DOCUMENTS
Edward Lacey

Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by Fraser Sutherland

Edward Allan Lacey, who was born in Lindsay, Ontario but lived most of his adult life abroad, hated Canada with a passion that ironically resembled love. Born in 1937, he was the only child of Allan Lacey, a respected lawyer, and his wife, Alexandrine, who came from a large, long-established Lindsay family. Of Franco-Irish origins, his parents were devoted Catholics.

Lacey identified himself as gay from his teens onward. A brilliant student, he won scholarships to Trinity College, University of Toronto and, later, to the University of Texas at Austin. In Toronto, over four troubled years, he was mentored by Robert Finch and Barker Fairley, and met John Robert Colombo and Henry Beissel, who became lifelong friends.

In 1961, shortly before he completed studies in Texas for an M.A. in linguistics, he was convicted of transporting marijuana across the Mexican-U.S. border. He received his degree in absentia while teaching English as a second language in Torreón, northern Mexico. For the next decade he taught ESL in Mexico and Brazil, broken by academic appointments at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, and at the University of the West Indies, in Trinidad. In Brazil, he was tutor and translator for Juscelino Kubitschek, the country's deposed President. Following his parents' deaths in the early 1970s, a legacy financed travels on five continents. His multilingual skills made his journeys easier: he was fluent in French, Spanish, and Portuguese, and could function in other languages, particularly Greek and Arabic. Part of his inheritance was spent on alcohol, and on his sexual preference, young rough trade. (He may have held the world record for most smashed glasses and lost passports.) In the mid-1980s, he was forced to resume teaching and commercial translation, working in Indonesia and Thailand. He suffered life-threatening injuries, including brain damage, after he was run over while lying in a drunken stupor on a Bangkok street. Repatriated to Canada in 1992, he died from a heart attack in 1995 in a welfare rooming house in Toronto.

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I first met Edward Lacey long-distance. In early 1972, I was living in Montreal, where Henry Beissel told me of a remarkable friend who lived in Rio de Janeiro. Beissel had published Lacey's poems and "Poetry Chronicles" in *Edge*, the literary magazine he had started in Edmonton. Lacey and I began to correspond, and I, too, published his poems and his reviewing, in the magazine *Northern Journey.* Although at long intervals we met during his sporadic stays in Canada, I got to know him best under unhappy circumstances. After Lacey's repatriation from Thailand, my wife, Alison, and I, then living in Nova Scotia, looked after him during the first few months of 1992. After his death in 1995, I was his executor and sole heir. His estate almost entirely consisted of letters and manuscripts.

Four collections of Lacey's poetry appeared in his lifetime: *The Forms of Loss* (Toronto, 1965) was issued under the aegis of Dennis Lee; the self-published *Path of Snow: Poems 1951-73* (Montreal, 1974) was distributed by Ian Young's Catalyst Press; *Later: Poems 1973-1978* (Toronto, 1978) came out with Catylst Press, and *Third World: Travel Poems by E.A. Lacey* (Jakarta, 1994), was published by his friend Byron Black. *The Collected Poems and Translations of Edward A. Lacey,* edited by myself and published by John Robert Colombo, appeared in 2000. Over the years, he translated four books from French, Spanish, and Portuguese, and occasionally contributed to anthologies and periodicals. *A Magic Prison: Letters from Edward Lacey,* appeared in 1995, edited by David Helwig, with an introduction by Henry Beissel.

From every point of the global compass he'd sent letters of extraordinary length and detail to such friends as Randy Wicker of New York, a frequent travelling companion; to Winston Leyland, his publisher at Gay Sunshine Press in San Francisco; and to John Robert and Ruth Colombo, to Henry and Ruth Beissel, and to Ian Young. Lacey's first letter to me (not reproduced below) was dated 7April 1972, and sent from Rio de Janeiro. In it, he agreed to let *Northern Journey* print several of his poems. Responding to my praise, he wrote that "when one lives in the intellectual sterility & isolation of a country like Brazil, being understood by someone, anyone, becomes almost an obsession, and words like yours bring a sort of euphoria." The fact that he was an outsider wherever he lived, not least in his country of birth, gives special direction to his letters and critical writings. Even when railing against his native country, he recognized himself as–much to his regret–inescapably Canadian.

No reviews of Canadian poetry before or since have been quite like Lacey's. He was facetious, subjective, iconoclastic, generous, hugely unfair, capable of changing his mind, comprehensively and rigorously

attentive. Although much has changed in Canadian culture and society since 1974, when he wrote his last omnibus review, his characterizations of Canadian poetry remain arresting and relevant. His own harshest critic, he was himself a poet until the day he died. Although he never closeted his homosexuality, and in *The Forms of Loss* published the first explicitly gay poems to appear in Canada in book form, he regarded himself not as a gay poet, but as a poet who was gay.

Editorial Practices

Lacey's many stylistic idiosyncrasies, especially of spelling and capitalization, have been preserved, with a few exceptions. Typographical errors have been silently corrected, or in ambiguous cases, noted with a [*sic*]. Punctuation has been regularized. Editorial interventions are square-bracketed. That Lacey quoted so copiously should have highly flattered the poets he reviewed but can be a burden to the reader. I have omitted some quotations (and repeated bibliographical information) that seemed surplus to requirements: omissions are indicated by ellipses. In the case of the letters–which represent only a tiny sampling of what he related to his friends –ellipses indicate personal matter and other observations that do not bear directly on Canadian culture and his own work. Lacey was the most periphrastic and digressive of writers. *Le style est l'homme même.*

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Edge 5 (Fall 1966)

Poetry Chronicle
Edward A. Lacey, pseudonym[1]

The Collected Poems of Frank Prewett
The Man in Yellow Boots, George Bowering
A Dream of Lilies, Joan Finnigan
The Beast with Three Backs, Tom Eadie, Tom Marshall & Colin Norman
Man in a Window, Wayne Clifford
The Cariboo Horses, Alfred Purdy

And the books of Canadian poetry keep rolling off the presses and in for reviewing. I believe it was Richard Eberhart who said that he wrote poetry

because he didn't have time to write prose. If this is true in all cases, there must be a lot of people hard-pressed for time in Canada, 1965. In the patent impossibility of dedicating a separate article to every volume of poetry received by *Edge* in the last few months, and considering the meagre contents of some of the volumes, I decided to write an omnibus, *Poetry Chicago*-type review of half-dozen [sic] of the books received about which I found something to say, however little. I shall not try to organize these remarks thematically or structurally, for I feel it is dishonest and an injustice to the contents of the books under review to attempt to force them into the straitjacket of whatever literary article one happens at the time to be wanting to write on some pet idea one has. The only unity this article will present will be that the books are all written by Canadian poets.

I am not sure that Frank Prewett belongs in this group. Few Canadian poets, at least in this century, can have used in their works such rustic English-countryside terms as "busk," "sward," "copse," "wold," and "mangold." Yet Prewett uses them, and more to the point uses them as accurately and justifiedly [*sic*] as any English nature poet. This is precisely what I think Prewett is: he is only accidentally Canadian. Born in Ontario in 1893, of Iroquois and (presumably) English or Scottish stock, he spent, from the biographical details given and the internal evidence of his poetry, most of his adult life in England, where he died unrecognized in 1962. He is a private poet and a nature poet par excellence, with natural affinities to the Georgians. Though he apparently published two small and unsuccessful volumes of poetry during the '20s, according to Robert Graves, who has edited *The Collected Poems of Frank Prewett* (Cassell, London, 1964) and who contributes a peculiarly timid and diffident introduction to the book, all but six of the forty-four poems contained in it [*The Collected Poems*] are previously unassembled material, written during various stages of Prewett's troubled life. A death-bed request, or promise, apparently made Graves responsible for editing his old friend's scanty collected works. The introduction is mostly biographical; the only quotation in favour of the poems–"they have a hard but true music and do not belong to the cant of the age"–turns out to have come originally from Prewett himself. Graves wisely confines himself to speaking about the author. He could scarcely have been expected to praise the poems unreservedly. There are a maze of influences and imitations. Prewett is so obviously self-tutored in poetry, whatever his schooling may have been, that the casual reader doesn't really know which awkwardnesses in him are simply the result of badly assimilated influences and which the deliberate result of copying stylistic features of fellow eccentrics like Hopkins and Emily Dickinson. The syntax

of the poems is "poetic" and inverted–to quote one particularly horrible example–"Like reedy bird in treetop top unseen / They parting fade who never shall away" ("Plea for a Day and a Night"). Stanzas of rime-type ABAB and ABCB recur monotonously–in twenty-six of the poems, in fact. Metrically, the poet follows the strange practice of abandoning any attempt at isometric or roughly isometric lines, which means that the number of strong stresses per line varies, and we have 4-stress lines alternating with 5-stress ones, 5-stress with 6-stresses, etc., without any kind of patterning whatsoever. This makes reading the poems jerky and difficult and I should really like to have heard the author's delivery of them. In view of the apparent influence of Hopkins, one doesn't know whether this sort of thing is the result of a misunderstanding of, or desire to employ, sprung rhythm, or whether it is due simply to a tin ear. I suspect the latter, because everything, from sound combinations to choice of lexical items, is weirdly misplaced and mismatched in Prewett's work. This is a pity, because the poet was evidently a highly intelligent and sensitive man and shows touches of felicity, notably in poems where a conceit is elaborated on, for example in the rather lovely first stanza of "The Pack," which is unfortunately vitiated by the second stanza and its awful last line. Similarly, "The Captive Bird" begins exquisitely with "Love, what joy it is to tempt, / To lure the bird to the ground" and thumps on heavily to "But tame and soon of preen unkempt / The captive bird of love is found." These last two lines are but further proof, were such needed, of the tortured syntax and extraordinarily inappropriate vocabulary affected by this writer.

Frank Prewett seems to live and feel nature in a fashion which recalls both Georgian pastoral sentimentalism and Indian animism, but which is remote from the sense of hostile and encroaching nature almost omnipresent in Canadian poetry…. So we find blackbirds and ploughboys and hedgerows mixed up with red men, spirits, and cloud-serpents–a poetry really more Amerindian than Canadian, but Amerinidan with a British setting.

The influences of other British poets in the writing are often overt, as of Hopkins in "Randall is Dead," scarcely more than an echo of "Felix Randall," or Housman in "The Soldier" and "Where the Wind Lies." Sometimes there are mere suggestions, a mood is established recalling, say, Francis Thompson or Blake ("I Went Out into the Fields"), John Clare ("Hated by Stars"), Robert Bridges ("Blackbird"), Edward Thomas (many poems, especially "Rooks," "I Shall Take You in Rough Weather," and "Naked Overlong"), even D. H. Lawrence ("A Woman's Safety," "Yet Still She Would Not Stay").

I imagine Prewett did not imitate other poets deliberately, and I certainly think that Emily Dickinson, being in the American tradition, was unlikely to wield any influence on him, but in the few good stanzas and poems he occasionally approaches her concentration and pithiness…. Prewett's range rarely goes beyond nature poetry. The second large category of poems in the small collection celebrates, in rather vague and idealistic language, the love, in union and separation, of two beings, communication once again being really the theme. Most of these poems have good lines and succeed in spots, but are flawed as a whole. They would naturally attract Robert Graves, as they are faintly reminiscent of his own love lyrics. Besides these, there are a few dreadful war poems and a couple of unclassifiables like "Hated by Stars," with its strange ending "but those stars are bold / And they hate me for heat that is mine."

I wish I could praise Mr. Prewett's poetry more highly, but, despite the unusual quality of the mind that produced it, I find it derivative and ragged, illuminated or illuminating only in flashes–in other words, the amateur poetry of an intelligent man who simply never learned the tricks of the trade. The prose selections making up the last third of the volume are sensitive evocations of an Ontario farm boyhood, more Canadian really than any of the poetry.

I wish to review George Bowering's *The Man in Yellow Boots* (*El Hombre de las Botas Amarillas*, Ediciones El Corno Emplumado, Mexico, 1965) for two reasons: one, it is a modest but good book, and two, I fear it will receive much less exposure in Canada than it deserves. In several ways it is surely a first in Canadian poetry. I first saw it reviewed (favourably) in a Caracas, Venezuela newspaper, and not only all thirty-one poems making up the book, but also the appendix of rather irrelevant personal correspondence sent by the author to the editors and even the dedication, editors' note, and note on the art work are accompanied by a facing page by their respective Spanish translation. For this book is a publication of *El Corno Emplumado*, a courageous and valuable magazine of poetry (and prose) edited in Mexico City by the American poet Margaret Randall and her Mexican husband, Sergio Mondragon, also a poet and Spanish translator for the volume under review here. Against disheartening odds *El Corno Emplumado* has for some years now striven almost alone to unify the English and Spanish speaking literary worlds of America, in both of which parallel explosions of youthful talent have occurred in recent times. This it has tried to do by printing new world poetry and prose in both English and Spanish, featuring among the English language writers various Canadians, including Mr. Bowering himself, and among the Spanish language

authors, young poets from all the Latin American republics. It was therefore natural that such a magazine should undertake to publish a bilingual collection of some young poet's works, and in fact, *The Man in Yellow Boots* is issue No. 16 of *El Corno Emplumado*, which habitually dedicates its fourth issue of each year to a poet "whose work we want to shout to both Americas." Because of distribution and subscription limitations, and the inclusion of the Spanish translation, this book is likely to find a wider audience south of the Rio Grande than north of it.

I think it is Mr. Bowering's best book of poetry yet, and I have never been a fan of the Tish[2] school in general or of Mr. Bowering in particular. I've found the poetry, like that of Frank Davey and many others of the school, thin, unindividual, unexciting, and, despite all the linguistic jargon which the group dressed itself in, metrically and decoratively uninteresting. I'm sure I have been biassed but I also think Mr. Bowering has improved. The Editors' Notes remark "the poems in Bowering's first book…were written out of the time when the poet's concern was largely involved with the technique of poetry, handling the language, finding his own place in it…. The poems in this new book deal with more meaningful concerns, not the problem of how to write poetry." Indeed so, and I must say that to me the most objectionable and solipsistic kind of poetry is poetry about poetry, of which in general there's gratifyingly little in the six books under review here. Any movement away from such a statuesque attitude on Mr. Bowering's part I would hail as an advance. Moreover, I'd never read the gentleman in bulk enough before. His strength is in numbers, and his individual poems are as it were only stanzas of the book; consequently he should stand or fall on a collection. Reading the poems in English and Spanish simultaneously produced several interesting discoveries. I wondered why I found Sergio Mondragon's Spanish version somehow more "poetic" than the English, and only after some time realized that I have always disliked, more particularly in much modern poetry influenced by the Creeley-Duncan-Olson-W.C. Williams experiments, poems divided into very short lines, linguistically sound as such a division along the lines of terminal-juncture groups or macrosegments may be. Bowering's poems, or many of them, are of this kind; each line contains one terminal-juncture group or at the most two, simply because of the lesser frequency of monosyllabic words in that language, and the CVCV structure of most words, has longer lines, if only by a few more weak-stressed syllables; furthermore, as a result of the typical stress superfixes of words in Spanish, lines were more recognizably iambic, trochaic, anapestic or what have you. Also, I had always thought Mr. Bowering's poetry poor in

imagery, but the Spanish made me slow my reading pace and not glide over the delicate use of figurative language in "Inside the Tulip," "Frost," and several other poems early in the book. With one exception, the vignette "Esta Muy Caliente," there is nothing at all Latin American about these poems; they are unmistakably Canadian in their obsession with cold, seasonal change, beggars, solitude, puritanism and censorship. Yet they are basically concerned with interpersonal relations and communication, between husband and wife. I grow a bit tired of this marital-sex-orgy kick, but this did not prevent me from enjoying "Old Cracker Barrel" or the more tender lyricism of "After Breakfast," "What is It," and other tributes, charming if fragile, to the poet's wife. Bowering sometimes moves out from his personal concerns to write political poetry or social protest; the results can be highly successful, like the surrealist ball game in "The Day Before the Chinese A-Bomb" and the effective repetitions of "Vox Crapulous," or less successful, as in "The Good Prospects" and that typical Sousterish poem-to-a-beggar, "Poor Man." We have sets of meditations on, or triggered by, paintings, sculptures, and photos, and another very Canadian kind of seasonal poem, such as "Indian Summer" and "The Grass." Two poems apostrophize the moon, "The Measurer" and "Moon Shadow," the latter being a sort of variations in an Alberta setting on various phrases and images taken from Romantic poetry. Various poems deal with friendships, particularly the long, and, to me, rather incoherent "The Descent." There's another nasty Sousterish little poem against teachers of English, of whom Mr. Bowering is one, and a long and graceful tribute (I liked especially Part II) to William Carlos Williams. I have refrained from quoting from Mr. Bowering's poems in this review, because, as I said, quotations seem not to do him justice. Though certainly not an important event in Canadian poetry, *The Man in Yellow Boots* represents a step forward in Mr. Bowering's definition of the world within and around him.

The whole of a poet's work is at times greater than the sum of its parts, as in Mr. Bowering's case. Isolated poems by Joan Finnigan have often moved and impressed me, but a collection of poems produces the opposite effect to that observed with Mr. Bowering. The forty-odd longish poems of her unindexed Fiddlehead Book, *A Dream of Lilies* (Crier Publications, Dartmouth, 1965) seem a surfeit, the style which delighted one on occasional encounters becomes on repetition cloying, soporific, woman's-magazinish. Sometimes Joan Finnigan seems to stand between real poetry and the stuff produced by the Edna Jacques and Ella Wheeler Wilcoxes and Felicia Hemens whom we always have with us. The poems in this book are almost all too diffuse, too didactic and too long. Let me illustrate. Looking

superficially at the lengthy poem "I Do Not Wish to be a Canadian Poet," and reading, as is my habit, the end before the middle, I thought the last lines were marvellous: "I DO NOT WISH TO BE A CANADIAN POET / I wish to be a Blue Titmouse." Closer inspection revealed that this was not at all one of those inspired non sequiturs of which true poetry is made. A substantial part of the poem is concerned with Julian Huxley's report that a blue titmouse in England learned to open, and drink from, milk bottles, and taught others of the same species to do the same, thus providing an instance of a Lamarckian breakthrough, and the author suggests that mankind must now experience a similar breakthrough, or be annihilated. Laudable sentiments. But, alas, the poetry has gone with the accidentalness of the blue titmouse. Another illustration. The rhetorical emptiness of its middle stanzas notwithstanding, I thought "Lovers in the Plaza," about interracial lovers, a fine poem, and I especially admired, again, its closing lines, at the foot of p. 8, "And one night a stone thrown in Alabama / will come through the window of your house, / strike your sleeping child." Then, unfortunately, I realized that this was *not* the poem's end, for it went pointlessly on, at the top of p. 9, "Black girl, white boy, / O forgive me."

Joan Finnigan must learn to prune and drastically shorten her poems, tighten their structure, and ruthlessly hold in check her tendency to preach, teach, and append morals and messages. Speaking about more technical matters, I like the conversational tone and the supple, long blank-verse line, basically iambs of varying numbers of feet, which she uses in most of the poems, but she could improve her style by avoiding unusual word orders, overuse of otiose adjectives, and extraneous ornament like alliteration ("savage silvered supplication"), too many vocative "O's" and exclamatory "oh's," and the rhetorical tone they represent, non-participle constructs like "eagle-clawed," "angry-gutted," "fury-filled," and deliberate poeticisms such as "await," "as" for "like" in prepositional use, and many others.

Moreover, she must learn to avoid sentimentality, which corrodes even her best efforts, and makes others so painfully embarrassing, with the concepts, contrasts, and liberal enthusiasms she seems to marshal together like counters, to form poems…. All the eternal ploys are there: the harpies and hypocrisies of the tea party, and the author's brave clean rejection of them, as though presence didn't mean consent; the irrational fear of science and of explanations for things, trotting out the ancient chestnut that it has been discovered the nightingale sings from hunger, not ecstasy, and isn't it wicked of science to tell us so and thus spoil our pure enjoyment; the old maid's love of dogs and birds and the insistence that whoever doesn't

share this fondness is spiritually dead; the dirty poor boy in school who of course loved one purely, whilst all the clean, rich boys wrote dirty notes; the neighbour who would have been a great artist had he not married a "thin-lipped life-eraser" who naturally "wanted it neat and secure / who harried his painting friends… / brought in the Saturday Night Bridge Club, / who kept the House Beautiful / and the children from masturbation"; the pathetic fallacy (the tree suffers, bleeds, and dies when cut); the seemingly inevitable (in Canadian literature) figure of the beggar, whose state makes one realize that, despite all one's silks and diamonds, one is more spiritually impoverished than he (as I mentioned, Mr. Bowering has a similar poem; the figure was brought into vogue by Mr. Raymond Souster, who performed and keeps on performing the surprising feat of encountering him at practically every street-corner in a land which has as little real poverty, and knows as little of it, as any country on earth–but, even in the modern socialist state, we must have our local colour and picturesquerie); the old man whose dim eyes perceive the divine in the commonplace; …the people who worry sanctimoniously over a sick deer which cries like a child –this is somehow different from throwing out a few useless crumbs and seeds for the birds, which to Mrs. Finnigan is a "good" act–and miss the real child crying because "people don't cry like deer"; the Teddy-bear-wielding little daughter who brings one Sunday coffee in bed. And on and on and on like this. If this were all there were to Joan Finnigan, this brave suburban housewife with her easy liberal indignation and sentimentality (I agree we are all sentimental about something; and object simply to the number of objects of Mrs. Finnigan's sentimentality and to the unalloyed way it is expressed), I'd not be reviewing this book here. But there is real dignity and stature in those poems which deal with death, loss, and frustration–in the simple, grave "Night Poem," the terrifying "And Poems Become a Kind of Loving"; the elegiac "For Monique at Midnight," and we become aware that the suburban housewife is an embattled and lonely poet, fearing death, age, and the dissolution of the body as all poets do, and yet capable of…compassion….

Even some of the overlong or overly didactic poems…have lines and passages that at their best recall the poetry of another fine Canadian female poet who has in these last years chosen silence, P. K. Page. But too often we get only the faked intensity and imagery (often revealed by mixed metaphors and wrongly chosen adjectives)…. In general, Joan Finnigan's figurative language is fresh and accurate, though a bit infantile; she is "toad-great with child"; her little daughter practising Civil Defence curls into "a little…doom-ball on the floor," though, alas, in the same poem, her chil-

dren have "little snowflakes of hands." (Indicatively, "little" is one of her favourite adjectives.)

I am, in fact, rather ambivalent in my attitude toward the poetry of Mrs. Finnigan. Is the lump that rises in one's throat when one reads her the real thing, or is it just the reaction to emotional counters like "home," "mother," and "dog"?

The Beast with Three Backs is a slim volume of poems by Tom Eadie, Tom Marshall, and Colin Norman, all teachers or students at Queen's University and all associated with, or contributors to, *Quarry.* In their preface, after a few nonsensical remarks about poetry, the authors state that they are "rubbing shoulders rather uneasily in the same book…each very jealous of his own identity." If that is so, their individual poems should speak with individual voices. Yet the tone of all three is often so similar that I wish they had followed that old trick of the 1920s, of not signing poems in co-authored volumes, leaving the reader the fun of guessing who wrote what…. A sameness of tone must be ascribable to the fact that all three poets are probably friends, with literary enthusiasms and ideas in common, and all are at the moment involved in the academic process. Mr. Eadie, presumably the youngest of the set, tends, in his section of the book, "The Fire Beasts," less toward flippancy and more toward what he no doubt considers a marmoreal attitude. He has several of the trappings of the budding academic, such as the foreign-language quotation which is *de rigueur*, and the classical allusions to phoenixes and gorgons. His imagery, like that of many young poets, is suitably "stony." …I have often wondered why this sort of imagery is attractive to the young. It may have something to do with attempting to fix one's attitudes, to find something permanent in a sea of change. When it isn't stone with Mr. Eadie, it's something equally permanent like "the dust of centuries." But of course there's death, always, and love comes in, a "blind, blunt-snouted mole" who "drives his chancy path / in ancient earthen tunnels," for Mr. Eadie uses a bit of animal imagery too. And this leads to a few ironic little poems on the ideal vs. the reality of love. Mr. Eadie's imagery repays study. He can vary his tone and his metrics nicely, and suggest everything except passion. I suspect he will keep on writing poetry.

I find it hard to take Mr. Norman's section, "Post Mortems," seriously, because of that very flippancy which Mr. Eadie does not attempt, and which Mr. Norman seems to bring off only too well. …indubitably fun to write and listen to, but have they really a place in what should be a mildly solemn affair–one's first (I presume) book of poetry?…His "serious" poems all sound to me like borrowed voices–"Cat on the Sand" being Lay-

ton, "Table Talk" and "I Have No Grief," Eliot, etc. Only in "Camelot," the last poem, with its "Serene like her crystal century she drifted away / Calm-browed under that romantic sky, / Old goddess looking down the river / With ancient laughter in her eye," do I hear a voice instead of ventriloquy– and it sounds awfully like Mr. Eadie's voice.

The only one of the three who succeeds in presenting anything like a full portrait of himself is Mr. Marshall in his section "Alchemy," and he is in some ways the slickest, most flippant, and most academic of them all. His poetry-chest is replete with classical, medieval, and even Canadian allusions, mythology, outrageous puns, songs, sonnets, echoes of Wallace Stevens, public European-tour poems which sneer at other tourists, private European-tour poems dedicated to European girls, poems about painting, poems about poets, poems about poetry, and even a poem about, and dedicated to, Susanna Moodie, as though to shock the most unconvinced critic into silence. Just when I begin to think Mr. Marshall is merely terribly clever and a good writer of pastiche, I hit on something honest and felt in his poetry…and know he's more than that. But above all it is Mr. Marshall who has produced the real justification for existence of *The Beast with Three Backs*, in his superb rondel-like mirror-poem, "Alchemy." I forbear to quote from this extraordinary poem, which bears as subtitle "Agnes Sorel was the mistress of that king whom Joan of Arc also served," because its incantatory effect can be observed and felt only when it is read as a unit. If, as A.J.M. Smith says, poems succeed by a kind of luck, Mr. Marshall has been lucky with this poem; he has managed, by a kind of alchemy indeed, to transmute his pack of tricks and quotations and allusions and virtuosities into something truly disciplined and beautiful. "Academic" poetry can produce its own minor masterpieces.

Rather similar in sensibility to these three Kingston poets is Wayne Clifford whose *Man in a Window* (The Coach House Press, Toronto, 1965) is the most elegantly printed, bound, and illustrated of the books being reviewed here, though filled with typographical errors, several of which the publishers did not catch or correct on the errata sheet enclosed with the book. Mr. Clifford is also a young poet, like Mr. Eadie, and I find his symbolism to be the most interesting characteristic of his poetry. He is concerned mostly with night, sleep, death, and the death and rebirth which is sexual union, as the very fine drawings accompanying the poems make quite clear…. Not since Leo Kennedy has English Canadian literature had such a death-obsessed poet. All this imagery is masochistic, as in "Letter to a Friend" in which the poet asks his lost friend "why was I not collected, carried home / and formed to be the chest that holds your smiles?" or

"Debt" in which he states "I am yet stamped with her. / I must tell her I am the coin / she struck that I wish to pay." Music and song is a recurrent symbol, as in the window of the title poem, which is not a window to the world but rather "the glass / before me with the whole world painted."–that is, a kind of mirror, as is natural to an artist, and so we find the window/mirror recurring in these poems: the face of the oracle withdraws among mirrors, the poet feels himself "surging beneath the mirror," the dream is a mirror of life and we naturally get a poem entitled "Narcissus." The stone-and-flesh symbolism is also present; stone turns into flesh in "The Lover" but more frequently, flesh goes into stone, as in "Carved of Marble."

I have examined these symbols in such detail because it is obvious that Mr. Clifford deploys them quite deliberately and that they are keys to his extremely interesting poetry. Except in poems of the love scene, though, I find Mr. Clifford's language in general undistinguished. His thirty-six poems are, with I think one exception, all unrimed, and most are written in iambic five-stress or variable-stress lines.

This leaves Alfred Purdy's *The Cariboo Horses*, a title which is explained by the title poem, and a book for which great claims have been made. Of the group of eight poets under review here, Mr. Purdy could best claim to be a public poet, in the sense that poets in the 1930s were, in the sense of social, historical, and personal involvement with the world around him–though Mr. Bowering and Mrs. Finnigan possess public impulses. *The Cariboo Horses* contains a good half-dozen of Mr. Purdy's best poems –and his best is very good indeed. I'd include in my list the title poem, "The Machines," "The Death of John F. Kennedy," "Potter," "Method for Calling Up Ghosts," and, to me the crowning achievement of the book, "Transient"–an unsurpassed recreation of depression-time Canada, even of that shadowy and fading entity itself called Canada. (I disagree of course with Mr. Purdy's "epic vision" of Canada–I'm glad he sees what he sees, but I don't think it's really there, and I've seen it only with his eyes. But let us get on with the review.) There are also several minor delights in the book–quite perfect ones such as "Lu Yu," "Cronos at the Quinte Hotel," and "Fidel Castro in Revolutionary Square," this last written during his stay in Cuba. On the whole, though, I do not think this book is Mr. Purdy's breakthrough to greatness; in fact, I get impatient with the whole idea of such a breakthrough–as though one ever stopped writing really bad poems now and then. People who never write bad poems usually never write good ones either. The book, however, is flawed, and with really the same defects as Mrs. Finnigan's–rhetoric and sentimentality. When one talks of Mr. Purdy's rhetoric, one really means his exaggeration, I suppose. Let us men-

tion Mr. Purdy's sense of history, epic vision, sense of place, of time, of secret life of objects, call it what you will–that wonderful empathy with all living and inanimate beings, through all time, which he has. The poems just mentioned display it, none perhaps better than the last stanza of "Kennedy" and the last lines of "Method." Yet so often his use of history is trivial, pettily irrelevant, or wildly incongruous, without even comic effect. Why the long footnote to "Music on a Tombstone," for example, when that Spoon-River-like poem says everything it needs to by itself? Or is it true that Purdy says or thinks "the poem ends / but it never does."? Why the long, trivial elegy on a union contract negotiator, when it doesn't even capture an attitude toward the man? Again, I'm aware of the validity of Mr. Purdy's juxtaposition technique when properly used, as when Kennedy's legend is compared to "an empty suit of armour made / by a Bronx tailor for maybe / Richard Coeur de Lion," which has bite and appropriateness, but what real function is served in "Complaint Lodged with LCBO" by the unnecessary intrusion of "so I sit up straight as / 'The Motorist' by Praxiteles excavated by Henry Ford 4 / from under a million traffic tickets / of dead Greeks speeding in / Argos agora / or was it 'Hermes' or 'Pallas Athene' and not 'The Motorist' at all." I find this just wilful toying with the reader–certainly not helpful to gain an understanding of the poem, the poet, history, or anything else. If the historical allusions aren't wildly exaggerated and out of place and expanded and ramified beyond all countenancing, it's the figurative language. When he keeps his tongue in cheek, Mr. Purdy can be quite amusing with things like "beautiful as an angel's ass without the genitals" ("Song of the Impermanent Husband")…but I failed to react at all to the opening lines of "Engraved on a Tomb": "Off the train and so hungry a / nova sucking pap at the stars' lurch / counter to make rock porridge with would / blush and burp six asteroids to watch the / way I finished a plate of ham and eggs": What does this flight of fancy accomplish? Besides confusing the reader completely. Does the idea of a nova sucking pap to make rock porridge and burping asteroids really suggest great hunger in any meaningful way? Is that what *you* think of when you're hungry? This to me is an efflorescence of verbiage, cancerous, not a legitimate use of figurative language. The charge of sentimentality would probably not bother Mr. Purdy very much; he would say, and perhaps rightly, that all poetry is by definition sentimental. I'm thinking not so much really of Mr. Purdy's nostalgia for a more romantic past, as evidenced in the title poem and many others throughout the book, with their rather predictable contrasts and laments, but more of lines like these from "Postscript": "and you / weep because you do not weep / for each

other / (or very little) / but all young things / the new and continually arriving hardly-able-to-stand things that live here /in the trees and the woods and the green fields of summer." This of course is Layton of "The Bull-Calf"; and it is indeed the same kind of false compassion, because, I suppose, it couldn't change anything, and wouldn't if it could. I find the same falseness, the same too easy sympathy, though less obviously and objectionably, in "Mountain Lions in Stanley Park," perhaps because it seems to me Purdy is really talking about Canadians, and doesn't care about the lions….

I find now and then a curious prudery in Mr. Purdy's vocabulary, combined with the rhetoric in horrible inflated and euphemistic passages like "I remember only their voices and not their names and / whether their bodies' white liquids were sweet or sour now / in the singing distant guts of the moment" ("Notes on Painting"). The same thing occurs in "But hold my separate madness like a sword / and plunge it in your body all night long." ("Necropsy of Love") What are all these "madnesses" and "swords"? He's talking about a penis, isn't he? Of course, this is the same man who can talk figuratively, without batting an eyelash, of "the stars…fucking the universe," so I had better just accept his reordering of language.

There are in this collection the traditionally Canadian nasty poems against other poets, but it's evident that Mr. Purdy is too good-natured to worry much about these, and as a result they're not particularly ferocious. The worst poem in the book is "Ballad of a Despairing Wife," for my money. It is a tasteless ditty, which reminds me of things we used to sing in freshman year at university. First, I object to this cult of the supervirility of our poets, which is evident in the "sword" and "madness" quotation above, but even more in this ballad. Poets are like anyone else usually, barring a few De Maupassants (lucky souls) and should not lie about their capacities. Actually, though, were the poem not about a wife, I don't think I should object so violently. But as in Bowering's case, I get so tired of all these prissily legal, marital orgies, and really must register my disappointment with our supervirile Canadian bards. Is nobody promiscuous anymore? Doesn't anybody have sex with someone other than his wife and then go home and write a poem about it? What has happened to post-extramarital sex in our poetry?

Laying these frivolities aside, it is evident that on the basis of his achievement to date (he has been writing for a good many years now; it seems to me I began seeing his name in the *Canadian Poetry Magazine* in the late '40s). Mr. Purdy is an important poet. His tragic sense of history…his gift of significant detail…his celebration of life, even of the vil-

lage crank…and his ability to define himself with his own symbols… provide for me at least, the excitement of genuine poetry. I suspect that Mr. Purdy, who when he's at his best doesn't exactly sound like anybody else, (a faint cousinly relationship to Cavafy, perhaps) may well become the most important Canadian poet of his generation.

*** This document will be continued in the next issue of *Canadian Poetry.***

Notes

1 On the *Edge* masthead Lacey was termed an Associate Editor under the name "Edward E. Lacey".

2 The Tish group took its name after the Vancouver literary journal *Tish* (1961-69), in which many of its poets appeared.

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