89

REVIEWS
The Matter of Glassco

Busby, Brian. *A Gentleman of Pleasure: One Life of John Glassco, Poet, Memoirist, Translator, and Pornographer.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2011. 398 pp.

I expected not only to know John Glassco better when I finished reading Brian Busby's handsome new biography *A Gentleman of Pleasure: One Life of John Glassco* but to like him better as well. The interlacing and estrangement of these expectations as I read on made me reflect on my naiveté as a reader (a loving reader) of biographies. I find that I expect a biography to leave me feeling nearer to the subject, though of course such improved intimacy might sharpen dislike to revulsion as easily as in another case it raises admiration to affection. The biographer's means of prompting such a sense of nearness seem obvious: he or she supplies a compendium of biographical facts and details, to at least some of which his or her readers had no easy access until the book was published, and then submits those discrete materials to some governing interpretation or finite range of major insights that re-constitutes the subject personality in our feelings and understanding. The biography of a writer has a special chance of such success in its opportunity to fuse narratives of the life with detailed and compelling interpretations of the work—the task of the so-called critical biography.

As the editor-in-progress of Glassco's *Complete Poems* for the Canadian Poetry Press, I must disclose that the timing of this book and its assistance to my own research simply could not be improved, and I am flat-out grateful for the clearly massive labour involved. The years of research that undergird Busby's achievement in the volume are palpable in its inclusions, methods and citations. Of course he visited every archive of Glassco material available to him, each no doubt several times over, given the extent and refinement with which he has quoted relevant findings; he naturally visited the archives of Glassco's major literary friends, such as F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith, to expand the range of correspondence and manuscripts on which he could draw. But it is an astoundingly ambitious and thorough-going biographer who will also read the major works, much less visit the archives, of writers and other persons who might rightly be called tertiary or quaternary figures in Glassco's writing life. Busby shows a sharp eye for the pithy, revealing passage from a letter or journal and times

the presentation of these very well in his chronological unfolding of Glassco's life and career. Every subsequent researcher on the writer will be in Busby's debt; the book cannot quite replace the archival research still incumbent on others, but it is a springboard, a lens, a compendium. Busby's industriousness is in keeping with his pleasing and passionate defence of Glassco's literary merit in the face of a scholarly and popular neglect the biographer obviously finds unconscionable.

So, I am more fully informed about the events of Glassco's life than I was before, and I now have leads on a range of scholarly resources that will unquestionably inform my shaping of Glassco's poetic *oeuvre*. My enduring sense, though—now the other shoe falls—is that at the end of reading I feel no nearer Glassco's deep character than I was before; or, if I do, if this really *was* his deep character, the encounter was productive of a distance and uneasy dislike I hadn't expected. Surely this was not the Glassco Busby wished me to see, the selfish, shallow, pusillanimous, obsessive, cold-blooded, and plagiarizing profiteer from others' paedophilia and his own forgery who emerges from the pages of this book? This "one life" is not of the Glassco I thought I knew, and have deeply cared for, from the poetry, the finest of his writings, of which I will have more to say at the end.

Busby is so very light of touch as an *interpreter* of Glassco's life that I can't be sure, though, what sort of man he *did* wish me to see. This is partly because the researcher's enthusiastic compilations are sometimes allowed to swamp the biographer's exactness of purpose; especially in the later chapters we are slowed down, just as we might want to gather excitement and momentum over Glassco's increasingly acclaimed public life as a writer, by lengthy asides summarizing the lives of other litterateurs that barely intersected with Glassco's own (e.g., Edwin Lanham, 119-21), or paraphrasing works by others at too great length *per* their relevance to some interesting question of Glassco's selfhood (e.g., the long synopsis of Robert McAlmon's *Nightinghouls of Paris*, 69-74), or chasing up controversies in which Glassco had at best a mummer's part, such as *Northern Journey*'s squabble with Margaret Atwood (272-3). Such digressions and diversions expose the real biographical impulse, which should be concentrating in later chapters and increasing in intensity, to moments of diffuseness and drift. They honour a rival aesthetic of life-writing in which all that is uncovered *must* be included, and they too often invite the reader to wield the shears of judgment that, at such moments, the biographer has put down.

Such are the risks of the method, but the reward of the book lies in its many revelations of fascinating incidents that had not been exposed before.

Among these is the surprise revelation of a summer trip Glassco made to France in 1926 prior to the well-known two-and-a-half-year stint in Montparnasse that led to the *Memoirs*; it was during this travel, at the age of sixteen, that he first discovered "the great attraction [he] possessed for homosexuals" (qtd. 31). A second instance is the substantial, even pivotal role that Robert McAlmon—friend, bedmate, sponsor, publisher, in the Paris days—was to play in the mid-century renewal of Glassco's writing life (104-9). Busby shows that it was typical of McAlmon to reach out to his old cohort in this way: in fact, he "soon resumed the supportive role he'd played with Glassco and so very many others in Paris. He began sending his friend a steady stream of [literary] magazines" (107), and as a consequence "Glassco now had someone other than [Graeme] Taylor with whom to discuss his work [...] McAlmon proved a more encouraging judge" (108). Their eventual second estrangement over McAlmon's depiction of Glassco as "Sudge" in *The Nightinghouls of Paris* does not speak well of Glassco's instincts of gratitude, but the chief point for the moment is that Busby's unearthing of the correspondence has given us a vivid new purchase on the sudden surge of Glassco's literary, especially poetic, productivity, during the war years. Rewards and pleasures of this kind are frequent in *A Gentleman of Pleasure*.

And if we concentrate on Glassco the writer and forget about Glassco the man—which it would seem most of his readers have been willing to do for decades—then these rewards are sufficient. The genius of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is such that it will survive its present neglect and be read with admiration a hundred years from now. But it is only the *writer* we can admire as we romp through the *Memoirs*, and not the young man they depict, with his utter aimlessness, his willingness to be led and debased by others, his indifference to his own literary gifts. Now we know that that young man's character—for all the fictionalizing of his past over thirty years later—was truly Glassco's own, or a deep and durable part of his own. Not *all* is fiction here. If we come to admire Glassco *the man* at all as we read the *Memoirs* it can only be because we feel he had begun to gain, in the older, italicized voice, some ironic purchase on his own character, and because he shows such scrupulous honesty in depicting himself as he was. He stares unflinching at his own excesses and tells us flatly that he would repeat them if he could—remarkable ethical courage. But reading superb ironists like Glassco well is an all but lost art, so I am not confident that, even in his endlessly amusing *Memoirs*, he has made himself in any degree admirable to most readers. And if your thought in response is "Who cares?"—well, we're largely in agreement, if the only question is of

Glassco's place in the canon, or the merit of his work. After Romanticism, Aestheticism, Modernism, we know that ethically impoverished men and women can be great artists. But some may find, as I do, that very impoverishment interesting and troubling; and when a biography at last presents itself, questions about the author's character may be thought natural, even pressing, to pose.

In a late passage Busby quotes M.T. Kelly's view that "The rare things about John Glassco, the writer, and John Glassco, the man … was [*sic*] how similar they were. Glassco's seemingly effortless prose was matched in life by a graciousness, the kind of good manners that seemed as great a gift as his talent" (299). Many have felt so who knew him, as I did not, and I don't mean to offend them. But it is now clear, with Busby's book before us, that Glassco's good manners and grace, his mannerisms of the ageing, chastened Decadent and just sufficiently prurient wit, which so many enjoyed during his later years, were a highly effective pose (as was almost the whole of his relational selfhood), and they bore little connection to his inner life and his own conscious understanding of himself. Any passage from his private journals quoted in the book, especially those from the so-called "Intimate Journal," will illustrate the claim; nothing could be farther from the *ethos* of those entries than the ideal of graciousness to others. Kelly's point seems to be shattered by the weight of spleen, manipulativeness, and retrospective self-exculpation in the autobiographical writings. Nor does an appeal to the favoured *Memoirs* improve the impression: if Glassco *was* a truly gracious man, the two personae of that book are as far from his real character in their own way as was the performance of personal grace in later years from the bitter journal entries. The effect is of a profoundly inchoate personality, expressing itself in fragments here and there to better or worse effect, with more or less candour and authenticity, but never able to resolve itself into an *ethos*—unless that be the *ethos* of the pornographer, by far the most consistent mode of self-expression across the decades of Glassco's life.

There *is*, however, a more likeable, more admirable, written John Glassco to whom we can turn, and arguably a more coherent one too: it is the voice, the "implied" author, of his poems. It was only in verse that Glassco was able to express and unify from time to time his multifaceted personality, to bring his public graces into line with his deeper character and to express a frequently appealing self that was in tune with some, though of course not all, of his private autobiographical writings. It follows that, if I like Glassco less after reading the biography than I did before, the poetry has not been presented and worked through by the biographer in

such a way as to yield its own rich forms of biographical meaning. Busby treats the poems for the most part as tertiary documents in the story of Glassco's life; they are quoted only when they can be appended to some incident that gave them rise, for instance, when the first four lines of "For Cora Lightbody, R.N." are attached (marred by a typo) to the story of Glassco's seduction by (or of?—we have only Glassco's self-justifying version) a virginal nurse attending to him during his convalescence after a recurrence of his tuberculosis in 1961. Since the lines receive no comment, their quotation serves only to clarify the circumstances of the poem's composition—a contribution of great value to the editor of Glassco's poetry, but one that suggests the poems cannot themselves assist us in getting a purchase on the man's real character. I think this is Busby's broad attitude to the poems, although I construe it here from a single case, for not one quoted poem is interpreted in such a way as to add to or alter the portrait.

Glassco himself is a fascinating ethical problem, though his readers have mostly been willing to skirt the difficult issues to which his life of pornography gives rise. Because the sexual violence Glassco enjoyed depicting was so stylized, and because in the vast majority of depictions it is enacted by women upon men—and perhaps because contemporary academics fear it would be uncool to disapprove on any grounds of Glassco's pornography—he has been given a stealth ride beneath the radar of his critics' ethical judgments. Let us continue to suspend this issue of sexual violence, for there is a thornier one to struggle with: that is, Glassco's glorification of paedophilia in *The Temple of Pederasty* and a few fugitive works. Busby presents the book neutrally, even as he clarifies through a deft textual comparison that Glassco was in part plagiarizing the work of Ken Sato, whose *Quaint Stories of the Samurais* was published by McAlmon in Paris in 1928. The textual comparison requires Busby to present the following passage from Glassco's work:

> At that time, the lord of the province of Izumi had a page-boy named Muroda. He was very beautiful yet very brave. His appearance was fragile as a delicate cherry-blossom, but his spirit was daring as a War God. At first glance, he could have been mistaken for a pretty maiden of some royal palace with his beautiful complexion and his swaying hips. His lord loved him to madness, and sodomized him more than any of his other pages. (qtd. 244)

Muroda's age is not revealed, so the criminality of Glassco's depiction is uncertain (author's copies of the book were eventually seized at the Canadian border and declared obscene [246]). The ethical case is complicated interestingly by Glassco's hiring by correspondence of an adolescent "in

his final year at Middlesex School" in Concord, Massachusetts, Philip Core, to create illustrations for the manuscript as an attractant to publishers—illustrations with such titles as "I Know the Art of Sucking a Boy's Penis." Core was seventeen at the time; Glassco had hired him once before, for similarly pornographic illustrations to *Squire Hardman*, when Core was sixteen. Busby chooses not to address the (to say the least) uncomfortable ethical issues arising from Glassco's correspondence with and peculiar employment of the boy. He does remark that Glassco "certainly recognized the risk *he* was taking" (245, emphasis added) but has no comment on the commissions' meaning for or impact on the young Core or, more pertinently, on what such writings and such a correspondence and professional relationship tell us about Glassco as an ethical subject.

To repeat: it is only Busby's thorough-going research that has given me facts and documents that expose the ethical problem of profit from the paedophilia of others that exists at the seemingly light heart of Glassco's career as a pornographer. I would not have been as disturbed as I am by *The Temple of Pederasty* without the biography, so the contribution is substantial. But I want my companion biographer to be disturbed with me by such representations, and more important I want him to help me to interpret them in light of Glassco's other qualities, including his genius and "graciousness" to others. I want him to have a broader and deeper grasp of the subject's character, including his ethical character, than I had when I began to read, and I want his own *ethos* to emerge in his just and wise interpretations of his subject's. *A Gentleman of Pleasure* is replete with well-researched instances of questionable or repellent conduct on Glassco's part, but because these pass before us with as little ethical remark from the author as does the case of Glassco's efforts to profit from the paedophilic fantasies of his target audience in *The Temple of Pederasty*, the reader is left to form his or her own interpretation of Glassco's character—and my efforts in that regard are now inflected, inevitably, by displays of such conduct throughout his life.

By the way, the plagiarism from Sato was not an isolated instance. The long-standing collaboration with Graeme Taylor, Glassco's long-time best friend, sometime lover, collaborator, and housemate, first undertaken with boyish admiration and excitement, gradually hardened into mutual one-upmanship that both men came to find stifling to their creativity. After his friend's death, Glassco was quite prepared to present Taylor's stories, in which he had had some minor part or none at all, as his own when he was trying to beef up a manuscript of his *Collected Short Stories* for Anansi. Taylor's work, which had received such prompt acclaim in the little mag-

azines of late 1920s Paris, simply "became" Glassco's. Busby supplies the grubby details: "…in preparing the manuscript, Glassco had photocopied the *transition* appearance [of Taylor's story "Deaf-Mute"], carefully pasting his name over that of Taylor. In the preface to the collection, Glassco describes the genesis of the story, never once mentioning his deceased friend" (278). Certainly one *suspects* the biographer's distaste for the incident he relates, but his ultimate remark on this fault of Glassco's character is that "In laying claim to stories originally published under Taylor's name, Glassco may very well have revealed something of the collaborative process he'd once shared with his deceased friend" (278). Something much more harsh surely needed saying here, especially as such actions were typical of rather than anomalous within "Glassco's writing" at the time.

Glassco turned once more to theft from the productions of others as a means of extending the "great porno novel" with which he was hoping in the mid-1970s to climax his career (*The Collected Short Stories* project having fallen apart), for instance by including "a paragraph from a newspaper account of Albert Einstein's death in which his protagonist's name was substituted for that of the great physicist. There were also descriptive passages, plagiarized from several Iris Murdoch novels, which he'd hoped would assist in setting the tone" (287). It may be the shabby pathos of such scenes of an old man's desperation that occasions Busby's charitable silence on the matter. He is somewhat more open on the significance of a far more substantial plagiarism, this time lying at the very root of the best-selling *The English Governess* (an earlier version of which appeared subsequently under the now better remembered title *Harriet Marwood, Governess*). Full praise is due to Busby for some exemplary literary detective work in these pages (165-9), where he reveals that Glassco's book project was launched when he discovered a work of flagellant literature of 1938, *La Gouvernante*, by the cheekily pseudonymous "Aimé Van Rod." Busby traces the parallel plot lines, varied by the slightest adjustments of incident and name (the boy "Lowell" becomes the boy "Lovel" in Glassco's hands), and shows that Glassco's first four chapters in the *Harriet Marwood* version are in fact simple translations of the first four sections of *La Gouvernante*. Busby's first remark seems disingenuous: "In this respect, *Harriet Marwood, Governess* marks Glassco's debut as a translator of prose" (166). But "translators" put their source text's title and author on their front covers. Busby later acknowledges that Glassco's "failure to acknowledge the dozens of translated pages left him vulnerable to a charge of plagiarism" and quotes from a letter to a "fellow expert in flagellant literature" Geoffrey Wagner in which Glassco admits to a number of sources for *Har-*

riet Marwood without mentioning *La Gouvernante*. Clearly Glassco counted on the fact that the "Van Rod" volume was "printed on cheap newsprint [and] was not designed to survive into the latter half of the twentieth century" (169)—that is, he counted on not being caught. Busby edges closer here to a frank engagement with Glassco the plagiarist, but we are well beyond the "literary subterfuge" that Philip Kokotailo detailed in his *John Glassco's Richer World*. In this case, to put it simply, John Glassco was richer for his plagiarism and his successful concealment of it.

As for cold-bloodedness, the key incidents are his astonishingly unfeeling reactions to the deaths of loved ones, including two of the greatest loves of his life. Once again, it is Busby's method to present the documentary material surrounding the incidents and to say nothing to guide its impact on our own judgments of Glassco's character. The first case is the death of Taylor. Those who do not know the story of their complex relationship must certainly read the biography—we have never had a better account of it—to understand the full dimensions of the available horror at Glassco's journal entry, written three years after Taylor's death:

> I have never realised before how great a clog & a drag he was on me, with that everlasting discouragement, depression, cynicism & passionate insistence on no effort being worth while. Indeed, it sometimes terrifies me to think how almost entirely so much of my life was wasted with him, & how very nearly the rest of it might have been wasted too, but for the accident of his death. Good God, how lucky I was! I have no feeling of shame in saying this. (qtd. 147)

This is again from Glassco's "Intimate Journal," a document upon which Busby draws substantially, and often, as in this case, without subsequent comment or explication. In fact a chapter break occurs immediately after the lines quoted above, as if the biographer specifically wishes Glassco's judgment to stand as an adequate summary statement of Taylor's meaning in his life. Or does he hope to have given Glassco enough rope here with which to hang himself, so that no public comment to his subject's discredit need be made? Such retrospective cruelty is typical of Glassco: the death of his hated father is not even recorded in the "Intimate Journal," apart from a long *post-facto* admission that he had "always wanted to kill [him]. (Not that it wouldn't have served him right!)" (137). Clearly, either Glassco was pathologically unfeeling or he was unable to record complex emotions in the "Intimate Journal"; either explanation suffices to make that document a deeply unreliable source of biographical understandings. Perhaps the most egregious such moment occurs after the final institutional-

ization of Elma Koolmer (*a.k.a.* Elma von Colmar), his first wife: "She was finally & definitively *mad*. I seemed to upset her. She said she never wanted to see me again as long as she lived. – A terrible confession: *this gave me a tremendous feeling of release*. I suddenly realized I don't want to see her again, ever, either! One can only stand so much pain" (254). It was only "Days later" that Glassco moved in with Marion McCormick.

Busby documents well the struggles of the husband as his wife descended into mental illness—so well that it is impossible not to feel acutely Glassco's suffering in that thankless, hapless role. At least the remarks on Elma had the excuse of being written in the heat of a moment of extreme anguish and bafflement; the "shameless" passing of judgment on Taylor, at a cooling distance of three years, has no such justification. My primary point here is not that Glassco was a shit, though he obviously could be one, especially at life-defining moments of personal loss; rather, I wish to stress that the "Intimate Journal" never appears to give us a sufficiently reflective comment on any major incident—certainly not on any major *relationship*—in Glassco's life. When passages from the journal are allowed to stand, as they mostly are in this book, without subsequent interpretation by the biographer, it is accorded an interpretative power it should not have over our responses to the poet, and we are too often left to do the biographer's primary work of trying to piece together the full and multivalent meaning of the life represented to us by its documents. Busby is notably cautious about the autobiographical value of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*—"For the purposes of this biography, unless corroborated—in contemporary publications, correspondence, or in other memoirs—many of the anecdotes and encounters found within the work have been ignored" (4)—and elsewhere explicit in his judgment that "The 'Autobiographical Sketch' is the most truthful of all Glassco's autobiographical writings" (175), but he never pauses to reflect methodologically to the same extent on the problem of biographical pertinacity that is presented by the "Intimate Journal," though he relies on it more fully than any other document. The examples above surely indicate how self-interested and posturing a narrative the "Intimate Journal" can provide. The excerpted passages are always compelling, and Busby's eye is fine; but in the best sense of the generic term the journal is a work of *fiction* that we must inspect and buttress and sometimes demolish scrupulously, as we have learned to do with the *Memoirs*.

I've been lamenting chiefly the author's lack of concern with Glassco as an ethical subject, but other interpretative paradigms might well have served to give *A Gentleman of Pleasure* the intensity it lacks. The great

psychological questions about Glassco's life remain to be answered, and some to be posed adequately. What after all made Glassco such a habitual liar? Busby is very fine at exposing the contradictions and inconsistencies and the frequency of deception in Glassco's writings, and of course Tausky's and Kokotailo's work on the *Memoirs*, exposing the original fiction of a 1930s composition, fully prepared us for such practices in and around the lesser works. Apart from passing along Glassco's own explanation of his furtive, truth-deflecting personality as having been necessitated by his interactions with a father who was a creature of vast temper and a dab hand at corporal punishment, Busby does not take us further into the patterns and motives of a mind that found it easier to imagine himself as a writer through prevarication and deception than by other means. As for the arcana of Glassco's sexual life, Busby gives us regular reports on the writer's life-long sexual fetish for a woman in a rubber bathing or shower cap with nipple-like protuberances, but does so chiefly, once again, by supplying Glassco's own retrospective comments on his fixation, rather than weaving such incidents of pathos and thwarted desire into his own full-blown psychological narrative of Glassco's inner life. Glassco was surely right to conclude that the obsession had "had a very bad influence on [his] literary work" (262).

Lastly, Busby's Glassco is a thoroughly de-historicized man, one who passed through the twentieth century but had no consciousness of, received no impact from, took no thought for, the Depression, the Second World War and the Holocaust, the nuclear arms race and the Cold War. (He did get a little irritable in his old age about Québécois nationalism.) To be sure, Glassco's allowances and eventual inheritances from his affluent family allowed him to live life at several removes from all that brutishness; he was not perhaps at financial ease during the Depression, but he was housed and fed and clothed without having to work for those essentials. His dissolute life in Paris had cost him a lung and that bodily expense saved him from service in the Second World War, and inadmissibility to service would seem, as far as the biography informs us, to have prompted an utter lack of interest in its campaigns, fears, and outcome. While his friend A.J.M. Smith was writing sonnets about nuclear holocaust in the 1950s, Glassco appears never to have seen the traumatizing newsreels of the 1954 H-bomb tests in the Pacific, or to have been troubled by developments in Indochina, or to have watched the Cuban Missile Crisis with alarm. Can this image of a man so thoroughly alienated from the grand and searing events of his time be accurate, and the writing still be fine? Or would the voluminous documents Busby has amassed with such industry, culled once more,

afford us glimpses of a Glassco more engaged, more concerned than this for the fate of a humankind with which he felt (the poetry would suggest) some qualms of fellowship? If Glassco *was* as thoroughly indifferent to the twentieth century as this narrative makes him appear, then some firm discussion from Busby on that remarkable defect of character could have served a vital function in clarifying the poet's character for us, his political *ethos* or lack of one.

Glassco's poetry assures us, however, that a deeper ethical consciousness defined him than that which we find in his autobiographical writings. Consider the suffusion of "The Rural Mail," for instance, by the atmosphere of the war years in which it was written, as the "makers and masters of nations" engineer a world in which "calves and chicks and children"—and young men—are "destined for slaughter in the course of things." It is in *that* world that the farmer's profiteering remark—"Far as I'm concerned, the war can go on forever!"—attains its full ethical horror. How much more complex and interesting is "The Whole Hog," next, on the subject of Glassco's father than anything he ever wrote in his journals:

> […] the poor gentleman
> Who laid claim, simply, to the whole universe,
> But brought no vouchers, bore no strawberry mark!
> And when lovely woman failed him, womanly,
> He built an altar in the sands of my heart.
>
> I have not sacrificed there for years…
> But the altar stands, eternal absolute,
> As if its foundations were laid in living rock;
> And when I went whoring after strange gods,
> Why, they were Gods, and it was whoring still—
> With reason, unreason, duality of will,
> And many others, masks of Nobodaddy.
>
> In my father's house there were no dissensions,
> There, all was unanimity and family:
> Now the plates fly in my head night and day;
> There, was infallible authority:
> Now I am free as a crow to fly or stay;
> There, was no check nor doubt nor indecision:
> Here I am a dog whistled by many masters,
>
> Always obliged to go the whole hog […]

This is not the place in which to try to elucidate Glassco's startlingly complex portrait here of a son's character in its relation to his father's. One need only say, for now, that there is nothing of this insightfulness and moving complexity in all of Glassco's prose writings, brief as they are, on either parent, and that Busby's decision not to draw—with the requisite caution—on Glassco's poems as vital documents for his biography has limited the complexity of his raw materials and the full interest of his conclusions about the man.

Perhaps the most compelling quality of the poetry, and the way in which it seems most at odds with the Glassco of *A Gentleman of Pleasure*, is in the poet's keen empathetic eye for the persons and personae of others. The biography relies heavily on autobiographical writings; it follows that the narrative is often limited by Glassco's inward gaze, and the result can be a cloying atmosphere of narcissism that certainly does not assist my effort to like him better by knowing him better through his life story. The poetry, on the other hand, simply revels in taking up the voices of others: that of the farmer in "The Rural Mail"; the voice of Corby the Trader in "The Burden of Junk"; the pious, pat voices of the dead in "Needham Cemetery"; the voice of Don Quixote on his deathbed, the voice of Penelope unweaving her web and praying against her husband's return too, the very call of the catbird recorded to the delight of Marian Scott. Those who are not spoken *for* are spoken of with a precision that renders their meaning with equal force: Beau Brummell stranded at Calais, for instance, "His little boots pick[ing] their way over the cobblestones," and Thomas à Kempis, with whose inner life the speaker so empathizes that their voices all but merge (especially if we remember how many months Glassco spent tubercular or convalescent in hospital rooms):

> Always the cell is here,
> Stronger than fire, than the release of fear,
> Than any love that I can answer for …
> But oh, green leaves and singing birds that see
> The flaming sun, lie, lie of the open door,
> The air of that bright heaven that is not his!

I could pursue at length the argument that Glassco is not only more humane and empathetic but also more richly self-knowing and self-articulating in the poetry than in any other of his writings; I would contend again, in such a conversation, that this quality makes his poetry the finest of his writing, finer even than the hugely funny, hugely poignant *Memoirs of Montparnasse* that continues to give me my "dream of Paris" as a regular fix. But

let us cut to the end of that particular chase, for even if I somehow held my point, we would still face the fundamental hermeneutic problem that the poems are no more reliable as biographical documents than are the various journals or the *Memoirs*. I only suggest that the poems needed to be accorded a role in Busby's biography equivalent to that accorded to all the other documents he has compiled: that is, *that the poems too have something to tell us about the historical man*—so long as they, like all the other archival materials upon which we might draw, are subject to corroboration, scrutiny, lively and alert reading, and a complex sense of voice in its acts of self-construal and self-justification. Let us not trust them *more* because they are poems, nor *less*, but equally with other kinds of "discourse"; and let all that we have learned about reading poems without heresy and fallacy guide our approach to the other private and delightful documents out of which we wish to construct a person's inner life.

Oscar Wilde said, "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth": a warning to the reader of the "Intimate Journal." Wilde doesn't tell us what will happen when you give a man a dozen masks or more. Brian Busby's *A Gentleman of Pleasure* presents itself as "*One Life of John Glassco*," but it offers finally, like its subject, a proliferation of poses and attitudes. Only I am sure that the real man is somewhere among them—that there *was* a real John Glassco, and he remains to be read.

Brian Trehearne