

## STUDIES

### John Glassco's Self-Construction

By Brian Trehearne

The fact of John Glassco's present neglect is irrefutable: the unavailability of his poems and his all but complete eclipse in contemporary anthologies of Canadian literature are sufficient proof. Apart from Michael Gnarowski's reprinting of the *Selected Poems* in 1997 with Golden Dog Press, now hard to secure, and a rare silk-bound 2011 selection of his writings by Carmine Starnino for Frog Hollow Press in Victoria, Glassco's poetry has been out of print since his death. He does not appear in any genre in Robert Lecker's *Open Country* (2008), nor in Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss's *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts* (2009), nor in the third edition of Donna Bennett and Russell Brown's *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (2010). *Memoirs of Montparnasse* has fared a little better than the poetry, not only because it remains in print, if only with an American publisher, but also because its bibliographical and textual subterfuges gave Glassco scholarship renewed impetus in the 1980s. Thomas Tausky's and Philip Kokotailo's separate revelations that the *Memoirs* were in fact composed almost wholly in the early 1960s and not, as Glassco had led us to believe, in the early 1930s (very soon after the events they described) delivered an excitement to Glassco scholarship after his death in 1981 that would be sustained, more and more to the exclusion of the poems, through the nineties (see Scobie 1983 and 1999, Adams, Brown, Dellamora). During the 1990s, three out of the four scholarly articles published on Glassco dealt with the *Memoirs*; the fourth dealt with Glassco's translations of French-Canadian poetry. Since the turn of the century only three scholarly articles have addressed Glassco, and only Glassco as translator, all by Patricia Godbout. In the last several years it has been left entirely to the industriousness and discrimination of Brian Busby, Glassco's biographer and editor of his selected letters, to sustain the poet's reputation for a broad audience. All of this means that no new scholarship has appeared on Glassco's original poetry since my *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists* sought to depict him as a "post-Decadent" over a quarter-century ago.<sup>1</sup>

As the editor of the forthcoming *Complete Poems of John Glassco*, I am dismayed and compelled by such patterns of neglect, but also eager to

understand their machinery, as well as to perceive the ways in which the forgotten poet might have given sustenance to his detractors in the course of curating his own works and reputation. In introducing *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith* I tried to articulate the interactions between Smith criticism and the ways in which Smith himself understood, valued, interpreted, arranged, marketed, and constructed his body of poetry for us. In particular, Smith's own critical writings, for example his potent and much contested introductions to the major anthologies he bestowed upon the Canadian tradition, worked in substantial part to the detriment of his poetry's reception. Readers of Smith who feel sure that his neglect is a just response to the merit of his poems had from the introduction, at least, some useful illumination of the poet's own involvement in their eventual devaluation. With the case of Glassco a similar pattern obtains: like most inexperienced poets of mid-century who were not Irving Layton, he had few useful instincts of self-marketing and in any case, as we shall see, badly distrusted his own poems' right to a posterity. Glassco differs dramatically from Smith, however, in two ways: in the paucity of his critical pronouncements, and in an instinct for archival hoaxes that either sustained fictions of his writing life that were more flamboyant than the facts or attracted notoriety and critical activity when they were exposed. A much less publicly controversial voice in Canadian letters, he construed the meaning and value and indeed the career arc of his poetry more surreptitiously than had Smith—but by no means without effect. Glassco criticism is richly interwoven with Glassco's self-construction; indeed, the two discourses are in tension and dialogue through the dozen years of his most intense activity, from *A Point of Sky* in 1964, through the *Memoirs* in 1970 and his Governor-General's Literary Award for the *Selected Poems* of 1971, to his translation of *The Complete Poems of St-Denys Garneau* in 1975.

Glassco's domestication for public and academic consumption during that period helped to diminish his stature. The Canadian reading public's recognition of the author and awareness of his poetry surely reached its high point when he won the Governor-General's Literary Award for his *Selected Poems* in 1971, in the year after he had published the *Memoirs* and edited *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation: an annus mirabilis* such as few Canadian literary careers can boast. Yet it is possible that the timing was unfortunate for Glassco's poetry. The *Memoirs* entertained and were reviewed brilliantly; Charles Murdoch refers to the book's having "sold out within weeks of its publication..." (29-30). He began to appear in popular media, chiefly newspapers and magazines, playing more and more the ex-Bohemian.<sup>2</sup> Glassco's life and works as a pornographer, as

they surfaced in this period, also caught critical imaginations briefly (Kelly, Darling); the republication of *Harriet Marwood, Governess* under his own name in 1976 suggested both a wider public acceptance of pornographic writing and an admission on Glassco's part that there was no longer anything terribly dangerous in the book for his legal position.

Meanwhile the poems, when they came up at all, were being tamed: Murdoch's quasi-Victorian appreciation of Glassco in "Essential Glassco" reassured readers that "Interspersed with [Glassco's] poems of negation and denial are others of a more tranquil mood and more positive tone which, in affirming life, lead the reader on to the next step, the consolation, and the transcendence of time" (34). Murdoch finds "Glassco's eulogy of the notorious dandy of Regency England," the brilliant "Brummell at Calais," "distressing and ambiguous" (35) but enjoys his Don Quixote as a "more affecting and noble" character (36). Lest the pornography's delight in sado-masochism disturb us, Murdoch wants us to know that for Glassco "commitment to another person is more rewarding and lasting than devotion to an ego-centred idea" (37). The reader will judge these remarks for herself, but taken at face value they characterize a poet largely without interest for readers of the seventies newly seized by such innovations as Michael Ondaatje's *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970) or Margaret Atwood's *Power Politics* (1971).

M.T. Kelly's appropriation of Glassco in *The Globe and Mail* in 1979 as the occasion for ruminations on the increasing public acceptance of sado-masochism confirmed that the time when Glassco might be thought inimical to public values was well over. In 1976 Kathy Mezei had consolidated such belittling treatments, albeit unwittingly, in a late review of the Garneau translations, into an image of "John Glassco" that could hardly have been more effective if she had *intended* to minimize his art's significance:

In his quiet, unassuming way, Glassco has greatly affected the course of Canadian literature. The mere presence of this whimsical and iconoclastic gentleman improves the temper of our culture. And Glassco's deliberate diletantism countering our dreadful professionalism is a high achievement for this country. His poetry presents a pensive, muted look at local landscapes and complex metaphysical spaces. His pornography mocks our puritanical anglo-saxon-sado-masochistical heritage. His journals *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, which are the reflections of a gay boulevardier in Paris during the '20's, and "A Season in Limbo" by Silas N. Gooch . . . a wry account of Glassco's sojourn in a [tuberculosis] sanatorium during the '50's, are sophisticated ventures into an interesting genre. (83)

The *Memoirs*: merely a “venture”; an “interesting genre.” Perhaps it was to such portraits that Sutherland referred shortly after when he wrote that “Conventional wisdom had categorized [Glassco] as an elaborate doodler, a nice dirty old man” (7).<sup>3</sup> In any case, it seems a plausible conclusion that John Glassco held Canadians’ attention chiefly and briefly as an eccentric literary personality; that he gave pleasure more for who he was—insofar as this was rendered in the *Memoirs*, when these were taken for truth, or in the role of pornographer, or in the interviews—than for what he wrote in verse.

Such dismissive and condescending gestures were strikingly estranged, however, from the tones of deep disturbance in some of Glassco’s earliest commentators. For Milton Wilson, reviewing *The Deficit Made Flesh* for the *Canadian Forum* in June 1959, Glassco “depicts...a grim map of changing landmarks, of generations at cross-purposes, of betrayal and revenge and empty success, although also of strength and survival, of form (or even grace) in the midst of ruin.” I emphasize Wilson’s balance of judgment, his ability to articulate both the psychological freight of Glassco’s Eastern Townships poems and their remote possibilities of a transient “grace.” We hear that ability to respond richly to paradox and disjunctive vision again when Wilson remarks that Glassco’s “key actors and images are hard to forget: the grasping, visionary fathers, the pathetic, as well as murderous, sons—victims and avengers; the forms of decay and the success that unforms itself; the realities that become real only when chaos is come again.” Northrop Frye, reviewing the same book for his “Letters in Canada 1958” in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, responds strongly to Glassco’s flirtation with nihilism: “There are several images of an exhausting uphill journey that gets one nowhere in particular...” while “a feverish vision of a paradise of conquered nature forces generations to wear themselves out...” (349). Frye was also alert as few later readers have been to the psychological resonance of violent fathers in Glassco’s poetry (350). Both reviewers appear to feel significant discomfort over Glassco’s vision—as well they might. When Munroe Beattie took up Glassco for the *Literary History of Canada* in 1965, he echoed their disturbance and made it explicit: recognizing rightly that Glassco’s poetry is “bent upon...communicating a peculiar kind of consciousness,” Beattie characterizes Glassco’s “attitude to life [as both] compelling and repulsive” (310). Glassco’s “commentary on human feelings and aspirations” is “corrosive,” and while Beattie acknowledges that some may find a “Pessimism so inordinate” to be a “valid ‘philosophy of life,’” “Others...may regard these poems as splinters from a damaged sensibility” (311). We may well cri-

tique such commentators for a conflation of persona, text, and poet, and refuse their confident moral grounding, but it is fascinating to hear the distance across a mere quarter-century between such troubled early responses to Glassco and Mezei's "whimsical and iconoclastic gentleman." An irony of my reading of these commentators is that the first reviews, full of negative judgment and ethical disturbance, constitute a more profound engagement with Glassco's work—and once stood, therefore, to perpetuate his poetry in a complex critical vision—than the approving but patronizing critical utterances of the 1970s. A second irony, I hope to show, is that Glassco had a part, surely unintended, in the transition in his public reputation from a troubling but profound voice to that of a dilettantish gentleman holding on feebly to a past literary world.

Glassco interpreted his poetry's sources and significance in two major bodies of writing and curation: publicly, in interviews and in a handful of widely scattered comments in essays and prefaces; and privately, in journals, correspondence, and other documents he deposited in his archives at McGill University and at Library and Archives Canada. In both public and private writings he is as eager as his critics would prove to be to identify the writers and thinkers who were influential in the growth of his own vision and technique. On the whole he takes a more salutary, even naïve view of artistic influence in the private writings, whereas the public announcements of his inspirations and sources can be cunningly misleading and indeed satirical at the expense of critics who confuse a catalogue of a writer's precursors with an articulation of his vision. The private writings also express a largely negative, even despairing, judgment of his own productions and writing life that the public expressions, perhaps naturally, rarely echo. A third mode of Glassco's self-construction was his selection, arrangement, and editing of his poems for publication by periodicals and presses. As he prepared his papers for deposition with public repositories, too—an act on the cusp of private and public self-description—he revised, dated, and collated his archive in ways that he hoped would direct future discussion of his poetry. Perhaps none of these modes was as impactful, however, as the wry self-construction imposed by *Memoirs of Montparnasse* in 1970.

The *Memoirs* played a double part, both retrospective and prospective, in the construction of Glassco's later critical reputation. They both responded and gave renewed license to critics who felt that his poetry's significance must have substantially to do with its sources. The once vexed question of Glassco's relation to the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth is especially clarifying of this function of the book's name-drop-

ping. Milton Wilson, as we have seen a judicious reviewer of *The Deficit Made Flesh*, was nevertheless the first to articulate Glassco's relation to Wordsworth in bald terms: "These poems are Canada's lyric equivalent of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage*, *Michael* and *The Brothers*." Glassco was having some typically anachronistic fun with such commentators in the *Memoirs* when he satirized the Canadian search for national examples of important poetic innovations across the pond and exempted himself from such subservience:

"What about your English Canadian poets?" [asks one Georges Pol<sup>4</sup> at a party.]

"We have Lampman, the Canadian Keats, and Carman, the Canadian Swinburne. We also have Smith, who is sometimes hailed as the Canadian Yeats but whom I prefer to all of them."

"May I ask if you yourself are already the Canadian avatar of someone else, and if so of whom?"

"So far I have not donned any mantle at all, but it was not easy." (32)

Now that we know he was writing the *Memoirs* in the early 1960s, we can well imagine that Wilson's 1959 comment on Glassco's emulation of Wordsworth would still have been ringing in his ears as he wrote these lines.

Their lesson, however, was lost on John Burnett, whose article "John Glassco: Canadian Wordsworth" appeared in an otherwise invaluable Glassco special issue of the present journal a year after the poet's death. My disagreements with him are sufficiently stated in the Glassco chapter of *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*. The important point at present is that Burnett's effort to align Glassco exactly with the great Romantic predecessor was cued in part by Glassco's own self-construction in the *Memoirs*. Presumably the satirical passage above was intended at least in part to warn off potential critics from too-facile alignments of Canadian poets and European or American precursors, but Burnett instead took the bait from another passage, in which "Buffy"<sup>5</sup> refers to his "favourite English poet Wordsworth" (22). Glassco's presentation of the influence in question is typically ironic: he insists on his appreciation of both "the poet and the prig" Wordsworth. Glassco's precise calibration of Wordsworth's contradictory legacy escaped Burnett, for whom "the model whose 'mantle' [Glassco] elected to wear was Wordsworth—Wordsworth the poet, but

not the prig” (3). Glassco’s own construal of literary reception was nothing so binary as the critic’s, but he—or “Buffy”—was not entirely without responsibility for the critic’s distortions.

In fact, Glassco seems determined in the *Memoirs* to lay down a number of promising leads and as many false scents for any susceptible critic of influence: Sutherland does not exaggerate when he calls the book “a virtual syllabus of Glassco’s artistic sympathies and antipathies” (13). Glassco’s “Buffy” is always incredibly well read, indeed gifted in the recognition of incipient authors who would later be widely acclaimed: it is easy to be prescient in 1928 when one is writing with foreknowledge granted by 1964.<sup>6</sup> Readers of the 1970s, without benefit of Tausky’s proof that the *Memoirs* had been written in near-entirety after 1961, must have been enormously impressed with the “real” and “younger” Glassco’s exceptional cultural taste, which ranges so fluently from eighteenth-century English philosophy and Italian memoir, through Decadents both living and dead, both French and English, to the avatars of French modernism both early and obscure. None of these trails of influence signified as keenly, however, as did their flippancy of expression by a jejune young man who could affiliate himself with and disaffiliate himself from powerful literary practitioners at the drop of a stylish hat. In the figure of “Buffy” in the *Memoirs* Glassco was constructing an image of hedonism, indolence, and indeed dilettantism that partly explains the otherwise puzzling transition in Glassco’s reputation from the “repulsi[on]” expressed by Beattie in 1965 to the affection felt for a safely domesticated “iconoclastic gentleman” by Mezei in 1976.<sup>7</sup>

It is in the *Memoirs* for example that Glassco identifies *Conan’s Fig* as his “first good surrealist poem” (10). While Fraser Sutherland was forced, working partly under Glassco’s advisement, to incorporate the supposed poem into his bibliography (albeit with a due undertone of skepticism in the annotation), Busby is definite that *Conan’s Fig* never existed, neither in Glassco’s original English nor in the French translation he claimed to have had published by Robert Desnos in Paris in 1930 (328 n. 49). The lie and its motivations are of interest below, but for present purposes—since we must wonder why no critic thought further about the possibility of a meaningful relation between Glassco and Surrealism—the more telling remark follows in the *Memoirs*: “Now,” he adds after a few lines, “less than six months later, when I have definitely abandoned surrealism, I still think [*Conan’s Fig*] has a certain idiotic grace” (10). This is the posture Glassco often wants to capture with irony in the *Memoirs*, of a young man who can move with his own “idiotic grace” from a thorough captivation by Surrealist mannerisms to a “definite” rejection of the movement within six short

months. This is indeed “Buffy” as dilettante, an enthusiast of cultural discoveries who becomes contemptuous of each once he has imbibed the charm of some new style. That flippancy is crucial to the *Memoirs*’ sustaining its precise ironic dissonance between the young “Buffy” and the retrospective slightly older narrator audible in italics, and it shallows every acknowledgment of influence that the young *boulevardier* spouts.

It is for these reasons, I suspect, that the literary name-dropping in the *Memoirs* did not give rise to a more thoughtful criticism of Glassco’s poetry, indeed helped to obscure and devalue the poetry thereafter. The *Memoirs* offered good fodder for any critic interested, for instance, in Glassco’s responses to French artists from Aestheticism to modernism, but the callowness of “Buffy’s” engagement with such sources probably helped to discourage disciplined scholarship in this area: “I had only to think I was now in the city of Baudelaire, Utrillo and Apollinaire,” he writes typically, “to be swept by a joy so strong it verged on nausea” (13).<sup>8</sup> Of equal note, and with equal lack of critical impact, is “Buffy’s” playful engagement, “slightly drunk,” with the philosophy of George (a.k.a. Bishop) Berkeley: “*Esse est percipi*, I thought; and I amused myself by closing my eyes, thus annihilating the visible universe...” (106).<sup>9</sup> The dissolute tone here helped to blur the relevance of such a passage to the rich epistemological theatre that makes up (as one example) “Hail and Farewell,” a poem written shortly before he began the *Memoirs* in 1961 and revised (as “The Art of Memory”) throughout the years of that book’s composition: as he has it there, “Only eyes closing, hooded from the sun, / Suffice in this splenetic hour to ease / The lust of matter” (*SP* 30). “Buffy’s” invitations to read Glassco’s poetry in relation to such sources are continual, but if Glassco had *hoped* to deter criticism of the broader sources of his poetry with the ironic self-annotations of the *Memoirs*, he could hardly have had a better result. Of course, it is equally possible, poignantly so, that he really did hope to lead his more discriminating critics to compelling new contexts for his works; in which case, the intervening flippancy of “Buffy’s” cultural posturing appears to have deflected the desired outcome.

Instead, the themes and composition history of the *Memoirs* dominated Glassco criticism for the remainder of his life and two decades beyond it, and attention to the poetry waned. The seventies reader appears to have been encouraged by this bit of “autobiographical” fun from the Jazz Age to forget the Glassco *persona* that had been articulated in the early poetry reviews produced by Wilson, Frye, and Beattie. On the evidence of “Buffy’s” shenanigans and callow judgments, John Glassco was a more



light-hearted, aimless, fun-loving fellow than one might have imagined from reading his “two slim volumes of verse”;<sup>10</sup> perhaps we needn’t take his vision of “betrayal and revenge and empty success” (Wilson), of life as an “exhausting uphill journey” (Frye), too seriously, or be too much troubled by his “damaged sensibility” (Beattie). In truth, the often agonized preoccupations of the poems seem fundamentally out of kilter with the levity of the *Memoirs*, and criticism kept them thoroughly estranged long thereafter. To make his argument for Glassco’s essential hedonism in “Liberty and the Pursuit of Pleasure,” for instance, John Lauber had to confine himself to the *Memoirs*. Glassco’s efforts both to seed and to mock future criticism of his poetry appear to have been caught up in a more powerful invitation extended by the *Memoirs* to take nothing he wrote too seriously. No critic wants to be caught out by an irony he senses but has failed to cognize.

Against the force of self-construction in the *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, Glassco’s non-fictional accounts of his poetry appear slight and weightless. His theorization of poetic composition in “Euterpe’s Honeymoon: Notes on the Poetic Process” (1971) sounds largely like warmed-over A.J.M. Smith, from such essays as “The Poetic Process,”<sup>11</sup> but Glassco’s passing emphasis on an achieved lyric poem’s “internal movement... a single major and continuous pulsation... a series of forward and backward movements, of alternating thrusts and retreats, or advancements and withdrawals...” (114) is both more original and more suggestive of new modes of reading the structure of his best poems. These ideas in “Euterpe’s Honeymoon,” however, had little impact on the critical readers of Glassco’s poems,<sup>12</sup> and none compared to the use made of his identification of his Decadent sources in the “Preface” to *The Fatal Woman* in 1974. There he wrote of having come “under the renewed influence of Huysmans, Pater, Villiers [de l’Isle-Adam], Barbey d’Aurévilly and others of the so-called Decadents” (ii), and the remark gave the present writer useful support for a claim that Glassco’s long-standing relation to Aesthetic and Decadent European literatures was decisive in his formulation of the uniquely modern stance of the “post-Decadent” (Trehearne 185). The remark also prompted comment from Burnett (1) and Sutherland (13) and was important to Kokotailo’s identification of Glassco’s “literary subterfuge” with the techniques of the Aesthetes and Decadents of Europe (79). The minor consensus has gone unchallenged, but Glassco’s remark now strikes one as a little too specific, too *helpful*, to be granted the authority I and others accorded it.

No other critical self-constructions by Glassco were made potent by subsequent criticism. He was neither a literary critic nor a prolific anthologist rife with arguments about the Canadian tradition that might direct readings of his own creative output; he was no Smith, in short, whose historical, critical, and theoretical writings did so much to establish his literary reputation and posterity, to their eventual detriment. Glassco's "Preface" to *English Poetry in Quebec*, the proceedings of the Foster Poetry Conference in 1964, does little more than narrate the organization and atmosphere of this simultaneously little and landmark conference, though there is some deftness in his managing to avoid choosing sides between "the elders still presumably stumbling around in post-war academic darkness and the clear-sighted children of a putative post-nuclear dawn" (6-7). The only anthology Glassco edited, *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, appeared in the same year as the *Memoirs*, but its introduction reveals nothing of Glassco's judgment of his own poetry. Rather it was in his practice of what Kokotailo has called "literary subterfuge" that Glassco sought, eccentrically but not ineffectively, to direct the critical conversation about his writing life.

Other than the back-dating of the *Memoirs* to 1933, the best-known hoax of Glassco's career is the retrospective creation of *Conan's Fig*, supposedly published as a "pamphlet" by the little magazine *transition* in 1928. The earliest instance Gnarowski mentions of a deliberate attempt to convince his public of *Conan's* existence is a typescript "List of Publications in Book Form" that Glassco sent to the editors of *Yes* magazine, Gnarowski among them, as they prepared a special issue on the poet (no. 15, Sep 1966; the list is reproduced in Gnarowski, ed., dated by Glassco "Feb. 27, 1964" [4]). Glassco's auto-bibliography opens with a *Conan* entry, followed by the pretended French translation by Robert Desnos; by hand Glassco has annotated these entries at the bottom of the page with the convenient remark, "I haven't even got copies of these myself" (Gnarowski, ed., 4).<sup>13</sup> *Conan's Fig* thereafter stood more or less firm in the Glassco *oeuvre*, supported by the *Memoirs* reference to the poem noted earlier, though of course the "poem" itself went unread, until Busby's refutation. Both Busby (328 fn 49) and Gnarowski ("John Glassco" 3 n. 4) acknowledge, however, the force of an entry in the "Intimate Journal" from July 30 1936, in which Glassco castigates himself for the quality of his juvenilia: "it is the most amateur, jejune tripe!"<sup>14</sup> At some later point he added in the margin, "*Conan's Fig*—what tripe!" As the various razored excisions from the "Intimate Journal" show, however, Glassco doctored this document heavily before he placed it with McGill, and there is no par-

ticular reason to believe that the marginal annotation was even roughly contemporary with the original entry.<sup>15</sup>

Such textual deceptions became habitual with Glassco in the early sixties. They were arguably demanded by the thin legal ice on which the pornographer was always skating, but in later years he became an occasional plagiarist as well as a hoaxer (see Trehearne, “Matter of Glassco” 94-96). Sometimes, of course, such hoaxes were intended merely to authenticate or give historical credence to a work he wished chiefly to publicize; such is the case with his attribution of his own *Squire Hardman* to George Colman the Younger, the supposed but misidentified author of *The Rodiad*, one of Glassco’s source-texts for his own practice of flagellation literature.<sup>16</sup> Of greater interest to the reader of the poetry, however, will be Glassco’s efforts to annotate and organize his archive so as to suggest that he had produced a more substantial and skilful body of verse in the mid-1930s than was in fact the case. These manoeuvres are in keeping with the *Conan* deception, in that they all indicate—as does the false dating of the *Memoirs*—Glassco’s desire in his mid-fifties to suggest that his writing career had been ample and prolific for fifteen years before his first published poem appeared in the *Canadian Forum* in 1943. At this point we must make the transition from Glassco’s public self-construction in the *Memoirs* and for the editors and readers of Gnarowski’s *Yes* to the private fictionalizing of his career that is visible only in the archives—including misrepresentations and hoaxes that he perhaps *wished* to see borne out in print but that have remained visible until now only to researchers. As the discussion below suggests, there would be nothing incredible at all in his having added a marginal note on *Conan’s Fig* to the “Intimate Journal” at a much later date.

The temporal bookends of the *Memoirs* hoax set the pattern. In that volume, Glassco sought to represent work of the early 1960s as writing of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In arranging and annotating his manuscripts and typescripts for their sale to and eventual deposition with McGill University in January 1966,<sup>17</sup> Glassco annotated the drafts of many poems with dates from memory, or what felt like memory—or pretended to be. The most striking instance is an onion-skin typescript of “For Lucifer,” first published in 1964 in the little magazine *Limbo* and thereafter in his second collection *A Point of Sky*, that he identified as an “Original version / (ca. 1934)”. The three-decade gap is striking. Glassco did not work often with onion-skin paper after the Second World War, so the stationery lends credence to his dating, as does the typeface of the typewriter, which

matches that of his Depression-era work, although he used the machine through much of 1962.<sup>18</sup>

Militating against the date he provides, however, are a number of facts: (1) the textual likeness of the “1934” version to the final version of the poem published in *Limbo* in 1964: if thirty years *had* passed they prompted Glassco to little more than a final tinkering with a few words of the earlier poem, despite archival evidence of substantial efforts with the poem in the early 1960s; (2) the lack of reference to a poem called “For Lucifer” (or any of its variant titles) in the “Intimate Journal,” of which, however, he destroyed various entries, including the first several pages running from 1931 to February 1934; (3) the “1934” typescript’s deposition with McGill inside the folder of his 1964 hospital memoir “A Season in Limbo”; (4) the TS dated “1934” has the same title as the *later* of two partial TSS he worked on for *Limbo* in 1963, a title that was the result of repeated cancellation and revision at that time; (5) the earlier of the two partial TSS is dated “Jul 29 ’63,” with no reference to revision of a prior version;<sup>19</sup> (6) the top right corner of the “1934” onion-skin TS has been roughly torn away, possibly to eliminate evidence of a later date of composition. None of these facts constitutes proof of a hoax, but in the aggregate, and in light of Glassco’s growing propensity at the time for “literary subterfuge,” they at least put his dating in question.

An appeal to internal and stylistic evidence does not entirely clarify the matter. A seventh argument against the 1934 dating of “For Lucifer” can and should be made, that the poem’s tone, diction, and style are clearly that of Glassco no earlier than the 1950s, and that the poem, in its deft and sour humour and cynicism, bears little likeness to the light and late Romantic wistfulness of the 1930s juvenilia with which he claimed, in arranging his papers, it was contemporary. The point may be illustrated at once with a glance at any stanza or two of “For Lucifer” alongside a similar excerpt from the typical juvenile piece “For Marguerite Whitney,” a poem he worked on from 1933 to 1935 which was thus closely contemporary with any draft of “For Lucifer” supposed to have been written in 1934:

Who puts his bowler on his head  
And hastens from the whore he’s manded,  
Shall see another in his stead,  
Waiting, his bowler in his hand,

While myriads of ephemerae,  
Urged on by a more formal lust,  
Like snowflakes on a stormy day

Fly, fecundate and fall to dust.  
(“For Lucifer,” *A Point of Sky* 20)

But music that comes and softly goes  
In wild-flower meadows from the bees  
And summer odours half disclose  
The richer world one never sees,

And as the south wind lovingly  
Bears in its breath a sweeter spring;  
So now your image turns for me  
To the shadow of some lovelier thing.  
(“For Marguerite Whitney” ll. 5-12)

Of course, an apprentice poet can move quickly through many dissonant voices and tones, Glassco perhaps more rapidly than most. A more precise comparison of the above stanzas from “For Lucifer” with a similarly Eliot-inspired quatrain poem of the early 1930s, “The Man of Action,” muddies the temporal waters:

. . . What should a man of action do?  
—Spring on both feet out of bed;

Draw the curtains, bathe and dress;  
And exit; passing unawares  
Beneath the unregarded man,  
The portrait on the darkened stairs,—

Against a looped-up velvet pall  
That half reveals a land of fruits,  
The bands and gown of him who framed  
A Discourse on the Attributes.  
(ll. 23-32)

To my ear, the more showy Eliotism of “The Man of Action”<sup>20</sup> and the comparative earnestness of its satire bespeak a much earlier composition than that of “For Lucifer,” but the likeness here is certainly closer and cannot enable a final ruling on his dating of the latter poem. The subjective nature of any such debate is strongly countered, nevertheless, by the six textual facts arising from Glassco’s archive. At the very least, his dating of the poem should not be trusted.

Further supporting the argument for a hoax with “For Lucifer” is the attribution in the archive of several other poems intended for *A Point of Sky*, his 1964 second collection, to the identical year of 1934. The poems are minor and brief; all were published first and solely in *A Point of Sky*, which made it impossible for any reader to question their age or provenance. Again, none is mentioned in the “Intimate Journal,” where Glassco typically listed his work in progress. They are “On Her Coldness” (47), “Myrrhina” (52), “To Certain Ladies” (52), “April” (63), “Beautés de la Nature” (66) and “Gratitude” (67). In the *Glassco Papers* (Box 1 Folder 13) the first and last-named of these poems appear on a single typescript page, along with the archival poem “When I Go Out”; Glassco has dated each separately on the page “’34”. “Myrrhina” and “To Certain Ladies,” as well as the archival poem “To My Enemies,” appear together on another typescript page; in this instance Glassco has dated the page as a whole “1934.” Finally, “April” and “Beautés de la Nature” are distinct typescripts, dated by Glassco respectively “1934” and “’34”. All have indeed been typed on Glassco’s Depression-era typewriter, but he used that machine until 1962; in all cases, I read the 1934 attribution to have been made in Glassco’s handwriting from later life. In some cases the dating is believable in relation to the arc of Glassco’s developing style: “April,” “Beautés de la Nature,” and “Gratitude” might well have been contemporary with the firmly dated archival poems of 1934, though they are more skilful in the vein. In other cases—“On Her Coldness,” “Myrrhina,” and “To Certain Ladies”—the poems evince a stylish cynicism and epigrammatic quality that is impossible to find elsewhere among the unpublished juvenilia of the 1930s. As *none* of the supposed “1934” poems so far discussed is mentioned in the “Intimate Journal,” we can conclude at a minimum that Glassco dated these archival documents from a great distance in time, and it was a convenience of memory that listed them *all* as 1934. Further, we must conclude that the year 1934 held some special significance for him as he dated his archive, since he had no evidence, for instance from the “Intimate Journal,” to support his memory when he dated “For Lucifer” and these six squibs to that year.<sup>21</sup> Since he was conceiving the *Memoirs* hoax—which would similarly see a work of the 1960s back-dated to no later than 1933—at roughly the same time as he dated these poem drafts, it is tempting to conclude that the minor poetry *circa* 1964 underwent the same deliberate misrepresentation as the better-known work of prose.

Certainly Glassco was writing juvenile poems in 1934: “A Birthday Present,” “The Golden Oriole,” “Sweet Marigold,” and “3 Sonnets” are archival poems<sup>22</sup> that can be placed in that year on the testimony of the

“Intimate Journal.” None prepares us for the deep cynicism of “For Lucifer” or for that matter “On Her Coldness.” There are remarkable ambiguities nevertheless in Glassco’s preparation and annotation of the archival materials pertinent to these poems. “The Golden Oriole,” for instance, exists only in a single typescript from Glassco’s post-1962 typewriter, though he has confirmed on the typescript the “Intimate Journal’s” dating to 1934; the typescript of “A Birthday Present” he dated in an autograph note to “1934-1938,” presumably to indicate an extended period of revision of the poem that the “Intimate Journal” mentions as having been written in 1934. In the case of the other two poems Glassco’s retrospective dating is somewhat more ambiguous: “Sweet Marigold” is dated “1939” on one typescript and “1932” on another, a reminder that he didn’t always verify his memory against the “Journal”; and “3 Sonnets” he has annotated with “Westmount, Nov.-Dec. 1924 / Re-typed May, 1945”. As he was fifteen in 1924, one suspects a simple typo for “1934” in the entry (or a desire to show his editor-to-be his teenage precocity, far from out of the question).

In any case, 1934 clearly loomed large in Glassco’s strategic memories as he prepared his *Memoirs*, gathered poems for *A Point of Sky*, and arranged his archives for sale to McGill.<sup>23</sup> Though the evidence remains circumstantial, my forthcoming edition of Glassco’s complete poems will consider “For Lucifer,” “On Her Coldness,” “Myrrhina,” and “To Certain Ladies” to be work of the early 1960s that Glassco deliberately misrepresented as work of 1934. The evidence is perhaps strongest for one who has turned the pages of his manuscripts and typescripts and seen “1934” penned in his older handwriting onto page after page of the archival record. This is a hoax of a pretty minor order when compared to the *Memoirs* subterfuge and the wholesale invention of a first book published in Paris called *Conan’s Fig*, but all these gambits suggest that Glassco wanted in his mid-fifties a longer and ampler record as a poet and memoirist than he in fact had. His friend A.J.M. Smith makes for an apt comparison here: when he gathered his *Collected Poems* in 1960 Smith raided his *McGill Fortnightly Review* files for poems that had not been collected, some not even published, in the thirty-five years since, and he made no mention in the book or elsewhere of his having expanded his canon significantly and suddenly with apprenticeship work; many reviewers noted the unexpectedly high number of poems in Smith’s *Collected* with surprise. Though they went about it in opposite ways (Smith bringing older work forward without comment, Glassco back-dating some newer work), both Glassco and Smith seem to have felt a need to underscore poetic substance and range that their publishing careers did not truthfully evince. The Glassco poems definitely

of 1934 having gone unpublished, and those few published poems he claimed for 1934 having been dated only in his private papers, the hoax was only ever potential, but it confirms the leaning towards bibliographical deceit that we see so often in his career and makes plain some of the anxieties of authorship and authority he was feeling during the 1960s.<sup>24</sup>

Glassco was unlike Smith, however, and unlike his exact contemporary A.M. Klein, in not having arranged and re-arranged his poems into typescript collections for circulation to publishers. There is no evidence that he prepared any particular collection of poems *per se* until the opportunity to publish a first book in McClelland and Stewart's "Indian File" series arose in 1958—and even in that case we must deduce the existence of lost typescript collections, none of them having been deposited in his archives. He was made anxious by the obligation to select and arrange his poems into larger wholes, and he often turned to Smith for guidance in such projects, as was the case with the final table of contents for both *A Point of Sky* and *Selected Poems* (the former is dedicated to Smith and the latter "thanks...A.J.M. Smith for his invaluable help in choosing and arranging" the poems ("Note")); he needed Smith's help again, and F.R. Scott's, with the selection for *English Poetry in Quebec*.<sup>25</sup> We have in fact only one typescript collection that formed the basis of a published collection, *A Point of Sky*, and we have no typescript collections that he produced on speculation alone. He did make a point in 1945 of retyping a few of his poems to that point, an action that suggests that his first successful placement of a poem in a Canadian periodical (in 1943, with "The Rural Mail" in the *Canadian Forum*) had triggered hopes of book publication, or at least thoughts of posterity, though only fugitive archival poems of questionable accomplishment received the honour of re-typing ("Spring in the City," "The Hag," "3 Sonnets," and "A Birthday Present").<sup>26</sup> Of "The Rural Mail" (SP 8-9) we have, remarkably, no archival record at all, and the same is true of many of his major early poems, for instance, "The Entailed Farm" (SP 13-14), "Gentleman's Farm" (SP 15-18), and "The Brill Road" (SP 23-4), though there must have been a typescript on which *The Deficit Made Flesh* was based that included these works. Presumably such poems were written, typed, and re-typed many times over in the course of their composition, circulation, and collection. We must presume that Glassco deliberately suppressed their composition history and destroyed surviving drafts and early versions—though most of these major poems were written only *after* he and Graeme Taylor lit an archival conflagration in fear of the use that might be made of their private papers in a lawsuit launched by their former housekeeper, sex partner and (in the case



of Taylor) spouse, Mary Elizabeth Wilson, *a.k.a.* “Sappho,” in 1944 (Busby 124).<sup>27</sup>

One of the few efforts Glassco did make to gather poems into sequences and clusters arose from his identification of “4 Civilian Poems” among his works in an “Intimate Journal” entry of 6 December 1943 (106-07). He notes there that the grouping had been rejected by the *Canadian Forum*, so he obviously submitted more work to them around the time of the appearance of “The Rural Mail” in September of that year. He does not, unfortunately, identify the four poems by title. In her doctoral dissertation on Glassco Patricia Whitney treats them as four lost poems (436); Busby does not mention the cluster. One archival poem was definitely included: “Man Overboard: 1941” is a poem only in typescript dated “Knowlton, 1941”, with the autograph annotation “4 Civilian Poems” scratched out at the top right. On this foundation the identity of the other three “Civilian Poems” can be deduced: “Noyade: 1942” appears only in *The Deficit Made Flesh* in 1958 (16-17), yet the structure and punctuation of its title, the shared imagery of drowning, and its wartime home-front theme clearly align it with “Man Overboard: 1941.” There is no archival record for “Noyade: 1942,” so there is no proof that it was written in or soon after the year of its subtitle, but it is like “Man Overboard: 1941” a poem by a non-combatant who must watch a loved one leave for war. The centrality of the non-combatant theme to both poems is underscored by the otherwise cryptic group title “4 Civilian Poems.” In addition, two other poems immediately adjacent to “Man Overboard: 1941” in the “Unpublished Poems 1924-1963” folder in volume 1 of the Glassco Fonds at Library and Archives Canada share the non-combatant theme, were typed on the same typewriter Glassco used in the 1940s, and have been dated by him to the same period: these are “How Does It Happen” (dated 1941), which was eventually printed under the title “Schlemihl” in *Delta* in 1962, and “No, I’d Not Break Now,” dated by Glassco on one of two typescripts to 1940.<sup>28</sup>

“Man Overboard” is certainly, then, one of the “4 Civilian Poems” Glassco sent to the *Canadian Forum*; circumstantial evidence places “Noyade” and “How Does It Happen” strongly in that grouping. Slightly less certain is the placement of “No, I’d Not Break Now” in the cluster. Curiously, Glassco thought of including this poem in *A Point of Sky*; it appears in the 1962 *Point of Sky* typescript (see endnote 18), and on the basis of internal evidence the said typescript appears to be the *earlier* of the two versions we have, despite Glassco’s dating. Despite this irreconcilable confusion, and the possibility of yet another back-dating of an early sixties

poem, “No, I’d Not Break Now” is not at all in Glassco’s style of the early 1960s but is entirely believable as a product of his war years work:

And O cave-bellied anchorite of the plain,  
Blind self-beshitten Simeon pillared on  
The swollen body of earth in pride and pain,  
Bring me again, stark patron, erect son  
And pointer of all vainglory, oh once again  
Faith in sterile standing without aim.

(ll. 9-14)

The lurid imagery and Milton echo<sup>29</sup> may also suggest transitional early work. At any rate, the identification of “No, I’d Not Break Now” as the fourth of the “4 Civilian Poems” must remain probable rather than definite.

More durable is the clear evidence from these poems that Glassco was keenly aware of and unhappy with the impact of his physical disabilities on his chances of war service. The “civilian” voice we hear in such poems is regretful and deeply embarrassed as well as fearful for a loved one who *has* enlisted.<sup>30</sup> Such attentiveness to the demands upon men of wartime and war culture supplies a rich emotional and psychological context for a canonical poem such as “The Rural Mail,” which is distinctly and even fearfully a poem of the war years, however “rural” its setting and the actions of its participants. Had Glassco placed this group of “4 Civilian Poems” successfully, a quite different *ethos* might have been stamped by early reviewers on his early work and no doubt would have attracted critical attention later on. Instead, “Man Overboard: 1941” and “No, I’d Not Break Now” went unpublished; “How Does It Happen / Schlemihl” appeared in Louis Dudek’s little magazine *Delta* but was never collected in a volume; and “Noyade: 1942” appeared after a decade and a half in *The Deficit Made Flesh* but was not chosen by Smith for the *Selected Poems*. Glassco’s decision never to recuperate this cluster of wartime poetry—apart from its badly obscured inclusion in the archives—denied us an important opportunity to see him in the ambiguous position of a bisexual man of soldiering age and prematurely failing body left behind on the home front. Critical attempts to fuse the bitter vision of the “4 Civilian Poems” with the broader concerns of the *Selected Poems* might have given a richer sense of Glassco as a man fully anchored—as who could not be?—in the twentieth century’s push and pull of atrocity and complacency.<sup>31</sup>

Glassco’s abashment as an editor and agent of his own poems surely has much to do with another continual note struck in the “Intimate Journal”: that his poetry has no merit, that his life of writing is largely a waste and

that of a wastrel, that he has little chance of publication and none of recognition. Such lamentations, often bordering on whining, make perfect sense in the context of the mid-1930s, when he is struggling to write barely adequate poetry: “I have just been looking over my poems, which I never fail to do when feeling low, and as usual think they are piffling, derivative, and though few, yet too many for the patience of even the most sympathetic & curious reader” (1 Apr 1936, 56). (Further evidence, perhaps, that the publishable poems he dated to 1934 in the early 1960s were not in his files at this time.) But the self-estimation is that much more disturbing to encounter when it recurs in the period of his early success, in the later 1940s, when he is publishing regularly in the literary periodicals and beginning to earn a minor reputation. The entry for September 16 1943 notes the acceptance of his first poem by the *Canadian Forum*. We might expect some satisfaction, even celebration, at the result; yet Glassco, though he admits himself “very gratif[ied]”, “did not have any thrill at all in seeing it in print” (100). That day’s entry instead opens by recording “A horrible feeling of emptiness for the last few days” (99). Persistent minor success with his poetry was to change nothing in this mood: as the late 1940s and 1950s unfold, he writes fiction, pornography, and plays, none of which succeeds, yet his increasing recognition as a poet, with regular publication in the *Forum* and new acceptances from *The Fiddlehead*, seems meaningless to him. An entry of 2 December 1954 lists some of his most important poems, including “Deserted Buildings under Shefford Mountain” (*SP* 19-20), “The White Mansion” (*SP* 21-2), and “A Devotion: To Cteis” (*SP* 68-9; referred to in the journal by an early title “John Donne genuflexus”), then adds, “But after all, what does it matter?—None of them are the kind of poetry I wanted to write. Then how did I come to write them? Merely because it is too wretched for me to go to bed without having written something” (146). And when *The Deficit Made Flesh* had appeared, to largely positive if (as noted) somewhat disturbed reviews, one of the last entries in the “Intimate Journal” flatly dismissed its pertinence: “The book of poems was published in 1958, & evoked mainly favourable comment—nothing enthusiastic, & a few notices definitely lukewarm. As I always thought, my poetry was out of date even when it was written, & is still more so now” (16 Sep 1960, 157). Glassco’s mood simply could not be lifted—at least not in the self-construction he offers us in the “Intimate Journal.”<sup>32</sup> It does not take the “Journal” too much at face value to suggest that Glassco experienced himself as a depressive, ineffectual failure very often.<sup>33</sup> Nor is much conjecture needed to suggest that a poet so lacking in conviction would prove

difficult to promote in the boom times of a more robust Canadian poetry in the 1960s and 1970s.

The “Intimate Journal” also allows us, finally, to come full circle on Glassco’s complex attitude to the poets and other authors who had given him his first prompts to literary imitation. The tendency we saw in the *Memoirs* both to deploy strategically and also to ironize an elaborate set of influences on his writing—Sutherland’s “virtual syllabus” (13)—is partially anticipated by the apprentice poet’s surprisingly clear and self-ironic attitude to the sources of his poetic inspiration. This young diary-writer clearly thought of literary influence and purposeful imitation as salutary experiences, and he is unabashed in his identification of the writers to whom he is indebted, although he allowed himself no illusions of having lived up to their examples. At the age of twenty-five, the Paris years and their supposed Surrealist enthusiasms behind him, he wrote in the first surviving pages of his journal, “I feel that I can do my best in the [A.E.] Housman style...” (28 Jul 1934, 28D). It was probably not long before this date that he wrote the archival poem “Love,” the typescript of which he has annotated as “(Houseman-type)” [*sic*].<sup>34</sup> His “best,” however—and now we know this to be typical—did not satisfy: the same journal entry admits that his “idea [of making] a book of poems...somewhat like ‘A Shropshire Lad’” had led to work “so hideously sentimental & wishy-washy that I am not so sure at all if the ‘simple’ note is the best for me.” Audible here is the usual Glassco willingness to announce affiliation with and disaffection from literary forebears in practically the same breath, and the depressing conflict between what he felt given to do and what he valued in poetry. This increasingly deliberate anti-sentimentalism would become a merit of his finest poems, but in 1934 it stood in painful contradiction to the slight “best” he knew he could do.

A little over a year later his candour about his juvenile poetry’s inspirations led him to write down in the “Journal,” “For [his] own private use and reference...the sources of [his] best poems” (23 Aug 1935, 35-6). The entry helps us to understand the early poetry as a series of exercises, and indeed as a kind of extended juvenilia, notwithstanding the fact that Glassco was in his mid-twenties when he wrote these poems and called them his “best.” Notably, the Housman-esque “Love,” and indeed Housman himself, is not among them; that whim had gone. I give the list in full here because it reveals Glassco’s disarming willingness both to admit his susceptibility to influence and to treat its results in his own work with scorn:

Sonnet on my 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. – Shakespeare & title: cf. Milton.  
I Loved You early. – Any sentimental ditty.  
Beauty on the Roads. – de la Mare.  
Perdita. – “ “ “ “ .  
Sweet Marigold. – Blake.  
The Golden Oriole. – Shelley, & Keats.  
? (Live for thyself) (unnamed). – Poe. (One line from Burton’s ‘Kasi dah.’)  
Sonnets – Bastard Shakespeare.  
Spring in the City – Not sure: bit of Swinburne metre. Prob. more original than most; & worse  
The Wild Canary – Cowper’s ‘Bull’ poem; & Wordsworth.  
The Two Linnets – Wordsworth’s ‘green Linnet.’  
July (unfinished) – More or less original: bits of Bridges influence.  
The Puritan ( “ ) – Slightly Robert Graves.  
A Reckoning ( “ ) – Frankly T.S. Eliot.  
Korin ( “ ) – Ralph Hodgson.

(The reader will note the absence of any reference to *Conan’s Fig*, “For Lucifer,” or any of the short *Point of Sky* poems, in this list of 1935.) The judgment of “Spring in the City”—“more original than most; & worse”—renders perfectly the double voice in which Glassco typically assessed his merit; it also hints at the jaundiced and occasionally self-serving idea he sustained of creative originality, which subtended his sometimes troubling indifference to intellectual property.<sup>35</sup> The domination of his reading at the time by the potentates of the Victorian canon—Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats—will surprise neither those who have studied other modernists and their juvenilia nor those who have disparaged Glassco as a closet Edwardian taken up and pampered by the credulous modernists of his generation.

He wrote down these influences “for [his] own private use and reference.” Obviously these “intimate” remarks in his journal could have no impact on his critical construction by others. But taken together, the *Memoirs* and *Conan* hoaxes, the uneasiness with the editing and arrangement of his own poems, the apparent desire to represent a longer career of meaningful writing than in fact obtained, the depressive sense of failure so routinely expressed in the “Intimate Journal,” and the at once earnest and sardonic articulation of his literary influences, from the early life writings to the late *Memoirs*, help us to see that the criticism of his poetry—susceptible for decades to his hoaxing, preoccupied with his European sources, and now at an end, in what must be a widely shared agreement with his own most negative assessments of his work—cannot be entirely disentan-

gled from Glassco's own self-constructions, especially in the period from *A Point of Sky* until his death in 1981. The opportunity now, if we want it, is to articulate and appreciate his own curation of his poetry while seeking new readings and intellectual sources and contexts that he did not himself anticipate or value.

### Notes

I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their funding of my forthcoming edition of *The Complete Poems of John Glassco*.

- 1 I have no methods for estimating the durability of Glassco's reputation and sales as a pornographer, but I would not be surprised to find his readership in that genre greater now than that of either his poems or his memoirs; it is at least enough to warrant a 2012 Amazon Kindle edition of *The English Governess*, the title of the first published version of *Harriet Marwood, Governess*. Amazon still refuses to provide bibliographical details for Kindle editions, so the provenance and reliability of their text cannot be verified.
- 2 An example of the genre is "An Uncultivated Persona," a review in *Time* by Geoffrey James of *The Fatal Woman*.
- 3 Though one must add that, astonishingly, Sutherland calls Kelly's bit of journalism "Perhaps the most perceptive commentary to date on Glassco and his work" (92).
- 4 According to Toye and Gnarowski, a pseudonym for the gallery owner and *littérateur* Marcel Noll (223).
- 5 I will henceforth follow the useful convention of referring to the author of the *Memoirs* as "Glassco" and his figuration in the *Memoirs* as "Buffy," the author's lifelong nickname among intimates.
- 6 A pertinent example would be his "prefer[ring A.J.M. Smith] to all of" the other Canadian poets in the passage quoted earlier, when in 1928 Smith had published very little outside the Montreal confines of the *McGill Fortnightly Review*; Glassco and Smith would become friendly only in the 1950s, though Glassco had published in the *Fortnightly* before leaving for Paris. Glassco of the early sixties writes a retroactive plug for his friend into the "1928" Parisian party chatter.
- 7 It may be relevant that I have not yet found the word "dilettante" used of Glassco in criticism and reviews published before the *Memoirs*.
- 8 Baudelaire has of course popped up in Glassco criticism over the years, though there has been no extended discussion of the relation between the two poets. Despite the obvious relevance of this passage too to Glassco's sonnet-pair "Utrillo's World" (*Selected Poems* 54-5; hereafter cited parenthetically as *SP*), the connection remains undeveloped, as is the intriguing claim here of a precocious interest in the poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire.
- 9 Fraser Sutherland does draw on this passage in a short discussion of Glassco's interests in the philosophy of Berkeley and Arthur Schopenhauer (17); he takes the treatment of Berkeley here to be straightforward and honorific.
- 10 A.J.M. Smith's self-castigating phrase, from his poem "My Lost Youth" (*Complete Poems* 98-9).
- 11 For instance when Glassco is at pains to distinguish the role of "idea" and "emotion" in the composition of poetry, or emphasizes the final judgment rendered by the poet's "conscious intellect" (113, 116). Smith's "The Poetic Process" appeared in 1964; also

- audible in Glassco's arguments is Smith's "Eclectic Detachment: Aspects of Identity in Canadian Poetry," from 1961.
- 12 Sutherland has a brief discussion of the article (20-22), though it does not carry forward much into the readings he later provides of Glassco's poems.
  - 13 In fact an earlier issue of *Yes* (no. 12, Apr 1963) printed Glassco's "For Cora Lightbody, R.N.," and then identified him as a "Canadian of international habits and reputation; earliest verse, *Conan's Fig*, Paris, 1928 . . ." (n.p.). This item points to a concoction of the *Conan* hoax by 1963. It is noteworthy that neither of the author's bio-bibliographical notes in *The Deficit Made Flesh* (1958) and *A Point of Sky* (1964) refers to the purportedly Surrealist poem.
  - 14 Glassco's "Intimate Journal 1934-1961," with many razored excisions, is held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the McLennan Library of McGill University in Montreal (Box 2 Folder 41); the entry cited is on p. 59 (by Glassco's eccentric pagination). Henceforth cited parenthetically with date of entry and Glassco's page number.
  - 15 If it *was* contemporary with the entry, the annotation is a puzzling one: why single out *Conan's Fig* in particular among his "amateur, jejune" work, if not simply to underscore its existence? The repetition of "tripe" might also strike the suspecting reader as too obvious an effort to link the later addition firmly to the wording of the 1936 entry.
  - 16 As Darling (22) and Busby (196-97) point out, *The Rodiad* was itself a hoax; its authorship is uncertain, but it was first published in an edition of 1871 that purported to reprint an 1810 work by Colman. Darling notes Ian Gibson's argument for its authorship by Richard Monckton Milnes (22). Glassco would surely have been delighted to double down in this way on the subterfuge upon which his slender volume rested.
  - 17 My thanks to Dr Richard Virr, Director of McGill University's Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, for providing me with a copy of his history of the acquisition of Glassco's papers.
  - 18 An early typescript of his second collection, *A Point of Sky*, typed on the old typewriter he had owned since the mid-1930s, can be definitively dated to 1962. It is held in the *Glassco Papers* at McGill University (Box 1 Folder 19). All dateable prior typescripts are from the same typewriter, with all of its characteristic misalignments and wear on some characters. Typescripts clearly dateable to later 1962 and early 1963, and all thereafter, are on a new typewriter. One wonders, in fact, if the transition to a new machine and typeface prompted thoughts in Glassco of dating hoaxes that could be supported by typing up recent work on the Depression-era typewriter.
  - 19 Nevertheless, the poem *is* complete at that time: he adds after the date that "They [the editors of *Tamarack Review*?] have the 4 further pages".
  - 20 Note the likeness of Glassco's last line to the closing depiction of Grishkin in Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality": "And even the Abstract Entities / Circumambulate her charm. . ." (*Complete Poems and Plays* 53). His "man of action" may also recall Sweeney from "Sweeney Erect" (*Complete Poems and Plays* 42-3), who has similarly left his bed so as to "bathe and dress."
  - 21 He had destroyed the pages of the "Intimate Journal" from its inception in 1931 to Feb 28 1934; though the surviving 1934 entries make no mention of the aforesaid poems, he could always refute any skeptical archivist by suggesting that the poems he had dated to 1934 had been written in the first two months of that year.
  - 22 All are in the *Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, "Unpublished Poems 1924-1963" folder.
  - 23 One notes the additional coincidence that he destroyed the pages of his "Intimate Journal" from its beginning in 1931, upon his return to Montreal, to early 1934, when he was struggling to recover from thoracic surgery to resolve his tuberculosis.
  - 24 Two other poems in the archive were wrongly dated by Glassco to 1934, but the errors in these cases are insignificant: the long poem "The Invitations" was begun, says the "Intimate Journal," on 30 August 1935, but Glassco has dated the typescript to "1934-

- 36" (*Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, "Unpublished Poems 1924-1963" folder). He dated a copy of "Sonnet on my 24<sup>th</sup> Birthday" retyped in 1974 to "December 15, 1934," even though his twenty-fourth birthday would have been on that date in 1933 (*Glassco Fonds* vol. 17, folder 21 "Poems in Progress. Mostly Rejected [2 of 6]"). To muddy the waters further, an earlier typescript is dated "April '33", although the birthday in question was still eight months away (*Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, "Unpublished Poems 1924-1963" folder). Such carelessness and lapse of memory encourages us to treat all of Glassco's dating with reasoned scepticism.
- 25 The archival record exposes the extent to which Glassco relied on Smith and F.R. Scott for editorial help with the publication of the conference proceedings. A letter to Smith of Jan 20 1964 asks "in strictest confidence" for his help with the selection of poems to be reproduced in the volume; the secrecy is required, he suggests, because the younger poets who attended might resent his appeal to older modernists for editorial advice (*Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, Foster Poetry Correspondence, "Scott-Wilson" folder).
- 26 All are in the *Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, "Unpublished Poems 1924-1963" folder.
- 27 The legal anxiety was protracted, however, and in an entry of Mar 27 1948 Glassco notes that he had recently razored out further portions of the "Intimate Journal" (134; cf. Busby 127).
- 28 As earlier discussions indicate, Glassco's dating is always to be held suspect; I offer it here as credible rather than reliable evidence.
- 29 Compare Glassco's final line to that of John Milton's "When I Consider how My Light Is Spent": "They also serve who only stand and wait."
- 30 Clearly the source material of such poems lies in the enlistment of Graeme Taylor in the army in July 1941 and Glassco's fears for his safety and for his own well-being if left alone on their farm. An "Intimate Journal" entry of 15 Oct 1941 captures Glassco's inner weather in this period: "It's now three months since Graeme enlisted and it seems like a year,—until he is back on leave, when it seems that all that time has been an unreal interlude! And how much longer it will be before he comes back, God only knows, — or if he ever will come back: as I write those last words, I am conscious I do not believe he can possibly fail to come back: I cannot face that possibility; I still cling to an inner assurance I have that all happiness is not over for me yet, and that I shall not be left without a soul who cares for me" (84).
- 31 Irving Layton's judgment that Glassco was among those Canadian modernists who "were as remote from what was painful and nightmarishly real in the brutal twentieth century as the planet Earth is from Saturn" (*Waiting for the Messiah* 236; qtd. in Busby 117) prompts my defence of Glassco here.
- 32 To balance the dismal tone slightly, Glassco does suggest in one entry: "As I read over this journal, I get the impression of one who is oftener wretched,—but that is only because I have written in it, as a rule, when I have been depressed or fearful. I really feel, most of the time, that I need nothing" (Apr 4 1936, 62).
- 33 A poem he dates to 1950, "The Music Box," published in *Tamarack Review* in 1961, is difficult not to read as if it were Glassco's own self-assessment: "I am an old music box / Knowing only the faded tunes / Of an inexhaustible love and duty . . . // Small sounds and old, faded, powerless / No clanging eloquence from the horn / Only a grating and a gurgle, / Missing notes, and a missed beat . . .".
- 34 *Glassco Fonds* vol. 1, "Unpublished Poems 1924-1963" folder.
- 35 As an avid reader of T.S. Eliot at this time Glassco might also have imbibed Eliot's complex claim in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (*Selected Prose* 38). When Glassco scorns "Spring in the City" as "more original than most; & worse," he may be making the modernist point that Romantic originality—imagined as self-authoring creation free of influence—does not typically conduce to a poem's goodness.



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