their opposites: lush green to abstract white; the swan a warm metamorphosis of snow. There is a frightening dimension to the poem when the imagination's hunger becomes so intense that even death seems a gentle seduction. The poem ends with one of those remarkable inversions that were to become Page's signature:

> And stories of this kind are often told
> in countries where great flowers bar the roads
> with reds and blues which seal the route to snow —
> as if, in telling, raconteurs unlock
> the colour with its complement and go
> through to the area behind the eyes
> where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies.

Commenting in retrospect on the image, Page has written: "My subconscious evidently knew something about the tyranny of subjectivity when it desired to go 'through to the area behind the eyes'." The escape from subjectivity is through the symbol-making process; to understand this process it may be most helpful to turn to another medium altogether.

Given the visual intensity of Page's poetry, it is not surprising to learn that she is also a painter. She began painting in Brazil, when her husband was appointed Canadian ambassador there. In a fascinating essay in *Canadian Literature* called "Questions and Images" she describes how "Brazil pelted me with images." Reduced to wordlessness in a foreign culture, as if "starting again from a pre-verbal state," Page describes how the old compulsion to record, which had been verbal, sought a visual outlet in painting. The image world was rich and suggestive:

> What was that tiny fret, that wordless dizzying vibration, the whole molecular dance? . . . What was that golden shimmer, the bright pink shine on the anturias, the delicately and exactly drawn design of the macaw's feathers? Why did I suddenly see with the eye of an ant? Or a fly? The golden — yes, there it was again — web spun by the spider among the leaves of the century plant?[8]

"Brazil," it is clear, is a state of mind: the daylight world of infinitely reverberating detail of a densely textured poem like "After Rain," so clearly transcribed on

many of her canvases. Its counterpart, and the opposite pole of images in her work, is the night (or dream) world of Mexico where she lived for several years:

> If Brazil was day, then Mexico was night. All the images of darkness hovered for me in the Mexican sunlight. If Brazil was a change of place, then Mexico was a change of time. One was very close to the old gods here. Death and the old gods . . . Coming as I do from a random or whim-oriented culture, this recurrence and interrelating of symbols into an ordered and significant pattern — prevalent too in the folk arts of pottery and weaving — was curiously illuminating . . . Great or little, for me it was still a night world — one into which the pattern was pricked like a constellation — bright, twinkling, hard to grasp, harder still to hold. A dreaming world in which I continued to draw and to dream.[9]

The transition from Brazil to Mexico describes a creative metamorphosis: images dissolve into their symbols. The two countries define precisely the *bouleversement* of the final image of "Stories of Snow": from the disturbing multiplicity of detail through the vortex to patterned space. The mandorla or "eye" image occupies the symbolic centre of this pictorial world. On one side of the eye, the sensuous multiple world; when pulled through the aperture, unrefracted whiteness.

Page asks: "I wonder now if 'brazil' would have happened wherever I was?" It is a teasing conundrum. Does the occasion create the artist, or does the place, any place, become catalyst, activating a potential that is incipient? In any case, these two poles, the sensuous day world of "brazil" and the symbol-ridden mystic night world, define a dialectic central to her poetry.

In an essay in *Canadian Literature*, "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," Page has frankly defined the "larger reality" she seeks as a mystic wholeness. Using a typically domestic image, transformed and made exotic, she writes:

> I am a two-dimensional being. I live in a sheet of paper. My home has length and breadth and very little thickness. The tines of a fork pushed vertically through the paper appear as four thin silver ellipses. I may, in a moment of insight, realize that it is more than coincidence that four identical but independent silver rings have entered my world. In a further breakthrough I may glimpse their unity, even sense the entire fork — large, glimmering, extraordinary. Just beyond my sight. Mystifying; marvellous.
>
> My two-dimensional consciousness yearns to catch some overtone which will convey that great resonant silver object.[10]

Only in moments of stillness, at-tension, is such a *bouleversement* of the normal world possible. The ideal condition is one of pure receptivity, inner silence. One thinks of Wordsworth's wise passiveness or Theodore Roethke's long-looking. Such silent patient waiting is an activity more potent than any searching. Thus

Page's best poems always describe still moments of the psyche which reveal the mind in the act of transition to, as her finest poem would have it, another space.

P. K. Page has written: "Most of my poems have been doors closing. A few were doors opening."[11] I find myself turning to Rilke to identify a sense of anguish, mystical in implication, which is beneath the baroque surface of her poems:

> Surely there is a degree of need to which the angels must lend ear, radiations of extreme emergency which men do not even perceive, which pass through their dense world and only over yonder, in the angel's aura, strike a gentle, sorrowful note of violet, like a tinge of amethyst in a pocket of rock crystal.[12]

Page's best poems are "radiations of extreme emergency," expressions of a compulsion to find a visionary world commensurate to the needs of the imagination. The penultimate poem of *Poems Selected and New*, "Cry Ararat!" is a poem that seeks to open doors. The title alludes to Mount Ararat, the mountain on which the dove landed after the flood. It is an image of a second Eden, recovered by the imagination in the dream state of "focused reality":

> First soft in the distance,
> blue in blue air
> then sharpening, quickening
> taking on green.
> Swiftly the fingers
> seek accurate focus
> (the bird
> has vanished so often
> before the sharp lens
> could deliver it)
> then as if from the sea
> the mountain appears
> emerging new-washed
> growing maples and firs.
> The faraway, here.

Against this image is set the deflation of normal reality:

> This is the loss that haunts our daylight hours
> leaving us parched at nightfall
> blowing like last year's leaves
> sibilant on blossoming trees.

The most valued moments in Page's poetry are moments of fantasy and dream because

> When dreaming, you desire
> and ask for nothing more
> than stillness to receive
> the I-am animal,

the we-are leaf and flower,
the distant mountain near.

She is speaking of the state of at-tension when external reality is invested with a sense of presence; a condition known only by the child who lives in a "quick" landscape where objective nature is a world of answering subjects. The adult recovers this world only in rare moments when penetration to the unconscious self in dream states releases the transcendental powers of the self. Page speaks of this self as a "dimensionless point in my absolute centre," to reach which "requires the focus of the total I." The expression describes emotional integration as though consciousness comes into contact with deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substrata of being and to which we rarely penetrate. Such moments are charged with numinous energy and bring a sense of completeness "as if I had drawn a circle in my flight / and filled its shape — / find air a perfect fit." The problem with this emotional kind of mysticism is that the experience is transient, involving an overwhelming sense of revelation of a noetic quality but without intellectual content. It implies another kind of consciousness, non-rational and potential, if rarely actualized. But the intuition remains incomplete and the fall from assurance is inherent in the experience itself. The poet's anguish comes from the recognition that our sense of deepest reality is dependent on whimsy: " 'Must my most exquisite and private dream remain unleavened?' " The poem's chief poignancy lies in its sense of a reality intuited, which must remain forever undefined. The poem ends with the remarkably cogent couplet:

A single leaf can block a mountainside,
all Ararat be conjured by a leaf.

A perfect couplet to describe the evanescence of the mystic dream. In retrospect, it becomes obvious that the title of the poem is an imperative.

The poem falls short of its dream, and partly for technical reasons. In an effort to convey a sense of mystical reality, Page reverts to traditional symbolism, but it intrudes upon the poem by calling attention to itself. The problem is similar to that of another great poem, Theodore Roethke's "In A Dark Time." In both cases, the poet has no traditional and still workable structure of belief which can provide him with the metaphors essential to his vision. In "Cry Ararat!" we balk at the line "the world stopped at the Word" and in Roethke's poem at the final metaphor: "one is One, free in the tearing wind," because the language carries no realizable meaning; or perhaps, more precisely, because the inherited structure of meaning implicit in the words is too potent. The poet cannot use them without calling on the traditional beliefs that give them meaning. This is not only the poet's responsibility. It is symptomatic of the disjunction at the core of our modern culture that now our most potent metaphors "remain unleavened."

The final poem of *Poems Selected and New*, "Another Space," is P. K. Page's

finest work. Its brilliance is a matter of perfect technical control. Its subject is a dream in which the poet sees a mandala: a personal vision of the archetype of the cosmic dance — the poet, a solitary viewer, is reeled into a human circle connected by an invisible axis to a starry spool. In such a poem, the poet must convince that she offers more than a formal arrangement of archetypal symbols. Page's poem convinces entirely; there is a feeling of recognition, a leap in response as if an elemental feeling larger than personal experience were tapped by the poem. Part of the achievement is a consequence of the rhythmical rightness of the poem. A precision in the use of line break catches the compulsive, hypnotic rhythm of the dream state:

> Those people in a circle reel me in.
> Down the whole length of golden beach I come
> willingly pulled by their rotation
> slow
> as a moon pulls waters
> on a string
> their turning circle winds around its rim.

There is a pulsative "surging and altering" rhythm even to the images which alternate in a sequence that one can only call an exfoliation of images: from rose to sunflower to bumble top to Chagall figures. One has the sense of looking into a kaleidoscope. No change is abrupt; as in dream, the principle is one of metamorphosis.

The primitive ritual dance (a reference to Chagall brings to mind the Chassidic dance)[13] expresses the ultimate wholeness and harmony of a universe that is forever surging and altering, yet forever one. The dream's meaning comes as a revelation of a subjective synthesis as the barriers of the self dissolve. The experience is so simple and so profound that it staggers the mind. I think of a line by Theodore Roethke to describe the change of state: "To what more vast permission have I come." The oxymoronic quality of the dream is caught in the image "staggering lightness," as the dreamer is pulled into the archetype by the "blow of love." Throughout the poem Page has used traditional diction — circle, axis, fixed parts, rose — but in such a way that the private integrity of the experience is never invaded, and yet a recognizable structure is given to the whole. Traditionally, as in Sir John Davies' *Orchestra* or in the *Divine Comedy*, the controlling principle of the cosmic dance is Divine Love. Page convinces us that the breaking down of the isolation of the self in the dream state gives access to an overwhelming sense of numinous energy, and that to define the impulse behind this most profound reaching out beyond the limitations of the self, the only adequate word is love.

Stasis, solidification, has always described a hell state for Page; the bright osmosis in which the self dissolves and is integrated with its deeper substrata is

described as a molecular dance. Fluidity leads to new direction, another seeing in a "dimension I can barely guess":

> And something in me melts.
> It is as if a glass partition melts —
> or something I had always thought was glass —
> some pane that halved my heart
> is proved, in its melting, ice.
>
> And to-fro all the atoms pass
> in bright osmosis
> hitherto
> in stasis locked
> where now a new
> direction opens like an eye.

It is fitting that these stanzas recall the earlier prayer: "And choir me too to keep my heart a size / larger than seeing." The momentary glimpse of an informing structure initiates the longed-for break from solipsism. The poem's humility is moving. It recognizes that the trembling or shaking is in the human eye, but that this does not call into question or invalidate the assurance of informing structure. And only once that order is sensed can the validity of the personal or other persons be reached; only then does the heart melt. This understanding points a "new direction" in Page's poetry as she continues to explore her vision of the poet as Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman.

NOTES

[1] *Poems Selected and New* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974). All other references are to this edition.

[2] "The Sense of Angels," *Dialog* (Passover 1973), pp. 18-19.

[3] Rpt. in *The Sun and the Moon: and Other Fictions* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973).

[4] John Keats, "To Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818," *Selected Poems and Letters*, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), pp. 279-80.

[5] *Cry Ararat!: Poems New and Selected* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967).

[6] *Essays, Controversies and Poems*, ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. 107.

[7] "The Sense of Angels," p. 19.

[8] "Questions and Images," *Canadian Literature*, 41 (Summer 1969), p. 18.

[9] Ibid., p. 19.

[10] "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," *Canadian Literature*, 46 (Autumn 1970), p. 36.

[11] Quoted by Tom Marshall in "Inferno, Paradise and Slapstick," *Canadian Literature*, 64 (Spring 1975), pp. 104-7.

[12] *Letters to Benvenuta*, trans. Heinz Norden (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 17.

[13] Marshall, p. 104.

THE MEASURE

(for P. K. Page)

Patrick Lane

What is the measure then, the magpie in the field
watching over death, the dog's eyes hard as marbles
breath still frozen to his lips? This quiet repose

the land having given up the battle against sleep
the voices crying out beneath the snow.
It is the cold spear of the wind piercing me

that makes me sing of this, the hunger in your eyes.
It is the room of your retreat
the strain in the hand when it reaches out to touch

the dried and frozen flowers brittle in their vase
the strain when the mind desires praise . . .
the music as of soldiers wandering among their dead

or the poor dreaming of wandering as they break
their mouths open to sing as prisoners sing.
Or soldiers marching toward their devotions

or the poor marching or the rich in their dark
rooms of commerce saying this is finally the answer
this will allow us the right to be and be. To be

anything. In the field the rare
stalks of grass stick stiffly into air.
The poor, the broken people, the endless suffering

we are heir to, given to desire and gaining little.
To fold the arms across the breast and fly
into ourselves. That painless darkness or stand

in the field with nothing everywhere and watch
the first flakes falling and pray for the deliverance
of the grass, a dog's death in the snow? Look

there. Stark as charred bone a magpie
stuns his tongue against the wind
and the wind steals the rattle of his cry.

GUSTAFSON'S DOUBLE HOOK

Wendy Keitner

RALPH GUSTAFSON'S POETIC DEVELOPMENT recapitulates in miniature the general pattern of the growth of poetry in Canada: it begins with a typically colonial deference to "the Greats" of English literature with imitations of Spenser, Shakespeare, and the Romantics; passes through a transitional phrase of dependency on newer but still foreign models, primarily Hopkins and Eliot; and culminates in the post-war period in a vigorous, distinctive maturity. The third phase of his career begins effectively in 1960 with the publication of *Rivers among Rocks*, a book which collects his poetry for the sixteen-year period 1944-1959, and it includes the eight books which have followed it to date in increasingly rapid succession: *Rocky Mountain Poems*, *Sift in an Hourglass*, and *Ixion's Wheel* in the 1960's; *Selected Poems*, *Theme and Variations for Sounding Brass*, *Fire on Stone*, *Corners in the Glass*, and *Soviet Poems* in the 1970's. This body of poetry — as all good poetry must, according to Eliot — creates the illusion of a view of life through its selected range of imagery, distinctive interrelationships between structure and content, and characteristic major themes: nature, love, ephemerality, unjustifiable death, and the conflict between time and space.

Gustafson's quest for meaning is conducted not in the terminology of rational discourse, Romantic aesthetics, or Christian dogma, in his final period, but primarily through love — love of woman, works of art, and natural beauty. That his ultimate religion (prophetic of Leonard Cohen's) is love is demonstrated from the time of *Rivers among Rocks* in a poem such as "Beach with White Cloud." Gustafson's fundamental conviction that the transcendent is attainable only through the sensuous is underscored by the use of Christian imagery of blood and bread in this love poem:

> The rage touched
> Your knees, thighs.
> Blood broke, bread,
> Stone, skies.

"Beach with White Cloud" is a passionate celebration of sexual communion, but frequently Gustafson's love poems move beyond simple joy to urgent defiance and even elegy. Gustafson typically writes with a double vision, bringing into focus simultaneously both the beauty and the brevity of life.

The persona of "Armorial," for example, ponders what colours and images might compose his heraldic arms. He and his lover could be represented by "gules" and "leopards/ Passant on bars of gold." The contrasting colours of red and gold, like the two discrete strands of imagery on which the tapestry of this poem is woven — one based on English history and the other on Canadian geography — highlight this characteristic doubleness of vision.

The imagery in "Armorial" includes flowers ("roses," "lilies," "rod and blood-red weed and rush"), and other living creatures ("leopards," "larks," and "porcupine") or embodiments of the life force ("water," "field"). But the lover persona feels stalked by death: roses remind him of the Wars of the Roses; the porcupine strikes an image of the arrow-riddled Richard III killed at Bosworth Field; and the lily is also ambiguous, having Lawrencean overtones of sexuality ("She lay down with love and my hand/ Was gold with dust of lily") and equally of death — Richard falls twisted in a ditch, "His hand wristdeep in lily." This elegiac love poem ends with the poignant line, "My love wept." Love and death are counterpointed; so, too, are Europe, with its historical pageantry and famous monuments, and Canada, a country "Far from kingdoms, which regal grew," "a field without myth or rhetoric." Gustafson's coat-of-arms, like his vision of life, combines several fundamental contraries.

The dichotomy between what Eli Mandel, in *Contemporary Canadian Poets*, has termed a "cultivated literary awareness" and an "almost primitive feeling for place" — a dichotomy Mandel finds in several contemporary Canadian poets — is one of the chief characteristics of Ralph Gustafson's poetry. Alternately, he is a hoary traditionalist and a new Canadian Adam taking his green inventory. In the sense in which Northrop Frye used these terms in his famous terror review, Gustafson's poetry is sometimes "original" — returning to cultural origins through study and imitation of poets and other artists of the past — and at other times "aboriginal" — drawing its inspiration from the land. Gustafson uses the sensuous to reach the transcendent, but this contact with physical realities may be made either directly with things in nature or indirectly with their recreations in works of art — poems, paintings, tapestry, music, sculpture, and so on. Furthermore, it is notable that in so far as he depicts the natural world, Gustafson writes almost exclusively about Canada; while in so far as he responds to the world of art, he writes almost entirely out of a European cultural context. Thus he has two basic sources of imagery around which he develops two distinctive poetic styles.

Gustafson writes both intricate, refined, art poems inspired by foreign masterpieces (for example, the poems grouped in the "Music and Imagery" section of

Selected Poems), and also strikingly more direct nature poems depicting with authenticity the sharp, irrefutable details of Canadian rural life and landscape under the impact of swiftly changing seasons. In these explorations of the geography of his native land, Gustafson's style is hefty, solid, and exposed, "Like field-rock brown/ Against the turning blade."

Rocky Mountain Poems, a collection of descriptive and reflective nature poems, tests this thesis and draws out the implications for a writer of living in a post-colonial society, "a country without myths," a place without a long history of visible achievement where "all is a beginning" and where there are few historic national symbols and no "tapestry and coronations, kings crowned/ With weights of gold." Overpowered by the harsh, massive grandeur of the Rockies, Gustafson's persona searches out mankind's place in the universal scheme, attempting to comprehend his own relation to nature which, despite his metaphysical efforts to yoke it to human consciousness, remains vast, primal, and insurmountable. Quickly humbled by the mammoth landscape, the poet persona recognizes that the Rockies are "immeasurables" and that "On mountains/ One does not try out metaphors"; thus he turns his attention to smaller, more manageable portions of the landscape, closely observing small details: a hummingbird, a flower, strawberries, and pine needles. Ultimately, he suggests that this "elsewhere/ Crazy, nearer look" can and must replace borrowed myths altogether.

In the poem, "At Moraine Lake," which exposes a conflict between Canadian geography and Western tradition, Gustafson writes contradicting Wordsworth with an important pun on the key word "lie":

> Myths
> Lie about us in our infancy.
> Take her of the foam somewhere where
> It's warmer. Look, I am occupied with
> The irrevocable decisions of the ants.

"At Moraine Lake" deposes European mythology and replaces it with an authentic spirit of place — an emphasis which links Ralph Gustafson, at least in his "aboriginal" poems, with other contemporary post-colonial writers.

In the Introduction to his *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse* written just two years earlier, Gustafson had pointed out already that "There are no Aphrodites in Canadian poetry — the seafoam is too cold. The Furies have to be imported. The Laurentian Shield is the intruder." Thus, he maintains, the Canadian poet ought to locate his symbols in the land — here the ants — something alive and indigenous.

The final poem of the Rocky Mountain collection, "In the Yukon," is structured again on the polarity between historic civilizations (European) and wilderness (Canadian). It begins: "In Europe you can't move without going down into history,/ Here, all is a beginning." What Canadians have instead of engulfments

by the past is geography, nature; the grandeur of this country, Gustafson suggests, lies in its natural pageantry of flora and fauna, rather than in the realm of social struggle and cultural achievement. Thematically and also stylistically in these nature poems, Gustafson thus has

> pitched
> glove off,
> touched cleanly
> the green ice
> the green fire.

Just as the Group of Seven artists abandoned European conventions and techniques to portray adequately and authentically the vibrant, bold colours and lines of the northland, the McGill Movement poets, and later Ralph Gustafson, needed to develop a new poetic idiom honed down for recreating the jagged, uncivilized beauty of this country.

PERHAPS BECAUSE THE LAND as antagonist to the human figure lies at the core of the Canadian experience, failure and death assume special significance in our literature, even in the poetry of Ralph Gustafson who in certain respects still holds a Romantic view of nature. Death and oblivion need not be synonymous in countries with ancient and still viable cultural traditions. By contrast, for the relatively newer transplanted populations of Canada, there can be little confidence in continuity through history or art. Also, the four sharp seasons here are a constant reminder of the passage of time, and the alien beauty of this cold northern land presents striking objective correlatives for the state of mind of individuals confronting their own mortality. For example, in one of the poems from *Sift in an Hourglass*, inspired equally by Galla Placidia's mausoleum in Ravenna, Italy, and a crystal of snow in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Gustafson suggests that death, contemplated serenely in a European setting within the man-made contours of a tomb decorated with mosaics which have outlasted centuries, assumes less manageable proportions in the open spaces of the Canadian landscape. Here the persona cannot structure reality as

> eight Beatitudes, Death
> the ninth, and crossed into four,
> north, south, east, west,
> the arch of the kingdom
> eternal, the Beatitude Death. . . .

In the falling snow, dimensions scarcely exist; certainly reason cannot comprehend them. "And in that Winter Night" ends:

myriad, the snow falling,
light ineffable and death
ineffable, the moment determining,
understanding death, death
understood under that winter night.

Ephemerality emerges as one of the dominant themes of *Sift in an Hourglass*, a collection which — by its title alone — reaffirms Gustafson's ties to British literary tradition; in fact, he becomes almost a poet's poet. Gustafson's "aboriginal" style — his spare lyricism and habit of stripped-down statement — is elicited almost exclusively by the Canadian terrain; when he writes of England, Greece, and other foreign countries or takes his inspiration from older works of art, his style consistently tends to be more allusive, complicated, and elaborate. Gustafson's "original" writing echoes and reverberates with references to a broad spectrum of English literature, as well as to European history and mythology. In several instances, borrowing diction from literary tradition reinforces the theme of transience at the level of style by showing that even language is subject to the processes of time.

The very mutability of things, however, in Gustafson's view, should make us treasure them the more fervently. One of his poems is subtitled, "An Accolade for Death who Makes Beauty Beauty"; another, "The Exhortation," begins with the premise that "Grief's love's origin." Echoing Yeats, Gustafson writes with Dionysian intensity:

Love
Is the thing, is it not?
To rage and sing, to thrust
The grinning skull and grave
And know the singing lust.

Unlike Christianity with its life-negating aspects, as Gustafson perceives it, the pagan religions of ancient Greece or Egypt come close to his own emphasis on sensuality. The persona in "The Valley of Kings" from *Ixion's Wheel* comments: "They weren't far wrong: / the body kept / to keep the soul." Again in "The Histiaean Poseidon: Athens," looking at the fifth-century B.C. bronze statue of the Greek god of the sea whose love affairs were almost as numerous if less celebrated than those of Zeus, the Christianized Gustafson persona is moved to a passionate identification with the primitive divinity:

I cry blasphemy.
Cry,
The hurl of the god
Is my hurl,
Hard, flung.

Repeatedly, his poems incorporate the belief that one reaches the highest meaning

of life through an affirmation, not a denial, of sensuous reality. Such affirmation is made, however, with full tragic awareness of the fleeting nature of all experience and frequently even of art. At the centre of Gustafson's poetry lie the twin facts of beauty and mutability; he contends that, despite injustice, violence, and death, only a full embrace of transience sufficies. Paradoxically though, many of the poems on this theme in *Ixion's Wheel* and other collections are articulated in a highly elliptical and allusive style, leaving Gustafson vulnerable to charges of aestheticism or academicism, while his historical and foreign illustrative material has raised, for Canadian readers and critics, the question of his relevance.

By the end of the 1960's, Gustafson's two separate styles, one direct, the other allusive, hitherto elicited by two distinct orders of experience: one of Canadian nature and weather, the other of European art and myth, and conveyed by two different types of imagery: one geographical and the other historical, begin to merge. The mixed media protest poems of *Theme and Variations for Sounding Brass* (1972) — a striking contrast to *Ixion's Wheel* — focus on the victims of international as well as local violence and injustice, from Cambodia to Quebec, and, taking an engagé stance, use bold, plain, prose-like statements. Gustafson sets for himself the task to "Shock our hearts" into a realization of the extent and significance of monstrous current events, and the collection demonstrates his full mastery of the public poem. The general structure which contains these five witness poems — theme and variations — is borrowed, of course, from music; so, too, are each of the five individual structures: nocturne, fantasia, ricercare, aubade, and coda. The central theme is love — no longer just in individual but in enlarged socio-political terms — and the variations show, in a range of different national contexts, the grim, dehumanizing results of its distortion or ultimate absence.

Gustafson's vocabulary, syntax, and rhythm in these poems are close to prose; in fact, in some instances, patterns of reference are established by means of incorporating into the poetry snatches of prose, usually from political speeches. There is a very interesting connection, then, between Gustafson's response to the Rockies and to political events of the past decade: in both cases, he encounters realities for which parable and metaphor seem irrelevant and for which only "plain / Statement" is appropriate.

Fire on Stone, winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for 1974, marks a sharp return to a more personal and reflective lyric mode as Gustafson resumes his study of nature, his world travels, and his Pound-like journey through the past to find touchstones of relevance for citizens of the contemporary, polluted, war-torn world. In these poems, Gustafson blends or moves freely between his two styles and two quarries of images: the symbolic desire for light, illumination, is one of the principal motifs, but it is pursued by a process sometimes antithetical, sometimes parallel, to the ascent of Plato's mythic caveman. Acutely conscious of growing older, the Gustafson persona — almost always a nearly autobiographical

figure — wants "all / Heart-saddening things resolved." He feels that "Death ought to bring / An answer to the questions." Yet he knows, finally, that it will not, and in these poems the great antinomies — life and death, beauty and brevity, good and evil, time and eternity, nature and art — remain unreconciled.

"North Cape," the opening poem, juxtaposes natural beauty — "midnight sun," "fjord," "gulls" — with man-made ugliness — "rubbish," "napalm." A fundamental opposition is suggested, too, between the persona and his lover on the one hand, and the engulfing natural and political environments on the other. Characteristic of Ralph Gustafson, reality is portrayed as the interplay of dualities. Several other poems — "Sunday Morning at Hammerfest," "Nails at Nijo," and "O Permanent Paean Periclean," for example — underscore his vision of the world as a combination, metaphorically, of both debris and miracle, stone and fire. His antinominal view of reality and his unusually positive informing vision perhaps are given fullest expression in "O Mud, Thou Vile Sublime." Here Gustafson confounds categories in lines which combine Elizabethan word play ("But what is grave? and quick? Life / Itself's a low-down buried pun") with contemporary conversational rhythms ("Tuesday wasn't it, we felt good?"). The persona concludes resolutely:

> Something's
> True amid all this slither surely?
> .....
> Cock-crow surely dawn; this pulled
> And washed-out line of intimate Monday,
> A stretch of purest meanwhile briefs?

The pun on "briefs" and the almost parenthetical placing of "meanwhile" — a word choice which itself underscores temporariness — give this last line tragi-comic possibilities, but the dominant note is celebration, for the satisfaction of Monday's wash or for Tuesday's health and happiness.

Ultimately, in Gustafson's universe, "The moment-when is what pertains." In "To Old Asclepius — Lyric at Epidaurus," life is again documented as being both painful and beautiful, and this poem seems intended as a final statement. In manuscript draft, it is entitled "Summation at Epidaurus," and the conclusion Gustafson reaches here is reiterated in many other poems which similarly rejoice in "the hour's magnificence," "that hour," "the flashed instant." Both are equally real, "Sting of wasp and swallow of moon," and his poetry urgently recommends that life be lived fully moment by moment since joy balances grief.

Characteristically, and perhaps as a result of his musical background, Ralph

Gustafson structures experience in counterpoint. Life and death are brought into focus almost simultaneously by the speaking voice of the two-part "Bishop Erik Grave's Grave" and by the gardener persona of "Poem in April" and "Hyacinths with Brevity." Alluding in a veiled way to Shakespeare and Eliot, and also including homespun domestic details, the latter poem is both richly allusive and compellingly direct as the persona implores with passionate ambivalence:

> these forty bulbs . . . should be
> Already in the ground so swift the wind
> Blows and brief the constituency
> Of sun.

The motif of light is an important strand in the intricately plaited imagery of the recent *Corners in the Glass*, too. As the sun, it symbolizes the life force itself; as reflected light, it suggests philosophical illumination, Joyce's *claritas*. But shunning abstract thought and pure speculation, Gustafson's intellectual grappling with the meaning of life here issues directly in joyous celebration of the tangible, audible, visible universe. The movement away from orthodox, religious, otherworldly solutions to the problems of the human condition, which was begun tentatively in the early *Flight into Darkness* and developed more fully in *Rivers among Rocks* and *Sift in an Hourglass*, culminates in readily accessible symbols and images and in pithy, direct language — a style which now illustrates the primary thesis: "I'll have the concrete." In "Argument," Gustafson proclaims:

> Light, Erigina's Light
> (Capital L)'s
> An abstract absolute
> I'll have the sun
> On cranky crystal, corners in
> The glass, tablecloths and silver,
> Oranges with peels on them.

One fine poem on the *carpe diem* theme is "The Moment Is Not Only Itself." Gustafson's familiar gardener persona is presented here as raking autumn leaves while listening to Chopin. The joy and beauty of this October day seem able, at least momentarily, to create a favourable equipoise of opposites and "make end/ Of foliage, of summer, descendings, however/ You finish it, not matter." The joy of the moment itself is of supreme importance, carrying significance for the future in providing what immortality there is on earth. Thinking of love, he concludes that "What is real is what the heart/ Has."

Both literally as well as metaphorically, throughout *Corners in the Glass* Gustafson presents himself as a cultivator of his own garden, focussing attention on common details in the immediate environment. The majority of these poems is set in rural Canada, largely in the vicinity of Gustafson's own home in North Hatley, Quebec. Sharply criticized in the 1960's for being a Grand Tour poet, in recent

years Gustafson has become increasingly a regional poet, the Canadian equivalent, in some respects, of Robert Frost. His autobiographical persona is no untutored country bumpkin, of course; but what concerns him above all is not speculation but sensation, not history but geography, not the foreign but the local — the beauties of flowers, birdsong, and even the antics of midges at the corner of his patio on a summer afternoon. Enjoying the backyard scene, he confesses that he is content to remain "Oblivious of Agamemnon and a thousand ships."

From the time of *Rivers among Rocks*, Gustafson's themes had begun to stress the value of the here and now. "A Candle for Pasch" had concluded with this-world emphasis: "Joy here, least: if none." "Apologue" had underscored that "taken joy is all." But Gustafson's medium at that stage did not always embody his message; in fact, it often worked at cross purposes. By the 1970's, style and theme reinforce each other, so that Gustafson's thoughts are articulated in sensuous terms. This is demonstrated succinctly in poems such as "The Overwhelming Green" or "Of Green Steps and Laundry" which notes:

> she will hang
> Blue and white shirts and a patched quilt
> On the laundry line that runs from the kitchen
> Step to the yard telephone pole and sheets
> That smell of winter's cold, and the pulley
> Each time the line is launched will squeak,
> And that will be important.

These latest poems about Canada, furthermore, tend to be set in winter. They explore the Canadian psyche in the context of northness and against the anagogic equivalent of winter, age. Gustafson's Canada is no longer the angular, incisive, overpowering Rockies; the landscape is that of the Quebec Townships — harsh but gentle, lonely but powerfully beautiful. "Airborne Thanksgiving" speaks of "those loved / Contradictions" and would seem to set Gustafson amongst those Canadians who hold "thanksgiving and snow in their pockets." Diverging from Frye, Jones, and Atwood, Gustafson's vision highlights neither terror nor bare survival, but rather the meeting of challenge with strength, grace, and acceptance of loneness and, ultimately, of death.

Brevity and death, he concludes, assume significance only for those who are lovers of life; this is the theme of "Improvisations on Lines of Somebody Else." That here Gustafson's inspiration comes from lines written by fellow Canadian poet George Johnston quietly underscores in another way both the dominant national theme of this collection and also the repatriation of Gustafson's style. Despite the fact that his very latest book, *Soviet Poems* (1978), is the diary of a trip outside Canada (his invited reading tour of the Soviet Union in the fall of 1976), what it stresses is that "unpolitical humanity is the same," and it does not invalidate the judgment that, in his poetry of the 1970's considered as a whole, Ralph

Gustafson demonstrates not the bleak discovery of Thomas Wolfe that we can't go home again, but rather the felt truth of Margaret Laurence that we must go home again. In the life-long process of uncovering this truth in his own way, Ralph Gustafson has produced an impressive body of poetry which bears witness to a personal, as well as a national, struggle.

THE COLLECTOR

Claire E. Harrison

He arranged shells
in shallow drawers, in cabinets,
containing the lavishness of oceans
in neat and quiet rows.

My grandfather, of precarious
heartbeat and locked into deafness,
who spoke love with tiny mollusks
showing me brown limpets
with holes in the centers
like small volcanoes,
and angel wings, tender
white fans with scalloped edges.

I liked to stroke
the vitreous olives
the whorls of orange-dusted whelks,
too child-intent to notice

that his breaths were being gathered
arranged in their rhythmic sequence
and numbered, like the finite
chambers of a nautilus.

IN THE WHALE'S BELLY

Jay Macpherson's Poetry

Suniti Namjoshi

JAY MACPHERSON'S FIRST MAJOR BOOK of poems, *The Boatman*, was published in 1957 by Oxford University Press and then republished in 1968 with the addition of sixteen new poems.[1] Her second book of poems, *Welcoming Disaster*, appeared in 1974. No discussion of modern Canadian poetry is complete without at least a mention of Jay Macpherson's name, but the only article on her poetry that I have come across is the one by James Reaney, "The Third Eye: Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*," which appeared in *Canadian Literature* in 1960. Fortunately, that article is almost definitive. Superficially, there seem to be some obvious differences between *The Boatman* and *Welcoming Disaster*. The second in some ways seems much "simpler." It is my purpose here to explore some of the similarities and differences with the aid of Jay Macpherson's other writings,[2] which include two theses, two lectures, and a children's text on classical mythology.

As Reaney makes clear, the central myth of *The Boatman* is that of the ark. The ark appears to contain us, as though we were trapped in the belly of some monstrous creature, and its contents appear to be hopelessly miscellaneous; but properly perceived, Man, in fact, contains the ark, and its contents are ordered:

> In a poem entitled "The Anagogic Man" we are presented with ... the figure of a sleeping Noah whose head contains all creation ... The whole collection of poems requires the reader to transfer himself from the sleep our senses keep to Noah's sleep, and from Noah's sleep eventually to the first morning in Paradise.

Or, to state the matter in Northrop Frye's terms:

> In the anagogic phase literature imitates the total dream of man, and so imitates the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the center of its reality.... When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained... Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way.[3]

Noah's salvaging operations at the time of the flood correspond to the activity of the poet, the man who perceives or "dreams" and thus makes "a Cosmos of miscellany." In other words, Noah, Endymion (the sleeping shepherd) and the

poet merge into one another. The type of the poet is, of course, Orpheus; and Narcissus, Orpheus and Psyche are interconnected figures. Narcissus is not seen in a negative light by Jay Macpherson. He also is the type of the poet, and the elegiac Orpheus engages in the same activity.[4] But the poet as an Orpheus or as a Psyche are conceptions that are of greater importance to the second book (*Welcoming Disaster*) than to the first, because both stories contain an element that is missing in the stories of the other figures. Both Orpheus and Psyche have to make a journey underground. Redemption is no longer a matter of starting with the world of the fall and gradually proceeding upwards. In the second book it becomes necessary to hit bottom and then to make the journey up with a fully regained or "half-regained Eurydice." Now the problem is not simply to get the animals outside, but to find the way to that perception again, the source of dreaming: "If you love me, take me back / To tread again the ancient track. . . ." Again, "Take me, guide of souls, with you / Paddled in your ghost canoe. . . ." Psyche is cast out of the palace,[5] and has to separate the seeds of good and evil[6] and to make the journey to the underworld before she can be reunited with love.

Again, as Reaney makes clear about *The Boatman*, the separation of the sexes corresponds to the separation between Man and Nature: "So Man, once a complete Man with Eve inside him, has seen himself split into two." In *The Boatman* it is enough to say that in a fallen world all attempts at union are bound to be somewhat unsatisfactory: "The sexes waking, now separate and sore, / Enjoy conjunction not feasible before; / But never long enough, never near enough, nor yet / Find their death mortal, however deeply met." In *Welcoming Disaster* the corpses that result from this disjunction have to be recognized and acknowledged. They have to be given their due. It is only then that they can in any way be recovered. "Naked spectres, come for shrouding, / Those I failed and snubbed and crossed, / In the deadly waters crowding: / Angel, let not one be lost." In *The Boatman* the Ark appears simply as a much misunderstood creature that has been needlessly at odds with Man: "Why did your spirit / Strive so long with me?" In *Welcoming Disaster* it is the self itself that is lost, and that is the corpse that must be recovered.

The obvious place to go looking for corpses is, of course, the world of the dead, the Kingdom of Hades, the world undersea, the world of memory, the world of the past. This is the world that *Welcoming Disaster* is primarily concerned with. Noah the boatman can be turned quite easily into a fisherman,[7] and this is, in fact, done in *The Boatman*, but the action is kindly rather than expiatory. To restate the matter, Noah is not a diver. Again, sleep imagery can be used to point the contrast between a drugged sleep and the sleep of the dreamer who sees with the third eye of real perception. This also is done in *The Boatman*, but in *Welcoming Disaster* the world of nightmare must first be explored. It becomes necessary to come to terms with or at least to face the past before the process of dreaming can begin again. (The Muses are, after all, the daughters of memory.) But here

a passage from *Anatomy of Criticism* is very much to the point: "Recurrence and desire interpenetrate, and are equally important in both ritual and dream. . . . In the middle of all this recurrence, however, is the central recurrent cycle of sleeping and waking life, the daily frustrations of the ego, the nightly awakening of a titanic self." The descent into the kingdom of Hades is not a search for the waters of forgetfulness, but for the source of dreams, for, in a sense, "pools where I fished with jamjars for minnows," for "strangeness of water." Rivers are life-giving, the sea is destructive. (In "Revelations" there is no more sea.) The boatman appears as a type of Charon. The corpses to be brought back are their own, the kid and the teddy bear (doll-god). This is, in fact, done, and expiation is achieved by a kind of acceptance of wrongs done and wrongs endured. The prayer to "infallibly restore my share in perdition" is granted.

THERE ARE IN GENERAL FOUR BASIC LOCATIONS. To quote Jay Macpherson: ". . . if you take *Paradise Lost* as illustrating literature's imaginative world-picture over a very long period it gives us an essentially four-level arrangement with Heaven on top, Hell at the bottom, and the unfallen and fallen worlds the important two storeys in between. . . ."[8] If Heaven is the total dream or the ark contained, then Hell is the waking nightmare or existence inside the belly of the fish. "Out of the belly of hell I cried. . . . I went down to the bottoms of mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever."[9] Reaney points out that *The Boatman* shows the way up from the fallen world. "If 'here' is this world and 'there' the world of Eternity, then this book shows the reader all the necessary steps of the way."

In *Welcoming Disaster* there are two kinds of movements. The first of these is concerned with the two lower levels, and the five sections of the book indicate the pattern. It is after a descent into the underworld that it is possible to return to the ordinary world of everyday life, the world in which "Some are plain lucky — we ourselves among them: / Houses with books, with gardens, all we wanted, / Work we enjoy, with colleagues we feel close to —/ Love we have, even." The teddy bear brought back from the past can in this world be seen in its ordinary aspect as a worn-out toy, but he is at the same time "the Tammuz of my song, / Of death and hell the key, / And gone to mend the primal wrong, / The rift in Being, Me."

While, in one sense, there is a movement from the fallen world to the world of nightmare and back again to the daylight world, there is another kind of movement as well. To put it simply: If you dig deep enough, the way down becomes the way up, and you eventually see the stars. In Northrop Frye's terms: "if we persevere with the *mythos* of irony and satire, we shall pass a dead center, and finally see the gentlemanly Prince of Darkness bottom side up." Appropriately

enough this movement can be seen most clearly in the middle section of the book, "The Dark Side," that is, when the lowest point of the descent is reached. It occurs, for example, in the lines: "A well of truth, of images, of words./ Low where Orion lies/ I watch the solstice pit become a stair,/ The constellations rise." But see also "Transformation" in the fourth section, "Recognitions": "Tadwit is the world-tree made:/ I, reposing in his shade,/ See through leaves the heavens, where/ Whirls in play a smallish Bear. . . ."

It is evident, of course, that the ark for Jay Macpherson represents not a withdrawal into isolation, but a merger into a community, a sealing of the "rift in Being," the externalization of the dream. The final chapter of her doctoral dissertation deals with Canadian literature, and she observes there: "The dream . . . at least points towards communion. If at our worst our civilization is mass-minded, reflecting the qualities of nature at deadest . . . perhaps at best it is socially-minded, and the search for America or True North resolves itself as the quest of community."[10] It is the descent into the kingdom of Hades that makes this entry into the world of community possible.

For the purposes of the central theme, that is the closure of "the rift in Being," it does not really matter very much whether Man is represented by a male figure or by a female one. With regard to *The Boatman* Reaney makes the following observation: "In the 'Garden of the Sexes' we see the natural feminine and fallen world imprisons man's waking life until he is bound to a Tree; but at night Man escapes from his prison in dreams and it is Nature that finds herself imprisoned there." And again: "So Man, once a complete Man with Eve inside him, has seen himself split into two. He has been content to copulate with the other half (the hideous hermaphrodite Phoenix); now the first Man returns." In *Welcoming Disaster* it is made explicit that the figures are interchangeable.[11] "First was Inanna . . . She sold to Hell, to save her skin, Dumuzi . . . Hell was Ereshkigal, her sister — her, then . . . he had a sister too, it seems Geshtinanna . . . She too offered herself for him . . . Four are there? No, my Ted, I guess just us two. . . ."[12] Psyche seeks a lost love; Orpheus a lost Eurydice; Demeter a lost Persephone, Venus a lost Adonis. Alice, the little girl who fell down a hole in the earth and then figured she had dreamed it all, seeks herself. (The poem "Playing" gives us the Questor Frustrated.) And Jonah in the whale's belly is in an underground world. But it is convenient in some ways to see the primary questor figure as that of Psyche since the doll-god is not allowed to speak directly for himself.

Murderer and victim are interchangeable, two halves of one another,[13] and the quest is in a sense a joint quest. Jay Macpherson sees the reverse of the story of Psyche in the story of Bluebeard.[14] Since the fact of murder must first be faced, Bluebeard's chamber serves very well as in the poem, "Visiting": "takes one to know one: he/ Never fooled me, Even without the/ Blood on the key. . . . I/ Can't any more/ Tell you to what, love, you've/ Opened your door."

Again, Psyche's candle or lamp can be seen as a means of exploring the underworld (something that must be done) and also as a beacon for those now lost. "Long desired the dead return./ Saw our candle and were safe. . . ." "Take the lantern: here I'll stay/ Nevermore behold the day,/ Keep a lasting watch above/ My undying monster love." In her lecture on Beauty and the Beast, Jay Macpherson expresses interest in

> the odd reversal by which . . . in Keats and in the Brontës . . . Psyche becomes specifically the poetic soul, and the other worldly lover at the window becomes the spirit of inspiration — whereas in the old story he is burned by the lamp and flies out in a temper, in Romantic revision the point of the lamp is to guide him safely in.

This aspect of the story fits in very well with the first section of *Welcoming Disaster*, "Invocations."

About Apuleius' story itself Jay Macpherson says:

> it seems close to the themes of fall and redemption; . . . Psyche . . . is also the first literary model we have of the adventures of a human heroine along the lines of the labours and sufferings of such a hero as Hercules [who also descended into the underworld]; but what the story is most obviously doing . . . is commenting on the double nature of love. . . . Cupid . . . is certainly also the dragon. . . .

So then, if asked what the book is about, it would be easy to say that it is about a little girl and her teddy bear. What could be more familiar? But it is also about the human soul exploring hell. What could be less abstruse, less abstract than human pain? — "too late . . . / . . . to unlearn / needed familiar pain. / Come, little thorn." The most obvious point, however, is that, placed side by side, *The Boatman* and *Welcoming Disaster* reveal that the distance between the mythopoeic and the familiar is less great than might be supposed.

NOTES

[1] Her very first book, *Nineteen Poems*, was published at the Seizin Press, Deya, Mallorca in 1952 by Robert Graves. *O Earth Return* (Toronto, 1954) contains the poems from Section II of *The Boatman*. "A Dry Light" and "The Dark Air" appeared as a pamphlet in the 1960's, from Hawkshead Press, Toronto. These do not appear in *The Boatman*. "Jonah, a cantata text set to music by John Beckwith, arranged by him out of the Bible with commissioned verse by Jay Macpherson" appeared in Reaney's *Alphabet*, No. 8, June 1964, pp. 8-13. Six "Emblem Drawings for the Boatman" appeared in *Alphabet*, No. 10, 1965, pp. 51-57. *Welcoming Disaster* was published privately in 1974 (Saannes Publications, Toronto).

[2] "Milton and the Pastoral Tradition," Master's Thesis, University of Toronto, 1955; "Narcissus: some uncertain reflections," *Alphabet*, No. 1 (Summer 1960), pp. 41-57, and No. 2 (July 1961) pp. 65-71; *Four Ages of Man: The Classical Myths* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962); "Narcissus, or the Pastoral of Solitude; Some Conventions of Nineteenth-Century Romance," doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto (1964); "Pratt's Romantic Mythology," The Pratt Lecture, Memorial

University, St. John's Newfoundland, 1972; "Beauty and the Beast and Some Relatives," A Lecture Given to the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith collections at Boys and Girls House, Toronto Public Library on Jan. 28, 1974.

[3] *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 119.

[4] See "Narcissus: some uncertain reflections," p. 56: "Behind Romantic elegy — such poems as *Kubla Khan* and *Dejection* — stands the 'gloomy egoist' Narcissus ... He carries his laments for a lost paradise over from the poems into romances ..." And again: "Orpheus is the central figure of Renaissance pastoral elegy ... The identity in his myth of mourning poet and the one mourned for clarifies and justifies the old inclination of the pastoral elegiac poet in another's fate to weep his own."

[5] See "Narcissus," p. 69. Psyche's castle is the house of the soul. The whale's belly is its opposite. See "Jonah, a cantata text," p 9, "(*Whale*) ... A living soul I did contain / Till God withdrew that soul again."

[6] See "Milton and the Pastoral Tradition," pp. 40-41. This is one way of looking at the task Venus sets Psyche. The other two tasks and the main purpose of her errand could be interpreted in such a way as to fit in with the poems in *Welcoming Disaster*, but perhaps that would be stretching matters.

[7] See "Emblem Drawings for The Boatman," p. 56. The one for the boatman depicts an ark with a hat on its head and a fish swimming underneath.

[8] "Pratt's Romantic Mythology," p. 6. See also "Milton and the Pastoral Tradition," pp. 3-4, and Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 63.

[9] *Jonah*, 2. But see also "Jonah, a cantata text," p. 11, and "Narcissus, or The Pastoral of Solitude," p. 442.

[10] "Narcissus, or The Pastoral of Solitude," p. 447.

[11] See "Narcissus," p. 52: "One could compare for example the view of ... Landino ... that Narcissus is the man who yearns after earthly beauty, while his own soul ... fades away ... to the configuration of 'my Spectre Round Me.' The same pattern applies in Blake's view of the Fall: the watery surface in which Adam sees his image corresponds to Adam's sleep in which his emanation Eve is separated from him and becomes the delusive object world of nature."

[12] As Jay Macpherson indicates in the notes to *Welcoming Disaster*, the figures are taken from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard, 2nd edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955). The fertility goddess, Sumerian Inanna is the same as Ishtar. Dumuzi is Tammuz (Adonis).

[13] See "Narcissus," pp. 56-57. "The Narcissus motif is characterized by a tendency towards triangular grouping of persons, roughly corresponding to Narcissus, the other self and Echo, or in Blake's convenient terms, 'Subject', 'spectre' and 'emanation.' ... Which is the soulmate and which the demon is left to the particular writer.... As with Frankenstein's 'demon' and 'friend', the moral status of one or both of the supporters may be left profoundly ambiguous."

[14] "Beauty and the Beast and Some Relatives," pp. 12-13. "It's inevitable that in later story-telling we should find split forms of this theme: on the one hand the 'Beauty and the Beast' group, where the hideous beast becomes, or proves to be after all, the desirable lover — on the other hand a group where the dashing suitor turns out to be a monster, and what I may call the archetype there is the story of Bluebeard...."

SUSAN MUSGRAVE

The Self and the Other

Dennis Brown

SUSAN MUSGRAVE'S *The Impstone* (1976), begins by presenting a mystery. "Anima," the first poem, addresses a shadowy "you" who exists entirely as smell:

> You smell of
> the woods
> You smell of
> lonely places.
>
> You smell of
> death
> of dreams I am
> afraid of.

When the "I" persona reaches out for this "you" it abruptly vanishes: untouchable, inaudible, invisible, it retreats "into the only darkness / animals come from." Yet for all its mysteriousness, the "you" will be familiar to those acquainted with Miss Musgrave's poetry (a poetry admired by an increasingly wide circle of readers). For it is associated with the characteristics of her unique and disturbing world — "woods," "lonely places," "death," "dreams," fear — and, as I shall argue, this "you" constitutes the key to an understanding of that world. For the Musgrave "wilderness," as Ted Hughes has called it, is essentially relational; a product of the outward gropings of selfhood toward the "you" in its varying aspects. At the core of the poetry is a fluctuating relationship between the self and the other.

To emphasize the uniqueness of this self-world is not to deny the influences upon the poetry — which include Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which such influences have been assimilated, even in the early poems. This may be partly because Musgrave has not had a formal education in literature, and has been able to keep her mentors at a distance — often difficult in an academic situation. But there is a more im-

portant reason. For the Musgrave self, if often victimized, fragmented, confused, is, in the last analysis, very tough indeed. It commits itself to encounter — with the natural world, lovers, mystic creatures, demons, fairies — yet always emerges, integral if not unscathed. Not betrayal, desecration, rejection or apparent annihilation can finally destroy the persona whose voice is the voice of the poetry. "I will eat my way out / of my own skinny veins . . . / I will ruin you," she vows to the threatening other in "Songs of the Sea Witch." That this is not pure bravado is attested by the persistence of the same self-voice in poem after poem, in the face of threat after threat. And in terms of poetic influences, as in terms of the dramatic antagonists, the self is never about to be swamped. In short, Susan Musgrave uses her influences; very rarely is she used by them.

With respect to dramatic situations in the poetry, of course, the persona's toughness must not be overstressed. It is a strength *in extremis*: a final capacity for transcendence of crisis, engendered only out of sensitivity, vulnerability and solitude. Even while the poetic voice persists, the dramatic self may be rent into more pieces than Adonis. Hence the unity of the self is experienced only through a contradictory fragmentation. The self is fluid, metamorphic, undergoing in poem after poem an almost ritual journey into disaster, separation and destruction (that "long journey beginning nowhere"). And part of what is involved in the quest is, in fact, the problem of whether there is such an entity as the self at all.

The first poem in *Songs of the Sea-Witch* (1970) constitutes a useful point of departure since it looks back to childhood and postulates a family unit of experience — "we." An open gate in a field initiates a world of children's shouts, mushrooms, grandpa, and imitated birdcalls. It is somewhat Edenic (hence "unreal"), but the ending sets a pattern for the sombreness of many later poems: "our hearts toll like clappers / in the bell of the dark." "The Spilled Child" leaves this world of communal experience behind, while yet alluding to it — the title phrase recurring three times. The protagonist's childhood is the prey of the shadowy other who demands its destruction — a prolonged "burning" postulated at the end. The horror of alien incursion is conveyed in startling images: "The abandoned bird / wingless and screaming"; "to sew her body / to the ground with worms." Here, then, the "you" — presumably a lover — demands a part of the self as the price of relationship. The world of "we" is sacrificed to the world of "you" and "I", and in the process the "I" too is torn apart. Already the world is expressed as balance of power, relationship as barter and sacrifice, selfhood as splitting and loss.

However, this is not always so. In "For Sean" the self-other dialectic is more optimistically drawn. The vision of the "lady of the green" sets up the fundamental relationship which achieves a tentative apotheosis:

> and I breathed as you
> in the dark ocean night

caught beneath your moon
caught in her laughter
that was yours —
almost then
I knew who I was

The sense of assimilation into the partner's world is central here: it occurs essentially through the magical intermediary — the poem opening and closing with the lady. In effect, the other has been dualized into lover and anima or muse. The lady is "your lady / lost to you," and at the same time she creates the reality of the lover for the self: "she seeded in the full of the moon / your heart / — pushed it behind my breast." At the end she threatens to leave, trailing the ambiguous phrase "through your wake." Can the relationship last without her? Certainly, as presented, it has been wholly created through her. The self "possesses" the lover by being "possessed" by what "possesses" him. Just as in later poems the self becomes the spirit she invokes, so here the other becomes an identity (hence gives the self identity too) by virtue of his spiritual daemon.

The "spiritual" factor is the basic key to the tone and purport of Musgrave's poems. Whether the self apprehends its own temporal physicality, the natural world, or a sexual partner, the mood of the verse is determined by the presence or absence of the spiritual (or imaginative) dimension. It is very like Martin Buber's distinction between "I — Thou" and "I — It" (as whole existential postures), with the difference that Susan Musgrave's "Thou" may at times appear almost as chilling as her "It." But the "Thou," however mythologized, is positive in that it gives meaning — and hence defines the self. Without it the other is nauseous in the Sartrean sense: relationships are arid, exploitative; the natural world becomes a wilderness of fragments: the self is dissipated into a vortex of unrealities. In "Once More" the despiritualized "you" is a nothingness: "You are / only a madman / in all the spaces I can't fill"; hence the self becomes reified and fragmented in a rigmarole of carnality: "I toss you / random pieces from my thigh, / fingernail parings, / a section of hair." Or in "After the Battle" the "you" literally becomes a corpse and all that remains is nonentity: "That is — / nothing to remain, / nothing to destroy." But unlike Sartre or Beckett, Musgrave is not expressing the logical inevitability of meaninglessness. The question of meaning is essentially experiential: it either is or is not *there*, depending on the random visitations of vision. Her landscapes are frequently despiritualized because the other has just deserted them. The moment of many poems is the moment of withdrawal of the other, leaving only the husks of personality, the rag-ends of an empty world. In "January 6" this is dramatized in terms of love:

Since you left
I have waited like the hours
unseen and heavy . . .

The long days mate with
the nude on the calendar

I have packed time like a suitcase

Now there is nothing to do
but organize my boredom.

The other as "Thou" (or muse) may be simultaneously sexual, natural, imaginative and religious: it is the well-spring of creativity and meaning in this world. Of course the bulk of the poems — especially the earlier ones — are devoted to bewailing its absence. In a quite strict sense Musgrave's poems are Romantic. But it is precisely this Romantic search for ultimate meaning in almost everything she writes that most distinguishes her poetry from the hundreds of other poems about love, landscape and the lost self that appear in magazines each year.

THE SECOND BOOK *Entrance of the Celebrant* (1972) shows a greater concern with the poem as artefact; an attempt at fuller objectivization through the use of mythological figures, talismanic objects and semi-ritual situations. The verse is tighter, less rhetorical — at times, in fact, too elliptical and somewhat obscurantist. But the (many) successes achieve a quasi-mystic power, as in "Gathering in the Host's Wood." The dramatic situation is central here: but it is by no means static and the pattern of its transitions must be assimilated by careful reading. The poem is essentially atmospheric, so that we have less ritual enactment than the mood of enactment built up through cinematic glimpses. This is appropriate since the subject — a rare moment of apotheosis of the self with the other — is arcane. The poem expresses the imaginative act itself. The first section effects an accumulation of preparations — the host's gathering, the plight of "the hunted," the Elf-queen's departure, the vision of the "little friend." In the record a preliminary union of the self and skuld is dramatized: "My tongue kisses / the cold kiss of her / mouth, her lips / the borders of constellations." In the third the magical forest is presented: it is a place of the dead, but of the magical dead, frozen in the mirror of art, where one footfall could awaken them. And so to the final apotheosis:

She
as a toad, and I a squirrel,
embrace in the
royal fire, spitting ash
in memory of a king.

The word "we" in this section signals the rare moment of union. The self is possessed in possessing its anima — a unique summation won from all the rejec-

tions, persecutions, bafflements exorcised in other poems. But it is typical of Susan Musgrave's world that this summation should have nothing of the Adamic gleam or Beatific Vision about it. It is pagan, witchy, animistic, awesome; celebrating an ecstasy of coldness, death, triumph and possibly revenge.

The bulk of the poems in this collection express, once again, not so much apotheosis as the need for it. The self is trapped in a world of partial becoming and incipient destruction; of birth through death and death in life; of variable lovers, mysterious familiars and fearful, if fascinating, elemental powers. It seeks for communion with stones and bones and stars; it mates and wrestles with men and mankind; it hunts with birds of prey and consults with witches; almost always it turns back in on itself, returns to un-creation, becoming lost in a wilderness of blood, feathers and dying ash. But the search for apprehension persists: "Everything must learn / How *I* have dreamed it"; "the / closed thought open to delivery"; "dreaming how I would / love him if I knew him"; "everything I have become is something already gone." In poem after poem Musgrave keeps her appointment with herself — and with the world that has made and unmade her, the metamorphic shapes of that other which haunts her as much by its absence as by its sudden epiphanic visitations. And almost always she manages to articulate a pattern of meaning to mark some important boundary: "the shape of darkness, a sound / that nowhere would dare to form."

The poems may be approximately differentiated into three main kinds: those which concern the self and the natural world; the self and the male; the self and its familiars. Such categorization is arbitrary, of course: the familiars may speak through natural objects; the lover's world will include both objects and familiars; the familiar may appear as an aspect of the male, and so forth. Nevertheless the distinctions serve to focus emphases in the poems as well as to facilitate discussion of them. In the first category the emphasis is on the lone self caught in the toils of birth, death and becoming, and encountering the impersonal objects of the natural world which stand potentially as codes to meaning. "Facing Moons" can be quoted in full:

> This night spent
> watchful, waking,
> no sound as the
> moment of all sound
> echoes
> anything else,
>
> this moment facing moons in
> darkness, dull glow
> from watchers, here and I
>
> here but not here
> before myself

inside —
moon of sleep constant inside
sleep, moon that I am
creeping down.

The poem articulates a polarity between the self ("watchful," "darkness," "here but not here") and the object, ("moon of sleep," "dull glow," "constant"). The self responds actively to the other: there is "no sound" but the moment "echoes / anything else"; the self is "here" but yet not so, and is "before myself / inside." In a sudden transition at the end it moves to assimilate the moon into its own need ("moon of sleep"), hence, "moon that I am / creeping down." It is a relatively simple poem but it expresses one form of dynamic in the Musgrave self-world — awareness, complication, assimilation. In inspired moments the natural world may be apprehended by appropriation: or, the self may be apprehended by becoming the other.

"The Herd" (unhelpfully titled, I think) is considerably more complex. Again it starts from a specific place ("No one would come here") and time ("*this* time"), but it holds the potentiality of "forever" and "distances." It concerns solitude and hence its ultimate locus is the dimensionless vortex of the individual mind: "I am somewhere / nearer myself"; "All I am becoming anyway / is wrong"; "Again and again I grow / no older." The self is in search of its identity — any kind of identity. It is "like roots," exists in darkness, hears but cannot remember sounds, senses "all things disappearing," remains ageless, imagining, but not finding, a man: yet also it asserts its own immortality and integrity (resisting self-betrayal), senses the inevitability of process and finds a partial identity in aloneness, "haunting the dark ground." Not only is the world alien here, but the self is, too — a perceived flux, living and partly living, nauseous yet to be protected, inventive but also fated; its own creative strivings seen as a function less owned than trapped in. It is a powerful poem and one that yields to empathetic interpretation even as it admits confusion: "The words tell / *again* and *again* and maybe *this* time / dream of finding what it was they say." As in "Simply" the self is "there . . . / moving, not yet / not alive"; and yet this also is a living experience: the predicament of the self exiled both from the meaningful other and its own meaning.

In poems about the self and the male the motivation is similar to that in the love poems in *Songs of the Sea-Witch*. In "Crow Wood" the male is also a familiar, a spirit ("every man / his ghost"), and the self acknowledges his passing rather than becoming part of his life: in "To Someone Asleep" there is relationship, but between active self and passive other; in "Finding Love" the relationship is more human and changeable: "I told you, then / the first lie I had in my heart"; in "As Death Does" it is nostalgic, sensual, elegiac. The dialectic is never repeated as such: each poem sounds out, as if by radar, the imagistic pattern of a

new relational experience. What is remarkable, indeed, is the absence of cliché; the absence, even of any inherited guidelines in the encounter of self with male. All is intuited uniquely within the confines of Musgrave's private vision.

"The night, the real night . . . " is particularly interesting because it suggests the degree to which the self half-creates the male other:

> I had dreamed him before,
> the stranger within me
> I have been waking beside. For a long time
> it was so dark
> I couldn't remember anyone
> Then I wanted it to be night again.

The poem proceeds to postulate a negation, the lover announcing "I have vanished!" "*That* sadness," the poet notes, "I was waiting for"; she has a vision of him "walking / into the blind sun" and the poem moves on to speculate on "this gladness we have shared / together in our first loneliness." "Shared" is an important word in Susan Musgrave's verse, and a comparatively rare one. It typically embraces dimensions of solitude and betrayal which appear as its normal opposite. Assimilation and differentiation, togetherness through an awareness of the other's essential aloneness, fidelity woven out of dreams of betrayal are hall-marks of this relational world. "It is doubtful . . . / that I shall return by you / in the same shape as I came" we read in "Finding Love." Relationship is tenuous — every new start may seem a different kind of failure — yet the need for it remains. In fact the male other is the frequent objective correlative of the larger "Thou." In a sense all Musgrave's poems are love poems, for her sense of the universe is essentially relational. This explains the peculiar "conjugation" of her verse, which one might term the First Person Vocative. Both the "I" and the "You" look beyond the reader to some ultimate Other as the real addressee.

The spirit-world evoked in poems about the self and its familiars may, as I have suggested, express its own kind of horror. But it provides meaning — for the poet, probably a magical meaning; for the reader, at the least a metaphoric one. In "Sounding," for example, the unnamed spirit ("she") is virtually a projection of the self: "she is / the same as I am and / I am the same / as anyone alone." This projected lady assumes the kind of external identity the self often lacks on its own. She is prodigal, tenacious, forceful, mysterious, pervasive, courageous, faithful in her fashion. She never threatens to engulf the self as the male often does; rather she represents a self-echo and provides a form of transcendence even in the poem's typical ending-in-crisis: "She follows me / attentive / to the failing edge." In "The Tribe of the Sea" the other is an apparition seen in relation to a group of old men. Her eyes are "the moon's colour"; she personifies the grave, seclusion, seduction; she sprouts flowers, is naked "with the new moon's life." Not surprisingly she is too much for the old men, who go fishing elsewhere; meanwhile the

lady glides off "riding / the last wave out." Almost surprisingly, the poem succeeds on its own terms. The lunar spirit is fully evoked. There is no Celtic Twilight fayness or dreaminess in her presentation: she is sensual, magnetic, dangerous. To this reader at least, she succeeds in invoking the white Goddess as few of Robert Graves' poems actually do.

"Night and Fog" presents the familiars as "voices": it expresses separation between the self and these others and hence offers a useful counterpoint to "Sounding" and "The Tribe and the Sea." But its central importance springs from overt declaration of the realities which underline virtually all these poems. "Night and Fog" is structured as a dialogue between the self's meditative characterization of the voices and its direct appeal to the other they represent. The voices have called her into the woods; they are "everything," dimly figured ("Moss grew / over their faces, seaweed / was their hair"); they inhabit mist, fire, moon; they represent a deep part of the self — "theirs are the wounds / beneath the scar" — indeed they have created it; but they are dying, and then "they are dead now / and / do not answer." In fact, they refuse to answer throughout the poem: hence the anguished appeals of the persona:

> 'Stay with me — *you who are*
> *other to all*
>
> *I am* — you whose darkness is the
> shadow of my birth'.
>
> 'Stay beside me — *you I have*
> *returned to*
> *more times ever than*
> *before; you I have returned to*
> *other than anyone,*
> other to myself'.
>
> 'Stay with me, I need your
> comfort now. *One wish is that*
> *you would return and*
> all would be warm again!'
>
> (italics mine)

Throughout the world of Musgrave's poems — behind the identity of the self and its functions, the reality of objects, lovers, familiars — is heard the echo of these voices of the other. And in this poem — as in many others — even the echo threatens to vanish. At the end there is a final appeal, "Stay with me," and then a note of assertion: "Out on the / trailing edges of darkness / I scatter their last bones before me / to my will." This is fair rhetoric, but no answer to the need expressed in the poem. When the mood of defiance is passed the self will have to

wait for these "last bones" to live again, for the voices to speak as animistic Word. For the voices constitute the life-principle behind the "will" itself.

GRAVE-DIRT AND SELECTED STRAWBERRIES (1973) constitutes an important new stage in Susan Musgrave's poetic development. It is divided into three sections — *Grave Dirt*, *Kiskatinaw Songs* and *Selected Strawberries* — each rather different in subject matter, intent and tone. *Selected Strawberries*, in fact, is quite unlike anything Musgrave has written before. I shall consider it only briefly, for I do not believe this delightful tour-de-force points a permanent direction for her *poetic* development. *Strawberries* is witty, light-hearted, knowing, mock-proverbial, satiric: full of surreal images, pseudo-information, pastiches and zany conceits. The self as protagonist is entirely withdrawn, leaving the field clear for the preposterous, hilarious, all-purpose symbol of the strawberry, which is located at the very centre of world history. The collection is splendid, and one hopes for more like it, since it expresses a vital new vein of talent. But it is not a product of Musgrave's central poetic imagination: it constitutes rather a witty spin-off from her deep and darker preoccupations with the self-world. The issues articulated in *Sea-Witch* and *Entrance* can only be elaborated in a poetry which takes up where they leave off.

Kiskatinaw Songs (written before the Grave-Dirt poems) effects this in a unique way. For Susan Musgrave has here employed "primitive" rhythms and "natural" images to create a neo-tribal synthesis of self and other:

> Grand-father, rise up
> Spread earth
> Over me.
> That man's eye
> Was a fire that burned
> Into me.
>
> What sort of fire, grand-daughter,
> What sort of fire?
>
> *Ashes to animal*
> *It could be that.*
>
> ("Transformation Song")

or:

> Bindweed bind
> The hunting moon
>
> Bind the stars

Bind the hollow mountain
The dry stream.

Bind the backed-up
Broken water

Bind the sky.

("Net Maker's Song")

This new mythological objectivity (expressing a Collective Consciousness as well as Unconscious) does indeed "bind" self to other, other to other, and female to male. Self-as-fragmentation becomes transformed into the tribal self, where the world has social coherence. Thus the concealed "tense" in these poems is the First Person Plural — the lost "we" of "After the Rain" projected as Indian communal consciousness.

The transcendence resulting from this breakthrough is evident in the new relations with nature, male and Spirit respectively. Female-male interchange, for instance, shows none of the familiar exploitation and anguish. On the contrary it becomes playful, sensuous, comradely, wholesome.

Go to the right place
My thick one — empty out
Go ahead
I keep my face hid.
Go on
Like this, when the fish jump.

("Counting Song")

In "Children's Song" the sexual act, far from being isolating and disillusioning, is a shared game which fructifies the larger community. The children watch and learn themselves, enjoying the interchange in Blakean innocence: "He puts it in / He pulls it out. . . . Because I like to watch / They show me." And such relational warmth characterizes even separation here. "Song at Parting" expresses affection, tenderness and mutual understanding: "When I fly up, / Don't look out!" says the woman repeatedly, and near the end: "Between us there is / Much to be remembered." The simple dignity of these words contrasts strongly with the strident recrimination of many earlier poems. And there is also here the notion of simple affectionate service, one to the other: "Should you fail and darkness come. . . . Then I will come to that place / And bury you." This is a far cry from the sophisticated self-male world where death and burial tend to be psychic annihilations visited by one partner upon the other.

Natural objects and spiritual forces are also fruitfully inter-dependent in this collection. Where the modern self is normally divorced from its fragmentary world

and fleeting familiars, the tribal self is part of both spirit and nature. There is no need for the "I" to yearn for a "Thou" beyond the "It" because all entities unite here as "We." Reality has become a spiritualized continuum:

From the throat of a
Fish-hawk
I fell in

From the gullet of a
Black-shag
I fell in

From the shroud of my
Grand-father
I fell in.

("Cradle Song")

Bind my dried-up
Deadhand sister

Bind the backed-up
Broken water

Bind the hunched-up
Humpback salmon

Bind the witch

("Net Maker's Song")

As in the earlier realm of the familiars, this world may at times be cruel, dark and ugly. But it has meaning — a meaning not dependent on present mood. Hence even suffering and death may achieve their appropriate ceremony: "Fish-eye feeds the / White bird / Lay bones around his heart." In *Kiskatinaw Songs*, then, the preoccupations of the earlier poems achieve at least a temporary consummation: the questing persona has here attained wholeness in the other as communal self. However, the "tribe" is ultimately self-projected, even self-invented — Musgrave is of the modern Western culture, for all her delicate mythologizing. Hence these songs represent a further mapping of her mental territory, not the end of the journey.

In *Grave-Dirt* and in the later poems from *Impstone* (which I shall consider together because they represent a single period of development) we are back in the world of fragmentation and loss. However there is a still greater degree of objectivization here — especially in certain poems. The fear of rejection and violation remains — at times projected in new and startling ways: "I want / enormous darkness / inside me, / unnatural / emptiness, / not small fingers and /

bodies all lodged and / lost . . . " ("Afterthought"). But the self-other dialectic is also developed in two uniquely objectivized ways: by mask and by narrative myth. These devices, together with the presence of "occasional" poems ("Burial of the Dog," etc.) indicate the extent to which Musgrave has begun to distance and control her preoccupation with the self-world.

The use of mask to get outside the suffering "I" and thus achieve a certain balance is especially effective in relation to the theme of solitude. Agriv is given public identity as "The Hermit," while the girl in "One-Sided Woman" is seen consistently from the outside — both her "inner" world of thoughts and dreams and her outward habits and appearance (her sexual organs are the most fully described part of her) being peculiarly reified. In this poem as in "The Hermit" we have an accumulation of short sections which build up refracted glimpses of life through a considerable time-span — in contrast to the earlier emotive "moments." The girl is the victim of both natural forces (e.g., "the / moon's pull") and the male "hunger." She is world-weary, forlorn, geared to habit. Yet a part of her still rebels:

> The person inside her
> is beating the
> damp walls —
> Knocking on stone
> now and again
> in the wreckage of
> her dreams.

Like Tennyson's Mariana she exemplifies a type of stricken vulnerability. Any possibility of transcendence of the situation (suggested here in terms of "maps," "a journey") is crushed by nausea, anguish, boredom. The past and present is inescapable: a new future apparently impossible. We have here not active torment but passive suffering. The self becomes reconciled to its world in terms of passive despair: "the / calm centre of a / different storm." In section XII the exploitative men cannot finally touch her: "her eyes like stones / that water / could not reach."

Agriv's technique of survival in "The Hermit" is an even completer surrender to stoical passivity. An old man, he is at the opposite pole to the young woman of other poems. Time works on him not only as memory, but as physical erosion. Horrific images express the assaults of the natural world.

> The ravens came for his
> eyes; Agriv said
> nothing. . . .
>
> eels risked his
> left nostril. . . .

> Agriv has eyes
> like burned-out
> stumps in a
> second-growth
> wilderness.

Agriv is almost a case-study of the self at bay. He represents Minimal, even Terminal, Man — like a Beckettean tramp transmogrified into a West Coast Wordsworthian rustic. He must endure the assault of predators, of wind and ice, of time, of the female apparition, of his own exhaustion and self-laceration. Yet he has both Independence and a form of Resolution. He achieves co-existence with the world through stoicism: "Agriv said / nothing." He apprehends and subsists — shivering, breathing "in the thin light," hearing the sounds of his own decay, learning the suffering of woman, "not pitying age" — not even his own. He has learnt to be what he is — what the other renders him. Instead of the agonized fragmentation of *Songs of the Sea-Witch* we have here a bitter integrity which constitutes a form of self-sufficiency: "A man could be lonelier / always / sharing the same bed." The creator in "Genesis" has no better defence against solitude.

"The Carver," the last poem in *Impstone*, reveals a natural connection between the mask and the narrative myth as devices. The carver is to an extent a mask of the poetic self, suffering ("waves break / over his heart"), but also creating ("Metals are clearer, / bone is nearer, / but wood understands"). But the carver is in fact Time, and so the poem becomes a myth of *natural* creation — that sculptural erosion which unbares the final shape of an Agriv. Time as process (the natural world as other) is both separate from the self in the manner of its creation and closely related to it in being creative. Myth provides the meaning and wholeness to a world that too often seems fragmented and incoherent. But the myth is of a special kind here. Though it is "personal" (as opposed to the communal myth of *Kiskatinaw Songs*) the self does not appear as character in relation to the mythic other (cf. "Gathering in the Host's Wood"). Following Hughes' *Crow* poems, perhaps, Musgrave has created a series of unique myths — narrative rather than dramatic — which are self-subsistent, constituting an apotheosis of the self-other opposition without exploiting the polarity directly.

"The Impstone" is a prime example of this, combining the resignation of "The Hermit" with the fable-like impersonality of, say, "Genesis." The self-other dialectic achieves synthesis at a further level: neither escape from nor a turning loose of emotion, in Eliot's celebrated terms, but the establishment of a finally Romantic "objective correlative" — like Wordsworth's Peele Castle, at once adamantine and luminescent. "This stone has been / rained on / this stone has been / left out in the / dark." But resignation does not preclude creative activity. So the stone can create woman (the other?) in I; can register poetic truth in VI ("knowing the

truth's disguised / as a bulldozer or a / typewriter"). In fact the impstone provides an almost excessively fitting summation of Miss Musgrave's preoccupations to date. It is multifaceted like the strawberry; it comprehends single identity and relationships and transcendence; it is primeval and archetypally modernist at once; it symbolizes both self, and world, and therefore the self-world. In addition, along with other poems from "Grave-Dirt" and *Impstone*, it adds to the earlier paradigm the important dimension of Time. The "carver" is always immanent here, setting the poems beyond the earlier "tense" of the psychological present. The past has now its own reality, irrespective of present mood ("This stone / was an island / once . . . "); the impstone's identity includes all its past metamorphoses. The ending of the poem is somewhat melodramatic (literally gun-in-mouth), but the central symbol transcends this. Suffering, creating, enduring, the impstone is a touchstone which consolidates Musgrave's poetic identity: as a Canadian survivor, a psychic survivor, a Romantic survivor.

review articles

FRINGE BENEFIT

Roy Daniells

A. J. M. SMITH, *The Classic Shade, Selected Poems.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.

THE WORK OF Arthur Smith has been examined with such critical acumen and so discriminately praised that it would be superfluous here to attempt another survey of his characteristic merits. What follows is a species of fringe benefit, the personal impression of a reader on the west coastal fringe of the Canadian mainland, far from the corridors of critical power.

I was leafing through *The Classic Shade*, reviewing some old favourites, when I was summoned to a Chinese wedding reception, with a few other Occidentals similarly honoured. During a dinner of more-than-oriental-splendour, we had come to the sharks' fins when my opposite number at table, a specialist in antiques, with a background of Winnipeg schools and U.B.C., began for some reason to quote Carman and I felt again, even on this coniferous coast, that "The scarlet of the maples can shake me like a cry." But what really shook me was that anyone outside a lecture room should be spontaneously quoting a Canadian poet, line by line.

Arthur Smith I suddenly apprehended as moving between two worlds, one dying, as the tradition of Carman, Lampman and Roberts subsides, one powerful to be born. The question arose, How well has Smith provided a continuum, bridged the gap, or at least navigated between these diversities?

Canadians can seldom quote from their own English-language poets. The man in bus and the student in the cafeteria are likely to know that Carman, Pratt, Birney, Scott, Smith and others deserve our gratitude but he is unlikely to produce four consecutive lines to prove it. We all know the reasons: they range from such mechanical matters as the reluctance of schools everywhere to require "memory work" to such demographic problems as the shift and drift of population, the lack of reciprocal influence between French and English poets in Canada and the steady influx of immigrants with cultures and languages of their own. My friend, quoting Carman and manipulating his chopsticks, is an endangered species.

As we reached the eleventh course, something indescribably delicious encased in sesame seeds, it dawned upon me that to the upcoming generation in this fair province the poetry of Roberts and Ned Pratt may seem remote indeed. About one-third of the students in the schools of Vancouver proper, the core community, do not have English as a first language and few indeed of this third have any knowledge of French. They will, in due course, produce their own idiom and their poets and playwrights. The Chinese

alone, a large minority in the city: what infusion, from their culture of the past millenium, will they make into the moving stream of Canadian sensibility on this western fringe?

Thinking of Arthur Smith as a bridge delicately suspended between what has been and what is yet to come, I am secretly delighted by his regard for rhyme and audible rhythm, those pillars of the temple that have served poets as different as Walter Scott and William Blake. (My delight is secret because my younger friends have been telling me that I should now look for the pattern of the poet's thinking, not the "superficial" patterning of his verse.)

Not that Smith treats rhyme as a constriction.

> Over the Galway shore
> The white bird is flying
> Forever, and crying
> To the tumultuous throng
> Of the sky his cold and passionate song.

Line 1 appears unrhymed but is subtly echoed in Line 3, as lines 2 and 3 are echoed in the last line. And we remember these lines because of this built-in rhyming resonance. Since time immemorial poetry has been composed to be heard and repeated. The bard is not a man at a typewriter. Bard has become a synonym for poet becauseof the great variety of styles and subjects that have lent themselves to memorable utterance. Give memory a moment to recall its treasures and what do we hear? "Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more," "Gentle and affable to me hath been thy condescension," "The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade," "Till we have built Jerusalem In England's green and pleasant land," and so on down until "They're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'." Nor is memorableness confined to the standard authors; few recall the creator of "The friendless bodies of unburied men"; the author of "If I should die, think only this of me" is cherished for that one cry and Newbolt's name remembered for little more than "The gatling's jammed and the colonel's dead."

I doubt if Smith ever wrote anything more compelling than "The Lonely Land." It is, for one thing, applicable as a recognizable scene to almost any Canadian province and its visual impact is immediate. But consider, too, the artistry of its rhymes. "And the pine trees/ Lean one way" has been adumbrated and made to seem inevitable by "gray," "bay," "spray" in preceding lines. And, at the close, the rhyme breaks down under the stress of the idea, which itself concerns something broken.

> This is the beauty
> of strength
> broken by strength
> and still strong.

Leon Edel and others have made clear how squarely Smith the man stands behind Smith the poet. His origins in Montreal's Westmount, his acquaintance with both France and the United States, his long labours as a critical anthologist and his early desire to define his poetic vocation — these are all contributory to the final impact of the poems themselves. Specific references to French originals and Greek myths are more than casual; they are places where, as on some breathing human body, the structure of the whole shows for a moment the curve of rib or collarbone. The structure of Smith's landscape references is a little more puzzling; they seem for the most part unlocated, although perhaps to the reader in Eastern Canada their provenance is clearer. His classical and Canadian materials combine with a deftness that keeps us from feeling them as an amalgam. Here he resembles Jay Macpherson, to whom he has offered an admiring tribute in his verses. When she evokes the ever-returning Canadian Spring, it is a classical image that underlies the picture: "the

shepherd under the snow/ Sleeps circled with his sheep." Similarly, when Smith takes me into the wood

> Where the crisp floor muffles the tread
> And the classic shade of cedar and pine
> Soothes the depraved head

the image is both Mediterranean and available a hundred yards from where I am living.

It is perhaps ungracious to criticize any poet's treatment of the universal theme of death. Yet I must admit that Smith's view, for one of his buoyancy, wisdom and composure, seems to me unnecessarily negative.

> And tomorrow will be late,
> For the ear shall turn to clay
> And the scrannel pipe will grate,
> Shiver, and die away,
>
> A sigh of the inconsequential dead,
> A murmur in a drain,
> Lapping a severed head,
> Unlaurelled, unlamented, vain.

One feels that he would pair with Lycidas and not with the makers of lean and flashy songs. Even the specific poem entitled "My death" seems strangely inconclusive as it concludes:

> I am the food of its hunger.
> It enlivens my darkness,
> Progressively illuminating
> What I know for the first time, yes,
> Is what I've always been wanting.

Smith is much possessed by death and it is perhaps too much to ask for such certainties as Brontë's "what thou art can never be destroyed," dispensing, as it does with "the thousand creeds," in favour of instantaneous apprehension. Or for Dylan Thomas' refusal to mourn for a child who sleeps "by the unmourning water of the riding Thames" which assures that "after the first death there is no other." Perhaps Smith's intense focus in "The Archer" is as much as we have reason to ask.

> Nothing remains for breath now but to waive
> His prior claim and let the barb fly clean
> Into the heart of what I know and hate —
> The central black, the ringed and targeted
> grave.

Most of Smith's poems we now enjoy would have been read with comprehension and appreciation by the generation of Roberts, Lampman, Carman and Scott. Rhythm and rhyme are respected; images, though requiring some consideration, are in the main clear and effective; subjects — including cross-references to other poets — enrich our sense of a common human experience. "Ancestral energy of blood and power/ Beats in his sinewy breast."

It is certain that a poet can become memorable on the strength of a handful of poems that show a fine excess of sensibility and achieve a genuine utterance. The upcoming local generation, a twist of many strands and enervated by the bombardment of radio and TV — what will this generation make of Smith? They will, I am sure, latch on to such poems as the "Ode" commemorating Yeats, which transcends its ostensible subject to celebrate the poet absolute; "Chinoiserie," which links a French sensibility with a Chinese work of art; "The Long Land," which is Canada, pure and simple; "Brigadier" in which the immemorial irony of differences in military rank is made to sparkle; the "In Memoriam" for Ned Pratt, once more transcending the particular for the universal; and probably "The Archer," against which my own prejudice will not be widely shared. This half-dozen would by themselves suffice to make Arthur Smith part of our heritage and a contributor to our future.

I have omitted to pay tribute to M. L. Rosenthal's "Introduction" to this volume, which probes more angles of Smith's sensibility than the above and is well worth a careful reading.

BORN OF THE LANDSCAPE

D. G. Jones

CH GERVAIS, *Poems for American Daughters*. The Porcupine's Quill, $2.95.
JOHN FLOOD, *The Land They Occupied*. The Porcupine's Quill.
TIM INKSTER, *The Crown Prince Waits for a Train*. The Porcupine's Quill, $2.95.
DWIGHT GARDINER, *A Soul Station in My Ear*. Coach House, $4.50.
BRIAN HENDERSON, *Paracelsus*. The Porcupine's Quill, $10.95, $4.95 paper.

THIS IS AN INTERESTING harvest of slim volumes. They suggest the extent to which orienting oneself to the world and to words has become problematical. Five poets supply five different answers.

ch Gervais' *Poems for American Daughters* begins with Christ, the ventriloquist, working the dummies on his knee and ends with a little girl cutting out paper angels. In between is the neutral air inhabited by bodies — mostly women, mostly anonymous, mostly wordless. The word becomes phallic or simply somatic, as in "Woman":

> Eight months pregnant
> her nipples
> the colour of
> strong tea
>
> heavy
> sagging belly
> like a drawn
> out
> voice
>
> complaining
> her beauty
> is
> violated verse

Bodies define a local space — and obey natural laws. "Falling Star" remembers a boy sent to bed and pushing at the bedroom window till it flew from his hands:

> suddenly to be arranged
> over the earth like a jig
>
> saw puzzle & leaving
> behind a rent in the sky.

It is a fallen world. The men talk bigger and fall harder. The coyote-killing, priapic farmer of "His Father" is carried off with cancer of the brain. Charles Atlas sags. Earle Birney, despite his word hoard, breaks falling from a tree. One large metaphor orients them in their fall. We read in "Carol Tree" that "the hanged man, the Christs," the "prodigal ghosts of/ tragedies, fallen once more," are "the bruised fruit below/ the boughs of their mother."

Women are less brittle, yet bear the brunt of the fall. Thus, says the speaker, a woman is roused "to breathe back life into me." Thus a woman is a physical glow, of face and shoulders, of "large hips and breasts/ moving with assurance at/ ease in breaking/ boundaries."

But these encounters are casual and lack any larger articulation. At best, such moments may be given a local precision and a minimal style. "Gift" would appear to redeem the failure to even manage that.

> He always lacked
> style This morning
> was no different
>
> found drowned at
> the bottom of a
> well three miles away.

Such style may give to the deluge the economy and grace of a miniature. "Poem for a Daughter" reads:

> Her
> coloring book

lies wet
& heavy
in a field
after
a
storm

John Flood would anchor *The Land They Occupied* in a larger moral and historical context, the conflict between the aboriginal people and the white man. The preface focusses the argument around Duncan Campbell Scott and his 1905-1906 negotiations of the James Bay Treaty. Photographs of Scott, his friend Edmund Morris, native Indians and Métis guides add to the documentary character of the book.

Of the poems roughly a third survey the early penetration of aboriginal lands as glimpsed through the case histories of George Gladman, Michel, a voyageur, Franklin, Riel, Lorne Saunders, Mrs. Clay. The central third turns upon Scott. And the last third brings us up to date with further case histories or personal reports.

Scott is the fulcrum. Before him the white man tends to be assimilated to the land; after him the Indian, the land itself, tends to be assimilated to the white man's world.

The scheme is neat, almost a cliché. But as we read, things begin to slip their moorings; the moral orientation begins to blur, the point of view to become ambiguous. The debate between Scott and Morris, between the accuracy of the photograph and the accuracy of painting, is incorporated into the text. Less and less can we see "two objects/ separately/ occupying/ themselves." The speaker identifies with the Indian, but he also identifies with Scott. Kitpoo, champion shaman, following his erection over a waterfall is no less absurd than Franklin in the arctic hunting foxes for their pelts. The Europe where Scott has sent his daughter is no less treacherous than the Abitibi where Scott paddles north in his canoe. Both, in effect, "capsize dreams/ as well as boats."

The first lines of the book, "Dogs baying at the landscape/ as at a full moon," might have warned us: our historical ground is not rational. "Northwest Passage" gives us the first glimpse of a nightmare vision that dissolves metonomy in metaphor. It unfolds an underworld where a speaker (the speaker?) invites *Mah e kun* (the wolf?) to attack, saying, "Give it to them." And he does.

Attacks in the night
pisses on câches of food.

Torrents of urine burn out,
make oily and rank
the mouths and bellies of hysterical men

becoming history.

The stones, the snowy owl, the Indian, the white man, the dead and the living, all now inhabit this underworld. We may travel through it by train, but it will be a night journey.

To move on the night train
is to whistle down the night mare
room of steel rail
blind and disfigured
toward a discovery that is not
a destination

like the magic
of a door between cars

We may sit tight, or, opening the door, slip and fall into the land. Either way, it makes little difference.

and if he falls under
the wheels of the train
the broken pieces of his body will wave
like the corpse of a dead god
a lethal germ that once
inhabited life
at the passengers
whose pathology is that of ravens
rummaging through waste
between the steel rails.

Flood's recovery of Canadian history, its translation into myth, may remind one of

recent literature, of Atwood or Lee, but it has its own particularity in the selection of material as in manner. Such echoes are especially strong in the final, title poem, until we arrive at the conclusion with its peculiar shrunken image of the flood: "The land/ they occupied included heaven/ and earth." It had its own natural boundaries. It was a world with a vertical orientation, of metaphor, of identity. Now, as we try to give it a purely horizontal orientation, to fix things in place with survey lines and railway ties, we only dig our own graves. We establish no essential relation; we founder.

when

we are wreckers
of a nation
we scar
with diggings
of stunted epiphanies, shovelling
ourselves
disjointed
into incoherent
trenches, vulnerable
with the litany of death
blotting

as a pool of rainwater
the reprieve
of the tragic grin we claw.

Raven and railway show up again in Tim Inkster's *The Crown Prince Waits for a Train*. The book opens with a score of crows on a dirt road, although "when a girl passed each day on a bicycle/ they flew off/ leaving dirt and gravel, no further secrets/ excepting a road in sore need of repair." If the actual landscape is too empty, one may simply furnish a raven from the poet's closet thus lending "uniqueness/ to an otherwise dreary line of snow/ and telegraph poles." A neat trick, but there is more.

Raven shudders and moves to the edge
of the crosstree, then resting
against its right wing becomes a loophole
through which is sighted in the distance
a house on fire.

Inkster's world has the orientation of a baroque theatre. Despite protests, the speaker is something of a poseur, a transvestite, an illusionist working with mirrors. As the poet he is a voyeur, "who watches/ life through a gilt framed mirror/ graven with his own reflection." As the printer he is a pimp, whose artifice is to language "no more than the idea of a whore/ to an adolescent/ naked in a haystack." Looking at a Tarot card he may see himself as printer; seated inside on a sunny afternoon, he is wearing a green visor, and he appears "to be simply writing." The printer, upon reflection, becomes the poet.

Everything reflects everything else. The immediate landscape becomes a screen upon which to project a film of the past. Watching a lady watching a freighter in the harbour, the speaker remarks:

. . . you were screening
a film in which this take
was a memory,
and there are the children
climbing rope ladders slung
over the sides of the ship,
poised
and dropping off
like black tadpoles
into the sea.

Those tadpoles have to be watched. But generally nothing happens. Past and present can coexist because for Inkster time has stopped, his world has been frozen.

"The Train in the Station," for example, presents us with slate shingles under a grey sky, semaphores, telegraph, a "station with benches painted red/ where porters sit in uniforms/ braided with years/ of service."

A man could yet walk through the door
into the waiting room and up to the wicket
but there are no tickets

and the station too is a photograph
sharpened as with bits of gold tinsel
used to mount it in an album.

It is in just such a station that the Crown

Prince, or the poet, or anyone you like is condemned to wait.

No train, hence no departure
or plot, but see, the man has now
become a hero
through sheer lack of motion;
the hands in his pockets are
fixed as in dread of worse pain.

Paradoxically, the train has become a metaphor of a world that has stopped, the photograph of a world of shifting images, metamorphosing objects.

They are metaphors of a demonic identity. The hero may well dread worse pain, for he is in hell, where the past is simply repeated, where out of the frost, fire, flood emerge the dead. In the water off Tobermory the divers touch the wreck of the *City of Cleveland* and out float the corpses of dead lovers. In the snow "north of where crow comes/ to be called Raven," there emerges a man dressed only in a shirt, "the cheeks of his buttocks/ crisp as frost." Nearby, indistinguishably silver as the snow, is "his grandfather's plated pocket clock." In nightly visitations Brébeuf emerges to feel "the shame ooze finally/ from his loins . . . glisten down his thigh."

Complete, predictable, Inkster's sophisticated hell has its fascination. But there is a danger: love, a mere attraction, might set time once more in motion. In "To a Woman Almost Thirty," the speaker pleads, "Lover please leave me." Because she is blonde, because he has bought a clock, because "there is something/ about the urging of a finger/ necessary to set going the mechanism," he fears for the future of his baroque illusion — though even if something should happen he would try and maintain it.

Lover please leave me,
I am afraid
that eventually you will bear children
although in the end the hours
anyway are the result of antics
played out by wooden birds
with gaily painted faces.

Dwight Gardiner's *A Soul Station in My Ear* tells us we can tune out the fallen world and tune in, once more, to the music of the heavenly spheres.

The stars are our lovers
They are loud and clear.

Love is a radio.
Love is a zen radio.
Love is an ear.

With a little Zen, a little Tantra, a little help from your friends — bush music, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Kerouac, Oppen — a little grass, a little breath control, everyman may become his own radio.

With their conviction that "We are saved,/ the signs/ are unmistakable," these lyrical aphorisms have a certain hip vitality. But apart from the doctrine and the directions (do nothing as hard as you can, try 93 on the FM dial, catch the next Trane) the program itself remains largely inaudible, ineffable. It's hard to distinguish the saint who arrives at satori from the receiving set that is hit by a short-circuit.

Turn on the radio
with its awesome possibilities
and become invisible for a while. Ah,

stoned again. The lights
cranking in my head.

These lighthouses cranking
on & off
from the city (and me)

are tied with
invisible radio waves.
Trane calling from a
distance.

Chuck Miller's collages translate this aural world into visual icons, surreal landscapes. They are, perhaps, apt. But typically they give us that incongruous mixture of the mechanical and organic (which the electronic age might hope to resolve?) and they are deserted: Egyp-

tian ruins, steel bridges and buildings, a bird/rocket flying from a mechanical mouth or ear as from an automated launching pad — the beautiful waste of stars. This is the music of silence.

Perhaps that is the ultimate word, beyond the static, after the radio goes dead. But then, too often the poems sound like mere chit chat.

Brian Henderson's *Paracelsus* comes as a kind of derailment. We might try to read it as history, as documentary, but it won't work. What are we to make of this Renaissance genius who becomes the persona of the poems and who is also something of a mountebank?

> The Montebank is not simply a charlatan
> despite his faulty hat.
> To the crowd he reveals
> the sun through it.

Yet we begin with some pretty black stuff, flayed bodies, entrails, poisonous toads. Paracelsus comes into the world dreaming of toads.

> In the mines
> where he was metallurgist
> Paracelsus ran into his friend Fugger
> who owned them.
> 'Croak,' he said.

He was a modern physician, successfully treating syphilis, exploring the idea of occupational diseases, of preventative medicine. But he was also an alchemist, an anti-vivisectionist, a man who hoped, it appears, for a resurrection by becoming his own toad. For the toad is the stone of the philosopher, the foul mass from which he may distill the pure elixir, the pure gold of the philosopher's stone.

Everyman may become his own toad, to prove the alchemical wisdom that what is below reflects what is above, what is inside reflects what is outside — to recover in an analytical age the intuition of a radical identity, of the unity of all things.

> Things, words hinge together
> for certain periods only
> then their constituent elements
> separate out

Such is our normal, fragmented sense of things in a fallen world. As in a failed alchemical experiment — or as in a phase of that experiment — we are left with:

> residue at the borrom, murk,
> evaporation, clouds overhead,
> simple water between,
> possibly contaminated.

But then, the speaker notes:

> As I write this
> you come into the room
> your hair, your body
> wet
> glistening
> warm.

The technique is a kind of no-technique. It is a matter of following Paracelsus trying to find things through inadvertence:

> attempting to align himself
> exactly with things
> so that things would align themselves
> in exactitude with him.

It is a matter of arranging to be arranged by the world.

Thus the toad, the real toad, amphibian, completes his habitat of field and marsh, an addition, but also swallows its objects, becomes infested by stone and clod, building "a semantics/ of the place." Thus:

> This toad I speak of
> (said Paracelsus in a book)
> is a vernacular toad
> either silent
> or croaking my own
> squat leaping language —
> a language hidden
> in a bush and a field
> by softening logs and hardening stones
> that only repeated listening
> ambling
> through it
> will find.

All the books delude,
are incomplete.
The body is your text
sounding it.

We are back where we started with Gervais' bodies in a local space, but with a difference — in their encounters they are sounding each other, becoming the other. "It is this continual/ meeting/ where we are/ that floods our separate rooms." We redeem ourselves in the other, in the world. On the subject of redemption Paracelsus is reported as saying:

'No one wishes to buy back the lease
but simply to take over the house.
As a people we approximate
who we are not
yet.

We arrive at something not unlike Olson and the so-called Modernist poets' emphasis on man as a subject participating with the objects of his immediate environment. We arrive at something very close to Dennis Lee's emphasis on listening, on being attentive to the paradoxical duality of all things in our immediate environment. But we arrive by a different route, by the alchemist's conception of the coincidence of opposites, that contraries cure contraries, that the "true ground of medicine is love."

These too might be considered poems for American daughters. These too end with the flood, but also with a rainbow.

After the rain
the spectrum arc
completes itself in this
still water we
look out over.

These too invoke an apocalyptic time, but it is not demonic. Henderson's world contains not only past and present but also the future. It is "the daughter you don't yet have" who plays on a stone circled by water, who was born of the landscape under the rainbow.

Dr. Paracelsus, who has no diploma,
performed the section.
You are scarless.
Our daughter steps off the stone
and comes out the front door
behind us.

COMMUNICATIONS IN CONTEXT

Rowland Lorimer

MARSHALL MCLUHAN, translated by Derrick de Kerckhove, *D'Oeil à Oreille.* Editions Hurtubise HMH.

PAUL RUTHERFORD, *The Making of the Canadian Media.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $12.95, paper $5.95.

PATRICIA HINDLEY, GAIL M. MARTIN and JEAN MCNULTY, *The Tangled Net: Basic Issues in Canadian Communications.* J. J. Douglas, $12.95.

ROBERT COLLINS, *A Voice from Afar: The History of Telecommunications in Canada.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $14.95.

THE FOUR BOOKS that are the basis of this commentary provide an interestingly divergent collection. The writing is various, being that of a theorist-humanist, an historian, a journalist and three media researchers. That so divergent a group would find a common subject is perhaps a sign of the character and organization of Canadian enquiry in the field of communications. For the conceivers of Canada as "little and tardy America," I am sure that such a diver-

gence represents an early stage in the evolution of an identifiable "field," one which is, of course, "further advanced in the U.S.A."

But the fact is that communication research and theory is far more advanced and exciting in Canada than in the U.S. As McLuhan himself says, the Americans are always behind the times. And yet, while the books that are the basis for this commentary provide something of an indication of the breadth of viewpoint brought to the field, I am not sure that (with the exception of the collection on and by McLuhan) they capture what is most exciting about Canadian work.

McLuhan is the theorist-humanist I have referred to. It is his work which provides some overall perspective which can be used to relate the disparate views of the central topic of the three other books. To comment on this collection of essays I did some broader reading around the selections in *D'Oeil à Oreille*. It was a good chance to review McLuhan. Because I have not made particular use of McLuhan in my own work, I have read him in bits and pieces from 1966 to the present. My memory of my first impressions is that I thought the work was trivial. As I saw it McLuhan was writing in a very opaque manner about the obvious. I was not the only one who was unable to "put on" McLuhan formally although I was very much already wearing what he was writing about. The numerous reviewers of his early work were usually prepared to grant him originality but certainly not wisdom, a grain of truth in his ideas, a neglected factor, but certainly not the identification of a fundamental yet unrecognized viewpoint.

But time and this mini-retrospective have allowed me to see two strengths in McLuhan. The first is his scholarship. His work, like that of his forebear, Harold Innis, is firmly grounded on both a breadth and depth of understanding which appears very seldom in social enquiry in North America. This fact comes through most clearly in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. The second strength is the power of his analysis. The predictions he has made on the basis of his analysis have stood the test of a little over a decade. While this may not seem like a terribly significant length of time, the accomplishment is, considering the nature of communications and its rate of development, formidable.

The selections Derrick de Kerckhove has chosen for *D'Oeil à Oreille* provide an interesting range of McLuhanesque. In a sense this set of readings performs much the same job as *Understanding Media*, a job not inappropriate to McLuhan's concern with presenting something in a mode reflective of the central thesis. Here we have McLuhan in conversation, in commentary, under contract (I presume), being made linear by others, and so on. This is not unlike a repertory. As McLuhan says in one of the essays, Bogart buffs gain a sense of their man through his various movie roles. Here we gain a sense of McLuhan in his writing for various purposes. For the most part, however, the sense we gain is the spinoff of the position not its roots, its application rather than its formulation. This is especially true of "La popote aux novelles," "De la Russie," and "Toutes les responses sont questions. . . . "

The scholarship is more visible in "Rôles, masques et représentations." This is because McLuhan is addressing himself to academics about academic activity. One of the other reasons that this essay deserves particular attention is that it contains a definition of "content," a definition which leads to an elaboration of "medium" as in "the medium is the message."

> L'usager d'un médium ou d'une technologie en est le contenu. Le Lecteur est le contenu

> du poème ou du langage dont il se sert et pour utilizer n'importe laquelle de ces formes, il doit littéralement les endosser, les "revêtir." Du coup, le voilà lancé dans une exploration imaginaire qui lui fait découvrir à la fois les possibilités et les limites du médium.

It is in such tidbits that one finds the genius of McLuhan, in the conception rather than the application. This is not to cast de Kerckhove's effort negatively. In fact, with just a few tidbits, we are introduced to novel ideas at an accustomed pace. This contrasts to the bombardment of conceptions which McLuhan presents in his own writing. In such a collection as that in *D'Oeil à Oreille*, one can begin to sense the generics of McLuhan because one is given a sufficient number of examples to digest them. The added advantage of such a mixture is that the detail of the "probes" — for instance, that movies and TV differ fundamentally by virtue of the fact that the former is "light on" and the latter "light through" — can be seen for what they are, individual examples of the general conception. As a consequence the reader will feel less inclined to dismiss or accept the entire system based on this one insight or folly.

One thing must be said about McLuhan's "probes." It may be that with future technological development the concept of "light through" may come to have a far-reaching power and McLuhan will be hailed as prophetic. But it may also be the case that the construction will never be particularly important. In that case the point will be used by detractors as an example of the "hit and miss" aspect of McLuhan's thought. However, such a probe is just an extension of his notion about the importance of the interchangeability of type. It is a seized-on point which appears central to the technology. However, it may prove not to be crucial. Indeed, it may prove to be a misreading by the master of his own system.

Perhaps the most engaging aspect of McLuhan's work is the rethinking involved if one attempts to "put him on" as one surely must to appreciate his insights. In such a process of immersion one ends up either frustrated or, if allowing McLuhan his humanity, somewhat bemused and a little wiser. It is important to remember that he comes to us from Joyce, utterly charmed. And I would think that he is involved in an attempt to extend the genre. Both authors can be fun, but it is the fun of the "put on" in both senses of the phrase. It is the fun of being on the trail without the climax of capture, control and as a result, the transformation of identity.

But such a process of enquiry has created somewhat of a paradox around McLuhan. The academic stands for that which thought can encompass. But thought is a limited medium of "being." Also scholarship has evolved in association with print. Scholarship is a limited medium for the expression of thought. To some extent McLuhan has realized that he is limited by print. In fact, he has made a valiant attempt to reach beyond these limitations. In so doing he has offended his brethren. As I see it, the issue can be characterized as follows. While academics may follow a thousand useless paths certainly they report on each path with as little ambiguity as seems possible. In other words, while they can be faulted for trivial choices and filtered or even mistaken vision, rarely can they be faulted for sloppy characterizations of what they were about. McLuhan's offensiveness to the average academic may be based on their misreading his concern for a correspondence between method and subject as sloppiness. I take his style to be a lasting enchantment with Joyce, the master mechanic.

But the basic paradox is this. The nar-

rowness of the academic enterprise (that is, the application of thought to the world), lends it a power, the power of potential clarity and associative overstatement. That power is realized when the subject happens to be far more important than the investigator realized and when s/he happens to capture in a characterization the elements of the subject. McLuhan may have hit the jackpot. But the paradox is that while he appears to be talking of "humankind" and the nature of present day life, he is in fact talking of "enquiring minds" and "communication systems." Thus the intellectual elite may be becoming "retribalized" through an increase in the span of both their curiosity and their effect. Undoubtedly, the media are organizing information about the world outside personal experience in the way that McLuhan has outlined. But the man on the street will go on living much the same kind of life because the nature of the information he needs to act on a world in which he has effect comes from his personal experience. I guess that I merely want to point out that while it may seem otherwise and while he may seem to claim otherwise McLuhan is no more talking to the "common man" than is any other academic. At the end of a four-month period of log cabin building outside the reach of the media I met an actor who, having done much the same, told me of the peculiar life in his part of the woods. There the only people he met were those of CBC radio and the only things he knew of the world came from the same source. "And you know what they are saying," he said, "it's not true, I see no evidence of it."

While there may be a paradoxical aspect to McLuhan's writing, there is something close to a degree of perversity to the writing of Paul Rutherford. After organizing the discussion of his three essays around the media and their organizing characteristics, he tells us that content is the really significant variable. He claims that his research has uncovered little evidence that "the medium is the message." Far more important in his opinion is content. Now although Rutherford appears to be speaking with reference to McLuhan, in fact he is not. What Rutherford means by content is much the same as what you or I might mean by it. Which is not what McLuhan means. Further on Rutherford makes a rather intriguing statement to the effect that the "multimedia" (his clever term) may now be the masters of consciousness but no media have ever been the masters of fate. Such a statement needs expansion. It is not there. Part of the reason it is not there is that Rutherford appears to be committed to a jolly pluralism and is reluctant to explore the depths of any issue. He contends that because the media "mediate" they are the servants rather than captains of consciousness. In another example of what I take to be the same phenomenon, at the top of one page he notes:

> The organized community was and is moving against an institution whose overweening power seems to threaten the fabric of democratic society.

He then spends the rest of the page building up to a condemnation of the CRTC for its arrogance in leading such a struggle. Such apparent changes of heart, or more accurately, statements of problems and rejections of attempted solutions plainly miff me.

The book is composed of three essays: "The rise of the newspaper," "The golden age of the press," and "The triumph of the multimedia." They do little more than exist side by side. The sense of social history which one gains from the first two essays is only tantalizing because it is so incomplete. As a person more inclined to reading social science and

literary criticism I found the essays frustrating in their narrow focus. The information Rutherford presents is not worked into an exploratory framework. The last sentence of the book ("Enjoy the present: . . . it can't last forever") conveys quite well the rather lackadaisical aspect of the expositions. They are so relaxed that I longed for some intensity. One gets a hint of the "massification" of the media and their content, but no attempt is made to characterize the significance of that very fundamental difference. When I reached the statement on page 90 which read, "All considered, then, the present multimedia supply their clientele with an excellent service," all I could say was "Oh, terrific!"

It is certainly not the case that Rutherford is ignorant. He notes that as a result of advertising,

> Masses of anonymous people were joined in ephemeral "consumption communities" defined by the common use of identical goods.

He is even prepared to take stock of the fact that "the news media (was turning in the 1960's) into an adversary of partisan authorities," that TV casts a fuehrer image on individual political leaders, and that the media lean heavily towards novelty and away from celebration and hence cohesion and stability. But such insights go to waste. They do not form the basis for a characterization. And by defining his quarry in the last essay as the "multimedia," and emphasizing their pluralism and difference, he obscures their hegemony. Only government is to be feared as a unitary body capable of destroying the variety of effort and content which is available to us all. My thought is that we deserve more. It is plainly facile to speak of "the waning of the advertising boom." Advertising is a symbol of control. The symbol may change slightly but the control will not, except under very extreme circumstances. And certainly to state that advertising is the incentive for the multimedia to serve a plural audience is quite peculiar.

For all its shortcomings *The Making of the Canadian Media* is an important book. It provides a beginning outline of a Canadian situation. Little exists elsewhere and as a consequence we hardly understand how we have been talking with ourselves during our short history. It is for the same reason that my colleagues' book, *The Tangled Net*, is so very important.

One of the ironies of placing McLuhan's work alongside the other three is that he argues that the organization of the ascendant media of our culture are making national boundaries obsolete. Yet the other three works start their enquiry using national boundaries as basic limits of their analysis. This slight problem does not go unnoticed, especially by Hindley et al. Underlying their description is a concern for cultural integrity and development even while they are dealing with technologies which are ever-more unaffected by distance. In fact, in some sense they document the struggle of the nation state to survive in the presence of technologies which make it unnecessary.

The Tangled Net provides an introduction to a number of areas of communication. Publishing, film, radio, TV, cable, telephony, computers, and satellites: each is the subject of at least one chapter, and the state of each is presented to be much the same as the others. It seems to me that this conclusion is reached because the authors are dealing with each area at the level of the fundamental contradiction between the tendencies of the technology and the national context within which they exist. What is depicted is the struggle within the nation to regulate matters in such a way as to prevent the domination of each of these media from the control of the United States.

Much of the material which is used in the book is official evaluation of the state of affairs in each medium. Many documents are federal reports on the state of the industries. Perhaps this should be sufficient for such a book, but it seems to me that quite a bias gets written in which the authors do not intend, one which leads to an unnecessary pessimism. If one takes any stock in the characterization of federal Liberal politics as outlined by James and Robert Laxer in *The Liberal Idea of Canada*, it is no wonder that an official point of view would lead to an overall pessimism. Canadian Liberalism fits hand in glove with American liberalism. The latter is the ideology of free enterprise, the former is the ideology of continentalism and of openness to domination by outside interests. Given such an overlying perspective a nationally based communication network exists as an anomaly to basic policy. Thus it is not too terribly surprising that federal reports might tend to overemphasize the enormity of the job of maintaining a nationally based communication network in face of the laws of economic and culture development and growing interdependence.

A far different picture might emerge if one examined the energies that are being put into the development of the various cultural industries in Canada. Given a fairly full familiarity with each of these areas and placing those efforts in an overall context of concern for building the integrity and independence of Canada a number of different insights might have been presented. Such a point of view almost emerges in some of the chapters on telecommunications where the authors and their colleagues in their research group have done extensive research. But it is distinctly lacking in the chapters on publishing and film.

A word or two needs to be said regarding the process by which *The Tangled Net* came into existence. Back in 1967 I had the chance of working as a graduate assistant at OISE for E. V. Sullivan when he was rewriting Ausubel's textbook on child development. I was one of four or five assistants, two of whom, as I recall, were working full time on the project. It was our responsibility to arrange abstracts by subject for Sullivan's use as he wrote the particular chapters. It was a massive task. After we had done our work he drafted the chapter; it was then looked over by Ausubel, and following that sent, in revised form, to Grune and Stratton who then sent it for comment before it was published.

The Tangled Net is designed as a general reader as well as an introductory textbook. It represents a much more difficult task than Sullivan was faced with. First it is not a rewrite. Secondly, it deals with an area where the background material is not to be found in an easily identifiable set of academic journals. Thirdly, its writing required a general sense of the history of Canada along with a specific knowledge of the communications industries. Fourth, it was not aided by any grants. Fifth, the publisher had not had a great deal of experience in the publishing of this kind of book. The book seems to suffer from a rush for publication both in its lack of a full bibliography and, as I understand it, no academic readers before publication. All these factors appear to have had some effect on the book which would make a second edition well worth the effort.

But as I have said, *The Tangled Net* is extremely important. Its importance lies in the fact that it takes a profoundly Canadian perspective. It is quite possible that before long (perhaps it is happening already), a U.S.-produced book will be exported to Canada outlining the relations between the various forms of communication and social forms, cultural phenomena and so forth. As is common,

generalizations from the U.S. experience will be turned into low level theory which students will be told are explanations of the Canadian experience, since they are universal laws. And as usual they will be encouraged to see the Canadian experience as slightly different from the basic American one. It is only because communications theory is more advanced in Canada that books such as *The Tangled Net* managed to appear before the American influx. It is only through these that we will give ourselves a sense of our own history as we have seen it.

The style in which *A Voice from Afar* is written is much different from that of *The Tangled Net* and *The Making of the Canadian Media.* The sense of the history of telecommunications is also much different. The focus of the book, on the individuals that figured in the history of telecommunications in Canada, both lends a strength and detracts from the subject matter. My first reaction was to dismiss it for being directed to proving that not all pioneer heroes were or are American. But the book held my interest, as does, I confess, the "People" section of *Maclean's.*

Collins shows a skill at journalism in providing a sense of the context within which various technological innovations developed and in which various of the Canadian giants lived. Clearly such a contextual flavour is not sufficient in a more serious work but its equivalent was lacking in *The Tangled Net* and *The Making of the Canadian Media. A Voice from Afar* is the kind of book that might be used to advantage in schools as an adjunct to history, geography, social studies, or even physics courses. It certainly provides within the limitations of its focus a sense of Canadian social history.

The book has two weaknesses. The first is that it provides no sense of the workings of the various sets of interests which have come into play in the determining of the organization of the Canadian media. Its rather simplistic view which is presented implicitly is one which emphasizes the competitive struggles between various inventors, entrepreneurs, big businesses, and so forth. One is left with the impression that cultural development rests with the energies of private entrepreneurs competing with each other for the massive profits which will accrue to the individual who is successful in capturing the business of the public through the introduction of the latest technological innovation. While that dynamic has played a major role in the early days of establishing the technology, such an emphasis is a distortion which ignores, as one major example, the role of government. The situation created by the publicly owned CNR which allowed Sir Henry Thornton to experiment with radio is completely underplayed. Sir Henry is portrayed as an innovative radio freak rather than as a public servant extending his communications mandate into a new technology.

As Collins comes closer to the present, the emphasis on individuals inevitably gives way to a discussion of the technology itself. The reader is thus left with a certain regret, and hence a solid foundation for nostalgia about the good old days when the efforts of an individual could turn the country on its ears. That, of course, is a distortion which comes from the book's primary focus. It is all the more regrettable because in spite of the fact that the subject matter of the book is exclusively Canadian, the reader is led towards the conclusion that the great American ethic is the saviour to us all.

books in review

SHADES OF PRECISION

FRED WAH, *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* Talonbooks.
DON DOMANSKI, *The Cape Breton Book of the Dead.* Anansi, $7.95 cloth, $3.95 paper.
TERRY CRAWFORD, *The Werewolf Miracles.* Oberon, $7.95.

THE TITLES of these three books suggests an immediate similarity of theme or concept — which is probably why they turned up together, in one batch, on the reviewer's desk. They suggest ways of mediating between the normal, everyday world (that fiction dear to sober reviewers, if not always to poets) and something other: a sense of the primitive, the supernatural, the wild. And though the "Interior" of Wah's title is geographically accurate, it surely carries a symbolic level as well. It is with the interior of our own conscious and subconscious minds that we wish to communicate with pictograms, or a Book of the Dead; it is from these depths that both werewolves and miracles arise.

But this thematic similarity does not in fact take the reader very far. The distinctions between those books are to be made in terms of technique, or precision of form, accuracy of perception. This is not at all the same thing as accessibility, in the sense of the book's being "easy to read," or delivering a fully graspable experience to the reader: I find Wah's *Pictograms* the least accessible of these three books, but it is, in a sense, the most precise and accurate. It is also by far the best.

Terry Crawford's *The Werewolf Miracles* is a collection of short pieces, mostly in prose, cast in a loosely surrealist mode. As one reads through the book, various strands of narrative start to appear and gradually coalesce: a re-telling of the story of Judas in science fiction terms is finally linked to the episodes about a young man lying in a field after a car-crash. But not all the various fragments come together as neatly as this, and in the end the effect of those that do is more artificial than organic, more irritating than convincing.

For Crawford, we are told, "A miracle ... is the window through which we look to see soul in body, spirit in matter... the miracle occurs when what is merely real becomes true, when the known is discovered to be unknown, the unknown is found to be known." If this sounds overly pretentious, that's because it is: and nothing in the poems justifies this kind of introduction. Perhaps the fault lies in the dismissive tone of "merely real": Crawford's poems are so determinedly *sur*real that they make insufficient contact with the "known" level of reality, from which alone they could derive the emotional truth which surrealism needs if it is not to be the boring relation of some stranger's dreams. The window needs a frame.

Or perhaps the fault lies in the genre of the short surrealistic prose-poem. I confess that my lack of sympathy for Crawford's book may stem largely from my general lack of sympathy for this genre. It seems to me dangerously loose: without some rigour of form, the writing can too easily, as here, slip into indulgence and superficiality.

Don Domanski is on solider ground with *The Cape Breton Book of the Dead.* Here there is the same attempt to see the unknown in the known, but rather than trying to deal with it directly, as werewolves or miracles, Domanski at his best lets it emerge by implication from the scenes and images of his natural world. The weakest poems in the book are those in which this happens in too obvious

or forced a manner, as in the melodramatics of "To a Boy Lost in the Forest and Believed Dead".

As the title suggests (at least in part: it is not a notably Buddhist book), the main concern is with death. This is approached especially through animals, and most especially through dogs. By the end of the book Domanski is able to project this image onto another plane in a poem on the Constellation of the Small Dog; and in the final poem, "Nightwalk", it is the poet, but not the natural environment, who can "hear/ the dog call everything/ by its proper name."

Nevertheless, I still find something missing in these poems (one only has to evoke the example of Michael Ondaatje to see that the animal poems are not entirely successful), and again I think the distinction is formal, not thematic. Domanski is able to produce a sense of tension and unease in his images, but not in his rhythms. Too often the line-break falls, conventionally, at the end of a phrase or sentence, and the poems' movement is smooth, predictable, and undisturbing. It was only on a second reading of many of the poems that I noticed how disturbing the images were: on a first reading, the rhythmic monotony had lulled me almost asleep.

Fred Wah's *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* consists of a series of poems based on pictographic drawings reproduced from a scholarly work by John Corner. The original drawings are reproduced on the pages facing the poems, and the whole volume has the impeccable appearance we have come to expect from Talonbooks. I say that the poems are "based on" the drawings, for it is hard to be more explicit. Sometimes they appear to be direct "translations"; sometimes they appear to take off at a tangent from the originals; most often they are something in between. The poems are often sparse and enigmatic, and the drawings do not always make the references clear:

> The feathers of my mind increase
> as I reach for the choices
> chance for what else
> other than what I knew (know)
> another talks to me (I think)
> something (things) to see

Yet the total effect of this is not, curiously, one of imprecision: if the reader feels at times excluded from these poems, it is because he is excluded from the whole experience of the Interior, in both literal and symbolic senses. The poems offer a way in, which is difficult and uncompromising, but not ultimately impossible. I know that I will return to this book far more often than I will to the other two.

And again, what convinces me is the language: the feeling Wah has for lines, words, and rhythms. The poems are often broken-up, hesitant, and tentative, but they are always exploratory, and ultimately revealing, in the same way as pictograms, less by what they can say in paraphrasable content than by what in their physical existence they are.

> Ambling along
> out of you
> I count it all
> in my mind
>
> many many many
> pretty straight
> across a sky.

STEPHEN SCOBIE

MODERNIST

LEO KENNEDY, *The Shrouding*. Golden Dog Press, $2.95.

THE GOLDEN DOG REPRINT of Leo Kennedy's *The Shrouding*, originally published in Toronto in 1933, will be of interest and value to all those who are concerned with the development of mod-

ernism in Canada. No doubt partly because he has been for many years a resident of the United States, Kennedy has become little more than a name in Canada and *The Shrouding* — a volume which was in the van of Canadian modernism — has become more talked about than known or read. The Golden Dog Press is to be commended, then, not only for making generally available what Leon Edel, in his perceptive and informative Introduction to the reprint, correctly calls the "first volume . . . to be published by a Montreal Group poet," but also for, in a sense, repatriating Leo Kennedy. Together with reprints which are either available or projected of such crucial documents as *The White Savannahs* and *New Provinces*, the reprint of *The Shrouding* will contribute substantially to a wider understanding of the artistic and intellectual forces which shaped the modern tradition in Canada.

Leo Kennedy himself is also to be commended for resisting the temptation to revise the poems in *The Shrouding*, for allowing the volume to appear with only the slightest emendations (a Latin spelling corrected here, an interjection altered there) or — as he says in his own short Preface to the reprint — with (nearly) "all its imperfections on its maidenhead." For it is the imperfections of *The Shrouding*, as much as its strengths, which are of interest to the literary historian.

Under the heading of "imperfections" may well come the fact that, for Leo

Kennedy, modernism apparently meant T. S. Eliot. It meant dense, metaphysical poems written often in tight, traditional forms. It meant putting the tradition — and Kennedy's tradition is very much Eliot's, but with the addition of Eliot himself — at the service of the individual talent, and bringing about a reminting of rusty words and forms. Perhaps Kennedy's greatest error was his failure to realize that Eliot is a poet from whom it is impossible to borrow or steal without being found out. Thus *The Shrouding* bears the indelible imprint of the early Eliot. Entire lines, stanzas, and even poems read like excised passages from *The Waste Land*. Even Kennedy's vision of nature as a graveyard whispered over by what is, cyclically, rebirth and, dialectically, resurrection owes more to Eliot's early poetry than to the Canadian seasons. (A comparison between any one of the several sonnets in *The Shrouding* and a sonnet by either Lampman or Roberts would reveal not only how the same form can be used as a vehicle for vastly differing conceptions of nature, but also how Kennedy's outlook and intentions differed from those of previous Canadian poets.) Kennedy's April is not the April of Lampman. It is Eliot's "cruellest month," with "Each pale Christ stirring underground" ("Words for a Resurrection") and with "plaited strands of . . . grass" which "Bind up this heart that splits and bleeds / As each sharp lilac leaf unsheathes" ("Perennial"). The buried bulbs and gods and the burgeoning shoots and blossoms with which Kennedy expresses his life-death-rebirth pattern are rooted in Eliot and, beyond him, in the mythical soil which nurtured *The Golden Bough*. But despite his many and obvious debts (most of which he admits to in his disarming Preface), Kennedy has moments, in such spare, precise poems as "The Captive" and "Mad Boy's Song," when he lives up to, and even beyond his own sardonic estimation of himself as a poet who "wrote of dying / As though life mattered" ("Self Epitaph").

Time is in the process of judging Klein, Pratt, Smith, Scott and a handful of others to be the major Canadian poets of the 'thirties. But literary historians should not be concerned only with the major figures. The spirit of an era is often better found in its less major and, yes, more derivative poets and thinkers. Those who would understand the origins and direction of Canadian modernism could do worse than to begin with one of its beginnings: Leo Kennedy's *The Shrouding*.

D. M. R. BENTLEY

POETIC JOURNEYS

MIKE DOYLE, *Stonedancer*. Auckland Univ. Press and Oxford Univ. Press, $7.95.
FRASER SUTHERLAND, *Within the Wound*. Northern Journey Press, $2.00.

THESE ARE BOOKS of a rare quality, and while reading them I felt more like shaking hands with their authors than writing a conventional review. It is with Latin gusto and with the echo of a somewhat Baudelairian sculptured exoticness that Fraser Sutherland welcomes you in "The Piazza":

> This is your happiness
> the wave-borne jests that lie
> scattered on the tranquil sands
> these are veins in the marble
> the starfish found
> outside its element.

In "Responsible Worlds: After St Exupéry," Mike Doyle meditates, with a seducing simplicity, upon nature's harmony. Then he states that only men are separated by a self-made psychological space. Beyond its Joycean charm the poem's final epiphany opens a central question in literature:

> a girl passes homeward
> smiling to herself

filled with adorable inventions & with fables
her reverie isolates her from me

how shall I enter into it?

Mike Doyle and Fraser Sutherland are aware that a poet's objective is the ordering of our vaguely perceived world of images. This basic integrity and intelligence are reflected even in the weaker lines of the two books. Doyle's words about the passing girl are not tremendously original. We could say the same thing for Sutherland's "City Men" that begins with "The city is a wound." But it is by starting with the spare, the immediate or the lyrical that these poets find the élan to move to multilinear level of references, to the almost perfect world of metaphorical perception in which they carve for us their discoveries: statues in the neighbourhood of truth.

Mike Doyle's "Noah" is the perfect example of the type of poetic consciousness we are attempting to clarify. The thirteen-page poem is divided into forty-six parts and is more an exploration of the myth than one of those amusing renderings of a biblical story. Again, one detail will be enough to illustrate Doyle's highly intuitive method. The first stanza of "Noah" tells us about the work, the fear and the anguish involved in gathering the animals "on that first morning." The second stanza reads:

Jung and Teilhard both make stones
breathe.
Aphrodite released from a shell. Stones,
shells, Might some of these not have been
chosen?

The question raised here is evidently colossal and one feels like the child in the third stanza who asks: "Are there giants in this country, daddy?" But some aspects of the problem tell us that we are paradoxically dealing here with pure poetry and not with any intellectual invasion of the Muse's domain. There is, for instance, the poetic stubborn will to look at the myth with a naïve eye. Here it is translated by the belief that the Flood destroyed all images of previous existence and that therefore we can trace the genesis of life only back to the Ark. Then what is questioned here has to do with Jung's and Teilhard's visions of the evolution of human consciousness. Doyle comes back to this in his twenty-seventh stanza where, while speaking of snails, he implicitly refers to the slow evolution of human consciousness. So instead of the beauty of "the Omega point" we are left with the contemplation of "the syphilitic vulva of the future." Now we must say that this type of acid irony is a valid method of poetic investigation. At the global level "Noah" is a successful and coherent poem and every reading reveals another dimension like "The ends of the rainbow rooted in the soil of the new world" that "grow again and again as flowers."

In Fraser Sutherland's "Good Times" we are attracted to the last line of the poem: "Today penicillin and a big cigar." The poem itself is a smooth rendering of a man's nostalgia, something we all share: and in that sense the title says enough. But the clever linguistic puns contained in the last line indicate that today is best represented by a straight line, a generalized phallic symbol. On the other hand, in the description of the past we find words like "oranges," "pumpkin" and "earth." The incantatory repetitions are also there to contribute to the circular perception of the past. By opposing the whole of his first poem to its last line Sutherland announces the basic conflict that he will develop in the rest of the book. Some might object that the poet didn't make this choice consciously — all the better....

But in these books the only function of aesthetic refinement is to serve the rendering of an ideal universe where compassion for the sufferers and denunciation of the enemies of man are the poets' main objectives.

Fraser Sutherland's "Marcel" is a strong description of a retarded "19-year-old in a Children's Hospital." But it is perhaps in "The Two Hearts of Frida Kahlo" that the poet exposes a tragic example of suffering in the life of the politically committed artist. In "The Poverty of Gesture" we find the echo of a Baudelairian misogyny, that also emerges in some of the other poems. There are signs of great promise in *Within the Wound*, and Fraser Sutherland might very well evolve to the level of "Auden's Face":

> This was Auden's face. He
> chose, was given these serious ruins,
> the mark of bitter weather.

Stonedancer gives us the best of what Mike Doyle has been writing for the past ten years. Poems like "The Inquisitor" show that from his earlier "self-absorbed subjectivism" he has evolved to a position that allows him to look at reality with courage. Finally "The Journey of Meng Chiao" sets Mike Doyle on a last and long poetic voyage:

> I must leave you here by the pinewoods
> under the sky,
> I must go now. What do I hope to find
> when I arrive?
> If I am lucky, the pinewoods under the sky.

And this is what *Stonedancer* and *Within the Wound* are: the former an Homeric journey, the latter a first step towards an Orphic adventure.

ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ

ZEROING IN ON ZERO

J. MICHAEL YATES, *The Qualicum Physics*. Kanchenjunga Press. *Breath of the Snow Leopard*. Sono Nis Press.

SOME TIME AGO I complained about the obscurity of Yates' poetry in a review of *Canticle For Electronic Music*, but that sequence is of startling clarity in comparison with *The Qualicum Physics*, which is exasperating in its inexplicitness.

A pretentious intellectualism is always threatening to break through the specifics of the landscape in Yates' poems. His early work, written before he came to Canada, *Spiral of Mirrors* and *Hunt in an Unmapped Interior*, despite some haziness of image and language, generally controlled the ideas within particularized scenes and short glimpses, even though he was pushing into them as landscapes symbolizing the deeper recesses of human feelings and intellectual concepts, the stretching beyond consciousness, a territory he described as an "unmapped interior." This territory was the arena for delving into limits and extensions of the human mind, survival in the depths of the destructive element, a theme he examined with some success in *The Great Bear Lake Meditations*, though even in that book, the same maddening gestures of philosophic insight wrapped in the covers of epigrammatic gibberish mar the symbolic thrust into the double landscape of exterior and interior zero.

I presume that *The Qualicum Physics* is attempting to chart the same area. I can only say 'presume' because the language of the poem makes no effort to clarify or expound. I can guess at the theme by extrapolating a meaning from the long epigraph about a dance in which one dancer is an isolate but is somehow joined to the dance. From this epigraph one can assume that Yates' concern is with the individual self, self-reliance turning into introversion, with isolation and the threatened self, and perhaps secondarily with the nature of the artist's place, his commitment to self and/or to community. The recurring image of ocean and tides to establish the essential polarities: motion against the fixity of shore, the between-world of the shoreline and the solidity of mountains.

This is a rough estimate of what the poem is saying and if it sounds overblown, then it is probably because the language of the epigraph is overwrought, and the poem itself is self-indulgent to the point that, as I was reading it, I began to feel that the whole poem was a hoax or at the very least a self-parody. But if it is hoax or parody, it is humorless and so wasted at this length, for the density of language muffles any comprehension of its aim.

The poem is an undigested mixture of linguistic convolution, snobbish phrase-dropping in other languages, latinate vocabulary in uneasy combination with the colloquial, some excruciating word-play and punning and at times the most turgid rhythms and tongue-tying harshness of diction. Further darkness descends on the reader when he tries to figure out what Yates is doing with the typography. The basic type is italic, interrupted by normal print, but it is not clear whether these are two voices (two states? the voices of sea and shore?), and more confusion comes from the fact that the foreign phrases, which occur often, are put in normal print, but the reader isn't sure if they belong to the print-voice or the italic-voice.

I have rarely been so expasperated by a poem — but let Yates speak for himself:

> *Pyrric* fagotti *flame once* — concerti
> *Toward the sum where the pyrotechnician,*
>
> Estremo, effimero, *oxidizes alive*
> *While the oxen peep their piccolos.*
>
> *The* Spitzlicker *metaphysical yo-yos*
> *I follow in and again in* — Io, εγω,
>
> This uneverlasting *vida entre suenos*

If this kind of self-indulgent mumbo-jumbo running rampant appeals to you, by all means read *The Qualicum Physics*, but *Breath of the Snow Leopard* is much better, covering much of the same ground in a series of poetic sequences. Starting from an epigraph by Demokritos, The is is no more than the isn't, the book, like *The Great Bear Lake Meditations* (indeed, one of the poems here is for Blackie Canada who provided an epigraph for *The Meditations*) is concerned with a journey to minimal existence, an obliteration into a nothingness which may reveal new modes of being.

The first section, "Naked Singularities," tries to balance polarities as the persona searches for pure being. Yet the paradox of such a search is that selflessness cannot exist without individuality — he cannot be swallowed without swallowing: references to sea beasts and water give a firm reality to these lyrics as the poet wrestles with interior and exterior space, moving in one poem from "I must remain close to myself in these times" to "I must keep space at a remove a little longer/It will come for me in its own black time."

This nothingness within and without becomes the thematic thread of "Poem of the Endless," a sequence in which the poems express a shearing away process in the face of barriers created by others and the self. Moving through, sloughing off, closing doors, the persona pushes his bridge "From nowhere to nothing. Nowhen." Though the bridge collapses in the last poem of this sequence, he may still fall into other spaces, an entry which may burn him up as in the next section, "Burn Tissue Cycle." Perhaps this is the essential aesthetic experience for its own sake ("to burn with a hard and gem-like flame"), the burning of desire, the destructive urge to reduce everything to minimal ash, with double possibilities opening: "To peer into or pass through the mirror of ashes." This burning down to simple essence destroys the ordinary processes of time and communication, so that the book can then move into "Three Schedules of Silence," the first part of which is "Blue Mundus," a series of short

cryptic poems, each separated from the other by a zero, examining the whittling down to achieve a state of "nowlessness." This poem is followed by the title poem, a symbolic fable of resurrection within a new existence in "sheer high air" where he dies "[his] own death repeatedly." Then "Timesmiths In Space" turns around the fallibilities of art, the inadequacies of words in trying "to express the inexpressible" "to/compose pure pause."

The book closes with "Death Suite," three poems attempting to define death and its ultimate obverse side, nirvana, each poem shuttling between ordinary print and italics (meaningfully this time), the italics summarizing, crystallizing, linking the three poems:

Death like:
the sound of an insect suffocating in a jar.
the last pin-prick of light when the television is over.
the end or beginning of a long rain.
an eraser, filaments part paper and part eraser
scattered in the shape of a man, then blown away.

This last image is taken up in the third poem in "Death Suite", the last poem in the book, for it is written *"for a poet who erased through the paper to what was beneath."*

Breath of the Snow Leopard is a more successful statement of Yates' concerns with the surface disintegrating, part paper, part eraser, and the life beneath, because it lacks the pretentious posturings of *The Qualicum Physics*, though it still contains much that is elusive. But its elusiveness sets up reverberations because the poetry is more firmly tied to a clarity of image, at times an almost imagistic suspended animation which for the most part catches the contemplative insistence on being and non-being, so that the poems sustain interest even though they may yield no definite meaning that the reader can articulate. The book carries its own system of interconnections and allusions, whereas *The Qualicum Physics* relies far too heavily on an imposed intellectualism which rarely sits easily with any developing pattern of image and thought.

PETER STEVENS

WINNING A READER

GARY GEDDES, ... *War & other measures.* Anansi, $3.50.
EUGENE MCNAMARA, *In Transit.* The Pennyworth Press, n.p.
ALAN PEARSON, *Freewheeling Through Gossamer Dragstrips.* Sesame Press, $2.50.

A CASUAL READER of Alan Pearson's poems might, at first, admire the enthusiasm for life which they exude. For they possess a mood that is commonly exuberant, they are fast-paced confessional statements which are not at all morbid, and they embody a sense of detail that seems tireless. With vigour and strenuous secularity Pearson is bent on creating and celebrating a fusion of the banal with the marvellous, the everyday with the exotic, as the title of his volume testifies. Yet a considered response to his poems is likely to question the pleasure they attempt to provide and to doubt their worth.

The reader will soon be surfeited by the unmodulated voice of the poems. The voice is too consistently hortatory and declamatory. Moreover, this formality of stance clashes with the easy reliance upon idiom and jargon. The result is that the voice seems simply defensive, that the poet's love for the world appears strained, and that his sense of detail is cursory rather than essentially curious. Indeed, the voice is not related variously or interestingly to the poet's actual nervousness about life.

Too many things impress the poet's mind superficially, and his deliberate blurring of empirical and imaginative categories in combination with the indistinctness of voice and stance aggravates, rather than gives purpose to, the welter of impressions and his nervous energy. One finds little organic development in argument, imagery or associations, while clichés which are amazingly trite are not offset by verbal or structural irony. Puns are often painful because too local and obvious. They are one indication of the lack of dialectic between the particular and the general. Since his diction and grammar are dominantly conversational, Pearson rarely exercises himself in ellipsis or understatement. Too often there is redundancy in his exposition and monotony in his syntax. Because he does not vary his voice, his confessions frequently appear gauche and unrepresentative. Important exceptions to most of the previous remarks are to be found in "Riding High," which, despite an adolescent subject, is a controlled medley of literary and popular diction, and "They Can Make You Happy," which is a plain yet ironical poem that exposes male fantasies about prostitutes.

Eugene McNamara's *In Transit* contains fourteen short poems which taken together constitute an accessible, controlled and interesting statement about love. The poems begin by describing the renewal of a relationship, pass on to demonstrate the positive and destructive aspects of loving, and end with a hard-won sense of resolution in isolation for the poet-speaker. The approach to the relationship, the relationship itself, and the acceptance of its dissolution are defined regularly by metaphors of movement. But McNamara draws for these images upon the technology of flying as well as upon more conventional cosmic references and the Icarus myth. He compounds his imagery in a diffuse and unsystematic way. He also embeds plain and down-to-earth metaphors and similes into his images of movement. His distinctive restraint with imagery is also to be attributed to his ability to make the metaphors of movement apply to the interior life.

The general sense of control and accessibility that McNamara's poems evidence derives from the fact that, while they are private they are not merely personal. The poet varies his stance, and exercises a verbal dexterity and an acute awareness of the tension between metrical and syntactical units. The confessional aspect of the poems is also restrained because of his ability to qualify the speaker's idea of himself and to develop his authorial sense of irony thematically.

Despite his complex metaphorical assertiveness and downright manner, McNamara's speaker is tentative in his passion. His expressions of desire for his woman often give way to clichés which expose his psychological dependence upon her. Wherea she is firm in her intellectual integrity, he is distracted by her physical presence. Although, however, his sympathy for things of the world and his desire for personal and imaginative independence are undermined consistently, there are signs that the speaker can transcend literary and cultural poses to engage himself with the world in the loss of love. McNamara's sense of irony gives cultural significance to the speaker's sexual perspective and to the inevitable dissolution of the romantic relationship.

Gary Geddes' volume attempts to represent the psychological truth of contemporary Canadian culture by depicting the character of Paul Joseph Chartier, a veteran of World War II who, embittered by both war and peace-time experience, tries to blow up the Canadian House of Commons but accidentally kills himself. Geddes' narrative is subtle and provocative, on the whole his stance is

compelling, and his thematic development is very convincing. The history of the forces which render Chartier spiritually impotent and insane is inseparably connected to the stunting commercial and political structures of society that explain, if they do not totally justify, Chartier's irrationality. Geddes successfully patterns the narrative facts round Chartier so that his unique and frequently chaotic mentality takes on a representative force. Chartier is never treated merely as an individual. He is a victim of a profound social malaise, he is the spokesman for the ordinary man's frustrations before the inflexibility of institutions, and, although he is socially ineffective, in his contorted self-consciousness he struggles for a meaning outside himself that in a minimal and elusive way is found in trusting to history.

Chartier's experience of organized and surreptitious killing is so deep that he cannot be open or intimate. Such things as sexual intercourse and appreciation of flowers cannot be separated from images of war. His personal fragmentation is also evidenced in that his aggressive perceptions of ordinary phenomena are voiced in a dispassionate, lethargic tone. Alert to the general dissociation of perception and compassion, Chartier cannot turn his implicit cultural judgments in a positive direction. Instead, his rationalizations become more sustained and detailed. In the first section Geddes shows well how Chartier evades meaning and identity by acting out ordinary social and cultural incongruities.

The argument of the second section of Geddes' volume is that commerce and industry have become dependent upon war. Chartier is lucid about post-war dehumanization and he records disenchantment with technology. His lapses into vivid memories of war do not prevent him from ironically imagining how appropriate machinery is for the description of human behaviour. In the third section, Chartier's contempt for privilege and business is emphasized. Despite increasingly confused imagery and perception, Chartier comprehends the social context. Confronting urban complexity, he recognizes social incoherence. Again it is ironical that the few sustained thoughts about society that he has are upheld only by his stunted military imagination. In the fourth section Chartier exemplifies perverse creativity and helplessness in the extreme. He regards bomb-making as a literary exercise; his bomb affords him the opportunity to be rational and sensitive. But this unusual commitment soon gives way to nihilism and vain, romantic egoism. At the last moment, however, there seems to be a selfless assertion of being and trust in the purposefulness of time.

As implied author, Geddes is an important presence. He manipulates Chartier variously and integrally. Sometimes, Chartier's imagery is perhaps too local and self-contained, and it is cut off from the double vision usually provided by the implied author. But, generally, Geddes succeeds in making Chartier representative and accessible. His is a rewarding volume and by far the most important of those reviewed here. Geddes is obviously intent on winning a wider audience for poetry and on arguing in his poems that poetry is necessary for Canadian culture.

ROBERT JAMES MERRETT

EDITOR'S NOTE: Professor Fred Cogswell is preparing an edition of the letters of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, and would appreciate hearing from anyone holding letters from Sir Charles. He may be contacted at the Department of English, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B.

LAMPMAN REAPPRAISED

CARL Y. CONNOR, *Archibald Lampman Canadian Poet of Nature*. Borealis Press Limited.
The Lampman Symposium, Edited and with an Introduction by Lorraine McMullen. University of Ottawa Press.

WHEN I REVIEWED Michael Gnarowski's *Archibald Lampman* (1970) in *Canadian Literature* (Autumn 1971), I welcomed this collection of critical essays because it dealt with a writer whom I then dubbed "respected but rather neglected." Now, all is changed. Archibald Lampman (1861-1899), like "Can cult," is "in," and as a result, editions and criticisms of his works are being published at a rapid rate. Before me, for example, I have *The Poems of Archibald Lampman (including At the Long Sault)* (1974), the reprint of the "Memorial Edition" of *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (1900) and of *At the Long Sault and Other New Poems* (1943); *Archibald Lampman: Selected Prose* (1975); and *Lampman's Sonnets 1884-1899* (1976). I also have before me the books that are the subject of this review.

Carl Y. Connor's *Archibald Lampman Canadian Poet of Nature* (1977) is a photocopy reprint of a book first published in 1929. Originally a doctoral dissertation, this critical biography comes with a "Preface" which names the relatives and friends of Lampman whom Connor consulted; a "Foreword" by Ray Palmer Baker; an "Appendix" which lists among other items Lampman's contributions to two periodicals published by his *alma mater*, the *Rouge et Noir* and the *Trinity University Review*; and an "Index." In the text itself, Connor quotes from letters and other documents which help him illuminate not only Lampman's life and works but his time and place as well.

There are difficulties with the study. Because there are no footnotes, it is sometimes impossible to identify the source of Connor's quotations. In "Ottawa," for example, he quotes from "another letter of this period" written by Lampman without indicating precisely to whom the letter was written, when it was written, or who owned the letter when Connor saw it. Because the distinction between speculation and fact is not always clear, it is also often impossible to know just how to read such statements as "his peace of mind was not improved if the porridge at breakfast proved burned or the steak tough" from the description of Lampman's "College Days." Because the biography is half-a-century old, some statements are out-of-date. Although it now seems evident that for much of his marriage Lampman was in love with another woman, Connor concludes that the poet was a "devoted ... husband." Still, *Archibald Lampman Canadian Poet of Nature* is a good criticism, and its republication is useful.

Aspects of this reprint bother me, however. Because of the manner of its reproduction, the printing errors of the first edition are retained. The reprint is called a "Second Edition," yet apart from a revised title page, there has apparently been no editing. No information is provided about the first edition. In order to verify that *Archibald Lampman Canadian Poet of Nature* published in Montreal by Carrier in 1929 had been reproduced, I phoned Glenn Clever of Borealis Press. He very graciously answered my questions, but I wonder why such information is not automatically included, along with the title page of the edition reproduced, in every reprint done by every publisher.

The second book for review is *The Lampman Symposium* (1976), edited and with an introduction by Lorraine McMullen. One of the publications in

the series "Re-Appraisals: Canadian Writers" sponsored by the Department of English at the University of Ottawa, the main source for each work in this series is the material presented at a symposium on a Canadian writer held at the university usually every spring. *The Lampman Symposium*, thus, is chiefly a collection of thirteen papers presented at the symposium on Lampman. In addition, the work includes the "Introduction" by Lorraine McMullen, the "Program of the Lampman Symposium, May 2-4, 1975," "The Lampman Manuscripts — A Brief Guide" by Margaret Coulby Whitridge, and a list of "Contributors."

Of this added material, the programme and list of contributors are useful. McMullen's introduction indicates some of the dynamics of the symposium itself. The most important addition, however, is "The Lampman Manuscripts — A Brief Guide." It lists the location and contents of the "Lampman Papers known to exist — the manuscripts and correspondence of Archibald Lampman," and it demonstrates perhaps more effectively than any other item in the volume the complexity of the challenge posed by these papers to critics and scholars.

Seven papers read at the symposium form the bulk of the printed text. The title and author of each should reveal something of its content and approach. Michael Gnarowski discussed "Lampman and His Critics"; Carl F. Klinck, "The Frogs: An Exercise in Reading Lampman"; Louis Dudek, "Lampman and the Death of the Sonnet"; Louis K. MacKendrick, "Sweet Patience and Her Guest, Reality: the Sonnets of Archibald Lampman"; Dick Harrison, " 'So Deathly Silent': The Resolution of Pain and Fear in the Poetry of Lampman and D. C. Scott"; Barrie Davies, "The Forms of Nature: Some of the Philosophical and Aesthetic Bases of Lampman's Poetry"; Bruce Nesbitt, "The New Lampman." According to the reader's point of view, he/she will find these papers more or less interesting, informative, or critically sound. I particularly enjoyed Dudek's and Nesbitt's, although the latter names Robert G. Haliburton as "Thomas's father" rather than his son. It also contains, as does the entire volume, numerous printing errors, some of which at least should have been caught, along with the mistake on Haliburton, by the editor.

The other six papers derived from the panel on either Lampman's biography or his achievement. These short, and on the whole sharp, papers reveal some of the currently fashionable concerns about, and critical approaches to, Lampman. Whitridge's presentation on the panel on biography brought up the question of Lampman's "affair" with Katherine Waddell and its influence on his life and works, a question which echoes throughout the criticism. On the panel on "Lampman's Achievement," Sandra Djwa's suggestion that Brown and Scott's version of "At the Long Sault" is better than the "restored Lampman may very well be" raised the issue of editorial responsibility, an issue important for Bruce Nesbitt and his "definitive edition" of Lampman's works. On the same panel, Robin Mathews discussed Lampman's "differing sense of reality" from an Englishman and an American and called for "critics and poets" to "hone words about reality as we live it here," and James Steele named Lampman as "the first poet of Canada's bourgeois intelligentsia to sing of his disaffection for a social system which he nevertheless laboured to maintain." Thus, "nationalism" and "Marxism" marched into the closing moments of the symposium.

And how shall I close this review of Lampman reprinted and re-appraised? Well . . . both *Archibald Lampman Canadian Poet of Nature* and *The Lampman Symposium* are welcome additions to the criticism about Lampman currently in

print. Each volume, too, is a proof of the increasing interest in Lampman and the growing industry in his scholarship and criticism. The symposium volume in particular shows that although this recent cultivation of the Lampman garden has so far produced more premature buds and ugly weeds than fine flowers of scholarship and criticism, these will come, especially when we have "the new Lampman." In the meantime, Archibald Lampman has become a much respected and no longer neglected Canadian writer.

MARY JANE EDWARDS

NEWLOVE'S POWER

JOHN NEWLOVE, *The Fat Man, Selected Poems 1962-1972*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

THE POETRY OF JOHN NEWLOVE, as presented here, begins in a dark and brooding whimsicality, and moves steadily into utter despair. From the very beginning the protagonist chooses to portray himself as a solitary dominated by fantasy and desire, making "poems babies & love-affairs/ out of women I've only seen once," a wanderer on the side of the road "cold/ & afraid." He asks himself

> With whom should I associate
> but suffering men? For all men
> who desire suffer; and my desires
> are too great for me to hold to
> alone. I must see the others. . . .

The others include a ten-year-old girl scarred and mutilated from being scalded, the victim of a car accident, and an animal killed on the highway. These he celebrates and mourns in a "tired and halting song," contemplating all his "mistakes and desires," seeing himself as lying

> alone in the shadowed grass,
> fond only, incapable of love or truth,
> caught in all I have done, afraid
> and unable to escape, formulating
> one more ruinous way to safety.

The safety he finds is in situations which do not involve him in affection or desire; he envies the hitch hikers and their aimless travelling, their "feeling safe with strangers/ in a moving car." He reports in drab low-key language on those who are "emptied of desire," on the beer parlour and street life of the small town, where all is directionless and customary. The lovely is dangerous:

> What's lovely
> is whatever makes the adrenalin run;
> therefore I count terror and fear among
> the greatest beauty. The greatest
> beauty is to be alive, forgetting nothing
> although remembrance hurts
> like a foolish act, is a foolish act.

He finds success a failure, for, recalling what he had wished to become and realizing he has succeeded, he finds that "complete,/ I am more empty than ever." He observes the bird that declines "the privilege/ of music" preferring to finger "the absolute/ wood/ beneath," just as he himself prefers plain and unvarnished speech. Sometimes this plain speech of pain results in self-pity as when in "The Dog" he recalls "never thinking anyone/ would love me," but the self pity is countered by his sardonic envy of the dog, "damn fool/ running and barking/ away toward the town." Unloved and unlovely humanity is portrayed in "Public Library" with almost hysterical savagery and vigour; and thoughts of human stench, excrement, and vomit dominate "Samuel Hearne in Wintertime." Recognizing our ugliness our futility we must learn to "Go without/ vanity," though perhaps with a proper pride, not in our solitary egos, but in the land to which we belong. This is expressed in the magnificent poem "The Pride" which, surveying the history and the cultural traditions of the Indians, discovers that

> we stand alone,
> we are no longer lonely
> but have roots,

and the rooted words
recur in the mind, mirror, so that
we dwell on nothing else, in nothing else,
touched, repeating them,
at home freely
at last, in amazement.

It is perhaps in contemplating the past, in sharing other lives, that we may discover something to admire, to revere, as in considering the strength of "The Doukhubor," and in "Remembering Christopher Smart" which concludes with the lines

I see that we all make the world what we want.
Our disappointment lies in the world as it is.

"Disappointment" is hardly an adequate word to describe the portrayal of humanity in the succeeding poems. The title poem is as brilliantly designed and as vigorous as a Daumier, and it has all Daumier's relish in the grotesque. "The Fat Man," waiting at the crossing light, is nameless, characterless, gross, and en route to an undignified and messy death. He is as hopeless a figure as the man in "Company" who has "a smell of having given up/ of having been given up on," from whom women edge away "feeling something unhuman,/ the wrong condition of longing, the wrong character of need,/ the long time waiting," and who "enjoys disgusting company" until they "cease to be amused," when he will leave them and "go somewhere else." This rhythm of hopelessness, lying, and nausea is inescapable.

The same things will occur in another place.
Things will always occur.
And back again. The same rhythms.
But shorter
durations. The time
always gets shorter. Until
in a rush at last there is no time.
At all.

The man portrayed in "Harry" is also a creature of futility and despair. The universe, in the last poems of the book, has become a purgatory, even a hell. Earth is no place to live. "We came to dream. It is not true, it is not true — / that we came to live on the earth." Moreover "Death is everywhere," "Sham heroes are popular," "Cities die just like men," and we must realize that "You don't have to live if you have no dreams." In "The Crammed World" man "starved of something he will not admit," says "Comfort my sad eyes" and "Accept my suffering, which is all I have made of my life,/ which is all the love I want to offer you." The poem, and the book, end with the lines

Painful man, your hurt lasts longer than a movie;
it will not amuse a woman or the future for so long. New turns
must be invented every day. And newer tricks. So dream; dream of success,
and hope, though hope for what you cannot guess, but when you slide
with your eyes closed into the universe you invented viciously,
do not complain that the wrong doors open wide, open, wait, then close behind you,
and some friendly animal long thought of greets you and grows fat
lapping your red gore.

John Newlove's vision is indeed dark. His universe is one of solitude, failure, ugliness and nausea. The only driving forces of life are desire, which is always thwarted, and dreams which are never fulfilled. This world is a place of waste, despair, and desolation. One is reminded of Empson's "Villanelle" and the lines

Slowly the poison the whole bloodstream fills;
It is the waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

Empson's most bleak visions are, however, given a kind of qualifying positive air by the verbal wit, the implied admiration of man's inventive intellect, just as the world of Graham Greene is lit with sudden appreciations of God's grace and mercy, and that of Samuel Beckett by

flashes of self-gratulatory comedy. Newlove's vision is not qualified in these ways. The comedy is never in the slightest life-enhancing, there is no discernible God, and the language is, in the majority of poems, bare of all but the most anguished flourishes. Newlove has, indeed, created a place where no other poet has yet had the courage to go without at least a Swiftian irony, a Websterian rhetoric, or a religious conviction as luggage. The Newlove man (and one is tempted to an ironic play upon the author's own name) is very much a creature of our times, however, as he is also a universal figure — the figure of need, solitude, despair. The poetry itself is enormously well crafted, subtly controlled in tone, and richly various in style, even while remaining consistent to what emerges as an over-all purpose to portray the human tragedy with an economy and elegance that succeed in making the whole book a tribute to courage and a statement of the awesome spiritual strength of man. This *Selected Poems*, omitting as it does many of the poems of pure reportage and of whimsy which lessened the impact of some of the separate collections is one of the most impressive to have been published in the English speaking world in the last twenty years. John Newlove is now at the height of his powers. One waits impatiently for further developments.

ROBIN SKELTON

TRANSLATIONS

F. R. SCOTT, transl., *The Poems of French Canada*. Blackfish Press.

THE BLACKFISH PRESS publication of F. R. Scott's translations is timely recognition of Scott's importance as a translator and of the symbiotic relationship between the arts of translation and poetry. As Scott insists in his introduction: "The author of a poem must select the words and images that best express what he wants to say: this is a process akin to translation." Most of the poems collected here were translated between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Quiet Revolution in Québec; some can be found in John Glassco's anthology; others in Scott's earlier *Saint-Denys Garneau and Anne Hébert* (1962). This collection, first of all, complements Glassco's anthology, and recent books by Glassco, Alan Brown, D. G. Jones and Fred Cogswell's *The Poetry of Modern Quebec: An Anthology* (1976) in the necessary activity of opening English-Canadian eyes to the more vibrant literature of Québec. Secondly, along with the Glassco and Jones translations, it creates an atmosphere for serious dialogue on the art of translation. In the introductions to the two Glassco books, *The Poems of French Canada*, and in Scott's own *Dialogue sur la traduction* (an exchange of letters and conversations with Anne Hébert about the translation of her poem, "Le Tombeau des rois" — "The Tomb of Kings") lie the beginnings of an aesthetic of translation in Canada.

This volume, moreover, provides concrete evidence, pleasingly arranged, of the significance of translation to Scott's own poetic process, to his artistic development, and to his versatility as he shifts easily from satiric to political to lyric verse. Scott belongs to a rare breed of Canadian renaissance men; born into an establishment family, he received a classical education and an Oxford degree and then taught and practised as a constitutional lawyer. He developed a passion for social justice (he was one of the founders of the CCF), a defiant faith in our two cultures (he sat on the Royal Commission for Biculturalism and Bilingualism), and a desire for literary expression and discourse. Translation for Frank Scott

was not only a poetic but a political act — "How to build a Canada that would allow the two principal cultures to flourish freely became an intellectual and emotional challenge and in this endeavour literature would obviously play an important role." In this introduction, Scott outlines his strong reaction to the social changes in Québec and the growth of friendships with Québec writers — he had met all the poets he translated here except Jean Narrache and, of course, Marc Lescarbot who died circa 1640. Scott was able to collaborate with them, and I think a history of modern Canadian poetry lies in these collaborations. Undoubtedly, Scott is the pioneer of poetic translation in Canada, and his "collaboration" and friendship with Glassco and A. J. M. Smith (whose 1960 Oxford anthology contained both French and English poems) and the inspiring example he set opened up new horizons for the next generation of poets. D. G. Jones, Margaret Atwood, Louis Dudek come to mind. The exchanges and contacts begun by a man shocked and surprised at the separatedness of two cultures in one place, have continued, particularly by English poets in Québec, some of whom have found a centre for a creative dialogue in the journal, *Ellipse*.

Scott's selections (except for Marc Lescarbot's "Farewell to the Frenchmen Returning from New France to Gallic France" [1606] are from well known twentieth-century poets. The majority are by Hébert and Garneau, but there are a couple of poems each by Roland Giguère, Fernand Ouellette, Jean-Guy Pilon, Jacques Brault and Pierre Trottier. Scott's own particular bias prompted his choice and so the poems generally reflect, in varying forms, images, and intensity, the "revolt of the individual conscience against the old imprisoning concepts." Images of imprisonment dominate the surrealistic dream sequence that describes the "perverse enchantment of these rooms" in Anne Hébert's "Manor Life," they remain a faint echo in Pierre Trottier's trenchant "State of Siege":

> Fear of the police
> Fear of arrests
> Made me afraid of permissions
> But even more of the unknown
> And of the freedom that led to it
> ....
> But the minute I was ready
> Authority had surrounded me
> Had beamed its searchlights on me
> Which relentlessly pinned me against the wall
> Of the priestless prison of my conscience

The obsession with the separation of spirit and flesh, heart and bone, the presence of death in life, which is partly the cry of a repressed, isolated, and dying culture is caught in Anne Hébert's "The Closed Room":

> Leave, leave the fire to colour
> The room with its reflections,
> And replenish your heart and your flesh;
> Unhappy pair now separate and lost.

Perhaps the most famous expression of this terrible absence is Saint-Denys Garneau's "Bird Cage":

> The bird in the cage of bone
> Is death building his nest

As you turn from the watercolour landscapes of Hébert and Garneau, moreover, you enter the winter landscape of the younger poets: the polar season of Giguère, the anatomy of the human landscape described by Jean Pilon. In many ways this parallels the move to symbolic and internal landscapes that we find among modern English-Canadian poets.

The translations themselves are very good — Scott is a meticulous craftsman. He is a more literal translator than Glassco or Alan Brown. Frequently Scott maintains the original syntax of the French line which sometimes results in awkwardness, yet he invariably demonstrates an

unerring instinct for the appropriate word or phrase, the right rhythm. Although one might occasionally wish to change a word or invert a line, Scott's translations carry the ring of authenticity — you can feel the hand of a conscientious poet who cares about words behind each line. In "La Chambre fermée" (translated by both Alan Brown and Scott as "The Closed Room"), Anne Hébert's taut

> Quatre fois
> Tant que durera le souvenir
> Du jour et de la nuit

is rendered by Scott as

> Four times
> For as long as will last the memory
> Of day and night.

Here the translation faithfully follows the original French syntax and so reads awkwardly. Brown's version is freer and more flowing:

> Four times
> Until of day and night
> The memory fades.

Yet in the same poem, Scott captures the chill horror, so matter-of-factly stated, of

> Mon coeur sur la table posé
> Qui a donc mis le couvert avec soin,

with

> When my heart was placed on the table
> who then laid the cover so carefully.

Brown's trimmer translation is not so chilling:

> My heart there on the table,
> Who set it with such care.

Scott has made a few minor corrections. In "The Tomb of Kings," for example, Scott improves the fifth verse by dispensing with literal translations of words, creating a more natural English syntax, and so clarifying the meaning:

The maker of the dream
Presses on the cord
Drawing the naked steps
One by one
Like the first drops of rain
At the bottom of a well

(1962)

becomes

The maker of the dream
Pulls on the cord
And my naked footsteps come
One by one
Like the first drops of rain
At the bottom of a well.

(1977)

The original reads as follows:

L'auteur du songe
Presse le fil
Et viennent les pas nus
Un à un
Comme les premières gouttes de pluie
Au fond du puits.

Another revision serves to restore the rhythm. The 1962 translation

Seven times I know the tight grip of the bones
And the dry hand seeking my heart to break it.

becomes more effectively monosyllabic and staccato in the 1977 version:

Seven times I know the tight grip of the bones
And the dry hand that seeks my heart to break it.

However, not all revisions are improvements. The appropriate antiquity and fluidity of "Wherefore does this bird quiver" is changed into the less astonished exclamation: "What then makes this bird quiver" as the poem moves to its apocalyptic:

And turn toward morning
Its blinded eyes.

Also I have never liked the adjective "lean" in the poem "The Lean Girl" — "thin" would be preferable, though not as descriptive of the girl's fleshless state.

Scott has characteristically entitled his collection *The Poems of French Canada* — he is fighting a lonely battle against what he feels is the vociferous and dangerously provincial nationalism of Québec. As a consequence, he refuses to succumb to the trend of converting "French Canada" into "Québec." This defiance underlines his introduction; it is perhaps "an old man's frenzy," perhaps an anachronistic gesture, perhaps the pain of a man who sees his dreams of the creative co-existence of two cultures dissolve into petty semantics. Titles notwithstanding, I can only wish that the poems were more numerous and the introduction to Québec poets more extensive.

Blackfish, a small, persevering press near Vancouver, has produced an elegant volume with the romantic inscription "Designed and Printed by Brett and Safarik at White Rock by the Sea" and — B.C. government take notice! — the strong condemnation "Made in British Columbia Without Government Funding." A most appropriate and ironic comment since writers and publishers in Québec give and receive a great deal of support from their government. May F. R. Scott's influence be far reaching.

KATHY MEZEI

MONSTER MAKERS

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *Mostly Monsters.* Hounslow Press, $4.95.
Giant Canadian Poetry Annual 1977. 17 Canadian Poets. Press Porcépic, $2.95.

THERE ARE MANY would-be poets writing in Canada today. There are relatively few readers of poetry, even among the poets. As a result, publishers are reduced to strange expediencies to attempt to market poetry. They even try their hand at an exploitation of nostalgia. Nostalgia is a

powerful emotion, as I have reason to know. In 1952, at a second-hand book shop in Edinburgh I once bought copies of *The Butterfly Book* and *The Moth Book* by William Holland for no earthly reason other than that I was an avid collector of lepidoptera during the Depression and coveted these volumes in vain during those years of boyhood. The two books under discussion are attempts to achieve popularity through the same human weakness I evinced.

The recipe of combined nostalgia, terror, and perfect safety on the part of the reader is evoked consistently by John Robert Colombo in *Mostly Monsters*, a series of found poems drawn from many sources. Here surely is something for every one. Superman, Dracula, Frankenstein, Wonder Woman, She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, Buck Rogers, Dr. Caligari, the Green Hornet, Mr. Moto, King Kong, and many more appear in the pages of this book in lines that are recognizably verse and in phrases that are word for word authentic, thanks to the talent of its compiler. My objection to most of this book is that I believe the poet should create his monsters and invoke his horrors out of his own psyche rather than rely so literally upon the works of others. I must admit, though, that occasionally Colombo can transform, by the magic of form, work imbedded in such prosaic books as Robert Ripley's *Believe It or Not* into something truly wonderful of its own kind. "Kaspar Hauser" is a case in point:

> Kaspar Hauser
> the mystery child of Europe
> could see the stars in the heavens
> shining at high noon
> without mechanical aid
>
> *Kaspar Hauser*
> *could see the stars*
> *in the daytime*

Only the cover, frontispiece, and format of Press Porcépic's *Giant Canadian Poetry Annual 1977* are nostalgic of comicbooks, but they seem to me to be, along with the art work of Sheila Gladstone, the most attractive features of the volume. It is perhaps fortunate that the poetry fails to live up to the pompous statements of intention often prefixed to it by its authors. It is, all the same, inevitably sincere, well put together formally, and honest in its intentions. It seldom, however, transcends the obvious concerns of the young adolescent faced with a world that he/she never made. At best, it is a good indication to other young poets, who may buy this volume, of how common are forms and themes which they are apt to think, in their own relative isolation, to be peculiarly their own. It also has a useful guide to "Who Publishes Poetry in Canada?"

Giant Canadian Poetry Annual 1977 is a commendable publishing venture for the encouragement that publication in it is bound to give to young and relatively unpublished poets. I think, though, that its format and cover do not provide enough nostalgia to make older readers buy it, and the very young are not going to be fooled into reading poetry by something as obvious as a format.

FRED COGSWELL

opinions and notes

LOUISE MOREY BOWMAN

BARRY CALLAGHAN HAS CLAIMED that W. W. E. Ross was "the first modern poet in Canada."[1] He bases this claim upon the assumption that Ross introduced Imagism into Canadian poetry. But Ross was not the first Canadian to write in the Imagist manner (though he was probably the first to dedicate himself totally to it). Four years before his first published poem appeared in *Dial* in 1928, another Canadian poet, Louise Morey Bowman, had published *Dream Tapestries* (1924), a volume which contained several poems which were clearly Imagist in technique. Her earlier book, *Moonlight and Common Day* (1922), had also shown a definite Imagist influence. The purpose of this note is to examine Bowman's efforts at writing poetry in a new and modern style and also to show how her struggle to break free of techniques which she inherited from the nineteenth century proved ultimately futile.

Louise Morey was born in 1882 in Sherbrooke, Quebec. She was educated by private tutors, then at Dana Hall, Wellesley, Mass., and by extensive travel in Europe. Married in 1909 to Archibald Bowman she lived in Toronto until 1919, when she moved to Montreal where she resided until her death in 1944.

Bowman's first published poem, "North Room," appeared in *Outlook* in May 1913, and she had quite an extensive magazine publication. Her work appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago), *Outlook*, *Independent*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *Canadian Magazine*. She also published three books with Macmillan: *Moonlight and Common Day*, *Dream Tapestries*, which won a David Award from the Quebec government, and *Characters in Cadence* (1938). Logan and French, in *Highways of Canadian Literature*, included her among the poets of the "Second Renaissance Period" of Canadian poetry, although their reasons for praising her were not inspired by any admiration for her Imagism. They wrote: "Louise Morey Bowman shows at times an airy fancy which is almost so ethereal as to be altogether abstract and unearthly."[2] It is ironic that this praise points toward one of the major weaknesses of her poetry. It often is, as Desmond Pacey described it, "deficient in substance and strength."[3] For someone attempting to write Imagist verse this can, as we shall see, be disastrous.

Moonlight and Common Day is marred by a lack of any consistent personal style. At times she seems to be writing imitations of poets rather than poetry. Obvious influences include Wordsworth, Poe, and Swinburne. Some of the poems are openly didactic, some are "modern" but not Imagist, and others show Imagist tendencies. In this and in her later volumes she is caught between the style of the old acknowledged masters and the methods of modern poetry. She never completely succeeds in sloughing off the ways of the past in favour of a more natural modern voice. The two following examples show how divided her style in this book is. The first is taken from a poem called "Lydia":

> Dost know the white, wild-cherry boughs
> Ablow midst green of May,
> That make enchanted palaces
> Of houses old and gray?
> (Ah me, that sweet, wild springtime!)

The second is from "Sea Sand":

> Between the rhythmical, unfathomed sea,
> And the rich warm fecundity of land

There lies the sand,
The shifting sand of beach and dune,
Pure, strange, sea dust, so alien to green
earth.

The first is clearly a derivation from nineteenth-century poetic tradition. It uses archaisms, a regular rhythm and rhyme scheme, and an exclamation mark which is not justified by the intensity of the line. She uses outdated forms and mannerisms badly because they are not native to her. "Sea Sand," a poem in which the description is far more convincing, is written in a modern voice.

This conflict between modern and nineteenth-century styles often occurs within a single poem. "Shadows" is a good example. The first stanza is written in the Imagist manner:

Oak tree,
Elm tree,
And apple bough . . .
Their shadows fall
On the cool green grass.
Shadows of willow trees lie in the
shimmering pool,
and the pine trees' flicker
On crystal snow.

There is direct treatment of the thing; the images are presented in a spare, clean diction; and it is written in free verse. The second stanza is purely sentimental:

(Even the baby, chubby and sweet,
Poised on her tiny, tottering feet,
Casts now *her* shadow — an instant's gloom,
Over a purple hyacinth bloom.)

The baby's "sweetness" has nothing to do with the shadow she casts nor with the rather melancholy mood of the first stanza. That image very obviously fails to abide by F. S. Flint's second rule of Imagism: "To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation."[4]

In the third stanza Bowman waxes philosophic:

Last winter, set in a fire-lit room,
Were two sprays of long-dried goldenrod . . .
Feathery, frosty plumes.
They were certainly ghostly enough in
themselves,
But the magical firelight leaped and shone
Till their dainty, elusive shadows fell,
Etched on the oak-paneled wall.
Each was an exquisite mystical ghost
Of Beauty —
A miracle truth.
Then the firelight died and they went out
Into the Silence, where shadows dwell.

She says that the goldenrods "were certainly ghostly enough in themselves" but she is not content to follow Flint's advice and deal with things in themselves. She has to interpret their shadows, not with an image, but with a direct statement which pins them down to one specific meaning: "Each was an exquisite mystical ghost/Of Beauty —/A miracle truth." She does not, as the Imagist must, let the image stand on its own merits. By giving it a stated meaning she has taken the image and reduced its function to that of a road sign which indicates only one direction.

Dream Tapestries is plagued by the same unevenness of style and attitude which characterized *Moonlight and Common Day*. In a few poems, however, she does succeed in writing well in the Imagist vein. The book is divided into several sections and one section, entitled "Cinquains," contains five Imagist pieces. These poems are especially interesting because they show the coming together of the Canadian setting with the Imagist style. "Deep Snow" describes a winter scene:

Powder
Of diamond
Upon a silver birch;
Old stone wall
Buried deep.

And you . . .
A scarlet bird
Whose wild wings flutter here
Against my soul. How still
The world!

Bowman uses simple natural details to

establish a number of contrasts between the two stanzas. The first stanza presents us with a picture of stillness; the second gives us movement. The first is characterized by the colour white; the second by scarlet. The first stanza contains inanimate and external things; the second contains life and takes us into the soul of the poet.

The sequence in which the images are presented is very important. The poem moves from the inanimate, to life, to the soul, and finally back to the inanimate. The poem takes the reader from an impersonal stillness, to a "flutter" in the soul of an observer and then returns to stillness. This sequence implies that human life is a soul's "flutter" enclosed by eternity. This aspect of the poem's meaning is linked to the sense of opposites which the images evoke, in that life and eternity are implicitly contrasted.

Another interesting, though less successful, piece in the "Cinquains" group is "Twelve Hokku on a Canadian Theme." Modelled upon Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird," it deals with twelve aspects of Canadian life both past and present and urban and rural. Most of these hokku are quite flat but in one or two she manages to make the images work. One of the best is the fourth hokku:

> Silver-haired Marquise!
> You were transplanted, one Spring,
> Into wild New France.

As in "Deep Snow" she uses contrast as her major device. Civilization and Europe, as embodied by the "Marquise," are contrasted with the "wild" new land. Silver is contrasted with the implied green of spring and through that contrast is implied another between youth and old age. These all serve as an ironic comment upon the "transplantation" of the Marquise. Even though it is spring the old ways will not flourish in the bush garden of New France.

An important poem written in the Imagist style which is not included among "Cinquains" is "Moment Musical":

> Blue moth! . . .
> Tiny, pulsating thing . . .
> You and I met upon a rock hill.
> I paused . . .
> You paused, and poised
> Blue,
> Blue on a dark stone:
> And all the vibrant sunshine in the world
> Was caught for the sparkle
> On your tiny wings . . .
> Blue moth!

The poem begins by simply presenting an image: "Blue moth." The exclamation mark and three dots which follow the image indicate an emotional reaction on the part of the poet and the rest of the poem is an articulation of this reaction.

Bowman's last and poorest volume is entitled *Characters in Cadence* and it appeared in 1938, six years before her death. On the whole it marks a return to the uneven style and derivativeness of her first book. Buried under a mound of bad verse there is one very short Imagist gem. It is the second of a series of poems called "Portraits of Five Sinners":

> Her little window-sills were all too narrow
> To hold her pots of lilting daffodils.

These two lines stand as a near perfect example of the power of the image to evoke the deepest of insights with the least amount of verbiage. The reader is left with the feeling (it is never more than that, it cannot be proven) that a narrowness lies within the "her" (presumably Bowman herself) of the poem. This narrowness is her "sin." Her soul cannot accommodate the "lilting daffodils" of feeling which life has to offer.

In Imagism Bowman sought a method which would set her free from the past, but she was unable to break away from the grip of the Romanticism which domi-

nated the Canadian literary scene. This struggle inevitably made her poems a confusing mixture of the old and new. Thus her work, when considered as a whole, is of too low a quality to make her an important poet. But she is an interesting representative figure nonetheless, whose career can serve to symbolize the slow and painful struggle which Canadian poetry underwent in this century prior to the arrival of Pratt and the McGill poets.

NOTES

[1] "Memoir," *Shapes and Sounds*, ed. Raymond Souster and John Robert Colombo (Toronto: Longmans, 1968), p. 3.

[2] J. D. Logan and Donald G. French, *Highways of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1928), p. 297.

[3] "Louise Morey Bowman," *Encyclopedia Canadiana.*

[4] "Imagism," *Poetry*, 1, No. 6 (March 1913), 199.

DONALD PRECOSKY

NEW PROVINCES

THE *New Provinces* ANTHOLOGY (1936) is certainly a landmark book in Canadian poetry, a signpost valuable in suggesting a direction in mood or movement. But there is a danger in extracting the book from its historical context by overemphasizing its later effect or in blurring the distinctiveness of the contributing poets by seeing a unity of purpose which may not have existed.

Both errors have occurred. On the one hand, *New Provinces* has been seen as a manifesto, a self-confident doctrine of what poetry should be (made explicit by the poems themselves), produced for this purpose by a collecting of Canadian modernists between two covers. On the other hand, the poets are compared to each other, and all are compared to the poets' theoretical writings (including A. J. M. Smith's "Rejected Preface" to the book). Thus theory is made to appear a more important outcome of the anthology than the poems themselves.

This has led to some difficulties. Why was F. R. Scott being "modest and overly reticent"[1] in his preface? Why was the Smith preface rejected? How can one account for certain omissions (e.g. W. W. E. Ross) or certain inclusions (E. J. Pratt, perhaps)? How can one account for the variety of form, content, etc., present among the poets or in one poet alone? Why do some poems appear contradictory to stated or implied theoretical aims and contentions?

The problem lies in viewing *New Provinces* as a unified exposition of modern exemplars. The book and its nature appear in quite a different light when set in time and place. We know, for example, that most of the poets were close friends; that most of them had not yet been published in book form; that many of their poems had been in print in scattered periodicals a long while before 1936. Together these three simple facts strongly suggest that the choice of poets and poems to be included was less doctrinaire than commonly inferred.

Moreover, there is no evidence to refute Scott's admission in his preface that "the need for a new direction was more apparent then [*sic*] the knowledge of what that direction would be." Even Smith's more polemic preface is as general:

> That the poet is not a dreamer, but a man of sense; that poetry is a discipline because it is an art; and that it is further a useful art; these are propositions which it is intended this volume shall suggest. We are not deceiving ourselves that it has proved them.

In practice these wide criteria hardly make rigid and detailed demands on the new poetry. The proof of this is that Smith himself invited Pratt to contribute

despite the "barrier" which seemed to separate older from younger poets.[2] This is particularly important when one remembers that Pratt not only felt obliged to object to the stridency of the Smith preface but was able to have it removed from the anthology. Clearly the sense of the book as new dogma is undermined.

This last point touches on another area of debate, i.e., the relation of this volume to the British anthologies *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933). There is no doubt that Smith had knowledge of and was involved with the Thirties movement in England, and that the similarity of titles is indicative of a shared notion of the collections as modern statements, but one must be careful not to draw too close a connection. First, for reasons already cited, there seems to be a gap in *New Provinces* between any supposed theoretical intentions and the result produced. Secondly, the strongest links to British modernism were held by Smith who, for the most part, left production of the Canadian anthology to Scott, particularly after Pratt's rejection of his preface. A comparison of tone and details of the two prefaces reveals the significance for the volume of that fact, especially as it affected the lack of a firmly convinced and rigidly schooled editorial vision.

My purpose here is to try to get away from the assumptions and confusions of a theoretical approach and consider *New Provinces* through an analysis of each of the poets through their chosen poems. Only then perhaps will it be appropriate to consider the implications of their being together by way of any common developments in content and form. To do so it will be useful to hold to a broad definition of form, i.e., to attend to tone or style or impact as the soul of form in order to avoid the failures which Saint-Exupéry perceived when he wrote that "the intellectuals take a face apart; they explain it piece by piece; and they can no longer see the smile."

The poets appear in *New Provinces* in alphabetical order, yet chance proved appropriate in placing Robert Finch first. While a good study of his work has yet to be made, we do know of his concern with French poetry, and a neat analogy appears when we remember the relation of Eliot to the French symbolists. However, while signs of this influence are evident in many of Finch's poems in this collection, there is also the presence of other traditions and an interest in broad experimentation.

Smith suggested the inclusion of Finch along with Pratt and it is useful to see the linkings of older and newer poets here. Finch reveals some of the difficulties in his first poem of the section, "The Five Kine." Archaisms in language ("a dearth of inauspicious ilk"; "sheering denial between pent and wrung") are juxtaposed with precise and vivid modernisms in image ("a famished parody of beauty"; "leisure is become a desert road"). A tendency to rhetoric is checked by a formal structure and complicated rhyme pattern. The tone shifts unevenly, as if the poet is unsure of the mood he wants to convey, and so the poem's emotional impact is neutralized. The contemporary thoughts on art, past and future, lose their power in the wordy detail of the symbols. The content itself suggests that the direction of the art is less obvious than its change: "The kine too had been there for long,/ yet now they seek the faithless drover's goad/ as he the scattered purchase of a song."

In "From the Hammock" Finch hopes to capture the pure feeling to be found in "the wood of sloth, the labyrinth of mood." Yet the poet loses that purity in the archaisms, the rhetoric and the very wordiness of his forced imagery, so different from the simple and effective fusion of mood, language and thought at

the poem's finish: "a soundless solitude/ whose brilliant exile, for the heart,/ is, and not makes, a work of art." The nostalgia for romance here, the regret that contentment is so often caught in the "ambush thought has laid" is significant, as it is in "Windowpiece" in which a landscape of "old willows in spun copper periwigs" is completed not by "a blue buck bearing vermilion horns/ led by a groom in tightest daffodil" but by a "silent steam shovel" ready to destroy. It is clear that Finch is aware of the change taking place in poetry, for "From the Hammock" is not primarily a poem of feeling but of thought, and "Windowpiece" is not primarily a glorification of trees but an exercise in irony.

The goal and the difficulties of trying to fuse poetic traditions are well illustrated in "The Excursionists" and "Beauty my Fond Fine Care." The first (I believe) is a disaster, intellectually and poetically forced, confused and ordinary. Admittedly it is meant to be about Uncertainty but that is hardly an excuse for poetry as heavy as:

> What muniment a mind must have
> Before it stammer I believe,
> Maugre the feats it can or may do
> Balking incontinent at Credo,
> Halting the leap from pro to con
> Across the gulf of Erewhon.

The second is as heavy and as awkward perhaps in trying to deal with one's relation to beauty and to changing concepts of beauty in intellectual terms, but this poem is salvaged by its conclusion:

> memory, beauty, in a unique ellipsis
> modulate fact to faith, now, and for after.

These lines succinctly accomplish the sense and rhythm that the whole poem was seeking, i.e., the correlation of the words on the page with the music of their sounds, the tone of beauty as a personal friend and companion, the intellectual aspect of considering the relation of self to beauty, and the description of the new concept of beauty.

Compare these abstractions to "Become that Village" where Finch follows the French influence more closely by using nature as symbol for love and art, much as Baudelaire and Verlaine did. One feels here a confidence in rhythm and a security in image, a success in expressing a feeling or thought of continual hopeful searching for something permanent, without didacticism or abstraction:

> Become that village where a world
> in small prevents my poverty,
> a common to community
> beyond the seas of access hurled.

The firmness of that base allowed Finch to be led back to the 1930's and create a successful modern poem in "Egg-and-Dart." One senses here the intensity and discipline of thought and emotion that Smith found so lacking in earlier Canadian poetry. Deeply emotional yet restrained and sharp, this poem manages to be powerful through a musical rhythm of the perpetual and depressing cycle of events the poet feels, and this is done in a conventional structure that is used to aid the impact of clear rhyme and neat line-breaks:

> The long, drear moment of the look that
> spoils
> The little bud of hope; the word that soils
> The pact immaculate, so newly born;
> The noisy silence of the old self-scorn;
> These, and the sudden leaving in the lurch;
> Then the droll recommencement of the
> search.

And when his language is applied to "imagiste" poems, Finch is at his best. Language in "The Hero" in forty-six words is engagingly effective in reinforcing in tone and atmosphere the dynamic heroism of the warrior until suddenly changing in mood to the sober, almost bitter recollection of death. The analogy of machinery and warrior adds power

and makes "Windowpiece" seem superfluous while making the theorizing of "The Five Kine" unnecessary. "The Hunt," better than anything by W. W. E. Ross, is remarkable, a jewel with the tone of a medieval tapestry, precious, beautiful, unique in itself, leaving the philosophizing of "Beauty my Fond Fine Care," "From the Hammock" or "Become that Village" all subordinate to its exciting twelve lines.

The poems of Leo Kennedy are less diversely experimental in content, form and tone than those of Finch. Kennedy's prime concern rests with affirming the life cycle of Birth-Copulation-Death-Rebirth, a process which is re-emphasized by tonal shifts from drabness to lightness of hope, and by conventional structures appropriate to the theme of regular and rhythmic cycles. It is perhaps the tone that is most interesting in these poems: the positive though qualified conclusions about life and love. Romanticism is brought into proportion by metaphysics, as when Donne moderated the excesses of the Elizabethan poets. This is the balance on which Kennedy seems poised.

On one scale is "A Bright Swan for my Daughter," a lyric in praise of flesh and life where the music of the poem is stressed more than its thought and the tone is more romantic than its classical form and references suggest. "Letter to Girls" reiterates the same joyful theme:

> Cup lovers' hands about your breasts,
> And give them kisses sharp as wine.

Here Kennedy reinforces the lightness by word-games ("surges up the urgent sap,/ and tups the dove, and dips the spray") but we can see in "Words for a Resurrection" how he qualifies this feeling by a more complex symbolism and the introduction of a strong death image. The power of this poem is strengthened by an effective combination of sound and detail in developing the thought of Death becoming Life again. For example, compare the use of heavy consonants in the first stanza with the liberated vowel sounds of the last, while the middle stanza sounds are transitional as partially exemplified here by the first lines of each:

> "Each pale Christ stirring underground";
>
> "And bones long quiet under frost";
>
> "This Man of April walks again."

Or compare the weighty adjectives, nouns and verbs of the first with the happy language of the last, again with the middle stanza transitional:

> pale, stirring, brown, casket, soil, shoot;
>
> quiet, frost, rejoice, bells, ecstatic, inviolate;
>
> April, walks, marvel, laughter, blessed, lilies.

"Delicate Clay" suggests a shift on the balance, for hope is reserved for the last two lines (again with a light speed of vowels and esses) while the dominant tone is the despair and "furtive anguish" of Death in the cycle of time. "Mole Talk" and "Epithalamium before Frost" rework this mood and idea of eventual Life after the dark agony of Death, but the poem "Epithalamium" is more successful than these two in doing so, for it combines remarkably powerful images with the language of Death and Love and the thought of the eternal cycle and thereby manages to fuse the romantic and the metaphysical in an impressive way. It is an epithalamium in Donne's sense, but the emotion is reserved, considered and made rugged. Here the poet's mother dies and is buried beside the "shell," the "shrunken side," the "dust" of her husband. And in that "shallow bridal bed of earth," they lift

> This bloom of tansy from the fertile ground:
> My sister, heralded by no moan, no sound.

The power of this poem is repeated in "Prophecy for Icarus" in which the agony of Death is captured in the image of a

bird no longer able to fly when it must "know itself betrayed." The force of these poems comes from their ability to express what Smith termed "the emotional effect of ideas," and the strength of these ideas coupled with image makes the emotion clear and effective by making it personal and intense.

"Shore" and "Testament" show more experimentation with form if not with content. The first is an imagist poem of irregular metre in which images of sand, waves, tide, etc., of apparent lifeless monotony, are used to evoke the old theme of infinite cycles, but it lacks the precision and conciseness to be really effective. However, the last three lines do succeed in uniting image and thought to reveal the hopeful gathering of life forces:

> But silt by the receded tide, a ravel
> Of weeds thrown high by the wash of water, a crest
> Of wave, distant, beyond the cove.

"Testament" suggests Kennedy's contact with the work of A. M. Klein for the force of language and of heritage in a freer form gives strong tone to his emotional and intellectual beliefs:

> bearded ones at ease with your passion, dust with your fathers' fathers and your sons' sons;
> ancestors remembered though not known, proudly aloof
> from time and weeping, quick again in me and my children.

Images of life and expressions of thought couple effectively in a personal manner to make one wish Kennedy had experimented further in this direction.

It is pleasant to find the two poems of A. M. Klein following Kennedy's "Testament" and developing its form and spirit. Emotion is translated into language and together they give power to intellect, while intellect restrains emotion by giving its linguistic manifestations a direction and purpose.

This is well illustrated in "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens." A central symbol, the story of Spinoza's persecution, gives body to thoughts on the problems of man's relation with the infinite. Section I states the conflict felt between true belief and dogma. Section II expands this to a broader historical base. Sections III and IV weigh faith in dogmas and doubt respectively while Section V combines the two around the ideas of Spinoza to produce further questions. Sections VI and VII suggest alternate answers with a synthesis in Section VIII and an epilogue in Section IX.

A rational structure for presenting a theory of mind? Perhaps; but Klein realized that issues of faith and doubt, of emotion and intellect, of microcosm and macrocosm are of the gut as well as of the mind, and the path to one is through the other. Therefore language as both effect and cause of emotion is the key to an expression of intellect, much as specifics are keys to universals. The extraordinary nature of this poem is the successful linking of the two.

Thus the images and language of Sections I and II are juxtaposed, one with spit and rhetorical questions noisy and violent, the other with minds and sharp statements cool and calculating, to set up the conflict on both fronts. Then III and IV move closer in style to suggest the duality being put forward, but it is obvious that the tones differ, one of guilt and self-recrimination and the other of fact and confident criticism:

> Malevolent scorpions befoul thy chambers,
> O my heart; they scurry across its floors,
> Leaving the slimy vestiges of doubt.

> Soul of Spinoza, Baruch Spinoza bids you
> Forsake the god suspended in mid-air,
> Seek you that other Law, and leave Jehovah
> Play his game of celestial solitaire.

Section V is almost prose to recapitulate the duality in dual images (one being the

title of the poem itself) and hint at a synthesis in the questions:

> Is it a marvel, then, that he forsook the abracadabra of the synagogue, and holding with timelessness a duologue, deciphered a new scripture in the book? Is it a marvel that he left old fraud for passion intellectual of god?

Then there is a brilliant transfer of emotional language to the intellectual argument ("Do genuflect before the jewelled brain!") while the emotional argument has a controlled tone:

> Before the song of a bird, before
> The breath of spring or fall
> I am lost; before these miracles
> I am nothing at all.

These synthesize to explode into a series of linguistic pyrotechnics in VIII, a prayer uniting faith and science and relating the microcosmic symbols to macrocosmic language:

> A babe in swaddling clothes laughs at the sunbeams on the door's lintel; the sucklings play with thee; with thee Kopernik holds communion through a lens. I am thy son, O Lord, and brother to all that lives am I.

The poem ends with Spinoza in a garden, a beautiful combination of mind and heart ("Spinoza, gathering flowers for the One,/ The ever-unwedded lover of the Lord").

The "Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger" shows Klein handling images more than thoughts, though strong social comment is obviously intended, and we can again see the use he makes of language:

> And having met your over-rated dawns,
> Together with milkmen watering their milk,
> And having trickled sweat, according to a scale of wages,
> Sewing buttons to warm the navels of your business sages,
> I have brought home at dusk,
> My several bones, my much-flailed husk.

The poem appears as a counterpoint to Eliot's "Prufrock" and Klein's portrayal of this conception of reality achieves impact. Not fretting about his image in Society or what he should wear, not philosophizing on himself, Velvel simply asks not to be lectured and continues card-playing and dreaming. In backroom scenes ("nicotined hand beyond the smoke sweeps off the pot") the succession of Velvel's moods is concisely captured — resignation, contempt, cynicism, boredom, self-pity, anger, dreaming, patience — and Klein gives these sharpness by earthy, clearly enunciated language interspersed with ironical light verse ("And my true love,/ She combs and combs,/ The lice from off/ My children's domes") and references of sudden insight ("fingers, pricked with a tailor's needle, draw/ The well-thumbed cards" or "teachers/ With dirty beards and hungry features"):

> So Velvel dreams; dreaming, he rises, and
> Buttons his coat, coughs in his raised lapel,
> Gropes his way home; he rings a raucous bell.

Perhaps Klein is achieving his purpose when the reader feels that Velvel makes Prufrock's rantings seem rather silly.

We know that Smith was impressed by E. J. Pratt's rich diction and his willingness to experiment with form but, after Klein's novelties and power, one is struck by how conventional Pratt's poems appear. Admittedly Pratt had achieved some exciting effects before 1936, particularly in his narratives, and certainly the subject matter of his *New Provinces* poems is a refreshing change from the Canadian Authors Association; but it is hard not to feel disappointed here.

For example, "Text of the Oath" seems facile in thought, dull in language, and very ordinary. "Seen on the Road" and "The Drag-Irons" seem ineffective in impact and simplistically handled (e.g., is the drowning of the captain really meant to have a carnival air? is resentment really the captain's feeling?). "The Convict Holocaust" is strange in that its

subject (the death of 300 men in a prison fire) can hardly help but move, yet its effect is betrayed when the "punchline" is delivered in the first two lines, thereby making the last line virtually superfluous. These poems simply lack control.

As with much of Pratt's poetry one feels that a good editor could have worked wonders. "The Man and the Machine" is a case in point where the whole first half adds nothing to thought or mood and so detracts from the competence of words and rhythm in the second part:

> He felt his lesioned pulses strum
> Against the rhythm of her hum,
> And found his nerves and sinews knot
> With sharper spasm as she climbed
> The steeper grades, so neatly timed
> From petrol tank to piston shot —
> This creature with the panther grace,
> This man with slag upon his face.

"From Java to Geneva" and "The Prize Winner" are important to understanding Pratt's views on man ("Between the temple and the cave/ The boundary lies tissue-thin" but again the ideas often seem overworked and so lose their force. "Java" impresses with its rhythm and thought in the first and last stanzas and its Neanderthal image in the second ("The snarl Neanderthal is worn/ Close to the smiling Aryan lips") but the rest only dilutes that effect. "Prize Winner" is more totally successful in its image of the cat and bird and the brilliant Abyssinian child symbol but all the musing comes close to destroying these fine lines:

> Behind the leap so furtive-wild
> Was such ignition in the gleam,
> I thought an Abyssinian child
> Had cried out in the whitethroat's scream.

While these cause one regret that Pratt did not apply more of his talent to precise imagist poems, at the very end he surprises us with "Sea Gulls," an exquisite poem in which image and language is aided by a freer form and an absence of didactic comment:

> Etched upon the horizon blue
> The frieze must go unchallenged, for the lift
> And carriage of the winds would stain the drift
> Of stars against a tropic indigo
> Or dull the parable of snow.

It must have been this quality which impressed Smith. For the rest, one feels he must have been disappointed.

The doubt expressed in the anthology's preface about the direction of modern poetry is seen most clearly in the poems of its author, Frank Scott, whose work shows a conscious exploration of styles and content. "March Field" and "Trees in ice," for example, are pure imagist poems, evocative and controlled, precise and aesthetic:

> There is a warm wind, stealing
> From blunt brown hills, loosening
> Sod and cold loam
> Round rigid root and stem.

However, Scott cannot resist ending with a thoughtful bite, though one still subordinate to the image:

> This cruelty is a formal loveliness
> on a tree's torn limbs
> this glittering pain.

In contrast, "Surfaces" and "Calvary," though centred on nature images, are primarily intellectual but convey a tone of awe more deeply emotional than any other of Scott's poems here. It is significant that this is so, for it shows how the intense emotions surrounding love and life were directed into a rationalized, controlled aestheticism rather than into the vague rhetorical generalities of the nineteenth-century Canadian poets. "Surfaces" is particularly forceful in expressing the union of men with the infinite by merging image with absolute and so redirecting the romantic impact of nature to an emotional identification with the metaphysical. The reader thus perceives

something of the intellect through his senses:

> Come, flaunt the brief prerogative of life,
> Dip your small civilized foot in this cold water
> And ripple, for a moment, the smooth surface of time.

"Summer Camp," "Efficiency," and "Teleological" show a different experiment: prose-like in style, contemporary in tone and content, didactically aggressive in purpose:

> Two weeks here in the sun and air
> Through the kindness of our wealthy citizens
> Will be a wonderful help to the little tots
> When they return for a winter in the slums.

The criticism that these have received for "not being real poetry" is challenged by the poems themselves. On the one hand, they raise the question of what poetry is and what it should be dealing with; on the other, they are more effective in poetical form than one can imagine they could be in prose for their precision and surprise are part of their effect. "The Canadian Authors Meet" has been recognized as one of the most successful of these satires; its ability to capture pretensions, irrelevance and a sense of desperate futility gives it a sting far beyond its innocently descriptive and genteel appearance.

"Overture" sums up Scott's doubts in an image ("A pretty octave played before a window/ Beyond whose curtain grows a world crescendo") and a question ("But how shall I hear old music?") though the description may be too mechanical to give justice to Mozart or the older traditions. Certainly the thought is precise:

> This is an hour
> Of new beginnings, concepts warring for power,
> Decay of systems — the tissue of art is torn
> With overtures of an era being born.

The impact here comes in the glimpse of the harsh effect of that modern pressure on the poet as artist and man. Yet, significantly, the tone of the poem is one of resolution.

Most commentators have seen A. J. M. Smith as a rigid mystical and esoteric poet, but *New Provinces* shows him as experimental and as social as the others. His poems of social comment are concerned with the role of Art (no pun intended) in a dead society and are therefore more abstract, more introspective than Scott's poems, which were addressed to a wider audience. Nevertheless "In the Wilderness" sharply portrays the wasteland around the poet's world and stresses the need that these be reconciled. The tone and images are sad but dutiful and the turning from romantic emotionalism is evident:

> And with a young, pedantic eye
> Observes how still the dead do lie.
>
> His gaze is stopped in the hard earth
> And cannot penetrate to heaven's mirth.

"To a Young Poet" outlines the artist's duty more positively and with an image which is more striking than that in "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable" but both poems declare the purpose of art: to dance elegantly before "stony eyes," to sing to the barren rock in "a meadow in the northern stone" ("a hard thing done/ Perfectly, as though without care"). "A Soldier's Ghost" and "News of the Phoenix" suggest the result, a confidence in the "triumph of beauty or love or strength or of spiritual values generally over all those forces, natural and social, which seek to overwhelm them."[3] Love will come from the ash. The phoenix will be found more alive than the bureaucrats.

The shiftings in style and language are interesting to observe in these poems. "Wilderness" is regular, repetitious and concise, an expression of a problem and a state of affairs, but "Proud King" becomes uneven, archaic and emotional in

trying to cope with the solitary frustration the poet feels until this reaction is checked by the calm intellectual order of "Young Poet" ("Tread the metallic nave/ Of this windless day with/ A pace designed and grave" — note that magnificent rhyme) and "Phoenix." "Soldier's Ghost" seems to be trying for the same tone but the power of the subject threatens the first stanza with emotional rhetoric until the style changes into a concise and tight image ("Bones/ Distilled in the frontier sand/ Fumble/ The natty chevron"). The third stanza again verges on hysteria and again is answered coolly in intellectual terms.

All this is not to suggest that social observation is Smith's primary concern. Many of the poems here are personal searches for expression of feelings through precise and meaningful poetry. Emotion is important to Smith but it must be directed and intensified in order to be made effective. One can almost set up a scale on which heart is balanced by varying amounts of mind. "Prothalamium" and "Epitaph" tend toward rhetoric in both language and image, but a tone of intellectual appreciation tries to check the emotional reaction. However, the poet seems to be jumping back and forth between heart and mind rather than merging them, so that one feels something is being added as if in parentheses.

"Two Sides of a Drum" and "Shadows There Are" are more integrated, intellectual concepts translated into a language of feeling, concerned with showing the emotional effects of ideas and the intellectual effect of emotions, fear of the infinite and hope of release being presented in a clarity of words and a complexity of image, as in "Shadows There Are":

> Yet shadows I have seen, of me deemed deeper,
> That backed on nothing in the horrid air

or "Two Sides of a Drum":

> I fare
> To that country under dream
> Where eternity and time are
> The two sides of a drum.

I believe the integration of thought and feeling is best achieved in "The Offices of the First and Second Hour." Here Smith is able to capture the tone of a Gregorian chant — austere, intensely emotional, precise and rigid — by format, repetition, steady rhythm, quiet resignation, while at the same time he can use the tone to transmit and express the power of intellectual thought and image:

> Is the rude root and manlike shape
> Of articulate mandrake still godlike in this light?

NAY, WE HAVE GIVEN

> Nay, we have given our flesh to the mouth and our
> Hearts to the fingers of oblivion. The darkness
> Is drained out of us slowly, and these are no more
> To us.

Finally, in the "Lonely Land" and "The Creek," Smith experiments with pure imagism built up by the use of complementary words and rhythms and aiming for an aesthetic-ascetic control of nature, a feeling for the image but one without sentiment, a passion for beauty but one of intensity and intelligence. The result is an exciting model to compare to the nature poets for whom Smith had so much contempt; his poetry gives a view of our environment both new and revealing. "The Lonely Land" particularly has been compared to the work of the Group of Seven, but so has *New Provinces* as a whole for its purposes and effects. This analogy is useful in a limited way. By noting the differences among the artists of the Group we are reminded of the differences among these poets. By acknowledging the influence of Realism and Impressionism on the Group, we can obtain a perspective on the anthology

which allows us to see it as part of a literary process rather than as a clean break from tradition.

Thinking of the Group raises further questions about *New Provinces*. Are the poets working from a similar set of ideas and purposes? Have they a tone or impact in common? Is the theory more important than the emotion? Is Smith's comment that any of these poems could have been written in the United States or Great Britain accurate by and large?

The strongest impression the book leaves is the dedication to experimentation and intellect by each of the poets. There is not the unity of approach or rigidity of principle one might have been led to expect, beyond the exploration of new poetic dimensions (particularly those of the mind). The general basis that the poet is a man of sense, that techniques and content could be new, that poetry is a discipline and useful art, was too broad to insist on a more programmed anthology and the number of poems which discuss poetry illustrates this fact.

The result, of course, is that the volume has the aura and energy of creative discovery, a virtue which still shows through the fumblings and failures which time has emphasized. We can still feel the exciting movement within the volume itself towards a cleaner language, more modern images, more relevant comment, and a more aesthetic control of emotions. Even to say this, however, is not to suppose a community of artistic, religious or even social concerns among the poets of *New Provinces*; we have seen too clearly their variety of interests and forms.

The most common element they share is the wish to infuse Canadian poetry with "things of the mind," with thoughtful intelligence regarding society or art or life, to get away from the blatant and easy emotionalism of overly romantic themes of nature and love. In some cases it is less a denial of romanticism than an effort to give it ascetic and intellectual proportion. In other cases it is a turning to the grace and sharp clear-headedness of classical traditions.

While we can see in this the universalist influence which Smith carried from the modern movement in Britain, the question of whether this volume could have been produced in England or the United States remains. Style of course is a more intricate affair than mere format or vocabulary; it has to do with tones and moods which too often cannot be separated from environment. On a simple level, for example, we might notice the relative lack of urban references in *New Provinces*. On a more complex level, one might have been struck by the tone of duty and purpose in this anthology, almost an optimism in face of rather negative visions of the world. The search is futile but must go on. The climbing bird will be betrayed but must climb. The social revolution will probably not come but must be dreamt anyway. The road will pass through Gethsemane but must be travelled. It would unfortunately take a wider study to compare this common mood in the Canadian poets to the despairs and pessimisms of Europe, so it must suffice here to suggest that there are subtle distinctions in style beneath the broad universalist purpose.

The fact then that the poets of *New Provinces* seem mainly bound by an interest in experimentation and intellect is not to belittle the success of the anthology as a landmark in Canadian modernism. To demonstrate those realms of poetry was no small thing in 1936 in opening up the potential and the debate in a closed and colonial land. Its very failure as a specific doctrine not only increased the scope of subsequent Canadian poetry but also inadvertently provided us forty years later with a workshop variety of modern theory in the making.

My thanks to Miriam Waddington and Frank Scott for their comments and encouragement. The mistakes of course are mine.

NOTES

[1] Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, eds., *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (Toronto, 1967), p. 26.

[2] A. J. M. Smith, in the preface to his *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: Gage, 1946).

[3] Desmond Pacey, *Ten Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1958), p. 215.

RON GRAHAM

A. M. KLEIN: PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS JEW

JEWS HAVE BEEN ALIENATED, anxious, and beset by visions of the absurdity of the human condition for centuries. But in spite of, or because of this, their skepticism is frequently tempered with humour, and almost always mingled with hope. In response to the questions "how to be?" and "why persist?" A. M. Klein offers a variety of answers. One of the speakers in "Design for Mediaeval Tapestry" looks for a hiding place, another declares that it is God's will that Israel should suffer, and he qualifies his answer with comic-tragic irony, "at once we are three tenses." Since the Hebrew language has only a perfect tense, it encompasses time present, past and future simultaneously; Nahum's expression, like that of the language, succinctly depicts his awareness of the transcience, and even the futility, of human life.

In the same poem Isaiah is the pragmatist; Job, the religious skeptic; Judith, the disillusioned romantic. Ezekiel offers penitence, Solomon is consumed with selfish pride, and Simeon takes refuge in apostasy. The first speaker, Reb Zadock,[1] contains within himself the history of the persecution of his people, and the others whose names suggest their Biblical lineage and their attitudes to life, each present a vignette of Jewish experience. The combination of name with characteristic, as in "Ezekiel the Simple," conveys the ludicrous contrast between visions of glory and redemption evoked by the name of the ancient prophet and the philosophy expounded by his latter-day namesake. The hyphenated name "Nahum-This-Also-Is-For-The-Good" combines both Hebrew and English and conveys the sing-song quality of the Yiddish idiom. Thus he not only combines three tenses, his name unites three eras of Jewish history. Hebrew was the language of antiquity, Yiddish was spoken in the European Diaspora, and English is the language of the poet and of North American Jews. Esther, whose name is the same in both Hebrew and English, and who is a symbol of salvation in the biblical story, concludes the poem. She finds no answers, only the age-old question: "Wherefore Lord and why?" All answers are inadequate, but the question is a universal one asked by all men who are oppressed.

The mediaeval setting of this poem, the use of archaisms in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," and of the names of mediaeval Jewish sages — for example in "Psalm XXXIV" (a psalm for the tomb of Rashi), and in "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage" — all point to Klein's deep attraction to this period in Jewish history. Although harassed by anti-semitism and by the Crusades, Jewish life in Western Europe during the Middle Ages (the Jewish Middle Ages lasted from the 7th to the 16th century) was characterized by relative political autonomy, by exchange of ideas with the Christian world, and by a proliferation of philosophical thought. These years exemplify the fluidity of Jewish tradition, how it borrows and adapts (to Judaism) contemporary forms and

institutions from other cultures and societies.[2] The separate, autonomous Jewish society seems relevant to Klein's view of Canada in the poem "Annual Banquet: Chambre de Commerce." In Canada, and in Quebec specifically, politics and economics and culture are inextricably bound together. In this poem Quebec sells out to the outsider and relinquishes control of its own intellectual home. By extension, it seems that Klein would prefer the independence, intellectual ferment and growing culture which he sees as representative of the Jewish Middle Ages. These times were not necessarily utopian, but for Klein they do represent a positive value. In contrast to this, Jewish life in Canada is seen as materialistic and superficial in "The Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet." Here, Milady Schwarz, a dilettante, almost a Jewish version of Pound's "Lady Valentine" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," has a "teaspoonful of art, before and after cards." Like her contemporaries in the poem who frequent the "pool-room," "dance-hall," "cinema," she symbolizes the shallowness of modern life.

Aside from his fondness for a type of mediaevalism, and for the structured society it represents in both Jewish and Christian history and literary tradition, Klein is also attracted by the life and work of Yehuda Halevi, an eleventh-century poet, mystic and philosopher. Klein's long poem about Halevi depicts the early poet's dream of the Promised Land and his murder while on a pilgrimage in fulfillment of that vision. Halevi's answer to suffering is perfect faith in God and dedication to an ideal. His was an active, fruitful type of existence, life with purpose and meaning. In his search for values Klein finds something of significance in the past.

But the modern poet cannot achieve Halevi's type of faith. In the guise of Childe Harold ("Childe Harold's Pilgrimage") he is plagued by doubt:

> My father is gathered to his fathers, God
> rest his wraith!
> And his son
> Is a pauper in spirit, a beggar in piety,
> Cut off without a penny's worth of faith.

Harold receives no sustenance from reviewing his former life; he is left with "the stance long-suffering, the stoic word." Like his Byronic namesake, he is filled with *Weltschmerz*; his mood is one of self-pity, and the tone of the poem is somewhat hysterical. Nevertheless, the poem does depict the will to survive during times of doubt and of oppression, and Quebec in the "thirties" was rife with overt anti-semitism.[3]

The mingling of joy with sorrow, of hope with despair, which is seen in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," is a common feature in Klein's work as it is in many Jewish rituals. He evokes this precise feeling in the final line of "Psalm XVII," "He breaks the wineglass underneath his heel," which depicts the practice of commemorating the destruction of the Temple in ancient Israel at Jewish wedding ceremonies to the present day. In Klein's later work, the bitter-sweetness associated with religion and with ethnic culture is not restricted to Jews; the French-Canadian, like his rocking chair, "makes a pleasure out of repeated pain."

Both Jew and French-Canadian are comforted by memories connected with their respective heritage. The image of the chair in "The Rocking Chair" and of "the sacred hearts, the crowns" in "The Sugaring" are symbols which embody the traditions of Quebec and its people. In the latter poem, Roman Catholicism is associated with sweetness, as is the Jewish religion in Klein's "The Venerable Bee." Many of his poems are filled with images of objects which play an important part in Jewish ritual. There is the "*Yahrzeit*"

date (memorial of the anniversary of the death of a loved one, at which time each year a special candle is lit) in "Heirloom"; the candles, wine and matzoh (symbols of Passover) in "The Still Small Voice"; the rooster, a sacrificial offering on the eve of the Day of Atonement (this practice has been largely replaced by donations of money to charity) in "Plumaged Proxy," and references to "tfillin" (phylacteries) in "Gift," "The Scribe," and many other poems. The connotations which these symbols carry evoke the texture of traditional Jewish home life and the quality of a life enclosed within a faith. The images, like the objects which they symbolize, are a constant reminder to the Jew of his religion. The phylacteries, worn by males on the hand opposite the heart and on the head, in observance of the Old Testament statute "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes" (*Deut.* 6: 8), indicate man's duty to subject the desires of heart, mind, senses, and faculties to God's will. They are a symbol of the unity of the physical, mental and spiritual; emblematically they create a wholeness that Klein sees as characteristic of earlier ages in civilization and of childhood. The persona of "Childe Harold" "cannot don phylactery," but the speaker in "Gift" can look back to the security and innocence of his own early life.

Indulging in ritual without faith can be seen as an empty gesture, but as Klein says, "O who can measure the potency of symbols?" In its impersonality ritual can become highly personal; it is a means to lose oneself in order to find oneself. In times of doubt the memory of tradition may be a desperate attempt to salvage something when on the point of losing faith. In this way, the rituals and their symbols have for Klein, the same type of significance as T. S. Eliot's "fragments" to "shore against" his ruin. But many of the poems in *Hath Not a Jew* do not have the universality of Eliot's "The Wasteland." Aside from the imagery which might be obscure to non-Jewish readers, there is a sentimentality and insularity about them that is antipathetic to the modern reader.

Nevertheless, the use of images connected with Jewish ritual emphasizes the tenacity with which religion grips the poet's imagination, and stresses the intensity of his disillusionment. There is poignancy in his nostalgia for the time of easy faith before the adult world disrupted the wholeness of life. Klein's vision of the past, like that of many Canadian poets and novelists, is centred on what Northrop Frye in *The Bush Garden* calls "the pastoral myth . . . associated with childhood." Klein's Eden is not in nature; it is in the past history of his people and of his own life.

Attraction to, and doubts about, religion, recur throughout Klein's work. Velvel, the vulgar, proletarian skeptic (in "Soirée") chooses cards instead of religion. He mocks the suggestion from his conscience that "This is no way for a man to do":

> Who
> Are you, my saint, to show us what is right?
> Make a fifth hand, and we will be contrite;
> Shuffle the cards, be sociable, Reb. Jew.

The use of the abbreviation "Reb." for rabbi, which means "scholar" or "teacher," reinforces Velvel's sense of scorn for both the advice and for his early "teachers/ with dirty beards and hungry features." The word "Reb." also carries the connotation of rebel, and Velvel sees one aspect of himself in this way, but his conscience will not free him from the past. We may dislike Velvel's flippant attitudes and his dreams of materialistic wealth, but we also sympathize with this Jewish Prufrock.

Klein's ambiguous attitude towards

religion is seen in many of his "psalms." "Psalm IV" is an ironic modern parody of the 23rd psalm; "Psalm V" of God's marvelous creation, man. But "Psalm XXXV" is a prayer of thanks for life and even for adversity, and the final psalm in "The Psalter of Avram Haktoni" gives the speaker's *raison d'être*:

> The latches of my heart, descend, and rise —
> And there look generations through my eyes.

In the first four glosses to *The Second Scroll* Klein recalls his own youth and the history of his people, with sadness, and often with bitterness, but the last section, "Gloss Hai," is his sympathetic version of the Orthodox Jewish Morning Service and the last "Psalm" is a transcription of the Biblical "Psalm XXX" which is repeated daily at the Morning Service.

Speaking of Klein in 1961, Layton said "Today there is a destructive element — a poison in the atmosphere — making it difficult for the writer to sustain himself . . . sensing this . . . Klein took refuge in the messianic vision."[4] The reference is to *The Second Scroll*, which at that time Layton said did not convince. But Klein had long been aware of "poison in the atmosphere"; poetry is his personal answer to apathy in "Boredom" (1927), but the futility and absurdity of the human condition are stressed in "Koheleth" (1929) and in "The Words of Plauni-Ben-Plauni to Job" (1930) and in many others. In the "radical poems" he condemns those who erect false gods of materialism. And in "Talisman in Seven Shrouds" he sees religion perverted by those who rely on superstition at it is by those who follow the pseudo-messiah Shabbathai Zvi in "Out of the Pulver and Political Lens." In the latter poem a more virulent poison, religious and political fanaticism, is attributed to the pious Jews of Amsterdam who are almost as dogmatic as the soldiers of the Inquisition. The Jews in "Landlord" and in "Pintele Yid" are castigated for their hypocrisy. Even the messianic vision of *The Second Scroll* is tinged with doubt when the narrator is repelled by the "reactionary mottoes" of some Israeli poets. It seems to him that they are creating an elitist type of poetry which excludes the Jews of the Diaspora. The attraction to, and skepticism about Israel as well as about religion is seen in Uncle Melech's attitude; he still hates and loves the "*galuth*" (the exile). Klein's Jews are sometimes romanticized, as Layton says, but they are also condemned in these poems, and Klein acknowledges that the poison is not only in the atmosphere, it is part of the human condition.

Klein questions all values. The security achieved through religious piety does not console in later life (although hope for an afterlife is the keynote of "Epitaph"). Assimilation is rejected, because those who lose or seek to hide their identity are still seen as Jews by others:

> To Gentile parties we will proudly go
> And Christians, anecdoting us, will say
> "Mr. and Mrs. Klein — the Jews, you
> know . . . "

Reason, not mysticism, is the way to truth in "Out of the Pulver and the Political Lens," and art is renounced in favour of life after the narrator of *The Second Scroll* sees the Jews of the "*mellah*."

Yet the poet who says,

> And I in my own faith once had faith like
> this
> but have not now, am crippled more than
> they

continues to be fascinated by the things that he has denied. Uncle Melech dies at Safed, the ancient seat of Jewish mysticism and the present day art centre of Israel. Safed is high in the mountains in the upper Galilee, and to this day the roofs of some of the houses are painted white or blue to blend with the clouds

and sky so that on His descent to earth, the Messiah will come to them first. (Klein mentions the "white roofs" of Safed in "Greetings on this Day.") The prose section of *The Second Scroll* concludes with allusions to Jewish folk stories and Biblical passages which impart the idea of rebirth. It is significant that here, as in "Greetings on this Day," he uses the word "halidom" in connection with Safed. According to the beliefs of adherents of certain branches of Jewish mysticism, at the advent of the Messiah the graves of the righteous will open and the dead will live again on earth. In the poem, Safed is the symbolic catalyst that transforms Klein's prose to poetry; in *The Second Scroll* it is the site from which he views the grave of Hosea, "prophet of social justice" and that of Simon ben Yochai, who is said to have written the *Zohar*. Thus, Klein affirms his belief in a better life, one that will harmoniously unite justice in the material world with inward wealth in the spiritual universe of man.

At his death Uncle Melech harmonizes within himself intellectual and emotional aspects of an ideal Judaism, but his name will not go down in the annals of history. Like so many of Klein's characters, he is a small man. Others are the protagonist of "Dr. Dwarf" who is presented lovingly; the "midget Jews" of "Etching" who are defined nostalgically, and the hypocrisy of "Pintele Yid" (of the poem of the same name) is conveyed with irony. The term "pintele yid" is a commonplace in Yiddish; the suffix "ele" is both a diminutive and a form of endearment;[5] "pintele" means a "dot" and it is the Yiddish term for the Hebrew letter "yud," which caligraphically is a dot, thus giving a play on words "yud/yid." There is the suggestion that the "Pintele Yid" of the poem is small in spirit as well as in stature (physically and in the eyes of the world), but the satire is done with affection. In "The Provinces" the smallest province, Prince Edward Island, is seen as a beautiful little girl, and by invoking an old Jewish superstition, the poet averts the evil eye and ensures her long life. (Since the name is "Prince," the angel of Death would look for a male, and finding a female, he would abandon his mission.) The poet in "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" with a "status of zero" is "a dot in a government table." Like the Jew, he is considered an alien and is insignificant in the eyes of the world. Perhaps this poem could also be entitled "Pintele Poet."

Not only is the Jew small, the terms "dwarf" and "midget" carry connotations of deformity, and in "Ballad for Unfortunate Ones" it is the blind man, the hunchback and the poor who will arise whole at the advent of the Messiah. Compassion for Jews extends to others who suffer in "The Cripples," to the Indians in "Indian Reservation" (in which the squaws "beneath their alimentary shawls" remind one of a bent Jew beneath a prayer shawl), to the French-Canadians in "Librarie Delorme" and in "Sire Alexandre Grandmaison." Throughout his work, it is the oppressed, the unrecognized, the dispossessed, who are figuratively Klein's Jews.

It is when he combines two cultures that Klein achieves wholeness, if not in life, then in art. In "Montreal" each individual race retains its identity, but each plays an equal part in the universe of the poem. Klein depicts this union through his use of language and he suggests by his use of innovative words which combine both French and English that verbal communication between men can bring them closer together. Language is a symbol of vitality and of creativity in this poem as it is to the narrator of *The Second Scroll.*

There is a more basic and a more universal means of communication in the

poems "Bread" and "Grain Elevator." Bread is a symbol of life, and as such it is given particular respect by traditional Jews (bread should not be wasted; when stale, it should be burned or fed to the birds, but not thrown away. A special bread "Challah" is baked for the Sabbath and for the Holy Days, and the benediction for bread takes precedence over blessings for any other solid food). The poem "Bread" conveys this reverence for the staff of life, the bakers are seen as high priests ("white Levites"), the ovens, as altars, and bread as the agent which will bring the dead to life. Wheat is Canada's most important agricultural product, and the grain elevator seems to be a particularly Canadian edifice. The Old Testament setting evoked by Klein's use of such imagery as "babylonians," "Leviathan," "Josephdream" in "Grain Elevator" suggests a timelessness; and the metaphors "think Arabian," "Caucasian sleep," "grains Mongolian" encompass the universe spatially. It is by means of bread that "all the coloured faces of mankind" can be united. In these poems Klein draws his themes and images from their association with his Jewish heritage. Paradoxically, he uses them in a way that makes these poems particularly Canadian and entirely universal.

Klein's concrete realization of the present in terms of the past conveys his profound knowledge of, and sensitivity to, Jewish history and to both Hebrew and Jewish literary tradition. Miriam Waddington, in her fine critical work on Klein, denies the religious quality of his poetry: "he was never religious in the orthodox sense, and this is precisely the conflict that lies at the root of so much of his poetry." Waddington emphasizes what she calls his "secular Jewishness."[6] Many of Klein's poems, however, are religious in the same way that Donne's "Holy Sonnets" are religious, and they are also religious in a specifically Jewish way. In Judaism it is difficult to separate religion, culture, race, way of life, and even attitudes to life from one another.

Klein may have been influenced by the "radical tradition in Yiddish literature in the thirties," but behind that tradition is the Biblical ideal of justice and compassion towards one's fellow man. The Book of Leviticus outlines obligations to the poor, commands love of one's neighbour, prohibits hatred, vengeance, hoarding of goods. And Passover celebrates the first mass revolt against oppression in Western history. The Bible itself may be the source of Klein's humanitarian outlook and the source of the radical tradition in Yiddish literature as well; religion would certainly play at least an equal part in Klein's vision. It is significant that in "Epitaph" (written in 1930), Klein sees himself in the afterlife sitting in God's lap, the same posture that the devout Reb Levi Yitschok assumes in the poem about him (1940).

Klein's doubts are as old as Judaism (in the widest possible sense), the tradition out of which he springs and out of which he writes. Invective against the Almighty is incorporated into Lamentations and into the Book of Job, and a sense of futility pervades Ecclesiastes. Pessimism and fatalism are within the roots of Judaism as is the vision of hope eternal.

Most of the Jews that Klein creates are Orthodox, sympathetic characters. Many of them are wise, some are foolish, some evil, most of them are skeptical. Although they are not revolutionaries, in a way they do represent the temper of the present time, with its focus on the rights of minorities. His Jews — whether Jews, French-Canadians, Indians, poets or children — are small men with large dreams. His is a messianic vision, not only for his own people, but for all mankind. It is not a facile optimism, but it is affirmation.

To A. M. Klein, Canada is also the Promised Land:

> But the heart seeks one, the heart, and also the mind
> seeks single the thing that makes them one, if one.

NOTES

[1] "Reb" means "rabbi," "Zadock" — priest, or of the priestly family. Thus he speaks with the wisdom of the ages.

[2] Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Phillip Feldheimer, 1964), p. xvi.

[3] See Gerald M. Craig, "The Canadian Setting," in *A People and its Faith*, ed. A. Rose (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 11.

[4] *Teangadoir*, 5, no. 2 (1961), pp. 77-78.

[5] See Miriam Waddington, *A. M. Klein* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970), p. 25.

[6] Waddington, p. 11.

ESTHER SAFER FISHER

THE PURDY POEM

IN THE PURDY POEM we are seldom aware of form, or even of verbal texture; we read for information, and once we have it, we feel disinclined to return to the verbal construct that delivered it to us. This disinclination is a natural consequence of the fact that "craft" does not mean to Purdy what it means to someone like Margaret Avison. The message or point of a Purdy poem is never very intimately related to its surface. The meaning of a line of Purdy's, for instance, hardly ever depends on our interpretation of a figure of speech; we never find any cross-qualification or refinement of meaning by the aural and visual qualities of the words themselves; nor do we find the kind of synergistic handling of very specific images we find in Avison. Purdy seems always to be less concerned with how he means than with what he means; he is quite willing to use the approximate word or image in an approximate way — indeed, he is forced to, in order to maintain the illusion of unpremeditated, casual speech. Understandably, we are apt on this basis to dismiss the whole question of form in Purdy's poetry, and to assume that in Purdy's case form is subservient to content. We say that it is "loose" or "open," meaning that it does not matter. But in fact, the Purdy poem does have a very definite, if not very restricting form.

Purdy's is not primarily a poetry of ideas; he writes about himself on the one hand, and about people and places on the other; and accordingly, his poetry ranges from self-disclosure to description, from poems like "Winter at Roblin Lake" to poems like "Snow at Roblin Lake." But this range is deceptive. For whatever the subject, whatever the outward appearance, the pattern of the Purdy poem is the same. "Winter at Roblin Lake," for instance, is ostensibly an autobiographical document, lacking obvious structure and many of the trappings of poetry, whereas "Snow at Roblin Lake" is a more or less autonomous artefact, written in more or less traditional rhyming quatrains; the two poems seem similar only in the respect that their point and effect is gently humorous. On closer examination, however, we discover that both poems have the same plot: the speaker of the poem imagines the environment to be hostile and then articulates a response to it. We discover, moreover, that the humour of both poems relies on this plot and is, in effect, a transcendence of the imagined threat. We discover that these poems enact a drama of opposition, a dialectic.

The form, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, is quite distinct in both poems. The thesis is the self implied in the opening word "Seeing" of "Winter . . . ," for instance, or simply in the tone of voice and choice of language, the famous Purdy personality; the antithesis is the landscape; and

the synthesis is the ironic reassertion of self, which resolves the tension between self and world by reversing them with respect to scale, power and importance. The slight and human is comically exaggerated by its juxtaposition with the magnificent and inhuman, the grandeur and seriousness of the latter being thus deflated.

We might note further that the rhyme in "Snow at Roblin Lake" is not inherent in the poem, but applied. The deliberate "snow" where we would expect "it," in the fourth line, renders the rhyme throughout the poem an intrusion. It does nothing for the poem, except in retrospect: having read it, we may reflect that the rhyme is contrapuntal to the dialectic movement, proceeding from the poem's humorous conclusion rather than leading to it, functioning, perhaps, as an oblique criticism of the "poetical," and rhyming, in this sense, with the conclusion's mock-heroism. In pursuing this line of reasoning, however, we would be excusing the rhyme rather than appreciating its contribution to the poem. The fact that "Winter at Roblin Lake" is just as successful in producing essentially the same effect as "Snow at Roblin Lake" without using rhyme confirms the idea that the surface of a Purdy poem has little relation to its meaning-structure.

At any rate, upon investigation, most of Purdy's poems turn out to be dialectical — greater or slighter oppositions between Purdy's self and the subject of the poem, followed by comic or pathetic reversals of the kind we have discussed. The reversal is usually a simultaneous deflation of whatever has enjoyed the upper hand in the opposition and elevation of the underdog. Of course, this does not mean that all of Purdy's poems look the same; the formula is capable of great variation, and it will even sustain a poem forced into a traditional mould.

In discovering the dialectic in the Purdy poem, however, we are not done with it. In the Purdy poem the dialectic is fleshed out in a certain way; there is a characteristic treatment of its terms. In Purdy's hands, the dialectic articulates a turning away from reality to the imagination, to fantasy. We can see this in Purdy's representation of the natural environment, the antithesis in both of the Roblin Lake poems. (This turning always occurs in the antithesis.)

In these two poems, Purdy does not simply present us with a few miscellaneous details to contemplate as we will: he directs us through a progression of looks and glimpses, in which the environment is seen to increase in scale and power to fantastic, mythic proportions. This progression and escalation is effected by an increasingly figurative use of language within the poems: from denotation, to simile, to metaphor in "Winter at Roblin Lake"; and from denotation, to metaphor, to Biblical allusion in "Snow at Roblin Lake." The effect of the shifts in language and imagery is one of acceleration, of being first drawn, then swept away, as into a whirlpool.

We might assume in the face of this sort of presentation of the natural world, that Purdy's final mock-heroic stance, his reassertion of self in, say, "Snow at Roblin Lake," is an attempt to recover his mental equilibrium, that the turning away articulated by the dialectic is necessary because the world has become too distressing to contemplate. And accordingly, we might interpret the poem as a brave, if foredoomed, attempt to face the world on its own terms. We might reason, as Purdy does in "Attempt," that the self's impotence in the face of an oppressive natural environment is magnificent simply because its aspirations are the highest. The fact is, however, that the increasingly figurative language of the description of the landscape, in turning from fact to fiction, represents the bankruptcy of na-

ture: it is Purdy who invests nature with significance, who lends its power and unlimited province; nature is neither significant, nor powerful, nor extensive by itself. Nature is never really a threat, just as Purdy will never really "take/ Leviathan on a bent pin." Purdy does turn from the world to the self, in accordance with the dialectic, but the significant turning is that from a neutral world to a self-induced, a pretended fear of it. For it means that the contest in Purdy's poems, between self and world, is won before it is begun. The dialectic is merely enacted like a magical ritual — a war-dance, say — in preparation for an actual confrontation; and Purdy is revealed to be a kind of shadow-boxer — a gesturer of defiance with nothing to defy.

In "The Cariboo Horses" Purdy seems to admit to being just such a figure. As the speaker of this poem, he is disappointed. The horses of the title are "only horses"; there is no contest; they cannot compare to the "Kiangs" and "Onagers," the historical and prehistoric horses he can imagine for himself. The poem communicates a reluctant resignation to the mundane, revealing a preference for the world of the imagination, for the world of literature, history and myth.

In this poem the order of the terms of the dialectic is the reverse of that in the two Roblin Lake poems. It is, if you will, the corollary of the formula operative in the latter. The dialectic process is just as distinct: the world, represented by the Cariboo horses, is the thesis; the self, in the form of associations about horses in an historical perspective, is the antithesis; and accordingly, the synthesis has a different quality — "waiting 15 minutes/ at the grocer's" holds the centuries-and-continents range of Purdy's associations in a peculiar, though satisfying balance.

This poem is down-turned in contrast to the Roblin Lake poems because it is the speaker of the poem rather than the subject of the poem that suffers deflation, the subject being thus back-handedly celebrated. Nevertheless the feeling that "The Cariboo Horses" successfully evokes derives from the impulse to turn away from mere reality.

But after all, we do not have to go very deep to see this tendency in Purdy's work. This same disinclination to dwell on the concrete or objectively real is revealed in his use of language. Purdy very rarely recreates the world in observed detail; instead, he refers and alludes to it. He delights neither in the sensuous qualities of words nor in his own senses. Even in a poem like "Sunday Swim" where we might expect some attention to the quality of the experience, we never discover how the water feels. It is neither warm nor cold; neither bland nor refreshing; it offers no resistance to Purdy's thrashing: it has no presence; it is entirely noumenal. The most we get from Purdy is that the water is "dazzling" and, incredibly, that it is a "green jelly" against his eyes.

At times Purdy seems literally to have taken leave of his senses. And when he does he really becomes a shadow-boxer: we have to infer the subject's size and shape from Purdy's attitude and the direction and placing of his "punches."

The people and things in Purdy's poetry are flat, denoted only by a name or, as in "Percy Lawson," by something like a "gold-toothed grin," the strikingness of which, incidentally, is largely due to how justly it balances the "nickel raise" Lawson haggles over. People and things, including Purdy's wife, only exist in the flux of association, are registered in the poems as mental events rather than as substantial entities in their own right. Figurative language is used only in representing his own mental life, his response to his subject or occasion. The Cariboo horses, for example, are generic; they are the sum or common denominator of all

the horses imagined "in stables," "at taverns" and "on the high prairie" rather than seen horses. The most specific they get is at the end of the poem, and even there the specificity is one of location ("at the grocer's") and state ("arriving," "waiting").

An extreme in this regard, a poem in which the subject is given up entirely in favour of Purdy's associations and imaginings, is "Policeman," for here "blue" and "flat footed," the principal physical description in the work, are completely stereotypical. The poem reads like hearsay. On the evidence of "Policeman," Purdy might easily be taken for a blind man.

Characteristically, Purdy is least successful when he surrenders to fantasy completely, abandoning the dialectic formula. In "Policeman," he wages an hysterical battle against a title, and consequently there is no real interaction, no opposition, and therefore no resolution: the hysteria evaporates; the fantasy, having no point of departure, gets nowhere.

Mere utilization of the formula, on the other hand, does not guarantee success for Purdy. "Notes on Painting," for instance, fails because Purdy has attempted to develop an idea about the representation of evil in painting at the same time as he seeks to oppose his vision of the world to those of the old masters. The dialectic nullifies the argument, by making its point dependent on Purdy's response to the paintings rather than on the paintings themselves, and the point of the argument nullifies the dialectic, making the final synthesis of opposed visions anticlimactic. The poem, as a result, reads like a jumble of unconnected observations and anecdotes. We can see, of course, that an intellectual generalization was required before Purdy could attempt a resolution of the string of oppositions which resulted from talking about a number of paintings rather than about a single painting, but the need for it resulted from letting the poem get out of control in the first place.

In poems of this sort and in those like "Attempt" in which, as George Bowering has said in *Al Purdy*, Purdy "gives a cheapened picture" of his work, we can see that Purdy's whole attention is on the making of a poem. He is not interested in being faithful to his subject nor to himself. And it is to this that Purdy's tendency to turn from fact to fiction leads. For despite the trappings of sincerity, Purdy is not a confessional poet: he doesn't turn from the world in order to bare his soul, or to plumb his own depths; he is really remarkably reticent. Moreover, what we do see of his inner self is so uncomplicated as to fail to interest us. What we respond to is his art, his craftsmanship — when it succeeds, when Purdy's tendency to leave his occasion altogether behind is sufficiently resisted.

Purdy's poems, then, are artificial; they are verbal creations, products of wit, and our interest in them is the same as our interest in metaphysical poetry. We keep reading to see how he will justify the flight of fancy, the outrageous imagery, the historical and mythological allusions. Purdy merely uses larger and looser tropes than metaphor or analogy.

We can see the artifice in "Wilderness Gothic"; it is closer to the surface here than in most of Purdy's work. The dialectic formula recurs — this time with a variation. As soon as the occasion of the poem, the workman sheathing the spire, is put before us, Purdy predictably launches into the flow of associations which are his response to it. But this excursion is shorter than usual. Purdy returns to his occasion for more fuel, and the process is rebegun with respect to landscape, the workman's adjunct. It is briefly presented and he takes off from it, too. When we finally return to the workman in the actual landscape we discover

that the rope from which he dangles has become fraught with the fate of Icarus. The workman has very neatly been made equal to the background of myth and history that Purdy has imagined and set him against. It is a satisfying resolution, but only formally. For our perception of the workman is not enhanced by this mythological enrichment as our perception of the Cariboo horses was by their being given an historical dimension. The resolution draws attention instead to Purdy's cleverness.

Fortunately Purdy doesn't insist on this identification of the workman with Icarus. Though he provides clues, like the reference to "sky navigation," he also provides a little misdirection: he refers to Dürer in describing the landscape rather than to Brueghel, whose "Icarus" probably inspired the poem, so that the connection between the workman and Icarus is delayed, for those who would make it, until the end.

There is nothing restrictive about the form that Purdy has developed for himself. It is capable of much more than Purdy demands of it. And yet the picture we get of Purdy in his poems is of someone wearing blinkers, of someone labouring within unnecessary limitations. His intellectual and emotional range is narrower than it needs to be. Although Purdy sees and feels, he does neither with any intensity. Although he speculates that the faith of the workman on the spire might "reach beyond," he never entertains the possibility for himself. At the moments in Purdy's poems when we feel he is most open to the spiritual or mystical dimension, to any kind of transcendental or religious experience, he turns away, denying his poetry the kind of depth it most lacks. In "The Country North of Belleville" Purdy includes himself among those "unwilling to know what their fathers know." He rejects the tuning in to the land which he characterizes with such empathy in these lines:

> plowing and plowing a ten acre field until
> the convolutions run parallel with his own
> brain —

and which, in the context of the whole poem, is the only victory presented in what he characterizes as "the country of our defeat." Purdy is content merely to recognize that he can return though he must "enquire the way/ of strangers." Meanwhile there are more poems to turn out.

ANTS REIGO

ON THE VERGE

** A. ROSS MCCORMACK. *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919.* University of Toronto Press, $15.00; $4.95. In recent years the dramatic events of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 have received a great deal of attention from historians, tendentious and objective alike. But much less attention has been paid to the preceding decades in western Canadian labour and socialist history, and Ross McCormack's rather pedestrianly written *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries,* which is largely based on previously unexplored documentary sources, goes a great way towards filling in the gap. Mr. McCormack deals with reformist labourites and the "impossiblists" of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the various aspects of the unionist movement and with the Industrial Workers of the World — the formidable, inveterately romantic and doomed Wobblies. Perhaps the most fascinating chapter, indeed, is that on the Wobblies, which shows how strong this movement, so often associated merely with the United States, actually was in western Canada and particularly in British Columbia. Continentalism has had many faces; the Wobblies presented one of its more shining aspects.

L.T.C.

** RICHARD WHITAKER. *The Government Party: Organizing and Financing The Liberal Party of Canada 1930-58.* University of Toronto Press, $19.95. *The Government Party* is a ponderous book, but it deals, after all, with ponderous people — with the Liberal Party, its organization and financing, and, more indirectly, its leadership during the era of Mackenzie

King and St. Laurent. This was the era when Liberalism in Canada became a monolithic movement, dedicated more than anything else to the holding of power; in it one can find the seeds of the peculiar arrogance that characterizes the present-day ruling elite in Canada and that has given us, with two very short interludes, something alarmingly near to a one-party system. Perhaps Conservatives should read this book with most attention; it may give them some hints of how they might at least partially counteract the historic disability laid upon them by Macdonald's great political error, the execution of Riel and the consequent alienation of Quebec.

L.T.C.

* RODERICK STEWART. *The Mind of Norman Bethune.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $15.95. *The Mind of Norman Bethune* is a curious hybrid work, part an anthology of Bethune's own writings, part a hagiolatry, put together with photographs. The price informs us that the cult of St. Norman has spilt out of China and Gravenhurst, Ontario, and is headed for the coffee tables of the nation. Parts of the book, like the last section showing how the cult is sustained in China, are object lessons in how a man of modest attainments, whose courage was no greater than that of many other combat surgeons, can be built for political purposes into a cultural hero. That is the pathetic side of the book. More interesting are the pieces of Bethune's own writing, and a single lamentable example of his incursion into the visual arts. Bethune was obviously a kind of *poète manqué*, a vivid reporter of experiences, but almost totally lacking in imaginative power, which perhaps explains why he never really understood how the Stalinists destroyed the Loyalist cause in Spain and why his own political statements sound like a rather naive gramophone record.

L.T.C.

** JOHN H. FERRES and MARTIN TUCKER, eds., *Modern Commonwealth Literature.* Frederick Ungar, $28.50. The critical sampler is a difficult book to make satisfying. No matter how inclusive the list of subjects or how wide-ranging the critical perspectives, readers remain aware of the limitations, the selectivity, and (unfortunately here) the typographical errors. It is as a set of mini-guides to the critical reception accorded major Commonwealth writers that this book serves. Yet it is inevitably introductory, and excerpts never provide the subtleties that full commentaries do.

W.N.

**** MARC GAGNE, *Gilles Vigneault.* Les presses de l'université Laval, $36.00. Vigneault in many ways epitomizes the precise spirit of Quebec that Anglophone Canada finds so hard to comprehend. Anglophones appreciate the singer, the music, the songs; but francophones appreciate also the song that is the singer himself — the rootedness of the chansonnier in a cultural whole. Gagné's mammoth (975-page) bibliography records Vigneault's papers, songs, poems, and other writings; it annotates criticism; it records productions and provides an invaluable guide to both the singer and his world.

W.N.

** WILFRID EGGLESTON. *National Research in Canada: the NRC 1916-1966.* Clarke, Irwin, $22.50. The scientific stories in this volume — those of combatting wheat rust, investigating "aviation medicine," developing radar and snow vehicles — describe substantial battles, but the author burdens them with excessive accounts of the bureaucracy and excessive use of the passive voice. The effect, probably unintentionally, stresses government involvement in ostensibly objective research: the close tie between science and military might, and the failure to resolve the imbalance between technology, imported financing, and exported wealth.

W.N.

** ANNE PITERNICK et al. *Proceedings* of the National Conference on the State of Canadian Bibliography. National Library of Canada, $7.50. These academic papers, from a 1974 conference, do not make easy reading, and they are necessary only for those interested in improving the state of Canadian bibliographic coverage. Perhaps inevitably, the index and the internal bibliographies are themselves the book's finest features.

W.N.

*** ROBERT D. DENHAM, *Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature.* Univ. of Chicago Press, $13.00. A collection of 21 of Frye's occasional reviews, this work shows the practical critic that the theorist often hides. Frye on Toynbee, Frye on Langer, Frye on Freud and Jung: these are valuable documents for more than students of Frye. But equally valuable for such students is Robert Denham's introduction: a long, detailed, balanced, and lucid account of Frye's ideas, career, and reputation.

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