

DOCUMENTS

Edward Lacey

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Don Gutteridge, *Riel. A Poem for Voices*, Fiddlehead Books, 1968
Dennis Lee, *Civil Elegies*, House of Anansi, 1968
David Helwig, *Figures in a Landscape*, Oberon Press, 1967
Fred Cogswell, *Star-People*, Fiddlehead Books, 1967
Neil Tracy, *Shapes of Clay*, Fiddlehead Books, 1967
Violet Anderson, *In the Balance*, Fiddlehead Books, 1967
Joy Kogawa, *The Splintered Moon*, Fiddlehead Books, 1967
Jim Brown, *If There are any Noahs*, Very Stone House, 1967

As I draft this review, reader, it's a hot and windless February night in the large tropical city where I'm at present staying. Now, long after midnight, the streets, and the many sidewalk bars and stand-up cafés, are still crowded with sweaty, uninhibited, chattering men and women—and will be, until night pales into morning. Discothèques and boîtes, with their black light and acid rock, will purvey that special form of madness till the dawn, but down in the industrial slums by the harbour the thirty-odd ramshackle houses of the red-light district have already dimmed their lights and shooed the crowds of proletarian clients away; the approximately 500 women who work there need their rest, for their working-day starts early—as early as that of the labourers and handy-men who will begin to drift past the houses again, stopping to stare, to touch and, when they have money, to enter, from 6 a.m. on. Palms breathe, statuesque, in the darkness. Beaches gleam under the moon, and those dark formless mounds you see

at intervals along the beaches, or shadowy, by the boardwalks, not catching or reflecting the light, are pairs of lovers copulating—they can't afford hotels. Cars go slowly down the more populated thoroughfares, braking, even stopping occasionally—not police, but men seeking women, or boys. It's a few days before Lent, and that means, in this Catholic country where Catholicism is only a body of rituals which helps to structure and give meaning to existence (and Lent, accordingly, has no significance except as a welcome change of routine, a rest after the last binge and before the next), a few days before Carnival. The principal streets and avenues are decorated for the occasion with huge colourful Sitwellian humming-birds and canaries swooping toward suns and clusters of fruits—all in plastic. The localities find this year's decoration a trifle cluttered and fussy, but I approve of it: it conveys well that at times oppressive denseness and prodigality—too many people, too many colours, too much vegetation—and that atmosphere of confusion always threatening to degenerate into chaos but never quite doing so, which the pre-industrial tropics so compellingly impart to the casual observer. A few more days, and Carnival Saturday, will be here, and off will go the clothes, and with them, the year's frustrations and privations and inhibitions, and on will go the costumes, and the people, like a great extended family, will dance in the streets and drink and screw for 4 days. Not all, of course. The intellectual rich will travel, the religious will retire to convents, the old will remember, and the middle-class rich will spend immense sums of money attending costly private masked balls. But, once a year, at least the poor will dance. And once a year is something to be grateful for.

For as I write this, reader, it is cold and dark in the city or town where you live, and the roadways are filled with drifting snow, through which only the ominous cop-cars move to and fro. You're a couple of time-zones earlier than here but even so, no-one is afoot, no-one stands talking with anyone in the empty streets, and Mr. Newlove's blue and dangerous gun-hipped cops would stop for questioning anyone who happened to be about at such an hour on such a night, on the grounds that he must be crazy or up to no good. Snow shines deathly white in the moonlight and skeletal bare trees are starkly silhouetted against it. Nameless call-girls receive nameless businessmen in antiseptic apartments. The "licensed premises"—serving ice-cold beer and tomato juice in bright enamel silence behind closed doors—are shutting down just about now, ejecting their few last all-male patrons—soused Indian and unmarried world-war-I veterans—into the unfriendly streets. Ah, the joys of anomie and the private life in post-industrial society! And you, wherever you are, in your great metropolis or your

Ameliasburgh, wife or lover by your side, or tossing in bed alone, you are isolated, reader, unrelated to any larger human community, forever frozen by climate and religion and upbringing into uniqueness, able with difficulty to move beyond the limits of the kingdom of self, completely unable ever to move beyond the nuclear unit of two and discover a world of interpersonal relationships, unable to know your neighbour (his driveway and walk aren't shovelled out, neither are yours, and the drifts are 400 years old and 1000 feet deep), unable ever to sit and talk and drink with him at a sidewalk café, unable to dance and screw with him, except at a winter carnival where clothes touch clothes, unable to console him, or be consoled, even if he's dying—or you are. And even when you read this, on some late spring or early summer evening, when the trees are green again, and a few Northern flowers bloom, there will still be an edge of cold on the green night, the eternal reminder built into the Canadian climate. But you may, if you are lucky and live near Toronto, be able to read this in the expensive ambiance of one of the sidewalk cafés (non-licensed, of course; what *would* the world be coming to if drinkers could sin in the open air?), which, David Helwig assures me, Toronto now boasts. I suppose a red-light district will be next!

Back here and now, the most popular carnival tune threatens to be a little thing called "Happy 69 to you," with all the obscene overtones that implies. Fitting, isn't it, that a decade which began with Fidel Castro and Khrushchev and Kennedy and John XXIII and a look at the far side of the moon, should end in the sterility of Fidel Castro and Brezhnev and Nixon and Paul VI and three moon-goons reciting the Bible and assuring Lyndon Johnson that there *is* a Santa Claus as they circle a dead planet at a cost which would feed every dying child in Biafra, or the world—a state of affairs for which the act of 69ing, with its sterility and false promise of communication, provides the perfect symbol? Even in 1969, however, Canadian poets seem firmly moored in 1967, and the Canadian Centennial Commission Poetry Competition (CCCPC to you), as though afraid to turn their fascinated gaze from it, lest it disappear from memory, as though unwilling to forget that there once was a Canada, and we were in the world's spotlight, briefly, even if only as empresarios [*sic*] and chief concessionaires of a highly successful carney-show. (It's only fair to add, though, that Margaret Atwood's *The Animals in That Country*, which I shall not be reviewing here, the winner of the CCCPC, is a sober and meritorious work, and the announcement of such a book's having been awarded the palm must have been like a bath of cold Maple Syrup poured all over our fledgling Charles Mairs and Louella Booths.

Remember 1967? That was long ago, of course, long before the demise of the late John Diefenbaker and our good grey diplomat¹, and the meteoric rise and fall of Canada's P E T.² 1967 was the year when we really began to fall apart, when decay really set in and even the French-Canadians stopped complaining about the fact when it became obvious that it just wasn't going to work—never had worked, actually. Obvious not only to us, but to others as well, as Expo became Exposé, and the naïve dream of a statesman (who really should have known better) that he could produce a country out of two non-nations, with a bit of red-and-white cloth and a fair held on an island near the confluence of two rivers, was exposed in all the poverty of its symbolism and its realisation. And 1967 was the year we welcomed 40-odd million Unitedstatesian and other English-speaking cattle as they trampled over what had up to then been our only important cultural and linguistic reduct [*sic*], and our only hope for any sort of separate identity—the Province of Québec. (Any linguist, any social scientist knows that languages and societies, especially fragile minority ones, do not long survive that kind of frontal attack. The people who planned Expo knew it, too.) To those of us, from Goldwin Smith down, who believe that Canada never really existed, that all we had was an accidentally insulated and preserved mediaeval French rural theocracy, set in the midst of various forms of Angloamerica surrounding it, and now doomed, by industrialisation, population drift to the cities and exposure to the mass media in English, and in the end by those laws of no-return which govern languages and peoples as surely as they do dodos or whooping cranes, to inevitable linguistic, cultural, and demographic assimilation (i.e. destruction) by about the year 2000 (a combination of external and internal factors—the rapidly falling birthrate being the chief of the latter—make this date, only a generation and-a-half away, more than probable), to those of who hear the strains of “No Canada” blowing faint yet ever stronger on the breeze, and who perhaps lament a little having their “neutral” liberal-humanitarian image tarnished and being forced to admit that they really are Unitedstatesians too (or at least Americo-Canadians), and share the guilt and responsibility of the world's policemen (and perhaps also mourn a little, sentimentally but not hypocritically, the passing of that stubborn “French fact” in America—after, there'll always be a Paris, and, for French cooking, we have New Orleans, with a much better climate), but are otherwise unconcerned about *le pourrissement canadien*, and perhaps doesn't matter. Take me, for example I don't care a hoot about Canada. I review Canadian poetry, because I care about Canadian poetry, finding it an interesting regional subtype of world poetry in English, as well as an unprecedented

and valiant attempt to crate a literate out of landscape and non-history. Moreover, I'm interested in poets, as among the few live human beings left in a country of the dead. But several of the books I shall be reviewing here are from the poisoned crop of 1967, and some of these poets are Luddites, and obviously do care about Canada and what happens to it, and one must examine their works in the light of their beliefs. The first such volume to come to hand is a curious antiquity by Don Gutteridge, *Riel. A Poem for Voices*...a long four-part dramatic poem, presumably meant for radio recitation, consisting of monologues delivered by the individual *dramatis personae*, relieved and mixed with "voices", basically choral interludes which range from letters, newspaper advertisements, accounts and editorials relevant to the events of Riel's life and death, to Indian chants. The monologues are retrospective in tone, and there is very little straight narration, the story being told in the peripheral, circular fashion of popular narrative, by bits and pieces, not always strictly chronological. An effect of tension, and movement towards inevitable tragic dénouement is achieved by the alternation of the meditative and "interiorised" monologues with the strident (or, in the case of the Indian material, soaringly lyrical) "voices", which have obviously been chosen with great care and a sharp sense of irony and contrast from the historical data to which the author had access, and which seem to mount in stridency as the poem progresses. I don't know just where Mr. Gutteridge got this technique—perhaps from Birney's "Trial of a City"; not from Pratt, except perhaps in the monologues and the use of the long line; it might well be from Benet's *John Brown's Body*, or, for all I know, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*—figures with whom Riel has a lot in common.

For I must quarrel with Mr. Gutteridge's basic premise (which of course doesn't affect the poems' artistic validity), that his poem is an attempt to come to grips with the French-English problem in poetic terms. The French-Canadians are not, and were not, the same thing as the Indians, by a long shot. Even though the WASP attitude toward the two groups may have been basically the same (and this is highly disputable), the groups' concept of, and attitude to, themselves, were very different. The latter were a colonised but not conquered people, the former were conquered but not colonised hence, for example, their lack of intermarriage [and] their retention of French language, religion, and civil law. Whatever the man Riel was, the Métis' were first of all Métis, not Frenchmen, and the Riel rebellions were race wars. The scorn felt by Anglo settlers in the west for the Métis were similar to that shown further south by their Unitedstatesian counterparts for the pure-blooded Indian—it was not primarily motivated

by the Métis' nominal Catholicism and sometimes French names (or if so only to the extent that mixed blood was felt, as in some Andean countries, to be a mark of further degeneration, causing them to be shunned by both pure-blood groups) but by the fact that they were dark-skinned, had lice, and spoke Cree.... Of course the French understood the Métis better, and assimilated them, or into them, better than the Anglo—the Latin races have always been superior colonisers—and to that extent the Métis participated, and still do, in the “French presence” in Canada. But in reality the Catholicism and “Frenchness” of the Métis were only the pathetic left-overs of their previous colonisation by the French who were, as indicated, tolerant enough to sire bastards on them, and zealous enough to proselytize them religiously and culturally, but also killed them, exploited them, and left them in their poverty and deprivation. The relevance this poem may have to the present-day French Canadians is that the enemy is still the same—be he named Orangeman or WASP or Social-Crediter—and, in all his attitudes and tactics, still relies on the same ally—the members of an Anglicised, sold-out French-Canadian élite (one doesn't have to go far to find the “Sir” Georges-Etienne Cartier of today). Furthermore, the fate of the Métis, who *have* been assimilated in a half-assed fashion, and are now considered neither Indian nor white, but suffer the disadvantages inherent in both conditions, probably prefigures the destiny of the French community in Americo-Canada. For Mr. Gutteridge's real theme—and it's more than a timely one—is not the French problem, at all, but the failure of Canada as a whole, in the sense of its inability to function as a bulwark against the Unitedstatesian “melting-pot” culture, to protect and preserve its minority cultures, as a country like Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia or even Spain does, and provide a place in the New World for European ethnocultural pluralism as an alternative to the assimilatory centripetal tendencies of the American republics with their cultural and linguistic totalitarianism.

Recognising, then, that *Riel* is about the subculture we have destroyed, not the one we are at present destroying, I have one further complaint—the evident bias with which Mr. Gutteridge treats Riel's opponents and mingles fancy with history. The quotation from Alexander Henry shocks with the horror and authenticity, the lengthy excerpts from *The Globe* and *The Mail* sadden one with their reminder of what Ontarians are, and were, and the discreditable part they played in the events under discussion, and the sensitive and poetic rearrangements of Riel's address to the court and of the recorded comments of bystanders at his execution bring the poem to a moving conclusion. But what of Dr. Schultz's monologue and self-portrait, and especially the pseudo-quotation from Thomas Scott? What is Mr. Gut-

teridge's authority for considering Scott a sadist to animals (except, of course, Canadian cultural traditions) or for causing him to speak an unauthentic, subliterate garble? I'd similarly challenge the shrinking-violet letter which a soldier in the first Riel campaign reportedly writes home to his father—the tone doesn't ring true. If Mr. Gutteridge is going to invent material, let him do so credibly. Apart from these instances, though, our author seems to have done his research and his combining and selecting of material well.

The mere story of our only tragic historical figure, and of the betrayed and broken Métis people is interesting enough to bear being told many times. But Mr. Gutteridge seems more—or especially—concerned with describing Riel's attempt to form the Métis nation, paralleling that with the simultaneous attempt to give shape to Canada, and showing how both failed. The image he chooses for his purpose, and the poem's dominant one, is the flowing together of many rivers into one.... Mr. Gutteridge's other concern seems to be to point up the difference between Indian and white man in attitudes toward their environment and toward other human beings. From the start, the Indians' oneness with, and adjustment to, nature and one another are contrasted with the white man's alienation and isolation.... What we have here then, as well as a meditation on the plight of the Métis and, on a larger scale, the failure of Canada, is an eloquent exposition on the eternal—and so Canadian—theme of man vs. the environment, man vs. the machine, man in nature, and man vs. man. A good deal more than the promised mere historical narrative, *Riel* is in some ways an "old-fashioned" rather pedestrian poem. Pratt, Frost, and others have been studied to some purpose in the fashioning of a flexible five-stress iambic line. But the figurative language is tame and expectable, and doesn't often move beyond such Hiawatha-type triteness as "buffalo robes spiralling / Around them and up to the dark temple of sky / and night-snow like music and wind its harp"... I also wish Mr. Gutteridge would get over his irritating habit of using so many parentheses (why not dashes?). But if Mr. Gutteridge's language is sometimes prosaic and lacking in intensity and imaginative force, we must remember that a 52-page narrative is something of a feat for any poet, and a *tour de force* for a young one, and that dramatic and narrative poetry should not be judged by the same exacting canons of style, imagination, and compression as the lyric, anyhow. *Riel* moves smoothly and holds the reader's interest till the end, and lives on in the memory after reading. It is a worthy tribute to its hero, and its author.

One of the reiterated symbols in *Riel* is the tower, from that of the church of his boyhood....

Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies*...are presided over by towers, too, the "luminous white inevitable towers" of Toronto City Hall, which spell out the failure of an aspiration and a nation. For Mr. Lee also has written a meditation, this time in seven parts (which he chooses to call "elegies") and long unrhymed lines of irregular numbers of stresses (many hexameters and heptameters), on Canada and the quality of Canadian life. Having known Mr. Lee superficially some time ago, and having taken a certain levity and irreverence as among his salient characteristics, I must say I am surprised by the grave and sombre tone [of] this work.... Mr. Lee here addresses himself principally to the sense of void, of non-significance, of life in "that great lacuna, Canada," and proposes "we have spent the bank-roll; here, in this place, / it is time to honour the void."

I have hitherto discussed the basic themes and problems of Canadian life and literature in terms of the need for, and lack of, communication. But they could be approached in another way. For that need, and that lack of some identification with either one's environment or one's fellows, produce the sense of nothingness, the feeling that everything is happening elsewhere, that one is in a void, a province, a backwater. (Canada is probably the world's only English-speaking country where the word "provincial" still carries both its primary and derived meaning, both at the same time.) And this feeling is the sense of exile. But when we examine more closely the theme of exile in our poetry—and references to it occur *passim*, particularly in Francanlit.—we find that it, like so much else in the cultural dualism which we are, breaks into two separate myths—journey and exile from a lost fatherland, and the disappearance of an Eden, a Camelot. The former, the myth of our Angcanpoetry, of the European homeland, is no sooner heard, in "Fair these broad meads, these hoary wood are grand / But we are exiles from our fathers' land", than the minor voice of Francanpoetry chimes in, lamenting its banishment, either physical or psychic (through alien conquest, even when remaining in the *terroir*) from the lost inviolate unity of the original Métis or Québec Eden: "Un canadien errant / Banni de ses foyers.... Sit tu vois mon pays / mon pays malheureux."... And on both sides of the linguistic fence, it is this sense of exile and void which has kept our poetry and our people from ever consolidating, or defining, or even facing themselves, and has retained us "truncated, stunted, not yet / naturalised in (our) birthright dimension."

But Mr. Lee goes considerably farther than this is in his definition of void.... Void is death, there being little difference between physical death, like Tom Thomson's, and death in life, like Saint-Denys-Garneau's.... On a larger scale, void is passive acquiescence or complacency vis-à-vis

evil.... Mr. Lee is hard on Canada, hard as a poet must be to try and save what little is left.... Mr. Lee recommends no “withdrawal in the gut” but a new vision for the things of the world, purified by the knowledge of void, “and there is no other world for us to live in.”.... And with a last sweep over the towers and city and world, we are abruptly dumped down into Canadiana again with the introduction of that improbable anti-hero, Sir John A. Macdonald, building a nation amid “the shambles of the CPR through twenty whiskey bottles,” “and the country was real enough though he could not think it would / come to civil bathos / (and) he did expend himself beyond his time of dying.” At this, the author leaves us, saying “now lately I have thought I also could begin my life.”

And leaves me, too. Cold. At the risk of seeming to be the Reader’s Digest Condensed Book of Canadian poetry, I have tried to summarise here the thought and movement of *Civil Elegies*, because I consider it an important and thoughtful poem. But if Mr. Lee has me thoroughly convinced, and depressed, through the first six elegies (though perhaps Hazlitt said it all more elegantly and pointedly many years ago when he stated that no young man really believes he will die), and if his argument about being purged by void to a new realisation and affirmation of “tree, lintel, tower, body, cup” is a philosophically familiar one, I fail even so to find much reason for hope in the seventh elegy. And what is the motive for the sudden introduction of the figure of Sir John A. Macdonald? (Does a non-nation require an anti-hero? There must be something, significant, beyond Centenniality [*sic*], in the appearance in so many volumes of this sinister and second-rate Scottish-Canadian politician whose much-lauded alcoholism is, in historical terms, the equivalent of that “bawdy grandfather” myth, necessary in a puritanical society as an escape valve, which I have previously attacked in Canpoetry.) Nor can I find much ground for hope in the future of Canada, or consider Mr. Lee’s argument a “resonant” one, as the dust-jacket suggests. But this is quibbling.

Mr. Lee’s long line, which I suppose is derived from such poets as Saint-John Perse, serves his purposes here well. The deliberately calm, discursive, reasonable tone of his dialogue and its refusal of rhetoric are seldom violated, there are no fortissimi.... [T]he effect conveyed by this deliberate soft-peddling is one of rage and sorrow almost schizophrenically controlled, and this provides the tension which the elegies, despite their danger of growing soporific, possess. A very fine line, between flatness of tone and rhetoric, is sustained, and the author is to be congratulated for having caught this tone of nervous, frustrated impotence, which may well be the characteristic tone of the civilised human being of our times....

If I consider both the author's populism and his condemnation of nullities like Paul Martin a trifle ingenuous, and find his constant appeal to children as an affirmation of life somewhat sentimental, this no doubt simply is because I am a disillusioned populist and dislike children. Best, then, to leave my comments at this. I recommend *Civil Elegies* to the serious reader, and think it may be read when Canada and Vietnam have faded from memory, and someone else is killing or colonising somebody else in some other part of the world—or some other world.

Leaving aside such serious reflections for the moment, one of the things which Canada most needs is beaches. It's not merely our climate, our insane laws and our vicious ethnic and religious heritage that lie at the root of that sleepwalking quality, that fear of life which Mr. Lee correctly defined as our most distinctive national characteristic. In part, the fault lies with the shroud of clothes in which we are nearly always swathed. Except perhaps for the even more pitiful Russians (whom we resemble in so many respects), we are the "clad" nation on earth. Ah, the scratchy winter underwear, the stockings within stockings, the boots over shoes, the coats inside coats and sweaters on sweaters, the mitts, muffs, galoshes, scarves and earmuffs, the toe-to-neck pyjamas—indumentary [*sic*] articles and combinations as foreign to the experience of most nations as [a] space suit! Poor flesh that never saw the sun! Rarely does skin touch skin—hence our "don't touch me" phobia and, to some extent, our inability to communicate one with another; we have lost, or allowed to atrophy with disuse, the most delicate, the most linking of the senses—touch. Do friends ever clap each other on the shoulder or walk arm-in-arm in Canada? Does one tap a stranger on the shoulder or arm to ask a question or call his attention, or pat passing children on the head, or shake hands or exchange an embrace on meeting and departure? Why, you'd go to jail—unless Trudeau's new laws are passed some time before 2000 A.D.—for doing that sort of thing even in private between consenting adults in Canada. Rarely amongst us, in fact, does skin ever see skin—which is why the aptly named Sons of Freedom so shocked the country. Brought up an only child in an inland area, and, in a good Canadian household, naturally never allowed to see my parents naked, I, for example, believed till the age of eight or so that I was the only person in the world with a penis, and regarded that organ of delight as a sort of cancer which it was my personal misfortune to possess (a reasonable belief, since my mother, when she bathed me, appeared to treat it as just that). A rather stupid child, I'll admit, but there you are. Then one summer we took a vacation on Lake Simcoe, which has beaches—and lo, the revelation! If Canada had more beaches, Canadians might wear more bath-

ing suits, and expose their fish-belly flesh to the sun, and thus, slowly, over the years, a comprehension that we are actually made of flesh, blood, and bone, not sheep's wool, orlon, and leather, would be forced on us, and we eventually might come to the stunning discovery that all men, even ex-Premier Manning³, have cock and balls, and all women, even our Canadian lilies like the organ-playing Miss Manning, have cunts, though the latter are perhaps not so visible under a swimsuit as are the former. The realisation that this is so, and is likely to be so for a while yet would, I'm sure, do wonders to help liberate the Canadian psyche.

These meditations have been induced by several readings of the well-bred, well-clad poetry of David Helwig (*Figures in a Landscape...*). No nakedness here, or if, atypically, Cupid is allowed to be a naked boy, it's because he's only a plaster cast.... Poetry for Mr. Helwig seems to be a kind of clothing, too, a set of costumes, which are constantly changed, but never thrown off, and never abbreviated enough to allow us to catch a glimpse of the real flesh beneath them. A phenomenon commoner than one at first thinks—the poet who wishes to write, but wants only to be half-known, to be exposed only on his own terms. Perhaps for many poets, poetic expression is a sort of carnival, a mixture of release and disguise, of truths and falsehoods, insights and deceptions about themselves and others, partly fantasizing what they are not, partly hiding what they are. Masks which serve both to protect them from the reader and to communicate through. And one mustn't forget that Canadian poets are, by profession, paranoid schizophrenics. What I'm trying to say is that, unlike the type of poet whose first volume is confessional and who thereafter moves on to a professional distancing and attitudinizing, Mr. Helwig has already made the move.

It's clear that this distancing has been both conscious and unconscious, both a decision, and a need imposed by the Puritan temperament, and that our author has done some agonising about it....I knew Mr. Helwig superficially too [many] years ago and the impression I retain of him is of a versatile, talented youngster, full of enthusiasm and appetite for life, to whom "to sing was as natural as it was to talk." The talent and versatility are still there, as these 80-odd poems, in half as many different genres and styles, amply attest, but I wonder what has become of the enthusiasm and singing and appetite for life. Well, I suppose this is what happens to the young in a country where "children feel the sting / of age blown into the eyes and across the swings of the swift brain." And Mr. Helwig's escape from Canada was, unfortunately, in keeping with the Ontario WASP tradition to which he belongs, a return from exile to the English fatherland.... No

wonder the poor fellow's crushed. Years ago, anyhow, I could see that Mr. Helwig was an extremely intelligent conformist, and was destined to become a somebody in our literary-academic establishment. If that meant donning the livery of grey, Mr. Helwig has obediently assumed it—albeit perhaps as just another costume. What then is left? A senile young man? Not quite. The small joys of domesticity, of living and growing older alongside one's wife, of watching one's children unfold into flower and reliving life through them, of nature observation, art appreciation and cultivation of the mind—and these are what Mr. Helwig's placid poetry is about. Second-hand experience, producing second-hand poetry? Not necessarily, especially when the poetry is rescued by the assurance and technical expertise which is the real surprise in this almost excessively mature first volume—a volume which would do many an already established poet proud.

The poet whom Mr. Helwig resembles in many respects is the early James Reaney. Both men are from, and write of, the same Southern-Ontario Anglo-Puritan tradition, and both have the same fascination with childhood and its “paper world,” and with that world's confrontation with the real world of “blood, pus, honor, death, stepmothers and lies.” For both, childhood is innocence, is freedom, is fated to be lost irrecoverably, and the adult is thus both exile and prisoner.... Mr. Helwig is a poet of death. And, in line with his interest in theatre and the world of art and perhaps with what I said earlier about his very use of poetry as mask, as disguise—he is especially drawn to masks—masks, and statues, paintings, sketches, images, slides—whatever hides death, or mimics life, but is not life. In poem after poem, the principal figure is either of life frozen in some form of art or of death or art, masquerading [*sic*] as life.... What does all this trompe-l'oeil, this playing with life, art and death, mean? If we had just the statue poems and others dealing with life frozen as art, I would say, as I've said before, that this sort of symbolism is very common in the work of youthful poets, and probably has some close connection with adolescent insecurity and catatonia, and cite Keats and Hofmannsthal. But Mr. Helwig is really a sort of anti-Keats. As I read his rather despairing credo, it is *ars longa, vita brevis*, yes, but, in the same breath, art is another form of death, and the work of art can only feign, or recall, life.... [T]he fine title-piece, which shows the influence of another of Mr. Helwig's confessed enthusiasts, Robert Finch. I am talking not about Finch the sonneteer but about Finch the tableau-poet here (they seem almost to be at times two different poets—both excellent, and when I refer to Finch's tableau-effect I mean his seizing on an instant of motion, usually involving several figures, to be

arrested in still-life in a poem, fixing, from a neutral outside vantage-point, simultaneously on all descriptive details....

Another theme which occupies both Helwig and Reaney is the decline of the Ontario small town and the puritan tradition it embodied. In each case, the poet's attitude toward both the tradition and its decay is ambivalent. On the one hand, there is the obvious desire, indicated by this book's choice of title, to situate oneself within a tradition, a landscape. On the other, is the obvious poverty of any real values, aesthetic or even moral, within that tradition, and the need to escape outside it, for artistic and personal reasons, the escape being but a further factor in the decay....

Lacking the ambivalence of the Ontario poems, Mr. Helwig's England ones, neutral and more purely descriptive...are among the best, conveying truthfully and dispassionately the atmosphere of that bleak industrial society.... Technically speaking, this poetry is ridiculously accomplished. Mr. Helwig, too, prefers, even in free-verse, longer lines than are currently fashionable (especially in West-Coast verse), and he uses rime and its variants and certain stanzaic types or patterns, notably ABAB or ABBA quatrains (often arranged in 4-stanza poems which really approximate a kind of 16-line Meredithian sonnet; there are, moreover, several cleverly disguised true sonnets in the volume), and, in the free-verse, 2-, 3-, and 5-line stanzas, often enough that one might call him a metrical traditionalist, but he seems at ease with any form or in any environment.... [T]his poetry pleases with its simplicity, its conversational tone, its lack of fake and distortion, of false surrealism, deliberately snarled imagery, etc. Its other lack, alas—praise Mr. Helwig though we may, and should, for his delicate qualities of observation, his intimate understanding of children, his good taste—is a lack of strong emotion. The tone is so calm and poised, the diction so perfect, that is almost soporific—more so than Mr. Lee, despite the apparent variety in Mr. Helwig's book.

Apparent variety? If I have talked a good deal about Mr. Helwig's debt to other poets, it is because he *is* derivative. This derivativeness is not here a vice; it is eclecticism, and the poet has selected well and widely. The poets he has taken as models are those he is spiritually akin to, so their styles fit him like good clothes. But if, under all the suits of clothing, any unit, any quality of spirit can be discerned here, it is, as I have tried to show, a remote, death-bound, and wintry one. In that respect, without once uttering the word "Canada," Mr. Helwig may be more Canadian than either of the previous two poets; he embodies what they protest against.

And, always, brooding behind this seemingly civilised poetry, is the cold, inhuman, immense Canadian landscape, where wolves pursue skaters

and foxes chase hares, a landscape of emptiness and loneliness against which Mr. Helwig's animals and people and statues are set, so dwarfed as to be truly but "figures in a landscape."

To sum up, Mr. Helwig is a minor poet: he originates nothing, he presents no strong personality or compelling philosophy for our consideration, and he lacks emotion. But minor poets may perpetuate a tradition worthily, and Mr. Helwig has written in this ample volume at least a half-dozen poems which I'd include in any future anthology.

Like Mr. Helwig, Fred Cogswell is an English professor, an editor, and a minor poet. But he certainly gets around, as witness the impressive credit-list of his latest book, *Star-People*.... One's always opening a magazine from or in some unlikely place and finding a poem by him. Perhaps that's only natural, considering his long years of editorial activity and the rules of reciprocity that usually apply among literary periodicals. But, though it is high time for a recognition of the debt we all owe to Mr. Cogswell for his patient editorship of *The Fiddlehead*, for all his reading and selecting, giving advice, praising, and consoling the rejected, to say that he is so widely published for that reason would be a rank injustice. Mr. Cogswell is a genuine and original poet; it would be difficult to mistake most of the gnomic, concentrated, epigrammatic yet lyrical poems of the present collection—page upon page of small, quite perfect things—for the work of anyone else. Walter Savage Landor, I might have said, were not the comparison so seemingly absurd; L.A. Mackay comes to mind as a Canadian example from the past.... At all events, as befits its epigrammatic and/or lyrical quality, this is poetry which reiterates what I like to call the immortal commonplaces, and so it's expectable that it should deal in antitheses and contrasts, and in elementals—youth and age, beauty and death, the ideal and the real, freedom and slavery. Its symbolism is often traditional, as well—the rose of beauty, the butterfly of love, the mask of pride, the cage of flesh, the lamb of chastity, the wolf of lust—symbolism with echoes of Blake, who seems to be a strong philosophical if not stylistic influence in this poetry. But since Mr. Cogswell is, like Mr. Helwig, a Canadian and Puritan, and a Maritimer to boot, he is of course hung up on communication and its tangled wires. Since, as I've noted, most Canadian poets are incapable of thinking in terms of societal or group relations, many of his poems deal with pairs of lovers and their efforts at contact. And, as we'd expect, the imagery is often drawn from the animal world.⁴

If I have dedicated less space here to Mr. Cogswell than to Mr. Helwig, that reflects only the comparative bulk of their two volumes, and does not indicate that I think Mr. Cogswell a lesser poet; indeed he is a finer one,

though I won't say greater, since I dislike that kind of adjective.... [I]n looking over the rough draft of my remarks, I see that the adjective I've most often used of this author is "neat." I now wish to turn the adjective of praise into one of criticism, and ask if Mr. Cogswell, especially in his neatly controlled, neatly rimed (or unrimed), neatly antithetical, neatly metaphorical short poems is not perhaps a little too minor, a little too neat.... I long to see him do what he promises in "Lines for my Fiftieth Birthday": "I shall be a fire / of what I am and have / and burn till I expire / in the free air of love." Just at the point where one feels that some of these neat little poems should "take off," they end. One feels that it should not have been so perfect, so easy, so antithetical, that life's not like that, that something was left unsaid, perhaps too terrible to say.... And then, there is that air of middle-aged male menopause which has so sadly invaded Raymond Souster's poetry.... It is in any case much harder to be a good minor poet than most reviewers fancy. And Mr. Cogswell has moved far from the regionalism of his first book to this fine offering. But what has clipped his wings? Too close and long an association with academia, too many term-papers and tutorials, too much editing—always reading and judging other people's poetry—too high a development of the critical faculties at the expense of the creative, or just simply too much work? One senses that Mr. Cogswell has the potential to be a much more considerable poet than he has hitherto proved himself. One also senses that he never will be.

Three small chapbooks from Mr. Cogswell's Fiddlehead Poetry series...deserve at least brief treatment. Neil Tracy is, spiritually speaking, a French-Canadian writing in English, and the 17 sonnets of *Shapes of Clay* show the particular influence of Albert Lozeau and of poets of the *terroir* like [Alfred] DesRochers and [Blanche] Lamontagne—even to the extent of the sonnet form. Because of its use, and of a certain immobile, attempted marmoreal quality in these poems, I'd almost call them Parnasian. Considered as English poetry, it's hard to believe that they were not written by a late Victorian contemporary of Lampman—and when Mr. Tracy tries to be what he probably considers "modern" and "realistic"... The result seems about as contemporary as the verses Lampman composed to prove that he, too, could write like Stephen Crane. I at times wonder why some poets, like Robert Finch or Roy Daniells, can make the sonnet seem not only elegant but inevitable, so that one can't conceive of a particular poem's being cast in any other mould, whereas in the hands of others, like this writer, it seems both a tyranny to which the author has submitted himself, artificially stricturing [*sic*] his poem in the process, and as inert and outmoded as the triolet or the virelai. The answer is, I think, the same as to

the query why Emily Dickinson's hymn-stanzas still attract us, and Isaac Watts' don't. Apart from the superior quality of the mind in both cases, Finch, like Dickinson, distorts and extends his chosen form, using freely the resources of consonance and assonance, internal rhyme, alliteration, variable caesura, outrageous puns, not always respecting the traditional thought-divisions of octave and sestet, mixing Shakespearean, Italian, and other rhyme-schemes, and by so doing, rescues the sonnet as a living, flexible form. Mr. Tracy...respects almost slavishly the textbook rules for sonnet composition, and ends up with—textbook sonnets.

All are, technically, well-built; few have any organic life. Clement Wood, author of *The Rhyming Dictionary*, used to churn this sort of thing out, for illustrative purposes, with a good deal more ease than Mr. Tracy—as it is, since he shuns most imperfect rhymes and uses mostly the Italian form, Mr. Tracy is kept so busy looking for rhyme-words (two sets of four, and two of three, per sonnet) that it is no wonder if other matters suffer. As a secondary consideration, I think the sonnet, in the English poetic tradition—quite different from the French—has not been used, and therefore does not lend itself easily, for purely descriptive “word-painting,” especially portraiture, and that is what Mr. Tracy to often, under his French influences, tries to do. At all events, there's nothing inherently wrong with being a traditionalist in form, as excellent poets like Wilson MacDonald demonstrate; it's the type of sensibility you bring to the form that matters, and what repels here is of course the morbid and complacent romanticism.... As for the language, this is not only the kind of stylist who can write, in but *one* poem, “it is to smile to fancy I have stayed,” “the years have sped,” and “the fire seems good on ancient shins widespread,” and, as well, invert a couple of verbs and objects for good measure....

[M]y second question is why the Spoon River village-vignette format, employed in most of these poems, worked for Masters and, for example, for Mr. Cogswell, while here it seems insightless and disjointed.... The answer here is that Mr. Tracy, like Lozeau and Saint-Denys Garneau (and unlike the poet of the *terroir*), has lived an invalid's life, isolated from the world, and with little experience of human experience. His is the *vie intérieure*; the buried, hidden life that I've already referred to in French-Canadian literature. He is as archaic and remote as his language, as though he feared contact with human beings, and turned away fastidiously from any that accidentally came his way—the mask of Canada again, *pace* Mr. Lee. But at the same time, from his distance and superiority, he judges and condemns human beings for their weaknesses, and there is, in the book's brief compass, an unmistakable note of disdain, an unhealthy mixture of

condescension and envy. Masters and Cogswell knew, and cared about, their villages and the latter's grim lives; Mr. Tracy appears neither to know nor to care; they are for him really only "shapes of clay." Mr. Tracy, in fact, cares little for life, which is a gloomy, meaningless business.... Only in "Electra" and "Let Us Now Praise" does Mr. Tracy succeed, by virtue of subjects well-chosen, not sentimentalised, and within his narrow range of experience, real sensory details sharply and truthfully described, a lack of archaic or poetic vocabulary and syntax, and above all, a suspension of judgment rather than a condemnatory or mawkish attitude toward the people of the poem. He should try this recipe more often, and not misuse his obvious talent.

The 17 poems of Violet Anderson's chapbook *In the Balance*...are almost as joyless as Mr. Tracy's, but considerably more interesting.... Miss Anderson writes in various styles, but certain concerns and themes are immediately apparent. Principal is her preoccupation with the relationship between man and nature, similar to *Riel*, and especially with the extinction of life—first, animal life, then all life...man, by destroying animals, becomes an animal. I suspect it's only we Canadians who have this really extraordinary concern with and for our animal brethren.... For all female—or male—poets who write this sort of false, anthropocentric trash, I'm tempted to prescribe as penance the repetition, until voice fails, of a certain sonnet by Matthew Arnold beginning "In Harmony with nature? Restless fool." This is all just the pathetic fallacy again. Nature in actuality neither knows nor wants our attempts at communication, and is, above all, not gentle and cute. If one were able to achieve an integration in Nature, it would first of all have to be of the human tribe, not one's own personal and insignificant self, and would be on a much deeper and less easily expressible level, as in *Riel*, or in Dorothy Roberts.... The difference between most of Mrs. Roberts' poems and something like "Alive O" is the lack of attempt to anthropomorphose [*sic*] or to press one's own moods and personality on nature, in Mrs. Roberts; she is content simply to observe. And she realizes that the response, as well as the benefits of such response, such in feeling, must come from and accrue to, the sentient observer; we learn from nature, not nature from us. We imitate nature, not nature us. We in feel with nature, not nature with us.

But this is making a mountain out of a molehill. Most of the time Miss Anderson avoids such falseness and bad taste.... Miss Anderson's is...an eloquent plea for man—Canadian man—to remove his metal clothes, and exist again, in the body, as an animal, integrated in nature, showing respect for other life.... These poems contain echoes of many previous female

poets; I detect the ghosts of Emily Dickinson, Elinor Wylie, Charlotte Mew, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Bigan et al. Or is it just a coincidence in sensibilities? Hard to tell, and influence is not imitation, necessarily. Miss Anderson writes well and uncomplicatedly, both in free verse and in the simpler rimed forms.... I just wonder why this author has given us only 17 poems; I shall be interested to read a larger collection by her.

I'll bring no such anticipation to any future collection by Joy Kogawa. The 23 fragments of *The Splintered Moon*...are more ideas or starting-points for poems than finished products. Or maybe Miss Kogawa has decided to complete the poetic opus of T.E. Hulme, since, from the evidence of this book, it would seem that nothing had happened in poetry since the first imagists.... There is no structural device, not technique of ornamentation but metaphor.... The better poems in the chapbook...deal with animals and the old issue of life, death, and cruelty- pain, and their interrelatedness. And the final, prose poem "we had not seen it," is a grim warning so surprisingly effective that it suggests the author might do well to stick to prose.

Jim Brown's *If There are any Noahs*...is full of grim warnings. This is another slight book...fleshed out by large print and some interesting etchings. Despite its arty format, and the solemn liner-notes by Lionel Kearns (who apparently feels that the West-Coast poetry movement is by now so venerably hoary, so well-established, and so well-known that he can talk of the departure of young poets from their home-towns in the mountainous interior of B.C. to the coast—which is after all only a few hours by bus away—as though it was not only an odyssey but a tribal rite, a kind of historical migration phenomenon—like the lemmings, I suppose), the poetry is honest, intelligent, often witty, and unassuming, and I liked it. With rather less verve than Mr. Renald Shoofler, and less lyricism than Raymond Fraser...Mr. Brown is the same kind of poet. Mr. Brown is particularly concerned, like...Anderson and so many other poets, with the mechanisation of man, and the possibility of our destruction, especially final, atomic destruction.... As he pursues his twin devils, whop are the same as Henry Beissel's, the state and religion (especially puritan Judeo-Christian religion), Mr. Brown returns many times to this theme.... Mr. Brown is, like all good 1967 poets, worried about Canada and the possibility of its destruction, too.... You know, poets, one does begin to get just a little tired of all this self-destructive humour, this self-indulgent flagellation and witty neuroticism. Why not try to relate Canada to something or someone else in the world but itself and "Johnny Appleseed"—say to Paraguay or Kuwait? And if Canada no longer exists, why so much chatter

about it then? And why should Canada's relation to the U.S. be any more traumatized and traumatizing than say, Guatemala's to Mexico, or Ecuador's to Peru, or any small country to a larger neighbour with basically the same language and cultural patterns, but superior military-economic power and pretension of cultural colonisation? And since this kind of poetry, supposedly humorous but actually mordant, embittered, and turned against itself (our masochism again), has been around with us for a long time now, and boast such eminent practitioners as Frank Scott and Earle Birney, let me remind you: if you are going to be nationalistic, you must be prepared to submit to the absolutism and complete humourlessness of patriotism and nationalism and all that they imply, such as taking flags and border disputes and military parades seriously, like the Latins, including having your own patriotic poetry banned as subversive and sacrilegious. Nationalism is a Pandora's box.

These are just considerations for you to mull around. For, like Mr. Lee, Mr. Brown is concerned about Canada only as part of his concern about the world's general decline into dehumanization and holocaust. In impressive imagery, similar to the Moloch imagery which I've noted in various other young poets, and as a natural consequence of Mr. Brown's hatred of religions, the passage from the old tyranny of religion to the new tyranny of the bomb, the state, the machine, is described as a *Götterdämmerung*. . . . So Man, for Mr. Brown, can never be free of the tyranny of gods, indeed, he activity seeks it, "searching / for an impossible father-figure." When freed from Judaeo-Christian religion, he will worship the state, the machine, the bomb itself as god, and enslave himself to them. And be destroyed by them. . . . I do not conceal the fact that I consider these urgent, earnest poems important, and cannot praise young poets enough for writing about the themes Mr. Brown (and, in the past, Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Beissel) has chosen; our times need this. Nor do I conceal that, in the present case, I consider the ideas and the effectiveness of presentation of them by means of imagery and language, more important than the poetic ornamentation and minor stylistic errors, especially when there's almost none of the former (as befits a West-Coast poet) and little of the latter, either. . . . I agree with Lionel Kearns that Mr. Brown is a young poet worth watching, and would add that he's a highly intelligent young poet, too.

And that about wraps up my contributions as a poetry reviewer for *EDGE*. I've not always been happy with the books I've had to pass judgment on in these pages; contrary to what anyone may feel, I don't like reading or criticising what I consider bad poetry, and am apt to be more unkind than usual, if obliged to do so. But there's not been much latitude for

choice; such volumes as *EDGE* received for review have been sent to me periodically and I've taken my pick among those about which I felt I had something to say. It's probably fairer, thus. I've not always been happy, either, about errors and misprints in these "Poetry Chronicles." All these reviews have been written while I've been away from Canada, with no personal library. This in the first place means that I've had virtually no access to Canadian source materials; and I am in the best of circumstances notoriously given to misspelling names, misquoting people, mixing up quotes or titles, etc. Second, I have sent all the reviews either typewritten (by me, and I'm a bad typist) or in longhand (and I'm a worse calligrapher) to the editor in Canada, who has then handed them, for copying and editing, to typists unfamiliar with my style, vocabulary, and handwriting. Even further errors naturally creep in at the printing level, especially with my penchant for quotation, and the many typographical operations it exacts. It's possible that my opinions are so eccentric, or unread, that no one has noticed, but someone might have wondered, for example, about the "madam-seer" (read "madman-seer") referred to in last reviewing Pádraig O Broin. The figure of the "artist-artist" (read "artist-autist") appears on several occasions; *EDGE* apparently possesses a printer's devil who doesn't like the word "autist". The same devil was surely responsible for my incredible statement in *EDGE* 8 that the world of Alberta academia was an "experiential *vogue*" (read "experiential *void*"), for my discussing Mr. Eli Mandel's smile instead of his simile and for calling Mr. Frank Davey "Maniches" instead of a "Manichee." I cannot imagine who was responsible for a peculiar footnote about Nixon, De Gaulle, and the McLandress dimension appearing also in *EDGE* 8, and intended as a personal aside to the editor. And all of us, I'm afraid, are responsible, try as we may for accuracy, for errors in the citations. I, for example, in the course of what I now consider a mildly wrong-head review of *An Idiot Joy* (one should not give in to one's proclivity for selecting a given poet as a whipping-boy, or scape-goat, for a whole offending school), miscopied "revolve" as "resolve" in quoting one passage, and thereafter proceeded to attack as meaningless the figurative language of the passage, completing missing the prayer-wheel image involved. I ask your indulgence for these errors, as well as for all the apocryphal poets, places, and beverages like Leticia E. Dandon (read "Landon"), Chichiciastenango (read "Chichicastenango") and cachaço (read "cachaça") which I've inflicted on you in the past—and for who knows what howlers in this present issue....

And now it's Carnival Saturday, and tropical drums are throbbing in the teeming city beyond my door. That means, reader, that it's time for me to

open the door, and turn back to life and away from snow and night and silence and the pallid pieties and dubieties of Canadian poetry, and, donning or doffing my Pierrot mask, descend to join the dancing throng, forgetting all about Puritanism and you and your identity problems. So, my friends, farewell, till we meet again someday, back in the Canadeath.

An unpublished letter to Ian Young, March 19, 1978, from Montreal⁵:

Dear Ian: Forgive my handwriting, but I'm averse to using a typewriter. I was very pleased to be able finally to meet you (and yr. friends Mr. Jackson & Mr. Forbes) during my recent stay in Toronto, & only regret that we had to spend so much time talking business rather than literature. You will be happy to know, by the way, that the Androgyny Bookstore has now deigned to stock at least one Catalyst book; I saw a single lorn copy of *The Apothecary Jar*⁶ on the shelf when I dropped in there last weekend — they prob. got it secondhand. However, they're well supplied with copies of *The Male Muse*.⁷ They were in a bit of a flap because Montréal customs had just confiscated their latest order of copies of *Gay*⁸; in fact, the chap at the cash register (owner or whatever) confided to me that a crackdown on the whole Montréal gay (indeed sexual) scene is expected & imminent, because of Mayor Crapaud's⁹ upcoming election campaign (this fall). A pity, because I regard Montréal as a very free, open place, not perhaps any longer (or ever) so wide-open as Toronto in respect of baths, massage parlours, whorehouses, political activity, etc. but definitely less guilt-ridden & sick than Anglo-Canada concerning sexual attitudes & definitions, drugs, & so on.

But I'll be long gone by then, I trust. I am growing extremely impatient to get away; enforced inactivity and, especially, the recent snowstorms & bouts of cold weather have me champing at the bit. I really do dislike the Canadian winter, & I am anxious to return to the dubious pleasures of the generals & the Death Squad in the Land of the Sun. Well, you as a various-times-transplanted expatriate, can, I'm sure, understand my emotions. However, I survive on hope, mandrax & valium. Called up my publisher [the printer] today, & he assured me that (after I went through the antepenultimate set of proofs last week & plucked out more errors than crabs on ahustler—on my language; *The Queen's Vernacular* has been my bedside reading for the past week, & I fear it has seriously perverted my "high style"), the penultimate would be ready early next week for my final inspection & then it would be only a matter of a week or ten days for binding & so on. The people who are doing the typesetting also do it for half the tabloids in Mtl.... (it would be delightful if they got a few pages mixed

up), & I'm sure they're not evading me, since they (and he) won't get their money till the thing is printed; it's just a matter of pressure of business. It would, of course, be nice to catch the college trade before universities vacate for the summer, but in my experience students don't do much buying or reading of non-essential books during the last month of exams (& the first of spring), anyhow. At all events, I'm so tired of re-reading my own poems & making niggling changes (for euphony or accuracy) in them that it will be a good ten years before I'll want to see them again. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it took all November & December to get them in shape, chosen & typed up, & now it's taken all winter to get them published.

I decided to follow your (and everybody else's) advice about the book's title & call it *Path of Snow*, so you can advertise it as such. Titles aren't really that important, anyhow. Henry Beissel suggested a bilingual one: *Si tu vois mons pays / God Save the Queen* (as the closest English emotional equivalent), but I regretfully had to drop the idea as frivolous, though it has its charms. As for the quotes you wanted I have 4 which you might use; each is authentic & I can authenticate it.

1) John Robert Colombo: "Some excellent poems and very high moments. The new Walt Whitman, celebrating his New Orleans (read Brazilian) lovers. Garrulous. Needed a peanut butter sandwich." (You may retain or dispense with the last part of this, as you please. E.A.L.)

2) Irving Layton: "Just misses being good.... Nostalgia is his predominant sentiment. Relies heavily on the iamb—suitable for the expression of a faded romantic sensibility, but not for anything contemporary. Still he dresses his FRS in seeming modern verse, but the wasting flesh shows through...." Considering Layton's own highly derivative romanticism—see Woodcock—I think this opinion is hilarious, though not completely unfounded. E.A.L. (This is a comment on *The Forms of Loss*.)

3) Alan Pearson (whoever he is), writing in *Tamarack Review*, Spring 1966, pp. 86-87: "When I read *The Forms of Loss* by E. A. Lacey I thought it was written by a woman. [Certain] lines...can be downright confusing.... As it happens, Lacey is male, a fact that becomes clear in 'Oneiro-mancy', a poem ostensibly dealing with his penchant for fellatio. The poems provide a neon-flash glimpse into the world of the invert and the motorcycle set, and are interesting for just that reason." (Notice how the bastard hedges himself against a libel suit with that adverb "ostensibly," concerning a poem which is not in the least about *my* penchant for fellatio—which I'm not in the least ashamed, but which the poem couldn't pos-

sibly concern, unless Pearson thinks I'm about 80 years old & habitually write of myself in the third person plural—E.A.L.)

4) From "Letters in Canada, 1965," University of Toronto Quarterly, July 1966, p. 44 (I don't know who wrote this rather reasonable review—whoever was Poetry Editor for L. in C. for 1965, I guess; would it have been Milton Wilson?): "Pity is...a ground-note in the writing of E.A. Lacey.... A few of the poems in *The Forms of Loss*...are elegies on death, but the loss most lamented is the loss of innocence. He writes with pity and tenderness of children and teenagers, and particularly of 'a year, a few months, between boyhood and adolescence.' He writes with pity and horror of the world after the fall, a sexual world of pick-ups, blue jeans and black jackets. At times the atmosphere is close to that of John Recky's [*sic*] *City of Night*, and love of any kind appears as a violation, an awakening to rapacity and 'the lovely contours of ruin.' Lacey has an ear for the dying fall, and the sweet but grave cadences of his verse convey the note of mourning in a touching but facile manner. His best poems are those few in which, as in the sonnet 'Orpheus,' he finds a definite image to objectify emotion."

Well, these 4 should give you enough to play around with (cutting them, of course, as I have already done in part), along with anything that you can cull from the Fulford review, which I don't have, & anything Dennis Lee might care to say....

"Canadian Bards and South American Reviewers"

Northern Journey 4 (1974)

I left Canada in 1959, when the beat generation was just beginning to expand its influence beyond the West Coast of the U.S., and General Eisenhower was still American president. The Hungarian revolt, the second Israeli-Arab war, and the McCarthy witch-hunts were a recent memory. Acid was something you spilled on your best shirt during chem. lab., and dope was called weed or tea (everyone was curious about it, but no one had tried it). Pope John XXIII had barely set about dismantling the Roman Catholic church, John Kennedy was still a rich young senator, Vietnam was a distant place, somewhere in Asia, where some peace accords signed a few years earlier didn't seem to be working out particularly well. Biafra and Bangladesh and the Sahel were names yet to be thrown up on the shores of the sea of language, and stand-ins and sit-ins were the thing to participate in (if you were a white student, of course, and we were all white students at that time) to show your commitment to the cause of "racial

equality” in the southern (never the northern U.S.A., John Diefenbaker was Prime. Minister of Canada and had pledged us to a “Northern Vision” which most Canadians thought was just the aurora borealis or reflections from his spectacles: Layton, Dudek, and Souster had finally made it as the “in” names of Canadian poetry, dethroning A.J.M. Smith, Robert Finch, Roy Daniells, and the like, and Maurice Duplessis was still the Premier of Quebec.

During the intervening years, except for a short eight-month hibernation in 1963-65 in Deadmonton (a “city” not especially suited to putting one in tune with the new vibrations emanating from the youth culture) and a couple of very brief visits home on family business, I have worked and travelled outside Canada, most of the time in what are usually called “underdeveloped” or “Third World” countries. This has meant, in essence, that the revolution of the ‘60s in all its aspects—social, pharmaceutical, utopian, anti-bellucist, neo-agrarian, communal, sexual, generational, musical, sartorial, linguistic, monetary, you name them—passed me by completely. The situation in the countries where I lived was in some respects so liberated that no revolution was necessary; in others, so medieval or repressive that none was possible, while in many of these pre-industrial regions the peculiar vices and problems of a post-industrial society and the need to rebel against it simply didn’t exist. Examples would be otiose; my purpose here is not to write an essay on developing countries. I simply wish to make clear that I am almost *wholly* a product of the Silent Generation, the Furtive Fifties, and, forced for personal reasons to return to Canada at the beginning of 1973 and to remain here more or less since then, I feel as though I had returned to an alien planet, or passed through a time warp and awakened in the year 2073.

Again, my purpose here is not to detail the changes I’ve found; those my age and younger (and many of the older, too) know all about them, especially those of you who, while carefully preserving the appearances and rules of the game, have withdrawn into a sort of parallel universe. The know-nothings still fight a rearguard action, especially in the small towns of Victorian backwaters like Canada, but, at least in the cities and in the minds of the young, the victories have been won, the battles are over—that is, in fact, why now, in the Silent Seventies, activism is dead. It is no longer needed. Two steps forward and one back; we may regress, but nothing will ever return to be quite as it was. Now I have completed the business that has kept me in Canada and am about to leave this great round pond again for the lands of real poverty, real suffering, and real people; and it occurred to someone on the staff of *Northern Journey* that it would be interesting to

have me, with my 1959 expatriate's viewpoint, review some of the poetry of the '60s and '70s before I go. I have, at various times during the past decade, reviewed different volumes of Canadian poetry, but always distinctly from the outsider's standpoint; now I am both there and here. Not wishing to fit my material into any conceptual strait-jacket so as to produce a "thesis" or an "essay," but rather simply desiring to pass judgment on as many books of poetry as possible in the space at my disposal and to indicate why I did or did not like them, I resolved, for lack of a better organizing system, to start with the older, established poets—the ones, now over the hill, who were on top or climbing the slopes when I was still around—and thus, proceed, by degrees, to the newer ones—reserving most space for these latter, since they get reviewed proportionately less, and less seriously.

Lovers and Lesser Men (McClelland and Stewart, 1973, 109 pp) is Irving Layton's 20th, or 22nd, or maybe 222nd book of poetry. Who can remember? Though established, Mr. Layton can truthfully claim (as, naturally, he does, with characteristic braggadocio, in one of the poems here: "I have only one establishment in mind: / That run by Homer and Shakespeare") that he has never joined the Establishment. Rather, the Establishment has come to him, brought round not so much by his poetic talent as by the changing mores of our era, which made him "titillating" before they made him passé. Certainly, Mr. Layton has not mellowed, or "yellowed"; in fact (perhaps the severest criticism one can level against him), except for aging and becoming aware of it, he doesn't seem to have altered or developed at all in the last thirty years. One must never forget the vexations Mr. Layton had to suffer in the bad old days of the 40s and 50s in his battle for poetry and free speech—the volumes published at his own expense, the books removed from shelves by prudish librarians, the critical neglect or superciliousness, the difficulty in finding teaching positions (facts of which he himself is constantly reminding us in this book of great length in a dreadful but amusing diatribe called "A Letter to No One in Particular"). For his ice-breaking role, everyone writing in Canada today should be profoundly grateful. It is he, in very large measure, who has made it possible for us to say and write what we now dare say and write what we now dare say and write (if you disagree, and give all the credit to the sexual revolution and Unitedstatesian authors and influences, then take a look at Australian or South African literature and judge for yourselves). We should be even more grateful for his poetry, of course; it is axiomatic that he is, and will be remembered as, the greatest poet Canada has yet produced (unless, of course, Romania claims him¹⁰, as she well could, under the rules of the Canlit game).

III

For all that, it's a little pathetic that the Establishment *has* come to him, and that the '60s *have* given us all such freedom of expression. Victory must taste bitter to him; now that everything he has to say can be said, and heard by everyone, what does he have to say that all the younger poets around him, like a chorus of frogs, aren't croaking out with less wisdom and wit but with the invincible vigour of youth? Time's revenge, or, as he himself would put it: "Wisdom is the decay of youth / but youth has no need of wisdom / being wise in its own fashion." In other words, Mr. Layton has had his day, and he knows it: the operative words in this volume are no longer only "lovely," "sun," and "castrato" but also "joyless," "grey," and "old." One can argue, it is true, that he has always alternated, in an authentically manic-depressive pattern, between the joyous and the bleak, and it is easy to find essentially the same rapidly shifting moods as far back as "Vexata Quaestrio" or "To the Girls of My Graduating Class." But the balance between the moods has also shifted here; Mr. Layton is no mellow, but he is a sadder man. And a less inspired poet. When I recall the state of excitement in which I used to devour his books of poetry and anticipate the appearance of new ones during the 50's, when I remember the chill that ran down my spine on first reading poems such as "The Birth of Tragedy," "The Bull Calf," "Poet of a Distant Time," "Street Funeral," "Song for a Late Hour," "Cat Dying in Autumn" and many others, long and short, I too am saddened that I cannot summon up the excitement or the chill for *Lovers and Lesser Men*.

Does the fault lie in Mr. Layton or in me? In both, no doubt. I can no longer respond to poetry as I did in adolescence, and Mr. Layton no longer writes as well as he did during the "high period" leading up to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (with a later, lesser peak around *Periods of the Moon* and *The Shattered Plinths*.) At all events, as in every Layton book, we have here the finely-crafted good poems, the flawed, careless, almost-good ones, and the vituperative bad ones. As for his modes (and moods), they are also familiar: hymns to life ... excursions into classical antiquity—many of these poems were written in Greece ... epigrams and "punch-line" poem ... erotica ... viciously sexist, half-baked "Philosophy" about women... father-and-son poems ... youth-and-age meditations ... misanthropic reflections on human greed, cruelty, and hatred of joy ... and, above all, Mr. Layton's lifelong quarrel with God and religion, poetry and poets (too many titles to mention).

All these categories of course overlap. And none of them is new. Nothing is, in this volume, except the sadness. I thought the best poems (many of which, you'll note, don't fit so easily into the above schematization)

were the moving tribute to Rupert Brooke (“quit of phony accent, the mannered phrase, your hangup / with language and beauty comes through—the poet’s / timeless eponym none can fake or erase”), the brilliant recreation “I think of Ovid,” “An Aubade,” “No Exit” (about fish and the mystery of life and death), “The Cockroach” (a romantic love-story, worth comparing with Mr. Birney’s equally amusing cockroach poem—is this a fashion developing?), “The Terrorist,” “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” (again about fish and life and death), “A Walk to Chora,” “Magic” (once more on fish; the poet says “See this red snapper? Its fins once moved / in blithe sea-currents / now / I’m gong to eat it and turn it into shit,” to which his young son comments “It’s a kind of / magic, isn’t it Dad?”),¹¹ and “A Tale with Teeth in It” (a delightful narrative on human greed). That’s ten good poems, at least, out of 85—a respectable average. I shall not comment on the bad poems; they are bad for precisely the same reason as all Mr. Layton’s previous bad poems have been bad, and criticism of them serves no useful purpose, as has been abundantly proved in the past. Love me, love my warts, says the poet, and in his method of composition, the failures are probably necessary so that he can keep on turning out the good things. I should like instead to point out a few facets of Mr. Layton’s poetry which seem to me to be relevant.

1) Mr. Layton is the most religious of poets, as close to God as he is remote from and intolerant of all manmade organized religions. He wrestles with God, praises him and rails against him...as no one but a Talmudic scholar or Emily Dickinson has ever done.

2) Years ago, in an American magazine, I was astonished to come on an article which dismissed Mr. Layton’s poetry as being “cold.” However, I think I now know what the reviewer meant. Mr. Layton professes to love life in the abstract, but he certainly shows precious little fondness for humanity, either collectively, with its “dreams / of religious exaltation and buggery,” its “schemes / for profit and cuckoldry,” or individually, except for his wife and children and a few (constantly changing) female sexual objects. Like Robertson Jeffers, a poet of whom he reminds me more and more as he grows old, he seems to prefer nature and inanimate objects to mankind. I would classify his attitude, however, as “arrogant” rather than “cold”.

3) Rather similarly, Mr. Layton professes to love poetry, but certainly hates most other (living) poets (he himself is one of his “necrophiles”); he has good words only for Shakespeare, Ovid, Virgil, and others who are safely dead), as well as all critics and reviewers—an impossible, schizophrenic division. You can’t separate the two. Poetry is written by, not

through, poets. And critics and reviewers no doubt also have their place in the divine scheme of things. I for one am tired of this attitudinizing: not just the scurrilous and stupid attacks, lacking even his habitual wit, against other Canpoets in the unspeakable “Poetry as the Fine Art of Pugilism,” or the obtuse and vulgar remarks on Yeats and Eliot in the equally bad “The Baroness” or Hopkins in “Economy, Please, Toronto.” I resent just as much the sneering, nonsensical generalizations about poets’; behaviour.... The question one asks immediately is—What’s the matter with this man? What has gone wrong with his mind? Has his relative wealth and fame given him no rest, that he feels the psychological need of pummelling straw men in this manner? Mr. Layton stands revealed as the jealous, rageful sickie, revealed by the evidence of all twenty-odd of his books, from only one of which I’m quoting here. All his storming is just a mask for the fear he expresses in one Leonard Cohenish poem, “The Silence”: “Now I have nothing to say / to anyone.” Let him get on with his business of writing about sun or sex or life or cruelty or whatever he pleases and stop lambasting other poets—as though the world had room for only one poet and that one poet’s name were Irving Layton—before he becomes obsessed. It is only at the end of *Lovers and Lesser Men* that he calms down and speaks slightly more objectively and sensibly about poets and poetry in “Love’s Philosophy” and “For Max”.

4) Mr. Layton has never resolved one of the ambivalences in his concept of poetry—is it a lie, or is it the ultimate truth?... Mr. Layton has long tormented himself, debating this question, and of course he isn’t the only poet to do so. One thinks of Pessoa’s description of himself as such a liar that when he thought he was lying he was actually telling the truth, and John Newlove has a whole recent volume of poets out exploring the theme.¹²

5) Mr. Layton relies heavily on iambic pentameter—suitable for the expression of a faded romantic sensibility, but not for anything contemporary. Still, he dresses his FRS in seemingly modern verse, but the wasting flesh shows through.¹³

6) If I were to choose the line from this volume best embodying his world-view, it would be “The pricks change but the arse remains the same” (“The World”).

7) Mr. Layton, not Callaghan, is the Canadian Hemingway. He is also the Canadian Dos Passos.

In contrast to Mr. Layton’s weary anger, the latest offering by that other old geezer, Earle Birney, *what’s so big about green?* (McClelland and Stewart, 1973, unnumbered), is an explosion of energy and verbal pyro-

technics. Birney, like Layton, doesn't seem to have developed too much: the linguistic inventiveness and experimentation, the delight in nature and landscape and travel, the curiosity about other human beings and what makes them tick, the sense of the doom and blight of our civilization—these were present in his poetry, at least embryonically, from the outset. But whereas Layton has grown strident and ossified and old, Birney has remained young and resilient in attitudes and language. A sharp, curious split runs through this volume. The first (not quite) half consists of poems set in and dealing with Canada, and they are as grim and misanthropic as anything Layton could write (though far wittier, more tightly constructed and more vigorous): expressions of revulsion against mankind and “civilization,” prophecies of eco-doom. Only the book's opening poem is a simple paean to nature and the rising sun. The title poem (and its smaller version “the shapers: vancouver”) is a profoundly pessimistic presentation of the progress of life as disease or cancer.... The nihilism and despair of this troubled, troubling, and extremely cleverly written ecological tract once more cannot but bring to mind Robinson Jeffers and his worship of stone and inanimate nature.... “I accuse us” is directed solely at Canadians and is that rare bird, a good angry witty political poem, putting most of the anaemic stuff written on the Vietnamese war by younger writers to shame. Not since Frank Scott has anyone flailed us more mercilessly, and not since Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* has anyone caught our defects—our hypocrisy, our money-lust, our mugwumpism, our lack of identity, our colonial mentality, our “dynamic apathy,” more accurately. This is an extremely valuable and important poem (especially for our “statesmen,” like the ineffable Mitchell Sharp, if they would read it, if they could read it, if they could read. But it's still damn depressing. Fortunately, at this point, the split occurs, the poet goes travelling (thank God for the Canada Council sometimes!), and the poetry turns lively and joyous—travel poetry at its best. It's amazing what just escaping from Canada for a little while and visiting a few real places can do for a body!...

The Australian poems, which are not the least interesting in the book, centre around a curious, long, engrossing narrative called “the gray wood exploding.” The “place” of this poem in the book's plan is not very clear. It is a sort of anti-“David,” of similar length and somewhat similar narrative technique; the hero in this case is a young man who, after all sorts of knocking about and blows to his idealism, is going to commit suicide—by jumping over a tremendous cliff—and does not. Probably Mr. Birney included it because he thought it was a good story. Which it is, and an expertly told one, too, displaying, under the surface, his ecological inter-

ests and worries once more. But then, these are all marvellously good poems; it's difficult to choose the best. The book, improbably, shows Mr. Birney, at the age of 70, at the peak of his poetic powers. I hope he will have many more years in which to beguile us with the product of them. This is a book which I urge young poets to buy—for pleasure and for what they can learn from it about the uses and effects of language. As well as for the lessons in ecology. P.S. The drawings are charming.

I'm going to review *Between Tears and Laughter* (Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1971, 119 pp), even though it is three years old, both because I think it is an excellent collection of poems and because I have always admired Alden Nowlan's work and wanted to write about it. Rereading the book's 110 poems now, in such close proximity in time to Irving Layton's most recent volume, I am struck first of all by how much the two poets resemble each other. Let me clarify. One, this is intended as a compliment to both. Two, there is certainly no imitation and probably little influence involved here, merely a coincidence of temperaments and outlook. Three, Mr. Nowlan is never either so bad or so good as Mr. Layton: his poems are written with much greater care and he'd never be guilty of some of the lapses of style and taste to be found in *Lovers and Lesser Men*. Nor is he abusive and scatological; he lacks the older poet's instinct for the jugular. At the same time, Mr. Nowlan has never reached or tried for the grand, tragic effects Mr. Layton sometimes brings off; the Maritime temperament is closely akin to that of New England, and Mr. Nowlan's forte is a sometimes highly effective reticence, control, and use of understatement and the conversational tone, whatever the topic under discussion. Clinically speaking, his highs are never so high nor his lows so low as Mr. Layton's. Withal, at times Alden Nowlan sounds very like a gentler, sweeter-tempered Irving Layton.

Looking closely, we discover in his poetry a misanthropy and fascination with human perversity and cruelty very similar to the older poet's, only more muffled.... The first thing to be observed is how much more effective Mr. Nowlan's muted tone often is than Mr. Layton's angry shout. Next, how skilful Mr. Nowlan is at digging out the reality beneath the appearances, the wildness under the seemingly mundane in life. It is precisely that quality which makes his poetry so frightening at times; he possesses a psychologist's ability for making us aware just what larcenies and evils lurk beneath our own and others' smiling exteriors. Here is, I think, one of the major themes of Mr. Nowlan's poetry (and in this he joins company with the distinguished ranks of the New England psychological poets and novelists, such as Hawthorne, Henry James, Emily Dickinson, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, etc.)—the mystery,

inviolability, and unknowableness of the “other,” even of the “self,” and the impossibility of any real communication among human beings. Again and again his poetry probes and comments on these facts, hurls itself up against the barriers that separate us. The book begins with the lines “How little we know / one another, ever,” followed by a couple of illustrations of that statement, and ends with a mysterious nightmare which is a perfect metaphor for non-communication: “The village has been transformed / into an island and there will never be / another boat to the mainland.”...

Mr. Nowlan, though he seems, or pretends, to be a “local poet” in the same manner as Raymond Souster does (our literary landscape is littered with these pseudo-“village-idiot” poets; Al Purdy was, until recently, another of them), and I shall later be reviewing a promising new one, Sid Marty), and though he patently loves his native province and its small towns and his Coasters...is actually the eternal outsider, the stranger, not quite at home anywhere.... Nature is not the consolation to him that it was to many of the transcendentalist-influenced New England poets; here, too, he feels himself a tenant, uneasily living on borrowed land. “This land is not ours / and the land on which its sets / belongs to the ants.”...

Another element which Mr. Nowlan shares with Mr. Layton is fantasy. Both of them have a long history of writing semi-surrealist and dream poems. Many of Mr. Nowlan’s fantasy poems are pure fun and play, another kind of attempt to strip the ordinariness from life and show its richness and strangeness.... The darker side of his fantasy, however, displays itself in a startling series of nightmare poems, dealing with unnameable obsessions, split personality, loss of identity, paralysis, symbols such as executions and approaching trains, the omnipresent spirit world and all the other horrors that flap their wings around the dreamer. I have seen this sort of fantasy expressed in painting, but never before so well done in poetry.... The emotion in these poems is genuine (as the emotion in all Mr. Nowlan’s poems is); the courage and honesty shine through. Mr. Nowlan has been there and has, like Lazarus, come back to give us his message. The authenticity and authority of this group of poems...make most poems I’ve read on the subject of death sound like the lovesick whining of adolescents.

Mr. Nowlan, like Mr. Layton, is a religious poet.... The two poets share a fondness for classical mythology and the Graeco-Roman world; Mr. Nowlan is also obviously well-read on ancient Egypt. But, as I’ve mentioned, it’s basically the strangeness beneath the familiar world of appearances, and the peculiar way in which the seemingly significant and the seemingly insignificant, the supernatural and the “real,” interpenetrate and are inextricably intertwined, that forms the subject matter of much of his

poetry. Style is important here, too. The nightmare poems derive much of their chilling effect from the calm, matter-of-fact tone in which terrible or impossible events are related. . . . Nobody is what he seems, nothing is what it seems, life is a shifting ground but continues always triumphant in its mingled banality and wonderfulness and horror—this would seem to be the message we are to take from the subtle yet simple poetry of Alden Nowlan. Deliberately limiting himself to a casual tone, low-key effects, a short line (two-stress is his favourite) and little ornamentation, he is an extremely accomplished and perfectly successful poet within the limits he, like his tiger, has set himself. Now I would like to see him, like Mr. Layton, try to burst beyond them. But given his temperament and tradition, that would probably be like asking Emily Dickinson to write an epic.

“He is a gifted poet—with the gift of energy.” (Phyllis Webb on George Bowering). Yes, energy to spare, but what else? Well, pomposity, for one thing; I have long thought Mr. Bowering to be one of the most unbearably pretentious of Canadian poets (including Mr. Layton, who is simply an egotist, sometimes rhetorical and sometimes silly, but rarely pompous). At any rate, I have here two items for review from the energumen, one mediocre and one rather evil. Let’s look at the mediocre one first. *In the Flesh* (McClelland and Stewart, 1974, 112 pp) is a collection of “magazine verse written after I turned thirty.” . . .

Of course, Mr. Bowering is not at all my kind of poet. I consider the whole West Coast minimalist movement from which he and the other Tish-poets sprang to be, not only non-Canadian, but basically non-poetic, a cul-de-sac for minor poets who can’t write in any other way and eventually all end up writing in the same monosyllabic words. I deplore both the “poetry” and the influence of Creeley-Duncan-Olson and the other American minimalists, above all the stuttering near-aphasia they have produced in the works of their devotees. I think Robert Duncan’s visit to Vancouver in 1959 or 1960 or whenever¹⁴ the most disastrous event for this country’s independence since the Reciprocity Agreement of 1911 and would have him and all his accomplices in the conspiracy against poetry barred from this country in person or in print, forever, as literary subversives. For me poetry means and needs rhetoric and ornament (sure, even alliteration and end-rime and stanzas, not Mr. Bowering’s so-called rimes that are so “slant” and so hidden that, by the law of probability, they could be pure statistical accident and were probably discovered by the poet after he had written them, anyhow) and simile (yes, George!) And metaphor (though not too much of it; when it runs wild it can become a weed) and lots of redundancy, rodomontade, and polysyllabic Latinate words tossed around.

The Anglo-Saxon strippedness of most Black Mountain poetry, its *reductio ad absurdum* of the Wordsworth-Coleridge proposition, its constant returning to the old simplistic clichés of imagism—all this produces in me the effects of emotional starvation. So I expected little nourishment when I began to read *In the Flesh*, and the first few poems certainly bore out my expectations.

Even aside from the flat unexciting imprecise language, lacking any reverberations, connotations, or imagery, the poems sounded to me like the product of someone far older than Mr. Layton or Mr. Birney or, for that matter, Walter Savage Landor—a sort of cross between Raymond Souster and Eli Mandel at their respective grimmest. Poem after poem dismally chronicles encroaching age and its disillusionments and dissolutions, Mountains become hills, skin, nails, hair fall off and out, teeth decay and break.... And then, stunningly, a long (12-page), wandering, Whitmanesque exploration of Mr. Bowering's youth, birth, and origins, called "Stab," which is completely different from and superior to all the other poems in the book. This mysterious and beautiful poem would be the only—and sufficient reason for buying or reading *In the Flesh*, and I must say it annoys me considerably to think that, when Mr. Bowering is capable of writing with such grace, delicacy, and sensitivity, he does it so seldom.... Whenever Mr. Bowering is good, it's interesting how little he sounds like his mentors and how much like "Song of Myself".

So much for the mediocre book. Now

LISTEN GEORGE THE WAY YOU ARE WRITING IN *CURIOUS* (The Coach House Press, 1973, unnumbered) today you write the way Gertrude Stein wrote fifty years ago George it's curious the way you write the way Gertrude Stein wrote or nonwrote fifty years ago today but that's the way it is today you write in 1973 the way Gertrude Stein didnt in 1923 dont you George trying to find the way to write today in your way in her way in a way its curious youre curious Im curious George &

LISTEN GEORGE I REALLY THINK IT IS POSSIBLE FOR SOMEONE TO BE STUPID & STILL WRITE the occasional good poem because after all poetry is not all intelligence it is also "hard work done under stress & at great personal cost" & some of it even inspiration & you must either work hard "under stress & at great personal loss" or be inspired because youve written a few good poems & I don't think youre very intelligent George &

LISTEN GEORGE whatever Mr. Fulford may have written in his review I don't agree that poets are or should be a "family" or know each other

well at all except in rare cases of collaboration that usually end up in quarrels & enmities anyhow & above all I don't think that poets should write poems about other poets like you do its all so incestuous somehow & when it isnt backpatting its backbiting & I thought we had got away from all that from Irving Layton penning broadsides against AJM Smith & AJM Smith writing elegant classical ripostes against Irving Layton & so on ad infinitum & it was all so boring to those of us on the outside who just wanted to read good poetry but here youve gone and started up the whole thing again & some of your poems are eulogistic & some are nasty but mostly theyre just boring & if we are going to be a family lets at least try to be an amicable one George &

LISTEN GEORGE I REALIZE THIS IS LESE MAJESTY BECAUSE AFTER ALL YOU WON THE GUV GIN'S Award didnt you George & thats an award given in the name of Elizabeth Secunda Dei Gratia Regina & you didnt turn it down like Leonard Cohen did you George but thats alright George we forgive you we realize how much Westerns like you and Wafflebaker¹⁵ care about royalty & the Dominion & Commonwealth ties & the IODE & especially B.C.ers like you & Robin Mathews &

LISTEN GEORGE AS I SAID MOST OF THE "POEMS" IN *CURIOUS* ARE JUST BORING BUT A FEW ARE vicious & offensive for example your poem on Irving Layton is far more obtuse & juvenile than Irving Layton at his most obtuse & juvenile & you forgot everything that Layton has done for Canadian poetry & your poem on Louis Dudek is obtuse & cruel & untrue and you forget everything that Dudek has done for Canadian poetry but thats natural enough because you really arent a Canadian poet at all George neither you nor any of your friends all your influences came & come from the West Coast of the great United Snakes & the whole bunch of you are just a bunch of fellowtravellers to the holy Black Mountain &

LISTEN GEORGE ITS ALL RIGHT FOR YOU TO PICK ON AUDEN & SPENDER & GUNN AS THE ENEMY in a literary sense but its another thing to pick on a poet in the personal sense especially a dead man & say of him "I hated him that no talent / easy work soft life faggot with his / witty insults" especially when the fact is that youll be lucky if someday you write even one poem as good as Auden's weakest & if posterity or contemporaneity for that matter considers you to be even one-hundredth the poet he was &

LISTEN GEORGE WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A POET IN THE FIRST PLACE WHO MADE YOU make the mistake why didnt

you just stay in the Air Force with your buddy-buddies there & you could have drunk beer & got into fights with them & avoided all this intellectual horseshit you hate so much & maybe you could have joined the American Air Force & become a bomber pilot & got sent to Vietnam & that way youd have had a lot more (permanent) influence on the lives of a lot more people than youll ever exercise as a poet & LISTEN GEORGE AUDEN & SPENDER & GUNN may be faggots & even carry handkerchiefs but George youre just too straight why its only recently that youve even begun to mention doing dope in your poetry now that everybodys doing it & its the thing to do why a few years ago you were all pristine innocence & beer busts youre just not with it George & next thing you know well all be gay & where will you be then George & Earle Birney may well seem to know less & less all the time but you knew nothing from the start & Margaret Avison may have despised the showoff poet but I bet she despises you just as much & who gives a fuck whether you ever did or do or didnt carry a handkerchief anywhere George & when I told a friend of mine that I was going to write this review & call you an intellectual hardhat he said fine man but don't pay the guy such a compliment he isnt an intellectual &

LISTEN GEORGE COULD YOUR REAL NAME MAYBE BE...JOE?

After Mr. Bowering, it is a pleasure to be able to review something like *Northern Comfort* (Commoners' Press, 1973, 88 pp), which is, to quote its subtitle, "a reading of poetry by various people, given in the back yard of the Victoria Hotel, 18 Murray Street, the Byward Market, Ottawa, on the evening of June 29th, 1972." That's nearly two years ago, and one wonders what has happened to the various poets and would-be poets and members of the audience who recited and rapped and clowned around on that boisterous evening. Nothing in this book is sensational (except maybe the poems by Yeats, Kenneth Parthen, Olson, and—by telephone—George Johnson, but they're hardly original contributors); some of the poems read are downright awful; I myself found Robert Hogg (inevitably!) Black-Mountain-style poetry interesting, but I liked that of Marius Kociejowski best. However, the point I'm trying to make is that *this* is the kind of relationship that should exist among poets—free, casual, bantering, and friendly, instead of literary vendettas and internecine family wares. I myself am not at all in favour of poetry readings, in part because I am archaic enough to consider poetry to be as much a visual as an auditory art. Nor, as I've mentioned earlier, do I think it a good idea for poets to get to know too many other poets too intimately. The job of a poet is to perceive

life and to write poetry, and for that he should not dwell in too rarefied an atmosphere; he should rub shoulders and be friends with all kinds of men, not just his fellow poets, and, above all, not academics. Most important, poets should maintain a certain healthy ignorance of exactly how the creative process works for them (though at the same time they will probably have sounder intuitions into how it works than the critics ever will). When poets get together, they—being all as vain as peacocks—tend to gossip and put each other down, and that’s dangerous; they also tend to talk shop and become inbred and ascribe more importance to their art than it really has in daily existence, and that’s even more dangerous. Know your fellow men first, and only afterwards your fellow poets. But if poets must get together and communicate, I’d prefer to see them do it in the light-hearted, enthusiastic spirit of *Northern Comfort*, rather than in the heavy, poisonous manner of *Curious*.

I have not read or reviewed a book by Frank Davey since *Bridge Force*, to which I did not exactly give accolades; I found the poems in it insipid, unstructured, and generally as soggy and depressing as the B.C. climate. I can now make amends. *The Clallam* (Talonbooks, 1973, unnumbered) is the story of the break-up and sinking in January 1904 of a small steamer ferryboat which ran between Port Townsend, Washington and Victoria, B.C., and the death by drowning of some fifty Canadian passengers and crewmen, because of the American captain’s criminal negligence.... Basing its narrative organization loosely on “goddamn Ned Pratt” and his “Titanic,” this bitterly ironic poem is, however, a deliberate send-up of both Pratt’s heroic style and the belief in Western man’s manifest destiny which infuses not only all Pratt’s poetry but the whole Unitedstatesian mystique and way of life. And it is heart-rending. The appalling subject matter is made even more terrible by the author’s use of understatement. The poem is short enough to read through in half an hour, but anyone who has not been so dehumanized by the violence of our era that he cannot respond to suffering will not soon forget it. The pathos resides not so much in what Mr. Davey says as in what he chooses not to say, cutting the inessentials away until only that which is most evocative and stark remains, and in his perfect use of the vernacular conversational/reportorial tone....

For once, Mr. Davey’s technique is here the correct one, and with *The Clallam* West Coast minimalism has produced a small masterpiece. I cavil at only one detail. It makes no doubt for a very dramatic and emotionally satisfying conclusion to write “The ship American / the builder American / the captain American / the survivors American.” But is it fair? Of course, those were the facts, and Mr. Davey has warned us that he does not intend

to be objective. But he knows that greed is a human vice and that imperialism and disregard for the lives of “inferior races” or citizens of “inferior countries” are human characteristics, not simply Unitedstatesian ones. After all, what *were* all those Canadians doing in the U. S. that particular Christmas, anyhow? Visiting relatives or working, probably—B.C. Has always looked south rather than east. However, this is a political rather than a poetic consideration, and it is probably unjust of me to bring it up in this context, since I consider *The Clallam* one of the best-made, most moving short narrative poems I have ever read. I recommend it heartily to all who care for good poetry.

And now, th skul, or th skool or th skule or whatever it calls itself, namely bill bissett n frens.¹⁶ As a linguist I am naturally annoyed and amused by this sort of demented fiddling with English orthography. Why don't these poets simply come out and write their poems in either the IPA or, more practical, one of the excellent phonemic alphabets for English devised by the Unitedstatesian descriptivists of the '40s and '50s? Complete with suprasegmentals, of course (though that would interfere to a certain extent with the reader's freedom of choosing among possible alternate stress patterns and would end some of the fruitful ambiguities of poetry). But why, oh why, do mr. bissett n croo assume, for example, that “the” has no vowel and “people” has one in the second syllable, whereas it's actually “the” which possesses a schwa vowel and “people” which has only a syllabic lingual consonant? Why “peopul” instead of “peepul,” and why “peopul” and “purpul” but “eternal”? Why is “do” “dew” but “you” “yu”? And so on and on. Isn't it a fact that there is no system at all at work here, and that this is just a rather adolescent attention-getting device? To be sure, it's no more juvenile than some of Shaw's or e. e. cummings' linguistic quirks, and I quite understand the point mr. bissett is trying to make—don't pay attention to how my poetry is spelled, pay attention to what it says. I have read pomes in which mr. bissett did indeed seem to have something to say, and I hope I shall again in the future, but I regret to report that in *Dragon Fly* (Weed/Flower Press, 1971, unnumbered) the spelling is practically all thee is to pay attention to. I began the poem by accident on the third rather than the first page, and so read it half backwards, and then in sequence, and, either way, it is sheer unadulterated blithering stoned dithyrambic nonsense. The man is certainly in love with words, but verborrhea is not poetry. Only one statement in the poem makes sense to me, and it sums up beautifully what peopul like this are trying to do to language: “forget th dialectick th dialectick forgot yu.” When one confronts mr. bissett's ravings with the exquisite lyricism of Joyce's or Burroughs's stream-

of-consciousness and spliced or cut-up segments, one sees how far “writing” has degenerated in our post-verbal, mass-media-zonked age.

When I read bertrand lachance’s *cock tales* last year, I shuddered. Not only a member of th skul (with some slight dialectal differences; mr. lachance writes “yur,” for example, while mr. bissett spells it “yr”) but an illiterate gay unpoet to boot—what had we done to deserve this? So I’m happy to be able to state that his latest (I guess) *Air 13* (of the *Air* series, of which there’ve apparently been eighteen up to the moment, a bryte raven production—whatever that is—put out in Vancouver in semi-magazine form, in plain inexpensive white-paper covers, costing a dollar or two each, each “book” or “issue” devoted to a single poet, six issues a year) is much better. Of the book’s twenty poems, four are in French, and it’s interesting to note how they differ from those in English. The French poems are conventionally “poetic,” even learned in language... with rimes and sometimes even stanzas, without any distortions of syntax or “phonetic” spellings (something to which French would, one would think, lend itself just as well as English; how about being consistent, bertrand, and writing “*le*” without the “*e*” and “*eau*” as “*o*”), full of “*pleurs*” and “*coeurs*” and “*pluie*” and echoes of the nineteenth-century romantics (one poem is even called “*d’après verlainé*”), and quite divorced from the mainstream of present-day French Canadian poetry. These contrast oddly, but not unpleasantly, in both form and contents, with the simple, almost inarticulate language, the lack of formalism, the modernness and the sexual explicitness of the poems in English. In both languages, however, the sweetness and lyricism, the patent need to love of mr. lachance’s character comes through. Certain of these pieces reminded me of Allen Ginsberg’s earlier, shorter, better poems.... A level lower, and they degenerate into the inane sentimentalities of Rod McKuen and popular-song lyrics.... (Strange how unspecific all such poetry is, despite the protests it makes about the uniqueness and individual, irreplaceable quality of the love object; yet we can never imagine what the loved one actually looks like; it’s all generalizations and an emotional haze). mr. lachance has a tendency to circular, obsessive repetition of words and phrases; sometimes, as in “all I want is i fuck you,” this is successful; other times, as in “union hall talk,” it isn’t...mr. lachance is certainly not likely to become a major poet, at this rate, but he has a fragile, genuine, developing talent.

Colleen Thibaudeau, to whom an enlarged (87 pp) omnibus number of *Air 14.15.16* is devoted, is extraordinarily unequal. In fact, I can’t quite decide whether she’s on the point of becoming good or whether she’s awful. She seems to flounder, without any fixed style of her own, in the

uncertain terrain between poetry and prose. There is a great deal of ancestor worship and looking for roots in this volume (complete with a whole album of suitably browned old portraits, but one does not, in justice, find here the poses or the cloying sentimentality of so much poetry; in fact, except in a few dreadful poems on children...she avoids many of the faults of traditional "female" poetry. But something is fundamentally wrong with her poetic vision; her language goes flat and prosaic at just the moment when one expects her to take lyrical flight. Nearly every poem is thus flawed; only occasionally does she manage a poem that is complete and satisfying in itself, like the sharp, simple "Liberate the Bears," or "isolation," one of those purely "prairie" terror-of-distance poems that people like John Newlove write.... Ms. Thibaudeau's poems seem to be jumbled together in no particular order or place.... This confusion and lack of any visible plan or development is compounded by hundreds of typographical errors (there is, in my copy, even a whole blank sheet, pp 69-70, supposedly containing the missing poem "my grand-daughters are combing out their long hair"), which the author seems to have decided, following the practice of certain Brazilian modernist poets, to incorporate into her text, since she bothers to correct only five of them in the list of errata at the end. But I think this is merely symptomatic of Ms. Thibaudeau's whole sloppy, slapdash, careless attitude toward her own writing. She badly needs discipline and a stern editor.... She certainly seems more at home in a sort of incantatory prose. Ms. Thibaudeau is obviously an intelligent, well-read, sensitive person. But her material, which is interesting and full of possibilities, appears to be beyond her technical control. Much of what is here is dross; the collection should have been carefully edited, most of the poems reworked, and the whole reduced to less than half the present size before publication. And I suspect that poetry is not Ms. Thibaudeau's true genre.

In *Air* 17, Catherine M. Buckaway has learned to do a couple of interesting things with haiku. She has realized first of all that, in a stress-counting language like English, it is absurd to limit haiku to 17 syllables—so hers have anywhere from eight to twenty. In effect, then, the haikyu becomes what it should be—a three-line imagist poem, as much of a blind alley as imagism itself was. Ms. Buckaway has also learned to string haiku together as stanzas, to form longer poems based on a set of related images. The effect is modest but novel, the poems are melodious and pleasant to read, the images and observations from nature are delicate, fresh, and appropriate, and in a few poems...she attains a clarity and precision almost worthy of H.D. But the end result is monotony. The stanzas and poems are all mere "instants of vision" and 120 such instants are a bit too much.

Something more is necessary—the human element. Ms. Buckaway has chastely avoided the more obvious dangers of anthropomorphizing nature, but one wearies of the constant emphasis on the prairie landscape (which she contemplates with no terror, only delight; the pastoral element alone in our ambivalent attitude toward nature is present here) and on natural phenomena. There are barely any farms, towns, cities, or even people, much less bodies, in these poems, and no consciousness of evil, death, or violence. This is another sort of minimalism, but the effect is oddly like a surfeit of Lampman. The poems are all uniformly five haiku (15 lines) long and eventually become as blurred and meaningless as the beautiful surrealist three-liners of J. Michael Yates and Andreas Schroeder. Ms. Buckaway has obvious descriptive talent and arranges her still-lives exquisitely; now she must see about breathing the spirit of life into them.

I find a similar static quality in the poetry of John Pass (*Air 18*). His are not imagist fragments, however, but still another set of travel pieces. How truly literature reflects the national character; had we no statistics whatsoever, we'd still be able to guess that Canadians are the world's champion tourists merely from examining the production of our poets. I wonder what percentage of "Canadian" poetry is now actually being written outside Canada. With the Canada Council's blessing, more than 50%, I'd wager. There's nothing inherently wrong with travel poetry, as the examples of Layton, Birney, Purdy, and many others of our nomads show, if the poems are informed with a real passion for (or against), and a real vision of the history or, the places and peoples being visited. (I would also add, as a rule of thumb, that if a poet is going to write seriously—more than an occasional poem or two, that is—about another country, he should know its language at least a little and have spent at least a year there.) Mr. Pass's travel poems, unfortunate, are, like Ms. Buckaway's haiku, well-arranged still-lives, meditations uninfused with emotion, as frozen as the sculptures and palaces and painting he writes about. And surely we don't need yet another bullfight poem.... [I]t is in the second half of his volume, where he turns to felt experiences with other people, that Mr. Pass comes half-alive. Even so, he's a reticent chap, with an almost Wallace-Stevenish hermeticism, and his poetry is sadly darkened by the Black Mountain shadow, the deputation unto extinction of imagery, emotion, and even language.... One longs for mr. lachance's sweaty intimacy.... Maybe the girl in "Tenderness" is right when she upbraids the author: "you're hurting me / you're in your own world".

Some years ago I was sent Joy Kogawa's *The Splintered Moon* to review, and I declined to do so, not because I found it positively bad, but

simply because it seemed to me so completely pedestrian and unexceptional that I would have had almost nothing to say about it. *A Choice of Dreams* (McClelland and Stewart, 1974, 95 pp) marks a considerable advance. Ms. Kogawa, like Ms. Buckaway, is essentially an imagist, but her images at least form part of a larger whole and move toward some insight or commentary on life, instead of existing in stasis in the void of her own beauty. Hers is minor, or, perhaps better, “small” poetry, but no less excellent for that; a perfect example, short enough to be quoted in full, of Ms. Kogawa’s sensitivity and technique is the little poem “Porcupine”:
“This is the way you are, Porcupine / I would wish you were otherwise / Gentle animal / Barricaded / Against my touch.”

Ms. Kogawa is in many respects a very modern poet; her favourite themes are the two most central to our times: alienation and the need for communication, and the cruelty of existence, both human and natural. As in the present case, the two themes are often found intertwined. Ms. Kogawa is Japanese-Canadian. Born in Vancouver and forced to move with her family to the Prairies in the shameful “evacuation” of the early days of World War II, she certainly has had enough experience of being alien.... Yet when she goes to Japan, seeking her roots (the ancestor poem, so common in Canadian literature, is merely the obverse side of a national sense of alienation), she is not at home either: when a man tries to pick her up on an Osaka street, or a drunk tries to communicate with her on a bus, she deliberately seeks refuge in English...that feeling of not belonging is a familiar, almost universal one in our times, and Ms. Kogawa is by no means alone in voicing it: because of her mixed background she does so more overtly and authentically than many other poets....

The Japanese poems of the first half of the book are the most deeply experienced and impressive, along with the childhood reminiscences; the love poems and dream poems that come later in the volume...are interesting but don’t come off nearly so well. Her defects? Like Swinburne, she is unable to decline an alliteration or an internal rime.... She should similarly try to resist her tendency to wordplay and puns (altogether / all together,” “weight, weight, I love you,” etc.) and the occasional poetic archaism.... She has a highly developed colour sense but uses, especially in the Japanese poems, perhaps too many adjectives; this may be, though, just the natural result of trying to communicate the discovery and strangeness of a new land. She shows several irritating mannerisms which seem always to crop up when imagists try to convey an impression of motion or to narrate—a plethora of present and past participles, most of them without any main clauses to hang them on, and a newspaper-headline style with nouns mod-

ifying other nouns and articles omitted... a turgidity utterly at variance with the delicacy of Ms. Kogawa's perceptions.

Another young poet of promise, especially considering that his two small volumes, *Shells* (Catalyst Press, 1972, unnumbered) and *Pantomime* (Catalyst Press, 1974, unnumbered), were published at the age of 19 and 21, respectively, is Wayne McNeil. His poetry possesses a rare, wistful, solipsistic quality, for which the word "shells" is the *mot juste*.... We find here the same confusion and gentleness as in Mr. Lachance's poetry, a sense of the fragility of existence... an obsession with light and darkness, candles and night, and with lovers and memories, an inner world cultivated as a defence against the cruelty of the outer... and at times an Alden-Nowlan-like nightmare fantasy.... Mr. McNeil can also write a fine formal traditional poem when he wishes, like "Letter," whose final stanza condenses masterfully the doubt and confusion of our era: "Now the past won't stay in place, / the future is drawing my fear, / on an ancestral shield we read / *aimer, travailler, souffrir*." A very talented and private young poet, of whom I think we are going to hear a lot.

Charles Tidler is a young American living at present in B.C., and his *Straw Things* (Crossing Press, 1972, 31 pp) shows many of the defects I have signalled in earlier parts of this review. Reading him, one is once more aware of the terrible harm the imagists, and particularly that minor poet William Carlos Williams, did to poetry in English.... But images and description, as in the case of Ms. Buckaway, are not enough, and a whole book of this sort of thing is no more interesting than a photograph album. Poetry is more than this.... I am not arguing for a return to the grand style and rhetoric of romanticism, not to the disciple of neo-formalism. And I find Mr. Tidler's kind of writing infinitely preferable to the barbaric yawp and verbal insanity of the Bill Bissetts and bpNichols, or the imageless, formless, almost lexiconless mumble of the stroke victims who have fallen prey to the Creeley-Duncan-Olson disease. I am merely stating that poetry has to do with the human condition, that it is commentary, an attempt at explanation or expiation, vision, pity, horror, meditation, mediation—any number of things beyond impassive diary jottings on nature. Mr. Tidler is a gardener (a very Japanese sort of profession; Orientalism seems to be big on the West Coast these days—naturally enough, I suppose), which I guess explains his predilection for plants and trees. But even so, these are characterless, "unsigned" poems; I've read thousands such already, and doubtless shall read thousands more before I die, and if you shuffled them all together and asked me whether they were the work of one author or various, I'd probably say "one." These poems, though technically competent

and often pleasant to read, bear almost no imprint of a distinct personality. And the days of communes—and communal poetry—are over. Moreover—something again that all younger poets need to have brought to their attention — poems must move to some sort of satisfactory conclusion, so that one can say: “That’s it; that’s precisely where and how this poem should have, was, from the beginning of time fated to have, ended—neither sooner nor later nor in any other fashion. The conclusion is, in fact, the most important part of the poem, I think. It is what remains and resonates longest in the reader’s mind. Too many of the poems here...just peter out, as though tired of themselves. I can’t really say I got to know Mr. Tidler very well; he’s a nice young fellow who gardens and plays the flute and has somehow, in the course of this book, managed to engender a son, and that’s about all I can tell you.... A slight little book.

An unusually gifted writer who also seems to be looking around for a style and a philosophy of existence is Sid Marty (*Headwaters*, McClelland and Stewart, 1973, 110 pp). Mr. Marty brings to poetry a variegated background: born in England, he was raised in Alberta, went to university in Montreal, and has worked for the last seven years as a park warden in the mountains of Alberta and B.C. I admit that his work is unique, quite different from any Canadian poetry I’ve yet read. But, though he has been praised in high places, the truth is, first, that he is still learning the craft of poetry (though he is by no means the naive backwoodsman he pretends to be). Second, his subject matter is rather limited, and 77 poems (over 100 pages) on the life of a park warden are rather numbing, the more so as Mr. Marty repeats his situations, incidents, and responses over and over. Let me illustrate. By my cursory count, at least 30 of these poems give prominent mention to horses, 20 to bears, 12 to elk and moose, 10 to coyotes, 7 to deer, 6 to wolves and so on down through an interminable Noah’s Ark of wild animals. Not to mention the countless poems on mountain-climbing, trail-cutting, fire-fighting, trout-fishing, and all the other activities of a warden. I realize this *is* Mr. Marty’s life and I do not lack sympathy for many of its aspects, both the pleasant and the disagreeable ones—I simply ask, what does it teach me about life? What relevance does this poetry have for me and the urban world I live in, the solution of whose problems is what really concerns me?

A particularly objectionable aspect of Mr. Marty’s poetry is his almost universal tendency to anthropomorphize nature.... Mr. Marty derives from the mainsprings of the nineteenth-century British romanticism and the good old pathetic fallacy. He seems to feel able to transfer himself under the skin of any animal and know its emotions, whether it be a dying deer

or moose, a frightened horse, or a hungry bear cub. Even the landscape is not, as so typically in more recent Canadian literature, immutable and inhuman; it is, in true Romantic fashion, transfused and transformed by the author's emotions, and humanized: mountains, lakes, and rivers reflect Mr. Marty's moods.

It is at this point that one begins to remember that the author is no rustic oddity, but a university graduate, a civilized man with a lot of reading and city life behind him and a sophisticated vocabulary, not some self-taught sasquatch, but a twentieth-century man who has deliberately chosen to reject the twentieth century and try to return to an earlier Eden. And when I hear Mr. Marty talking reverently about "a lake / fed by its own glacier / a world where men had never stepped / frequented by goats, birds / and a few hardy squirrels" I cannot avoid thinking of George Frederick Scott's "The Unnamed Lake." The reverence is the same. Seemingly tough, this is actually very soft poetry, showing the typical nineteenth-century Canadian dichotomy between a romantic-transcendentalist worship and humanization of nature and attempt to draw lessons and comfort from it, and the Darwinian-humanist fear, horror, and rejection of nature. Not a twentieth century viewpoint at all. Well, I much prefer, I must say, Alden Nowlan's herring gull to Mr. Marty's cute humanoid animals. One also encounters here the minor annoyance of having to learn a whole set of (colourful!) Cree names for the various animals mentioned, though Indians hardly appear at all in the book; this is, once again, a nineteenth-century European literary trick, reaching back through Grey Owl to Longfellow to Chateaubriand.

If there were no human actors in these poems they might be unbearable. The humans are there, though—lonely isolates clinging to a ferociously individualistic existence in cabins and lumber camps and warden's stations, barely audible voices humming across wires, rescue crews, or fire-fighting teams flown in for emergencies, old duffers trading horse-talk and mountain-lore as they swill their beer in taverns on their rare excursions to the "civilization" of places like Edmonton.... It is a relief in the last twenty pages or so to discover that Mr. Marty has taken unto himself a wife, actually enjoys sex, and has a young daughter, even though he seems still to be almost constantly separated from his family and the book's last poem ends Canadianly, beautifully, and ominously: "Now it is the moon of frozen leaves / You are alone / it is beginning to snow."

Mr. Marty, the romantic neo-primitive, never really resolves his own attitudes. He always feels homeless and displaced.... Technically, he's a much more polished writer than one might have expected if one didn't

know his background. His poems' endings are especially good. The defects I would mention are principally an insecurity of tone—a wavering between the literary and the colloquial, which...catches him sometimes in odd juxtapositions of different styles—and a tendency, like Colleen Thibadeau, sometimes to write what is neither poetry nor prose, but something between the two.... The two poets whom Mr. Marty most resembles, by temperament and worldview, are probably Mr. Purdy and Mr. Birney. He has learned a lot from the apparently offhand anecdotal style of Mr. Purdy; now I'd recommend he study the verbal economy, and exact ear for the proper style to be adopted in different kinds of situations, possessed by Mr. Birney. He should watch the middle of his poems...his endings, and his beginnings, are strong: it's halfway through that many of his best things seem to go flat or flatulent.

Mr. Marty is a serious poet. And I have a couple of serious questions to pose to him, as such—essentially the same questions as I asked at the beginning of this review. Does he really feel that the poetry he writes, good as it is, is relevant to life as most of us live in the twentieth century? Doesn't he feel it might be time for him to come to grips again—in his poetry—with the horror of existence, the problem of evil, not as it affects bears and moose, but in the forms of wars, human violence, famine, social injustice, pollution, the mass media, our unliveable cities, etc., and what these are doing to our lives and sensibilities, bearing especially in mind that poets should speak not just for themselves but for all mankind, and though they must be a little detached, should not be hermits; that less than 8% of Canadians are still ruralites and probably less than .00008% still can live the kind of life he lives; and that, even if he does succeed in living it, he probably belongs to the last generation on earth which will be able to do so, or will even know the names of the animals he so lovingly studies? In short, doesn't he feel that his attitudes are in the end a little artificial, a kind of nineteenth-century cop-out? These are just questions—the same ones that might have been addressed to Thoreau—it's up to Mr. Marty to answer them. Myself, I don't believe in regressions.

Well, that's all. I thought of a grand finale, talking about alienation and apocalypse and future shock and financial panics and hunger wars and the destruction of language and determinism and beyond freedom and dignity and generic mutations and the sleek glossy rats and the neurotic skinny rats and so on, but there are enough futurologists and sociologists around who can spout that rhetoric better than I. And the poets, who are the prophets of our time, see and tell the dangers more incisively and more concisely than anyone else, so I decided to give them as much space as possible here. So,

no great wrap-up or final synthesis. That's no longer my style. Sorry. *J'ai mon voyage*. Ciao."

An unpublished letter to Fraser Sutherland, February 19, 1975, from Tunja, Colombia:

Dear Fraser: Sorry to subject you to my excruciating handwriting, but it can't be helped. I'm writing this in bed at what must be about 4 a.m. (all the lights in town went out suddenly at 8 last night, & I soon tired of stumbling around the streets in the dark over drunken Indians, & went to bed; now I know not what time it is, since I threw the clock away 4 years ago in Fez, but a chilly rooster is disconsolately crowing, and my water closet is melancholically dripping.... Herewith my comments on your comments on my comments on your comments on that book. No, I don't think it was a mistake for you to send the article¹⁷ to me, in any way, *so long as* you are not unduly influenced by my remarks in such a way as to distort yr own opinions (except where I have corrected factual or typographical errors). This way, you simply have my reaction before rather than after the event. The original moral problem was not that, but whether a person as closely connected to me (professionally, I mean) as you should write such an article at all, and, as I pointed out, that's a question for you & you alone to settle with yourself, and, as you correctly pointed out, it's common literary-cultural practice. (I myself have done the same thing, with Henry's *New Wings for Icarus*, though I afterwards regretted it & shall not do it again—hence my refusal to review Purdy's *Sex & Death*¹⁸—as I felt it spoiled my stance of objectivity and distance.) But so few people read or care about poetry (& those few almost inevitably also write it) that it's unavoidable such situations should occur, & friend should review friend. Just don't ever expect me to return the compliment.... How is Montréal weathering its winter of gangland discothèque murders? (I mentioned to you that the only news one ever gets of Canada, esp. Québec [one rarely reads anything about the rest of the country), down here is of fires burning down orphanages, old people's homes, bars, farms, etc.—Witchwood¹⁹ was dead right in her chapter, "Burning Mansions," in *Survival*; this year, though, instead of fires it's murders.) I got out just in time.... Back to *Pathology of Snow*. Why should people call *me your bumboy*,²⁰ when everybody's quite aware (because of that air of virility & manly self-reliance I so marvellously, sweatily & Laytonesquely project—my balls are indeed irresistible) that *you're mine*? I am not saying homosexuality is a matter of *will* (I have read enough Genet, & Sartre on Genet to realise how specious a pose that is, tho' I suppose Genet had his own good reasons for adopting it, or allowing

Sartre to foist it on him; this in no way diminishes my admiration for his—prose, not dramatic—writings) (and by the way, I’m not a “lapsed” Catholic, but simply a non-believing, non-practising one; there *is* a difference; I still consider myself socially & psychologically a Catholic & shall, I know, never be anything else; by contrast, consider H.E.B.,²⁶ who tries to deny & fight his Catholicism—something I shall never be stupid enough to do, since I realise that Catholicism has formed [read “distorted”] my whole personality & viewpoint, & to resist that fact would only twist me further); I am saying that my whole involvement in the “sensual world” (be it sex, food, poetry, landscape, other people) is an act of will—in the sense that my puritan background & mentors tried so hard to stifle any interest in these things in me (I still recall those long theological arguments with my uncle the priest—everyone in my family wanted me to be a priest—in which I would take the position that I loved life & people, and *he*, that this was sinful, that one should love only God, & life & people *only* because they were creations) and other (well-meaning) mentors tried just as hard to force me into the dreary non-life of scholarship (“my days among the dead are spent,” “this man chose not to live, but know”—you probably think, like H.E.B., that his is a shallow, puerile dichotomising of scholarship and life but, having nearly been sucked in by that insidious academic ersatz world, with its rewards & camaraderie & ease, I know better), toward which, in fact, I showed some predilection at first (if only because it was an escape from religion & parents)—so that it was indeed an act of will—or rebellion — for me to spurn both groups of nay-sayers & embrace (even as gingerly & squeamishly as I do) “Life.” As far as alienation goes, I *am* more alienated than most, than you, for example—the very fact that I can’t stand Canada & you can shows it clearly enough. So “Muy hombre” stays!—hélas, alack, eheu, ¡ay! ¡oi! Couldn’t you commit a typo and have it come out “Muy hembra”? *That* I would accept. Well, the cock hath crowed, and the day hath dawned and the crowing cock has awakened all his harem of hens, who (which?) are lucking noisily; in compensation, the toilet has stopped marking out the seconds of my waning life.... I found your CF article most interesting²².... Since I consider the Mexican muralists to have been, since ca. 1920, when the Mexican Revolution ended & the Mexican Corruption, or Counter-Revolution, if you will, began, paid toadies, sycophants & employees of that Counter-Revolution, I cannot of course buy yr. argument about their art. Granted, a people’s culture is expressed in one or two dominant forms, but Mexican fiction & poetry *has* produced, even in the past, names of note.... You didn’t explain anywhere *why* “the writer’s medium, in Canada at least, is better suited [than the

painter's] to the expression of national culture." Why indeed? And why the hell most painters or writers be "technically innovative" to create a "national art"? What in the world do these two qualities have to do with each other? Because sonnets in Italy, were Shakespeare or Wordsworth or a thousand others the less "national" for using the form? What about Dante, who got everything from Virgil, & Virgil, who got it all from Greece? Is there no continuity, no universality in art? Must every nation, every ethnic group, invent its own new "form"? 135 nations, 135 art forms? What about Fraser Sutherland, who writes ballades? I am *very* skeptical about "indigenism" in Canadian culture, whether in painting or, more recently, in our fiction, drama, & poetry. Canada is, whether we like it or not, a "transplanted culture," a European country like Argentina (someday I shall write an essay comparing Canada's & Argentina's search for "roots"—*there*, it's the partially successful attempt to refind a semi-Indian gaucho culture—as against the Italian-Spanish culture of the cities which really make up Argentina—that did indeed once exist, but has long since ceased to, and, of course, you miss it only when it's gone, &, except for that unique & marvellous poem, "Martín Fierro," no one thought of tapping it while it was still around). We too once had our half-breed culture, with heroes like Brulé & Riel, but they, too, & their culture, are long since gone, & nothing can revive them. All this "indigenism" reminds me of the 18th & 19th century preromantics & Romantics trying to revive the folk ballad, or writing mock-medieval poetry—e.g., *Ossian* & Chatterton's stuff. French-Canadians have probably the highest percentage of Indian blood, but it scarcely shows in their literature. In Anglo-Canadian literature (even if Newlove *is* part-Indian; so I am I, for that matter), it's a conscious literary pose. In Canada, native peoples & half-breeds make up, at most 5% of the population. We have not destroyed the Indian, as did the U.S.; we have so much space that we have simply made him invisible — away off there on his reservations. And we have borrowed nothing culturally from him. No, I'm afraid our indigenism & search for Indian roots is merely, like so much in Canada, a pale reflection of what happens in the U.S.—the "Indian power"... Your comments on the Québec writers,—& common man's—need for "les maudits anglais" against whom to measure himself & his virtue—a negative sort of nationalism—are acute, and could of course be extended to the Anglo-Canadian's need for "the goddamn Yanks" against whom similarly to measure himself.... As for French-English cultural identity or similarity—the two cultures may indeed be "twin solitudes" but they are not the *same* solitude. Insofar as both cultures are European in origin, & both are affected-afflicted by the same natural

environment, they would obviously have to have features in common with each other (and with Russian, U.S., etc., etc. literature). But the important point is that they do not have the *same* European (if England is Europe) origin; moreover, one (the French) is a minority; until recently rural; introverted; now as always before, largely closed to outside influence & certainly to new immigration, physical or cultural or to racial & religious mixing; with a national inferiority complex, a very strong sense of place & roots, & a long period of utter isolation between its mother-country & itself (attachment, indeed, to a myth or past of the mother-country itself), whereas the other is a majority; more urbanised; still, as traditionally, extremely open to migration, cultural influence, & mixing; with a quite different kind of inferiority complex, a very weak sense of place, & closer contacts, both historically & at present, with its various mother-countries (including the U.S.A.). Actually, I think Ronald S.'s a very imperceptive book²³, a set of truisms. Witchwood is much more to the point in her brief chapter²⁴, as is D.G. Jones in *Butterfly on Rock*. Finally, your igloo symbol. It should, & does, appeal to me immensely as a symbol for Canada. It is made of snow, it's a kind of protecting womb, with only an umbilical cord to the outside world, & above all, it *cuts one off* from all other human contact—one lives in the small world of oneself, or one's immediate family—no community. (I'm aware that real Eskimo igloos are very much the reverse of this, being somewhat the equivalent of the Indians' long houses—a communal gathering-spot; but I'm talking about our symbolic igloo.) But isn't it really the same symbol as Frye's fortress surrounded by hostile Indians or hostile nature, or that symbol, which I first had pointed out to me in Hemingway's work, but which I have since found again & again in American literature, of "the clean, well-lighted place," the small circle of light as a refuge against the surrounding, encroaching darkness? All are paranoid in structure—small & round (i.e., self-contained), both protective & fragile, beleaguered on all sides by a hostile environment. Your symbol has the advantage of reducing that "unhealthy psychic dualism between light and dark, man and nature; the igloo which protects us is made out of the same material that threatens us—snow. (Someone should also do a study someday—omitting my work—of Canadians' attitude toward snow, in literature.) Your last sentence (in the article) sounds like something written by Bruce Hutchinson for Moral Rearmament—it is the typical message of resignation & fatalism (disguised as optimism) that breathes from all Canadian literature, be it Margaret Laurence or Souster or Grove or *As for Me and My House* or *The Wind Our Enemy* or *Maria Chapdelaine*—"make the best of what we have," and that repels me as

much as does Canada. To hell with that attitude. Transform what we have—or abandon it! (As I have done.)...” The Word’s” Catalogue No. 8²⁵ amused me highly, & I hasten to enclose my Charles Tidler card (it was no good to masturbate by.) In return, I demand two Fraser Sutherland-E.A. Lacey cards (the ones that appeared in NJ 4); if these are not available, two Alexandre Amprimoz cards or one-half a Terry Kelly card will do.²⁶ Since “The Word” is apparently associated with you; can you find a copy of Alexander McLoughlin’s poems²⁷? The book I mean appeared in 1873 or 1874 and was called, I think, *Songs of the Great Dominion or Songs & Lyrics* or something of the sort. If you can, I’m not interested in it.... Ian Young who, like most intelligent people, is baffled & (alternately) regaled by Hatewood’s paranoid manic persecution of NJ, sent me a clipping from the *Toronto Star* on the matter...so apparently the controversy continues. Actually, it’s good for NJ—not only gets it publicity, but gives it an anti-mandarin, anti-establishment reputation. I’m proud to be associated with such a publication. And it shows up the Writers’ Union for what it is (WUC—sounds a lot like WCTU—and *is*)—a clique-claque sponsored by Batwood & gang, attempting to form a literary *apparat*—how *inappropriate* that she didn’t go to Russia last year), dictate literary policy for Canadian writers & clean up on, or at least control, CC grants, literary awards, publication opportunities, etc.²⁸ This is very sinister—far more dangerous than what the old Canadian Authors’ Association & its forgotten dictators like Dr. Rhodenizer, Watson Kirkconnell (my fellow Lindsayite) & William Arthur Deacon²⁹ ever tried to do—and must be nipped in the bud. Whatever you may think of JRC...he *never* attempted anything of this type. John, in fact, has been much maligned in the Canadian literary world. He certainly does publicise himself, & he is certainly a literary entrepreneur (which is what he set out to be, in no uncertain terms & with no concealment or subterfuges; he told me from the start that he intended to make his living from—rather than by—literature); but he has never tried to harm or smother other writers or publications; on the contrary, he has often been most generous to them....

Considering Robert Finch’s discretion in the choice of language, we may indeed take “fascinating” & “unusual” as compliments. See his sonnets “Words”—“and then there are the words that are left unsaid / and the undetectable words used in their stead.” Actually, being that “unusual” combination of poet-painter-musician (synesthesiast, one could perhaps call him), he probably finds what you are trying to do (and doing very well) in “Déjeuner sur l’herbe” & the second part of *In the Wake Of*³⁰ very close to his heart & interests. How rare such beings are, as I have often reflected.

A few minor poets like Finch, W.J. Turner, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. I wonder why it is so difficult to divide one's creative talents & susceptibilities among the arts? Of course there are figures like Michelangelo (yet his poetry is incomparably less important than his painting), but many more like Goethe (in his reaction to Beethoven's music). This is one respect (among many) in which I envy Henry³¹; he is able to enjoy (though not practise) such a wide gamut of sensations, whereas much music & painting leave me utterly cold & unaffected. I have my *aficiones*—folk music, baroque art & architecture, etc., but the fields of art & music, on the whole, lie closed to me: I am moved by words & language. Barker Fairley, the last time I was talking with him, noted that—it's a sort of one-way street—most of his artist friends had, he said, been much more sensitive & open to literature than had his literary friends been to art. Why are the literati such monomaths, in general, I wonder? Before we leave Finch—if you are writing or speaking to Woodcock, you might remind him that in May this year Finch will be 75 years old, & this w'd be a very suitable occasion for *Can. Lit.* to devote at least an article to his poetry. I realise that he is not a great poet, that he overuses the sonnet, & also that he peaked early; his first book, *Poems* (published, though, when he was already 46), was by far his best, his next, *The Strength of the Hills*, was his second best, and from there on, to *Acis in Oxford, Silverthorne & Other Poems*, & who knows what else, has been a continual downhill stretch. But he is the *one* Canadian poet who paid pre-eminent attention to form as well as content, the *one* Canadian poet who wrote (at his best) in the glittering but cerebral style of Wallace Stevens & Richard Wilbur. If Layton is Canada's greatest poet, Finch is Canada's best poet, purely as a craftsman. I have told him that I consider him a baroque poet (his field of specialization, incidentally, is 18-century French minor poets), & possibly it is my fondness for the baroque that conditions my sensibility to his work. I find in his word-plays & puns, his ornateness, his formalism & sense of tone, of taste, his internal rhymes, his constant use of paradox & oxymoron, his subtle wit & sadness, the verbal equivalent of baroque art. And I think it is a scandal that he has been so neglected by Canadian critics—the worst kind of example of our inbred bitchy cliqueishness: when they haven't blasted him, as John Sutherland did in *Northern Review*, they have dismissed or ignored him; it has taken American critics & reviewers to say an occasional kind word for him.... Thank you...for the various comments, official & unofficial, on my poetry...which you relayed. It seems impossible for me to please anybody with *Path of Snow*, or my poetry in general. And believe it or not, those have been the same comments made on my poetry since I was a teenager, when

Jay Macpherson commented that “they’re all gems, & all of them flawed,” & David Helwig (to be echoed nearly 20 years later by Louis Dudek) quoted a line of mine & said that what I wrote was “between a poem and a prose.” Dennis Lee 10 years ago, reviewing my first booklet, wrote... about my “chunks of prose hacked into liens of verse.” On the other side are those, like Layton, who attack me for my “reliance on the iamb, suitable only for the expression of a faded romantic sensibility. (Have you had any reaction from him on the NJ review? You are aware, are you not, that my point (5) on his verse... was actually a quotation from a written critique of my poetry which he sent to Henry Beissel. But he’s probably by now forgotten that he ever wrote it. Circles within circles. Now, if he remembers, he’ll *never* believe E.A. Lacey isn’t Henry Beissel) or for my formalism, use of rhyme schemes, and “facility.” (U of T. Quarterly). When critics attack my “uninspired sentimentality,” that’s a critique I do accept & admit—the others, as I’ve suggested, simply seem to contradict one other. If I write free verse, they don’t like it; if I adopt formal structures, they don’t like it either. And what does it all matter? I really write to please myself anyhow. Also, alas, I seem destined to be remembered; or at least liked (or hated) not for my poetry, which I care about, but for those review articles I’ve done for *Edge & NJ*, which everyone seems to find stimulating, even if not in complete agreement with them, but which I turn out quite casually & care about not at all—to such an extent that I usually dislike them heartily on rereading; on reexamination of the one done for NJ recently, in fact, I found so many flaws, so much of undefined, imprecise language & subjective, gut-bucket judgments in it, that I felt I could have attacked it as slashingly as tho’ I were George Bowering himself (though I doubt he could, since his vocabulary consists mostly of Anglo-Saxon monosyllables —pity he doesn’t write in Anglo-Saxon). I shouldn’t say I don’t care at all about those articles, or write them completely off the top of my head, but basically they are reviews, not criticism—opinionated & subjective; meant as a first, on-the-spot reaction to the poetry, not as a considered judgment; intended half as a sort of letter to the poet, telling him what I think is good or bad about his book, half as a letter to the ideal hypothetical (i.e., exactly like me in his tastes) reader, communicating to him my enthusiasms, warning him against what I think is bad or puffed-up. I completely lack the true critic’s objectivity, set of immutable standards, eclectic tastes, scholarly discipline, training, background & omnivorous appetite for reading (all that apparatus I once had, have remnants of it still, but have thrown most of it into the dust-bin scrap-heap of memory.) (I hardly read any more; I simply don’t enjoy it.) But then, who are the real

critics in Canada? Frye, Milton Wilson, Woodcock, in the past Desmond Pacey, perhaps—and who else—of the type of an Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley or Malcolm Muggeridge? The type of the “bookman”—so rare in the best of times? All I claim to have is a certain intuitive talent for recognising good poetry—so that if I say something’s good, it usually is, though I lack all the critical formal criteria for being able to say *why*; if I say it’s bad, that doesn’t, or shouldn’t, mean a thing. I am amazed that people take those re views of mine so seriously. Being a behaviourist; like Skinner, I can’t, & don’t; I realise that all taste, all criteria of “goodness” & “badness,” are learned, not innate; & there are no absolute standards....

An unpublished postcard to Fraser Sutherland, ca. March 1976, from Bariloche, Argentina:

Alas, poor otherland, yours not even
 red autumn leaves and blue snow-shadows
 not even ink frozen in pens, frost on flowers
 or dripping nose and ears (try Bariloche
 at minus ten degrees Celsius—with numbed hands).
 Not maple sugar (Product of New Hampshire)
 nor pea-soup (that came—somehow—from the Dutch)
 nor tuques (one of these cultural universals).
 Your apple pie’s as Unitedstatesian
 as apple pie, and so’s your literature.
 Your cultural-linguistic problem you share with Belgium
 and half-a-hundred countries: even, even
 your /əy/ and /əw/ before an unvoiced consonant
 are common in Ireland tidewater Virginia.
 What then, poor otherland? Yours perhaps
 spruce beer, hot dogs steamés, Saskatoon berries
 a savoury ragout, lumberjacket jackets,
 joul, leftenant, kharkis (rimes with “darkies”).
 The kingdom of absence? Absence forms no kingdoms.
 And zero is a concept. Not a number.

An unpublished letter to Fraser Sutherland, April 27, 1988, from Montréal:
 Dear Fraser: 5 months ago, to the day, I was in Tashkent (where so recently the doomed Gorbachev met with the doomed Najibullah—both of them, poor men, destined soon to be liquidated, tho’ I feel sorrier for G., who *seems* well-meaning, than I do for N., who is a brutal murderer á la Saddam Hussein, & former head of the Afghani secret police—to hammer (and

sickle) out the details of the doomed Afghani peace pact, which is actually a civil-war pact: has no one read the history of Afghanistan, and, especially relevantly, what happened to the British there in 1841, 1880 and 1919?... [T]he people here are strangers. I never particularly wanted to become the “Nabokovian citizen of the world” you implicitly accuse me of posing as.... I realise now that it was a great mistake to put that quote from “Un Canadien Errant” as an epigraph to *Path of Snow*, because it implied nostalgia for Canada, which I didn’t, don’t feel. Tho’ you correctly identified Canada as the “pays malheureux” in yr. review article. Of course the reference to “mes amis” tied in with the book’s dedication, the fotografs at the back, et.) I did so because I’d originally planned to call the book *Si Tu Vois Mon Pays*, but I meant that in a conditional, future mode: “If you see my country, i.e., the country suitable for me, tell me, so that I can go there.” Anyhow, for excellent linguistic reasons, you & others talked me out of a French title, but I shd have suppressed the epigraph as well. There is a deeper sense of estrangement in me.... Only JRC³², with his usual sensitivity, ever put his finger on it. In the course of a long conversation among him, his wife, Ruth & me, about Canadianness, etc., in reply to a query by Ruth as to whether I felt I was a Can. writer (this was in the 70’s, on one of my returns from abroad), John remarked “the problem for Edward, I think, is not whether he feels he’s Canadian, but to define for himself whether he’s really human at all.” And that hit the nail on the head. The neurotic alienation of a homosexual? Perhaps. But again, from earliest childhood I had the sense of having been born, not only in the wrong country, but on the wrong planet.... [I]t strikes me that Can. Poets in general expect something from Europe—simultaneous reunion with their “roots” & renewal of their “vital forces:—which that exhausted museum continent is no longer able to provide. Witness Layton’s & Purdy’s—& many others’—Greek poems (and Greece remains one of the most lively & unEuropean countries of the agglomerate.). (They also want “Kultur,” & *that* there still is, a surfeit of it, but mummified, like the mummies of Palermo.) One must go further afield now, like Birney & Purdy. The world is now our home.... I’m interested in another theme: “the European (as distinct from English or American) strain in Can. Poetry” or, if you will, “the influence of European poetry on Canadian.” My thesis—and this wd have been the point of that article on Robert Finch that I never wrote for yr. Mr. Woodcock—is that, despite the predominance of English & American influences, there are also Continental ones that occasionally crop up in Can. (& Amer. Poetry, as in Finch (Mallarmé & Valéry), Wallace Stevens (ditto influences), Nelligan (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud), & I suspect, Purdy, Layton, Klein (why

no one has thot of a systematic comparative study of these latter two poets baffles me). I'd need to do a lot more organised thinking & examination of the works of both Anglo- & French-Canadian poets (and there are prose-writers who'd need to be considered—Grove, Kreisel, & other actual immigrants) before I'd be prepared to defend this thesis, but I think it bears consideration.... Are there any young poets of the past 10 or 15 years whom I *shd* read, whom it's important to read, who are good, whom I'd find sympathetic—in the way it *was* important to read Nowlan & Newlove & Purdy & Acorn 20 or 25 years ago, & was *not* to read Atwood or Bowering & most of the Tish poets? Has *anything at all* happened in Canpoetry since I've been gone?

Notes

- 1 Lester B. Pearson.
- 2 Pierre Elliott Trudeau.
- 3 Ernest C. Manning, former Premier of Alberta.
- 4 Lacey adds a footnote: "I have, I think, finally identified one of the sources of our poetry's bestiality. An article I read, months ago, in a copy of some American periodical—either the *Kenyon* or the *Hudson Review*, I suspect—pointed out that the old Canadian school-readers were filled, not only with stories exemplifying Sousterian stoicism—the boy on the burning deck or with his finger in the dyke—but as well with moralistic and anthropomorphic animal symbols and fables, from the industrious beaver on down)."
- 5 Lacey is writing Young concerning promotional material for *Path of Snow*, which Catalyst Press distributed.
- 6 A collection of short stories by Graham Jackson (Toronto: Catalyst, 1972).
- 7 An anthology of gay poems edited by Ian Young (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1973. Lacey's poems "Guest," "Oneiromancy," and "Greek Boy" appeared in it.
- 8 The *Gay* that Lacey mentions is not the Toronto publication that was the subject of Donald W. McLeod's *A Brief History of GAY: Canada's First Gay Tabloid, 1964-1966* (Toronto: Homewood, 2003). McLeod has told me that it might be the book *Gay: What You Should Know about Homosexuality*, by Morton M. Hunt (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1977).
- 9 Jean Drapeau, then Mayor of Montreal.
- 10 Layton was born in Romania.
- 11 A footnote states: "Shit definitely seems to be becoming a central theme in Canpoetry. In another book to be reviewed here, we find Alden Nowlan calling man "a machine designed / for the manufacture / of shit"; Earle Birney's cockroaches "grow on what the world as most to give / on shit especially ours & as you know / we double our production now each generation"; Sid Marty asks "Is life but a shit / and a tramp through mud?" and even the demure Joy Kogawa shows a curious fascination with toilets and human excretory functions in Japan. Well, it would all make a suitable meaty topic for someone's doctoral dissertation: *Shit in Canadian Poetry*. The Tish poets could be in-

- serted most appropriately under such a heading.
- 12 *Lies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).
 - 13 Lacey is using the exact words Layton used in reviewing Lacey's work. See his letter of March 19, 1978.
 - 14 At the invitation of Warren Tallman of the University of British Columbia, the American poet Robert Duncan gave a series of lectures in Vancouver in July 1961, which led to the founding of the journal *Tish*.
 - 15 John Diefenbaker.
 - 16 Lacey is parodying bissett's idiosyncratic spellings. He also follows bill bissett's and bertrand lachance's preferred spellings of their personal names and book titles.
 - 17 The article, a review of *Path of Snow*, was published as "Muy Hombre" in *Canadian Literature* 65 (Summer 1975), pp. 104-09
 - 18 Possibly Lacey's perceived conflict of interest may have derived from his having met Purdy in Montreal while in Canada in 1974.
 - 19 Margaret Atwood.
 - 20 In a previous letter, I had joked that readers might assume I was Lacey's "bumboy."
 - 21 Henry Beissel.
 - 22 "What the Murals Say," *The Canadian Forum* (October 1974).
 - 23 Ronald Sutherland, *Second Image: Comparative Studies in Quebec/Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1971).
 - 24 In Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).
 - 25 The Word was, and is, a Montreal used and antiquarian bookshop.
 - 26 *Northern Journey* 4 included a glued-in packet of "Canadian Writers' Cards," on the model of hockey or baseball cards.
 - 27 Intentionally or not, Lacey misspells the name of Alexander McLachlan, whose *Poems and Songs* appeared in 1874.
 - 28 *Northern Journey* 3 (1973) published a short story by Wil Wigle entitled "Slow Burn." In the story Margaret Atwood appears under her own name as a minor character and tells an anecdote about how the poet and pornographic novelist John Glassco had approached her after a reading in Montreal and said she'd given him "a great big erection." Atwood took offence to the published story; her lawyer, Rosalie Abella (appointed in 2004 to the Supreme Court of Canada), wrote *Northern Journey* purporting to represent Atwood and Glassco, and threatening a libel suit. During the row that ensued, an attempt was made to have the Writers' Union of Canada boycott the magazine. The threat of legal action subsided after Glassco publicly dissociated himself from it, calling the affair "an erection in a teapot."
 - 29 Deacon, Kirkconnell, and V.B. Rhodenizer (author of *A Handbook to Canadian Literature*) were prominent members of the Canadian Authors' Association, founded in 1921.
 - 30 "Déjeuner sur l'herbe" was a short story in my collection *In the Village of Alias* (Porters Lake, N.S.: Pottersfield, 1986); my poetry collection *In the Wake Of* was published by Northern Journey Press in 1974.
 - 31 Henry Beissel.
 - 32 John Robert Colombo.

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