"Between Orpheus and Morpheus": Louis Dudek's *Continuation* and the Aches and Pains of Old Age

by Antonio Ruiz

A look at the numerous attempts to define the Canadian long poem will reveal the important role that this poetic genre has played in the development of Canadian poetry. As early as 1946, Northrop Frye observed: "in looking over the best poems of our best poets . . . we are surprised to find how often the narrative poem has been attempted, and attempted with uneven but frequently remarkable success" (Frye 149). A few years later, Milton Wilson wrote: "the discontinuous long poem, the cyclical short poem and the cycle of lyrics have always been the most fruitful cluster of genres in our poetic history" (Wilson 199). Academic interest on the subject has not diminished over the last few decades. Still, Louis Dudek's long poems have received little critical attention, despite the fact that Dudek is considered by many as Canada's "most important—that is to say, consequential—modern voice" (Blaser 19). Dudek has expressed his discontent and frustration over this neglect on several occasions. For example, in a letter to Sam Solecki, he confesses: "My writing in general seems to be very difficult for Canadians to grasp as a whole."[1] Dudek is referring not so much to his lyric poetry as to his long meditative poems:

> As a result [of the publication of these poems] I practically disappeared from the scene of Canadian poetry for two and a half decades; and it is perhaps because some other poets have begun to write this same kind of poem, out of inner necessity, that I have surfaced now a bit. (*Paradise* 81-2)

Curiously enough, Dudek's long poems, as Douglas Barbour has rightly pointed out, explored new paths that were subsequently followed by other Canadian poets: "[h]e is the only one of the three *Cerberus* poets even to attempt a truly long poem. He has walked

the paths of his arts alone. If he has not been completely successful in his poetic quest, surely one of the reasons is that he had to do it all by himself: he had no other poets in Canada to share his particular problems and efforts" (Barbour 21).[2]

Dudek, it seems to me, never felt at home with the strict limits that the lyric genre imposes on the writer. Thus, after the release of a series of books of lyrics (*The Searching Image* (1944), *East of the City* (1946), *Cerberus* (1952), *Twenty Four Poems* (1952)), he began to experiment with the long poem, something he did until the end of his career. In Dudek's opinion the long poem offers the modern poet a new range of possibilities: "[f]or this is the key to the long poem . . . It is the mind that is entirely open, incapable of 'closure,' that generates the verbal form, equally open, fragmentary, disjunct, spasmodic. The poetic mind today is open to all possibility and speculation . . ." (*Paradise* 98). Dudek consequently regards the long poem as a perfect, flexible medium in which to develop the meditative poetry he is so fond of. In this regard, we should not forget that one of the writer's persistent complaints concerned the progressive withdrawal of modern poetry from deep and serious thought: "*[p]oets are not supposed to be thinkers*, is the common conclusion. Well, if they're supposed to be prophets, I will make a prophecy—that they will become thinkers, in future—. What have they to lose? Only their sense of inadequacy and their present intellectual vacuity" (*Paradise* 79).

Louis Dudek's trajectory in his long poems can be seen as an adventure—a voyage, if you like—towards knowledge. This intuition is based not only upon his works, but also on the poet's various theoretical statements, which supply valuable clues in this respect. In the book *Ideas for Poetry*, for example, Dudek explicitly reveals the great tragedy of man in the face of life:

> Each living creature is endowed with some means to know the world, so far as this bit of knowledge is necessary to its survival, but this is not knowledge of the world as it is, it is not the real order of the world but only such a form of knowledge as is useful for life. An ant knows one world and an eagle knows another; and so does man. All our thinking and science cannot get beyond this fact of tentativeness and relativity of knowledge. (*Ideas for Poetry* 44)

But this undeniable limitation of man should not lead him to paralysis, as it is only in his search for the unattainable knowledge that

he will be able to escape the absurdity of existence and reach the highest form of dignity: "[t]he work of creation is always before us, to be read and interpreted; and if we approach it, not as dumb beasts, but as men, with our whole minds, it will not fail us. That is the answer to nothingness and to triviality" (*Technology and Culture* 50).

Like all poets, Dudek explores reality in search of an interior, subjective, and personal form of knowledge. This is characteristic of poetry, which comes about through the sensorial and emotive contact of the poet with reality and through the magical combination of words. But Dudek has also defined the need for poetry to seek a more objective and rational form of knowledge, found characteristically in thought and reflection. In this instance, it is a knowledge of intersubjective and collective legitimacy which originates in lucid reflections on reality. This form of knowledge is generally overlooked by poetry and associated with prose and disciplines such as philosophy.

Following the path marked by Pound, Dudek also begins his long poems by setting sail for the sea on a voyage that is essentially a search for origins and the legacy of knowledge. *Europe* (1954) is not an epic like *The Cantos*, but it is certainly a journey of discovery and personal education. "What are we going to find?" Dudek asks himself at the beginning of his adventure. *Europe* is a voyage to the past where the poet hopes to find answers to the present. But Dudek does not find these answers on the Old Continent. In poetic terms, Dudek swerves from Pound so as to intone a Whitmanian chant about the potential of America and the decadence of Europe. If Europeans can no longer proceed with this journey, then it is time for North Americans to carry on: "we have lots to do, we in America, / who know that there is no end to the journey" (138).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Dudek should choose Mexico for his next voyage and adventure. As opposed to the stale knowledge he found in Europe, Dudek searches Mexico and the fertility of its jungle for a new form of wisdom. Perhaps as a response to the many museums and ruins seen in Europe, we find that *En México* (1958) diverts its focus to a type of knowledge that is more essential and derives from the communion between the natural world and a more primitive country: "And I do not know why a leaf should be less worth / than a Vatican" (21). Reading *En México*, we are left with the impression of a poet satisfied after his encounter with the

new surroundings. Dudek's intellectual curiosity, however, does not end with the Mexican experience: "There is more than one road," he writes at the beginning of *Atlantis*, and this makes it necessary to begin his travels once more, on a new journey. With *Atlantis* we can clearly note how a basic idea stands out, an idea that permeates Dudek's philosophy: the conviction that knowledge is not so much an achieved state, as a form of continuous search. This idea runs parallel to the conception of the poem as a continuum, a constant stream, like a universe of its own in which the poet can unfold his craving for knowledge with no limitations of space. This explains why Dudek would refer to *Atlantis* as an "infinite poem" and why he would begin his next long poem with the invitation "Let's continue." *Atlantis* is essentially a breach, a reaction to the pleasing state achieved in *En México*. Intellectualism replaces primitivism now and this explains not only Dudek's return to Europe, but also the wider thematic range of the poem and its consequent "greater density of reference and discourse."[3] This desire for order brings the poet to a moment where he embraces an ideal, Atlantis, that may give him the desired final coherence and spiritual integration:[4] "An architecture of contradictions and inexorable chances / reconciled at last, / in a single body" (148). But Dudek's adventure does not end in this climax. And so, years later he would write in *Continuation*: "Still trying to find that meaning which eludes us / to say why the molecule prances" (*Continuation I* 15).

Louis Dudek's fourth long poem, *Continuation*, is certainly his most radical and innovative venture in poetry. From the very beginning, the writer was conscious of the importance of his project:

> A couple of days ago I started a new phenomenal thing, a POEM WITHOUT AN END, I think I have at last discovered what I wanted to do all my life. No fooling. The first line is "Let's continue." I.e. where Atlantis broke off. And I mean to go on. You will never hear the end of this . . . [sic].[5]

Continuation thus represents Louis Dudek's desire to write his definitive long poem. It is surprising, therefore, that Dudek's achievement in this work went almost unnoticed both by the public and critics, especially as *Continuation* deals with questions as fashionable as the status of the speaking ego, the need to transform lyric modes, or the intricacy of a poetics of thinking. There is nonetheless an exception, Brian Trehearne's convincing reading of the poem in

his study *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition.* Although my own reading will ratify some of Trehearne's ideas, I will also extend my study to a consideration of *Continuation II* and *III.*

Possibly, it would be a good thing to start my analysis of *Continuation* with a brief comparison with an earlier work, equally ambitious and radical, William Carlos Williams' *Kora in Hell.*[6] The latter has been regarded as a brilliant starting point in Williams' literary career that led to future experiments such as *Spring and All* and *The Great American Novel. Continuation,* by contrast, is the result of Dudek's prolonged struggle with the long poem in his search for his own voice:

> I have been groping toward a form, that becomes realized in *Atlantis,* and then proceeds on to *Continuation II.* That is to say, a kind of voice, the perfect voice that I was looking for, is now fully realized. . . . I think my discovery of myself, gradually, through thinking and through a sort of philosophical monologue, tossing about the life questions, comes together finally, so that in *Continuation II* I am supposed to be. (Schrier 47)

Both *Kora in Hell* and *Continuation* are "private" books. Williams wrote in the "Prologue" to the City Lights Edition that his work, as soon as it was printed, "entered a world which I didn't feel I could betray so that I did not at first want it to be republished. It remained more or less of a secret document for my own wonder and amusement known to few others" (*Imaginations* 30). *Continuation,* for its part, is aware of the "implicit audience's lack of interest": "Who cares, does anybody care / about your precious mind and what goes on in it?" (*Continuation I* 13); "The poem, a man talking to himself" (25); "I don't want your fake poems / I want a record of your mind" (33). Both books also require a considerable effort from the reader. *Kora in Hell* is one of the most obscure and challenging books of American literature, a work Williams was proud of: "a unique book, not like any other I have written. . . . It reveals itself to me and perhaps that is why I have kept it to myself" (*I Wanted to Write a Poem* 23). The book is structured in twenty-seven sections, each divided into three parts. The different sections do not follow any lineal order and they lack a stable thematic development. *Kora in Hell* is, to a great extent, the result of dadaist improvisation tech-

niques adopted and adapted by Williams in which hazard and chance are true motors of the creative process.

The concept of automatic writing also lies behind the process of composition of *Continuation*, especially one of its most characteristic features, the idea that one should not revise. Dudek links this technique with the myth of poetic inspiration as described, for example, in Plato's *Ion* and other Dialogues:

> O the poet that incredible madman
> possessed by what he hardly knows or comprehends
> See him coming toward you, his fat cheeks on fire
> convinced of his potency, his craft, his supreme art
> that no one needs or understand
>
> One of God's handymen
> for whom the future is still the word, hot out of chaos
> and the present cracked mirrors, in which his own face
> appears and reappears on every wall
>
> He is possessed with possibility,
> will create the world anew
> until it burns out, or give place to others
> just as hot and new
>
> Sometimes his models become real and part of nature—
> even for me and you
>
> (*Continuation I* 13-4)

Dudek, however, found it difficult to achieve a truly spontaneous writing in *Continuation*, as he himself recognizes:

> Yes, an infinite poem in progress, in which the main job is simply recording the words that come to you and writing them down continually in a book, and then reworking them—rarely, very rarely altering the position of the lines. Sometimes this may be necessary, but it should be avoided. Usually cutting out, rephrasing slightly; I have a respect for divine dictation. Every poet wants the poems to come to him ready-made and complete. . . . The first draft: is not yet the perfect thing, but it is because so many imperfections exist that I want to perfect it to what it would be if it were like the other poem that would have come to me entire. And so this process of going on and then of perfecting goes on. (Nause 41)

Certainly, the first draft, as well as the subsequent worksheets of *Continuation I*, show a writer greatly concerned with revision in the initial stages of the poem. As a result, we are able to find up to ten versions of a single fragment. Still, in the process of writing the poem, he seems to feel more and more comfortable, as the similitude of the first draft with the published version will show. The pressure to revise is, therefore, smaller now. The first half of the drafts of *Continuation I* are made up of short fragments that generally do not go beyond two or three sentences per page. In the second half, by contrast, the fragments become longer and, occasionally, it is difficult to discern a dividing point between them, since they form a long passage that runs through several pages. This may indicate that the writer not only feels less need to revise now but can also write faster.[7]

Fragmentation is widespread in both *Kora in Hell* and *Continuation I*. Williams joins sentence parts irrationally by multiplying and missing connectives and employing metaphors that contradict each other. He also experiments with open syntax and the use of several voices (Schmidt 114). There are semantic incompatibilities too between most of the fragments of *Continuation I*, which lack any stable symbolism or narrative perspective. Within the fragments fragmentation is also enforced: "the predominantly aligned left-hand margin is sometimes ignored as words skim across the page to a right-hand, or medial, alignment; internal ellipses, parentheses, and dashes underscore sudden voltas within fragments" (Trehearne 246). "Section IV," however, is an exception to the extreme incoherence and fragmentation of *Continuation I*. The presence of Pound's diatribes against cultural barbarism is notable here, and the reproduction of a Chinese ideogram points to the American master's influence.[8] According to Trehearne, we are cast as auditors and not as overhearers in this section: "[t]he relation is far less interesting. It is rather as if the suspended fragments of earlier sections, floating in time and paginally in space, were suddenly imploded by the vehemence of opinion into a hard kernel, without the interstices of meaning that invited us inward before" (Trehearne 260).

In any case, "Section IV" is an exception and *Continuation I*, like *Kora in Hell*, is a tour de force that requires an aggressive reading. The fragmentation and incoherence of both books, however, serve different ends. As a radical gesture, Williams launches an attack on reason to dislodge the mind from its fixities and to destroy

obsolete forms of thought so that we can see "everything afresh." Dudek's intention is far less radical, and the random flux of language in *Continuation* attempts to achieve an imitation of the mind at work. Brian Trehearne argues that the *Continuation* project "is itself coherent—and only so—as a representation of the motion of content and phenomena in the poet's mind" (250). Adopting the mind as a principle of structural order has the advantage that the "energy of fragmentation, the ambiguity of reference, the subtlety of connotation, are now predicated as forms of mental energy, as motions of consciousness, and whereas our conscious desire for clarity remains frustrated, a new pleasure emerges *in that we are sharing the ambiguities and liberties of consciousness with another*" (Trehearne 257). Despite Trehearne's advice on how to approach *Continuation I*, it remains a difficult text. Our frustration, in my opinion, does not arise only from its obvious fragmentation, but also from the very general abstract dimension in which the poem places us. In his desire to recreate the motion of the mind, Dudek almost dispenses with specific dramatic contexts or imaginary situations in *Continuation I*. The meaning of the poem seems to reside almost entirely in the motion of the mind, thus recalling Mallarmé's claim that the mind's action at once makes and becomes a place sufficient unto itself. A reader familiar with Dudek's life and work, will recognize some of these fragments as characteristic of the poet's thought. Yet they do not consolidate in any narrative or symbolic function. Other fragments are so unmediated that they are indeed pure abstract statements devoid of any present or past context or affective situation. I am referring to fragments such as: "The imagination wants satisfaction / as much as the body does"; or "One hurt in love loves no one, / Yet a bird is like a vital child." This abstract writing is the result of Dudek's fondness for the epigram and the aphoristic style.

After *Atlantis*, Dudek's third long poem, Dudek realized that in order for his long poems to fully recreate the stream of consciousness of the poet's mind, its randomness and lack of direction, it was necessary for him not to model them on the basis of any of his travels or, in other words, that he did not adopt the travelogue as a structuring device. "Travel, or change of scene"—Dudek maintains—"has the effect of making us realize the arbitrariness of all reality. . . . It's a poetic disturbance in the world of appearances. If you can produce this effect by thinking, you do not need to travel"

(*Ideas for Poetry* 61). In this decision, I would say, lies the main difference between *Continuation I* and Dudek's previous long poems. In *Atlantis* fragmentation is also strong, but we are able, in many cases, to relate the fragments to a particular context: a visit to a museum, a botanical garden or a monument; a stroll in the streets of Rome or Paris; a friendly conversation. In *Continuation I*, by contrast, the fragments follow and recur without any apparent logic. This radical poetics of thinking makes it difficult for the poet to impose lyric intensity on the ongoing discourse, which, as a consequence, often turns out to be repetitive and monotonous.

The fragments hardly offer any sensuous appeal or personal drama, and are settled in an abstract and self-sufficient dimension in which everyday reality seems to have been superseded: "I am the imagination / that creates itself" (*Continuation I* 20). The poem not only lacks personal drama, but its extreme fragmentation prevents the consolidation of philosophical or meditative discourse. As a result, generalizations and epigrams seem to float freely in the text, liberated from any interpretative function. Devoid of any illusionistic drama, narrative or symbolic construction, the poem seems to rest solely in its own rhythm, in the movement of the mind in action. One fragment follows another, creating odd and sharp juxtapositions in a seemingly never-ending process. In order to fight traditional modes of lyricism, Dudek has adopted a different strategy from other poets of the second half of the twentieth century. I cannot see in *Continuation I* the well-known "novelization" of the Canadian documentary long poem. I perceive neither a desire to excavate the ground of the unconscious, which may account for the lack of any surrealistic elements in the poem, nor an intention to remain in the dramatic domains of confessional poetry. Rather *Continuation I* remains at the abstract levels of the intellect on which the poet relies in his quest for insight into himself, his life and his writing.

The problem with *Continuation* is to find elements of structural coherence that somehow unify the different fragments. Adopting the mind as a principle of that coherence, according to Trehearne, "has the advantage of establishing singularity and integritas for the otherwise incoherent project, without the disadvantage of imposing a reductive model of 'unity' on a long poem that very apparently wants to flout or at least go beyond established forms of modernist poetic unity" (Trehearne 250). Trehearne is right when he

uses the expression "adopting the mind," denoting a conscious choice, since most of the time it is difficult to grasp this premise, the sensation of a single consciousness in the act of thinking, from the text. In my opinion, too much abstraction in *Continuation I* impoverishes our sense of the poet's self and, as a consequence, obliges the reader to impose this required *integritas* as we read.

In our first approach to *Continuation II* we can get the impression that the poem is a mere extension, aesthetically speaking, of *Continuation I*. Fragmentation is also widespread, and we discover the same typographical layout and the same proliferation of themes. *Continuation II*, however, represents an important evolution in Dudek's accumulative aesthetics and poetics of thinking. *Continuation II* is a longer poem than its predecessor—the first is made up of 4 sections, while *Continuation II* has 21. The first section shows hardly any formal difference from the opening lines of *Continuation I*. There are also brief flowing fragments that juxtapose rapidly. The section, however, finishes with a kind of prayer that works as a final climax:

> Lord, let me have wings
> in my late years, when baldness comes
> Open my skull to heaven like a mirror
>
> Let me think nothing but
> eternal thoughts, out of that dust a gravel,
> the ashes of existence
>
> Make new hope possible, for future birds
> Laugh at wounds, tear all obstacles aside
> and show, naked, the creative chromosomes
> (*Continuation II* 13)

These lines foreshadow two recurrent themes in *Continuation II*: old age and the proximity of death. The intense fragmentation of the poem does not conceal the psychological drama of the poet who realizes his time is coming to an end. In this sense, *Continuation II* can be regarded as an experimental physiological record of the poet in his last years, of his poor health, of the aches and pains of old age, as well as of his moments of joy. This account is summarized by the writer with humor in the following passage:

The poet in old age
between Orpheus and Morpheus,
cut off from the media,

thinks that Jaws
is a movie about dentists.

Remembers sex
as something he missed
in youth.

Finds serenity of old age
an illusion.

Spends his days meditating
on things he will never do.

(Might take up a second career,
if he knew what he always knew
he wanted to do)

Sleeps well, the first part of the night,
and any part of the day.

When asked, says he's o.k.
Doubts that you would listen
to the whole story, anyway
(97)

This is not the only time Dudek makes use of humour and sarcasm when referring to death and old age. At one point, for example, he complains: "Every doctor is a 100 per cent failure / All patients die" (40). In other occasions, however, allusions to death and old age acquire a more dramatic tone. An aside reads: "(Can I survive another season, / and do I really want it?)." Another reflection has an added tint of morbidness: "As one gets older, gradually / one begins to look more and more like a corpse / (Long before you're dead, you've taken on / 'that quiet look')" (82). The poet even envisions his own death: "When I am dead I will see my body /lying there like an empty grape-skin" (91). In other examples, however, the references to death and life discard a dramatic tone to embrace a more philosophical and meditative quality:

Yes, we are like God's birds
in our cage of a world,
know where the feed-box is, and the water,
the little swing,
and the wires of the cage we can hop to—

but what's beyond we can't imagine,
can't conceive, the real, the great thing,
as a bird can't conceive the quantum theory
(91)

Probably the most important difference between this book and *Continuation I* is that we are able now to perceive a better dramatization of the self in the shifts of emotional levels and in the contextualization of psychic impulses. Abstraction is now tamed with many references to everyday life and routine. Dudek, for example, records ordinary conversation: "I asked the driver, 'Why do you keep it going?' / He said, 'That's for the A.C.' / (the air-conditioning) / 'It works only when the motor's on, that's why / we keep it on'" (70). Occasionally, he even rejoices in trivial incidents, as in the shower passage (19). No incident or action seems to be too mundane. A strong attachment to life is evident in this work, in which every single moment, being exceptional and irreplaceable, is celebrated: "Thinking today / how the best performance or entertainment, /for all its art, / becomes tiresome after an hour or two / while ordinary life, without skill or effort, goes on and on, for days, months and years / yet never bores a normal man / (unless you have a French ennui) What is it / makes life so interesting?" (16). It is curious how Dudek's long poem, always caught up in the whirlwind of novelty and permanent change of context during the voyage, now discovers the charm of everyday life and a more sedentary reality. The sarcastic comments and the aches and pains of old age do not lessen the poet's delight at a world that still surprises him. The recovered lyricism of some passages is thus explained: "Eternal process in the fields of green, / eternal the clover hills— / eternal the converging traffic / the many and the one / Eternal's the body's death" (102).

Still, these moments of beauty do not stop the poet from thinking, now and again, about death and the tragical nature of life: "Our tragedy is life's tragedy / it is the tragedy of a world / in which life glimmers, diversifies and spreads, / and then fades out / To die

forever To know this world no more" (111). Cheerfulness then turns to melancholy and sadness: "Optimism is for the young" (99). Dudek's feeling of the proximity of death leads him to reflect on the idea of God: "YHVH One of the 625 possible names of God" (53). Occasionally, the poet complains about the tragic destiny God has designed for man: "God, precisely, plays dice with the universe" (35). The poet may also address a petition to God: "God, give me a rational voice" (22). In most cases, however, God is the subject of intellectual speculation, something which accounts for the epigrammatic quality of these and similar examples: "God exists, in potentia, not as actuality"; "God is merely an idea 'X' the unknown, in the Great Equation, / forever insoluble"; "But God is a nice short word / for something too vast to imagine"; "The weak point in Nietzsche is the lack of proof / that 'God is dead'" (50, 63, 78, 84).

God, however, being only a "possibility," is not a final consolation for Dudek, whose anxiety is perceived in the final section of *Continuation II* which exhibits a rhetorical intensity that is unusual in the *Continuation* project: "Live for the moment, like the swallow / who rose, paused / and fell to a smooth glide / one mid-summer / like a leaf in the tall grass" (112). The thought of death also makes Dudek to worry about his literary legacy: "Poor old Charles Sangster / spent thirty years revising his poetry / but the U of T reprinted his work / in '72 / ignoring his revisions (Cost of re-setting) / Are there flaws in the poem? / and should I die with instructions / that some pages be destroyed?" (114).

Continuation II lacks the symbolic and quasi-visionary ending of *Atlantis*. Nevertheless, and unlike *Continuation I*, there is a formal closure in the final passages of this book. Lyric intensity is heightened as the poet recalls his former voyages and, especially, the sea:

> But when it's over, we know, don't we
> this life has been magical
>
> that we were lifted once
> out of ourselves
> writing those poems
>
> and looking at people
> in distant places—
>
> the magic of the voyage

to other worlds

And the sea, the sea
remember

and the clear rolling breakers out there
dying out in the sand

by the white washed sea-shell
lying on the shore
(112)

Conversely, the sea no longer offers the promise of a future, or of continuation as in *Atlantis*, but is an image of past memories and times. Dudek, therefore, follows in *Continuation II* the elegiac tendency manifested in the late writings of other poets of his generation, such as Irving Layton, Al Purdy, and Margaret Avison.[9]

The elegiac tone also prevails in *Continuation III* in which references to death and old age are numerous. The book is an extension of *Continuation II* in the sense that it makes central a particular theme, hence moderating the radical fragmentation and indetermination of *Continuation I*. *Continuation III* is published in two different books: *The Caged Tiger*, which contains the first five sections; and *The Surface of Time*, which completes the poem with section six. The theme of death is quite prominent in both books, especially in *The Surface of Time*. The poem records the different moods of the poet in his routine and, in this sense, can be considered a psychological diary. The brightness of the morning, for example, and the promise of a new day bring special joy to Dudek: "Bless the quiet hour in the morning / before the phone starts ringing / As you begin to recover you enjoy the small pleasures / cool water on your face / bagels for breakfast" (*The Caged Tiger* 56). The menace of death, however, seems to hover over the poet, reminding him of what little time is left. Is it not difficult to understand his laments, or the sardonic comments such as: "An increase in suicides? / Good sign. / At least they know when to go" (68). From a stylistic point of view, *Continuation III*, using fragmentation in a moderate fashion, represents an important achievement on Dudek's part. He combines the fragmentation in *Continuation I* with the dramatism in *Continuation II*, and seasons it all with suggestive language that is not lacking in beautiful metaphors, foreign words from Greek, Latin, German, or

Italian, and terms taken from scientific language, which in this context acquire unusual charm: "The program of the genes and of the soma / and of the ordering of sense / where each stratum contains / the weighed entelechies of the creation. / A great hunger, a great ecstasy / to which all things aspire / hidden in the impulse of life (in unicellular structures)" (*The Caged Tiger* 73-74).

Criticism has labeled Dudek a philosophical poet who is always striving for an intellectually tough form of poetry: "[e]ven in the early poems," claims Douglas Barbour, "where his control of 'voice' is weak, the philosophical tone which marks all his serious poetry is present" (Babour 18). Dudek himself has promoted a poetry of reason that is intellectually demanding. Yet he has also warned us against the danger of lack of emotion in poetry. "A work of art," Dudek argues, "is one man's emotional drama" and "no poetry can be very good that is empty of feeling and emotional intensity" (*Selected Essays* 251). Devoid of specific dramatic contexts, except for the virtually self-contained space of recurrent themes, ideas and thoughts, *Continuation I* works in an abstract dimension that makes it difficult to render the emotional drama that Dudek has claimed for poetry. In his obsession to imitate the movement of the mind, Dudek's thoughts are reproduced in *Continuation* in as unmediated a form as possible. This aesthetic decision creates a notational space in which the self surges as a set of relations among fragments that avoid any symbolic or narrative meaning. Fragments seem to be self-sufficient as they float and recur freely throughout the poem, apparently, without the stimulus of any incident, situation or external reality. In *Continuation II* and *III*, by contrast, self and context are not separate realms. Metaphysical presence and psychical drama are thus more successfully suggested. Abstraction is now tempered as death and the pains of the age prevail over other themes, relating distant fragments or generating passages of unusual coherence in the *Continuation* project. Once the stage has been set, lyric intensity and rhetorical embellishment are difficult to repress:

> Like a bevy of birds the children came running
> on the way to school
> —morning's little floral decorations
>
> After the rain,
> the first words, something that, re-worded
> leaves nothing to be desired

Falling on stone, or air into water
As now

I sit here listening to the leaves grow
(*Continuation II* 13)

Brian Trehearne considers the coherence and directness of speech of Section IV in *Continuation I* an aesthetic fault that reduces the poem's "diaphaneity and Heracliteanism" (Trehearne 259). The coherent passages of *Continuations*, however, are not confined to a single, specific section and, as a result, they do not give the impression that they are something extraneous to the global design of the poem. Rather, extreme fragmentation and coherent passages alternate providing a rich and vivid picture of consciousness which does not reject emotional drama, but similarly avoids resting on traditional modes of lyric celebration. The *Continuation* project shares with many contemporary Canadian long poems the fascination for the flow and movement of the poem and their desire to foreground the fictions of representation of the speaking subject. The *Continuations* do not achieve resolved coherence, but they do not remain comfortably, or permanently, in the chaos of fragmentation.

Notes

1 Letter to Sam Solecki, August 15, 1979.
2 Frank Davey and bp Nichol share the same opinion: "His long poems, the first major modernist poems in Canadian literature, open up formal possibilities which are later to dominate important work by Marlatt, Bowering, Nichol, Lee and Kroetsch," *Louis Dudek: Texts and Essays*, eds. Frank Davey and bp Nichol. *Open Letter* 4:8/9 (1981): 7.
3 I borrow this expression from Trehearne, 280.
4 *Atlantis* can be viewed as a spiritual journey in which the Dudek embarks on a search for, what he calls, "the other half of existence." Dudek has explained that after the Enlightment and the French Revolution—i.e. after the "rationalist harrowing" of religion—there was a sort of reconstruction carried out by Romanticism. Yet after the decline of Romanticism, which degenerated into sentimentalism, and with the advance of science and realism, it came a "great vacuum of negation" that permeated the thought and art of the twentieth century:

> T. S. Eliot's solution was an arbitrary return to Anglican Christianity. (Note that his longish poem *The Waste Land* (1922) was often taken to represent the meaningless modern world without religion, which in fact points in the opposite direction. It expresses a thirst for religious meaning). My poem *Atlantis* has a similar predicament to that of Eliot. As I have explained earlier I had been teaching literature from the 18th century to the present for years, and this had inevitably been an account of Romanticism and its negation. But just before writing *Atlantis* I came to realize that this universal skepticism and demolition of past beliefs—this nihilism of Bazarov—must be only half of the truth, that the other half is the idea just the idea—of a great good, of perfection, and that reality only occasionally and in some part attains it (. . .) So that when in a moment I gave it the name of "Atlantis" the whole thing crystallized and the poem began to write itself. (Letter November 7, 2000)

5 Louis Dudek, letter to Raymond Souster and Peter Miller. June, 17, 1967. *Souster Collection*. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. University of Toronto.

6 In 1947 Dudek met William Carlos Williams in a reading given by the poet-doctor on October 25 in New York:

> I asked him whether he had any news of Ezra Pound. Told me he had been to see him that weekend (?) at St. Elizabeth's hospital. Pound happier than he had ever seen: his wife said she had never seen him so lucid. He has put on some weight. Wears his own clothing at the hospital. Gets all the papers and books from the curator. Is doing a translation of the Odes of Confucius. When W.C. Williams told him he could not make anything of his middle Cantos, Pound said "Well, Bill, you never could read more than 18 pages," (*1947 Notebook*. May 10-11. Louis Dudek Papers. NLC).

7 Dudek's need to revise the *Continuation II* manuscripts, as he himself explains, was also minimal: "I sent parts of *Continuation II* to friends, editors—even to virtual strangers—as the work was being written. I now can't remember where some of them are lodged, those first copies, though corrections have been few," "Reflections on Failure." Louis Dudek Papers at NLC, 4.

8 See the volume published in 1974 by Dudek: *Dk/ Some Letters of Ezra Pound*.

9 "You know, everyone of my generation is now either dead or silent—people like Frank Scott, Art Smith, Earle Birney, Abe Klein, John Glassco. An on and on, a whole list of people. I'm entirely alone. All the people I lived and worked with in poetry are gone" (Hildebrand 104).

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