

Edward Lacey

Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by
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Edward A. Lacey, Pseudonym

Moving In Alone, John Newlove, Contact Press, 1965
Bridge Force, Frank Davey, Contact Press, 1965
Smoking the City, Bryan McCarthy, McClelland and Stewart, 1965
Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, Raymond Souster, Ryerson Press,
1965
For the Record, Luella Booth, Fiddlehead Books, 1965
Old Momma, Luella Booth, Fiddlehead Books, 1965
The LSD Leacock, Joe Rosenblatt, Coach House Books, 1966
The Love Poems of Elizabeth Sargent, Elizabeth Sargent, New
American Library, 1966

In this year of gracelessness, one's thoughts return from abroad, from real places, to the fatherland (dare one invest Canada with a sexual attribute?), to the uncountryside, now celebrating 100 years of non-history with all its accustomed joy and vitality. One hundred is a suitable age indeed for Canada; we seem, now as always, to possess, collectively, the intellectual curiosity, the sexual appetite and the physical independence of the centenarian. I have been out of Canada, and out of contact with the world of Canadian letters, for most of the last eight years. Prolonged absence and isolation confer on one a special status and a unique, though not necessarily superior vision. I need not itemize on what this vision feeds, or starves—lapsed correspondences and friendships, lack of access to the new books, or time to read them, or even the proper frames of reference in which to judge their relevance and importance, lack of knowledge of the new authors and

anecdotes. One has—to use a once fashionable term—opted out, (though [page 79] always with that enviably Canadian alternative of opting back in at some future date). If at the same time one has taken on some of the attitudes of another socio-linguistic entity, and accepted, even partially, its codes of behaviour, one's perceptions are apt to be more radically affected.

All this, unfortunately, is my case. I am hopelessly out of touch (hence the stunning degree of ignorance displayed here concerning the previous literary wars, triumphs, and *mésalliances* [*sic*] of some poets, especially the younger ones) and out of date (hence the venerable age of some of the volumes under review, for which I apologize, though I am not wholly to blame), semi-Latinized and quite remote from whatever being Canadian may mean to you.

I should, if asked, be hard put to specify how my opinion of Canadian poetry has been altered by absence. Principally, I no longer find it so special, so different as it once seemed to me. The main themes always signalled by our critics as omnipresent in our poetry—the gigantism and hostility of a nature which tends to be mythologized and endowed with godlike, malevolent traits, the resultant fatalism and conception of life as struggle, the pathetic quality of the individual surrounded by a hostile or indifferent universe in a drama of which he is the tragic hero and nature the all-powerful villain, the imagery of violence, sharpness, and cold—these indeed dominate our literature, and I shall have occasion to refer to them often in my remarks on the poets to be reviewed here. But, except for our obsession with cold and darkness, these now seem to me perhaps less specifically Canadian and more a response to certain generalized pioneer situations and environments. (An illuminating comparison could be made in this respect of parallel trends in Canadian and South American literature, despite the great socio-cultural and physical differences between the two regions). If anything could distinguish a poet as Canadian, it might be something quite accidental and secondary, such as reticence and lateness in publication and the paucity and seasonal nature of the production, giving us the typically Canadian phenomena of the one-book poet (Leo Kennedy), the dried-up poet (Klein), the silent sybil (Jay Macpherson, P.K. Page), the sleeper (Finch), the century plant (Everson), the lapidary (Smith, MacKay), etc. Even this at least dignified infertility seems no longer the mark of the Canadian poets, especially since *Tish* gushed up.

There is, nonetheless, a theme running through almost everything Canadian I have ever read, which, though characteristic of all modern poets, is present in such an accentuated form in ours as to be able to serve almost as a touchstone. Very simply, it's the theme of loneliness,

and the problem of communication, or incommunication. I want to view the poets [page 80] whom I'll be discussing here partly in the light of their handling and awareness of the problem. If this is true, then I shall just have to be trite, and I have every intention of deluging you with a bunch of kitsch sociopsychological jargon about anomie, alienation, and deracination. I take it, then, that we understand what we're talking about.

At least three important elements in our culture and heritage—and this is grossly simplifying—have contributed to make us isolates, preoccupied with communicating. (Canadians, incidentally, in proportion to their numbers, travel more and make more telephone calls than any other nation.) One of these, of course, is the already mentioned immensity and overwhelming harshness of a physical environment which is and does everything on a grand scale, which is both violent and inimical to human endeavour, which is still, in many ways, a pioneer nature, dwarfing and isolating us, which can, and indeed does, in mid-20th century, still kill, which, with its distances and rigours, cuts off community from community, and even, with its omnipresent cold, isolates man from man, neighbour from neighbour, locking human activity into secrecy and self-absorption, in the very heart of our great cities, during six to eight months of the year (precluding the existence—which industrialization would have destroyed anyhow, as it is effectively doing in Quebec, the only area of the country where that way of life ever was to be found, even minimally—of the street-corner, door-stoop community culture, so rich in human and folkloric values and so useful to the novelist, which is possible in warmer zones where people perform practically all their basic activities in sight of one another). A nature which, with its vastness, and our small, border-hugging population, and the forever unusable snow deserts stretching supine and supreme as far as mind can conceive, north of the population ribbon, makes of us all not only isolates, personally and internationally, but featureless beings lost in a landscape which has more identity, a more idiosyncratic quality, than we. We are Canada, a nation represented by an empty chair in the OAS; the country with one of the world's highest income levels, lowest population densities, and worst immigration records; the land with no common language, no name (are we dominion or realm, of what?); no anthem; no flag (except a recent plagiarism of the Peruvian flag); the place with more cows than people, etc., etc., *ad nauseum*. Another element in our alienation, deriving from the curse of our Anglo-Scottish-Irish heritage and backwater mentality, is the dominance among us in both official spheres and personal lives, of a God-fearing, joy-hating, sexually insane, masochistic, work-centred ethic, which even the sexual and sensory “revolution” supposedly taking place in

our Southern neighbour has not yet [page 81] cracked. (When Anglo-Canadians are called by others juiceless or colourless this is usually what is referred to. I find them more monstrous than colourless). The third element, a product of irreversible processes occurring in the modern industrial world and aggravated here by our physical propinquity to the U.S.A., is the development and presence of an industrial technocratic society with the faint antiseptic odour of statism and naturally provided with all the efficient apparatus of the modern state, whatever its creed, for denying and destroying man's creative talents, robbing him of the animal joy of existence, depersonalizing him while claiming to educate him, and incidentally making not only communication among individuals more difficult but also rendering the historical role of the poet in society completely meaningless (though clearly the poet in a pioneer society like ours, struggling for its physical existence, was always marginal, at best a decorative figure, but essentially meaningless).

These three reasons, all reinforcing one another, explain why the dilemma of isolation and non-communication is more acute in Canada than elsewhere, and more obsessive in our literature. This is one cause, I fear, for Canadians' inability to write good novels. The explanation may both naive and simplistic, but I should think we greatly lack material for novels—human material. We are simply short on knowledge, however acquired, of other human beings and their workings, because of our isolation, both physical and spiritual, our self-absorption and our lack of human contacts, making impossible the presentation of character in depth so necessary in the novel form. And so our novels fail though their settings are often impressive. (Another obvious cause is the problemless nature of the Scandinavian-type welfare state toward which we are moving, and the plain “dullness” of such a world compared with the inequality and variety of wicked old laissez-faire capitalist society—with what pathetic delight we have leaped on our recent insignificant French-English differences as giving us not only a cause, and something for the desperate staffers of *Macleans*'s magazine to write about, but even a *raison d'être* and an identity, arising out of variety and inequality). I'd especially note the poverty of novelistic efforts—except for Margaret Laurence's—emanating from that vast Sahara of the Bozart stretching between the Rockies and the Great Lakes, where climatic extremes and Puritan religiosity are greatest and population is least dense. It is significant, too, that Canadians are generally better on the short span and less developed character level of the short story. And it is natural that poetry, being even more impressionist, more fragmentary, relying more on self than on the other, and on insights into people rather than broad knowledge of character, should temporarily flourish [page 82] —

even—though the final state of things in such a society may be silence. It is also natural that some poets, in an attempt to reclaim their lost domains, should turn to social protest as the only valid way of communicating with their fellow men, even when there is little left to protest about, while others, like Birney, seek local colour (and communication and good poetry) in travel and others retreat into a dream of history (like Purdy), or into mythology (like Macpherson, Hine, et al). Or move further and further into a narcissistic or bipersonal world. And it is obvious that all will suffer the effects of their environment, and that loneliness, and communication, failed or achieved, will be the genesis and theme of much of their writing.

Is this just belabouring and embroidering the obvious? I think not. Our poetry contains some of the most striking and beautiful expressions of isolation I have read in any literature. I am thinking of such things as Carman's "A Northern Vigil," with its atmosphere of doom and loss, of Pickthall's "P"re Lament," of the sententious yet moving sonnets of Robert Finch's first volume, of the sealed landscape in which the sealed characters of Alden Nowlan and Fred Cogswell move, of the lonely secretaries and landladies and adolescents who people *The Metal and the Flower*, of the exquisite neuroticism of Jay Macpherson in poems like "The Garden of the Sexes" or in such unforgettable lines as "Reader, have mercy on my plight / Let be, or else consume me quite." Need I go on?

Of the poets I shall examine here, none shows the effects of alienation and isolation more than John Newlove...as the very title of his volume would indicate. Years ago, when first reading Robert Finch, one of Canada's most original and undervalued poets, my attention was caught not only by the overt symbolism with which he expressed his problem of communication—his doors and windows and letters written or not written and handshakes and, above all, the "word"—but also by his attempt to express verbally something of the same problem and its resultant bewilderment, negativism, and retreat into self. I found, fitting his philosophical negativism, more negative words in Finch than in almost any other poet—negative pronouns, nouns, verbs, adjectives, even negated [sic] participles ("the word unspoken, the road untaken, the door unopened," etc.) and double negatives of the "not without," "not-un-"type, creating an effect of confusion, impotence and inability to move or do, of tragic loss and frustration. Such an apparently different poet as Newlove seems to have read Finch well, though not too wisely. Newlove, too, is always writing or receiving or not receiving letters and constantly mentions "the word." But above all, he uses negatives, negatives, negatives. The art of communication, indeed of living, seems to evoke in him such

dumb despair of its purpose and [page 83] results that he would really prefer not to speak, or write, or act, or even feel at all. Psychiatry has a preciser name for this anomic state—catatonia...counted a total of 64 negatives and quasi-negatives in the first twelve poems of this book, before losing both count and patience. And when it's not negatives, it's indefinite pronouns, or passive infinitives, or conditional clauses which crop up over and over, producing a similar effect, of indefiniteness, passiveness and doubt. Rhetorical questions tiresomely recur, especially one formula with "but" ("With whom should I associate but suffering men?," "What to do then, but turn around," "what should I do but walk home," etc.) The passive fatalism which accompanies Mr. Newlove's state is just as wearily reiterated....

I agree that Newlove's is a nightmare world. But all this negativism, tentativeness, and repetition creates, despite the real pain which informs it, a numbing effect. Agony (however real) is not art. If there's nothing to say or do, why does he write at all? Despite the confusion enveloping him, Mr. Newlove is fortunately at times more coherent, less inchoate, and above all, less subjective, and what jells into form then is an occasional very fine expression of the old Canadian fears of cold and isolation—what Frye has called our tragic theme of loneliness and terror. The title poem gives us the sensitive recollection of a fatherless boy, growing up alone in an isolated interior town, among traumatic experiences of violence and cruelty to human and animal which makes one think of some recent French Canadian fiction. Newlove is the quintessential loner, whatever the role in which he appears in his poems—growing up, on the road, as a lover, working. And he has, so the dust-jacket informs us, had quite a life, having been school-teacher, university student, "reporter and disc-jockey in Saskatchewan, ditch-digger in Edmonton, worm-picker in Montreal, candy-maker in Vancouver"; no publisher ever enquires whether the reader really wishes to have this litany of Canadian whistle-stops and useless information foisted on him, or whether he'd perhaps not prefer to glean it from the poems. One begins to feel, through Newlove, the real horror of a world where there is "no one else for 100 miles" ("In the Forest").... Some of these more controlled and nervous poems are very good indeed, especially "East fro the Mountains," another deeply Canadian poem like Purdy's "Transient"... This particular poem uncharacteristic ends, like Smith's "The Lonely Land," triumphantly, with "faltering, tenuous melody— / o tired and halting song!" And because of his poverty and his poetry, Newlove professes little fear of the Moloch of the modern industrial city.... But such moments of optimism are few...reciprocity is unattainable...while sex and kindness will not suffice either, as various poems point out. Life is filled with gratuitous [page 84] cruelty, and people are frightened

monsters.... So the salvation is in the writing, in the compassion of “Eight Dollars Will Do It,” “For Judith,” and especially of “The Flowers,” the most impressive poem in the book, with its atmospheric effects, its symbolism and the magnificent final stanza which concludes “I breathe / as harshly as the wind.”

I have tried to indicate fairly both the defects and the virtues of Mr. Newlove’s poetry, and I must conclude that, though the latter certainly outweigh the former, the former, being matters of style, syntax, and vocabulary, tend to loom larger. This is sad, for by wearing the reader beforehand it robs the best poems of the sympathetic reading they deserve. Seldom had I read a poet whose less distinguished pieces were so monotonously and so mechanically similar to one another as Newlove’s. But at the time, I had not read Frank Davey.

Mr. Davey...is another Contact Press poet, this time with a less flamboyant biography, associated more closely than Newlove with the former Tish group. I have vented my feelings about the Tish poets in an earlier review, so I need not repeat myself. Davey’s poetry betrays a flaccidity of sentiment, language, and structure similar to Newlove’s in the latter’s worst moments (“Force” is a strange word to find in his title), and he has similar themes and preoccupations, but he is, I think, a less talented and genuine poet than Newlove. Indeed, I don’t think he is much of a poet at all, though he was the temperament of a West Coast Matthew Arnold.... Mr. Davey, being a West Coast poet, suffers in poem after poem with the obsession that he is at the end of things, at the end of a voyage and process, at the edge of a continent both physical and mental.... Sad thoughts for a young man, even a sad young man like Mr. Davey. It is natural in the circumstances that Mr. Davey should use bridges as his symbol of communication, and the sea and mountains as symbols of estrangement, and those who cavil at the conventionality of the symbolism might remember its inevitability, though others may have used it better a long time before. This means that Mr. Davey’s statements on communication will be rather predictable and unmemorable ones. Another subject which the changeless sea suggests to him is *mutabilitie*, and his poetry abounds in reflections on this theme, and on the difference between the then and the now with the sea as a backdrop.... I find this all rather old hat, though pleasant enough, in a soporific way. In his constant moralizing on time and change, Mr. Davey quite often falls into a Purdyish romanticism (indeed, at least one poem in the book, “A Vancouver History,” is pure Purdy-Souster, and better than most of the rest). So it is no surprise to find here those familiar romantic symbols of *mutabilitie*, the ghost town (mentioned in at least three poems, [page 85] one of them, “Fairview,” a fine Purdy-type mood picture) and the

cemetery which is the setting of four diffuse and elegiac sea-and-cemetery pieces—for there is no escape from water in Mr. Davey’s pages.... Elegies are fun, but what I find distasteful about Mr. Davey is his masochistic Jansenism. Even his lovers are always sad, lonely couples in the rain, huddled under umbrellas, and he revels in scenes of physical discomfort, especially if connected with sex.... Mr. Davey obviously enjoys his dismal coastal climate, too, despite disclaimers. He certainly pays as much attention to it as to the sea (in fact they are simply facets of the same thing...and his poems are filled with references to rain, fog, cold, wind, and damp. Even warm, sunny days somehow manage to seem disagreeable in Mr. Davey’s treatment of them...and one does get tired of raindrops in *Bridge Force*—as tired, presumably, as Mr. Davey gets of them in practice. His favourite colour is that patriotic Canadian hue, grey.... His favourite hour is the grey dawn, the hour between light and dark, and he seems, like a good Manichean, to be fascinated by the struggle between light and darkness, though it goes without saying that darkness always wins in the end....

Well, it is all very depressing. Such a climate must be dull and dreary indeed. So is Mr. Davey’s poetry. I don’t ask him for joy; a statement, in memorable language, occasionally, of this dullness and dreariness would be enough, just as Newlove’s occasional crystallization of a memorable and objective statement of his predicaments is enough. This, in the individual poems, I don’t get, though the book as a whole certainly conveys a water-logged atmosphere....

Of the technique of the poems I can say little—because, as in Newlove, there is little, though at least Newlove usually has the sense to keep basically to a Sousterish two-, three- or four-stress line, containing various juncture-groups, and doesn’t split his lines up into single-juncture group units like Mr. Davey. I’m aware of the soundness of the theory here, but it just doesn’t seem to me to provide satisfactory practical results, for various reasons. My dislike for very short lines is due in part no doubt to the diet of iambic pentameters which I grew up on. But poetry nowadays, especially unrhymed poetry, is so non-lyrical and so much tied to the printed page and has such an overwhelmingly visual orientation—and that a traditional one—despite what poets think, that I feel the application of oral theories leads to nothing but failure. Mr. Davey’s punctuation is amazingly inconsistent from anyone’s point of view. His language is unadventurous and repetitive, his sentences are too often verbless fragments, giving the effect of notes for unfinished poems, and his imagery is stale. One of his few flights of fancy is the statement that “Description / is a bird / who [page 86] comes down / all too

easily” (“For an April Angel”). Oh, but she doesn’t, Mr. Davey, she doesn’t.

Real urban poetry has been quite unfamiliar in the predominantly rural and small-town history of Canadian literature. Our poetry seems not so much biased toward the countryside as unable to grasp and assimilate the modern city as a connected, complex, industrial phenomenon with its own rules, logic, and ambiance. This is only to be expected from being lost in a landscape. Mr. Davey, for example, is as non-urban a poet as one could wish: in his preoccupation with the elemental forces of nature, he is unmistakably in but not of Vancouver. Were he really part of the modern city, it would enfold him in its own climate and rhythms, shielding him from the rhythms of seasons, tides and light and darkness until they eventually became meaningless to him. Most of our poets—perhaps up till now most poets—are equally in but not of the city, and not only those whom I have mentioned as retreating into myth or history. Even supposed urban poets tend to use the city only as a background, a stage across which their isolates walk. Our city poet par excellence, Raymond Souster, is a suburban or “neighbourhood” poet, not an urban poet at all; he constantly justifies and affirms the presence of “nature” in the city, and moons over squirrels, birds, trees, and the nostalgically conceived small Ontario towns.

The poet in the group under review who is most of the modern city and who at the same time rebels most radically and consciously against its diabolical and estranging mechanism is Bryan McCarthy.... His type of *ville tentaculaire* poetry has a long family tree, going back to the roots of the Industrial Revolution itself, in the anti-capitalist poetry written on the subject of child labour and exploitation of workers by Victorians and Romantics such as Hood, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Leticia E. Dandon [sic], and even Blake. (Mr. McCarthy’s remark, in the interesting—and helpful—notes to his poems, on “the aggressive, aggrieved, lost teenagers that the modern city spawns in such quantity” oddly mirrors the Romantics’ concern for the soul of the child caught up in the industrial process). Typical of this kind of poetry have been its vision of the modern city in violent, distorted, and apocalyptic imagery, the emphasis given to the city’s estranging and fragmenting effects on the individual, and, often, the idea of some malign deity (quite distinct from the malign nature deity, Wendigo, which hovers over so much of our poetry), some Nobodaddy¹ or Moloch, presiding over the whole infernal scene. The use of these concepts and images in Canadian poetry would owe a lot to Layton, particularly the Layton of such poems as “The Improved Binoculars”—Mr. McCarthy acknowledges the debt—and practically

nothing to anyone else. Perhaps [page 87] Mr. McCarthy possesses the clearer vision of the outsider, who sees the menace and irreversibility of a process in which we are too involved to grasp it as a whole. Perhaps he, coming from a world of cities, shared before arrival the myth of Canada as a forest of pastoral innocence—hence the violence of the disappointment. But he by now knows us too well for further disappointment; he has been wooded by both our Wendigo (during a stay in Ungava) and our Moloch (Montreal), and seems, like another distinguished Transatlantic guest, to have politely said “thank you, my dear, but no” to the former, and regretfully embraced the latter, as his poem “Moloch,” and others, would indicate.

Mr. McCarthy’s language is at all events sufficiently apocalyptic. The city burns, buildings crack and go down “before they were built,” and in “The Man with the Terrible Green Eyes” we have a vision of the final destruction of the whole social order from which the city arose and which it perpetuates.... The individual in this world is depersonalized, alienated and, as in *Newlove*, catatonically impotent; the poet, the rebel against the system, is pursued and destroyed by the police of society. The theme of catatonia is explicit here; “Nobody moves / we are mad / catatonic- / welded into our madness (“8.30 a.m. bus line-up”).... Mr. McCarthy’s obsessive symbol is the metamorphosis of man into metal and machine, and the theme recurs in powerful images again and again.... Society is almost wholly mechanized now, with the omnipresent “cop” as its watchman, and dialogue with it is “the interminable / boring argument” of a “cylindrical steel mouth.”.... The last escape Mr. McCarthy mentions is the old one—human joy and human communication.... Though I applaud the point of view, I’m afraid I find this also a very sentimental solution, and sentimentality, as Mr. McCarthy knows, is the easy way out, besides being a sort of metal emotion.

Mr. McCarthy’s language and imagery are of course the common idiom of a certain kind of modern poetry, borrowing from science fiction, cinema, technology, Burroughs, Ginsberg, Fearing, etc., etc., and perhaps I dwell unduly on them. But I find these poems very powerful stuff, strongly conceived and sharply executed, especially after the incoherencies of *Newlove* and the insipidities of *Davey*. The imagery is fresh and accurate, the language both spare and brilliant and there is a masterly use of repetition, cumulative effect, and symbolism. I also consider these to be important documents, as a purgative and as a warning. What is interesting especially, in the light of my earlier remarks about how our modern technological and industrial world both reproduces and at the same time reinforces the gigantism, inhumanity, hostility, and isolating, estranging effect of our physical

[page 88] environment, is how closely Mr. McCarthy's world parallels Newlove's—a similar impotence and catatonia, a similar dislocation of reality, similar hatred of society and its “cops,” and even similar solutions to the dilemma. Yet no one would call Newlove a “city” poet. There is a certain limitedness in the range and even the style and language of the poems in *Smoking the City*; they really are all facets of one another, and Mr. McCarthy cannot go on writing this way indefinitely. It will be interesting to see what a poet of his verve and talent will produce next, provided, of course, that he doesn't lock away his wings and elect for a very Canadian silence.

Mr. McCarthy is one of the few poets writing in Canada in the last twenty years who don't show the direct and seminal influence of Raymond Souster. This is the stranger, in that the two would be classified (by many) as “city” poets, though I have already explained that I don't think Mr. Souster really is—not in Mr. McCarthy's sense, anyhow; though he is certainly and indubitably a “Toronto” poet. It's just that his “Toronto,” the focus of his poetry, is not a focus, is not seen by him as a unit, a complex, a city, in the way Mr. McCarthy sees his Montreal. At all events, since I have attacked Mr. Souster underhandedly various times without reviewing a book of his, let me deal with *Ten Elephants on Yonge Street*.... Mr. Souster almost disarms criticism by his dust-jacket remarks, which are a model of humorous discretion. And he is a good poet, though no better in this volume than in all his previous ones. I suppose my basic quarrel with him is that he hasn't grown, and is today still writing versions of the same poems he wrote twenty years ago. The topics may be superficially more varied, a few poems may be longer (that is, more diffuse), some may even heretically use end-rime, or be in prose, the locale may *seem* not to be Toronto, but all the old changes are still being rung on the same old attitudes. Isn't this true of all but a few poets, and shouldn't a mode one once found delightful continue to delight? Maybe, but some of these poems are supposedly reprinted from out-of-print volumes, and I cannot tell, in most cases, which they are. Did I meet “Jeannette” somewhere before—or was that his “Motorcycle Queen”? Are these the same robins, squirrels, cats, and beggars I recall from earlier readings—or are they a younger generation? The impression of overriding sameness in both subject matter and technique (I shall deal with the technique in a moment), from book to book and within a single book, is the most I can say against this well-written, sensitive, and intelligent verse. This, of course, is why the dust-jacket remarks must have been made tongue-in-cheek.

Mr. Souster reminds me strongly of a sort of Heine—arrested at the

point the latter had reached after his first couple of volumes, with a permanent [page 89] *Stimmungsbrechung* like a tic. Nor is this fanciful, for indeed many of Mr. Souster's poems end in a very Heinesque *Stimmungsbrechung*, an abrupt and ironic change of mood.... This "O. Henry" type of wry, twist ending is very typical of Mr. Souster, Related to it, no doubt, is his love of antithetical structure, using often a very bald and obvious antithesis. For Mr. Souster is a man of tried and few poetic tricks and these he tends to re-use. Antithesis is employed in this book to excellent effect in short poems...but it works more unobtrusively into many others, especially in connection with the author's melancholy sense of time and change (in which he rather resembles Mr. Davey; similarly to Davey, Mr. Souster seems very much preoccupied—like any good Romantic who doesn't truly understand the nature of the modern city—with buildings which are torn down, neighbourhoods which change character, trees being cut down, etc.).... It has been pointed out that another of Mr. Souster's stock devices is the riddle-type extended metaphor (it is noteworthy how seldom Mr. Souster makes use of simile, and how often of the subtler metaphor or personification), the point of which depends on solving the problem of how X resembles Y (How is the world like an acorn? How is summer like a lizard?), or its variant, what unknown does X resemble, with clues supplied (What claws and slips from a roof like falling snow?). The present collection abounds in poems of this sort, some quite clever, such as "The Acorn," "April Fourth," "Great Beast of the Fog," "This Lizard of Summer," "Last Bonfire," and "First Ship." What is notable in all these—and in many other poems as well—is the extraordinary amount of anthropomorphism inherent in Souster's metaphors and personifications—another tendency, incidentally, which he shares with the youthful Heine. A mechanical stump-remover becomes an evil woman, an evergreen is a humanized figure of hope an struggle, buds grow passionate with sun, a cat is Cleopatra, leaves are years of life, farms, and tenements are old people, fog is a great animal, summer is a lizard, sleep a bird, a music-box a butterfly, etc. The dangers of excessive anthropomorphism are sentimentality and cuteness, from which Souster does not escape, and a certain strainedness in the comparisons.... Another danger, overuse of the pathetic fallacy, he falls into now and then as well, in his meditations on leaves and trees, and their harmony with his moods.... Worth attention is the animal basis of so much of the imagery and as well the insistent occurrence of animals as subjects of his poems; not only are objects like animals, animals like people, and people like animals, but animals are repeatedly observed or responded to in these pages—there's even a strange little poem that begins "All animals like me / now get themselves out of the cold /into some kind of lair." Mr. Souster [page

90] seems to have a special infelting for cats. He not only keeps and closely watches them (and personifies them), but even compares his love-making with theirs.... I suppose it's all by Layton out of Baudelaire, and the cat, comfortably toeing, like Mr. Souster, the line between wildness and bourgeoisie, should be his favourite animal. Besides this, we have the archetypal dead-animal piece "The Dead Squirrel," as well as dead-leaf and dead-tree poems; these are also all from Layton, and have by now become as well-established academic exercises and as indispensable for a Canpoet as the anti-professorial poem the anti-other-poets poem, the beggar poem which Mr. Souster himself originated, and others, like the spinster poem and the (grand-) father (-mother) poem to which I shall be adverting later. The purpose, except in the self-contained riddle poems, of all these observations and parallels from nature is of course to express the tragic view of life. And Souster's view is genuinely tragic. But, in peculiarly Canadian fashion, what he chooses to emphasize, and glorify, is the element of struggle—struggle to survive, to eke out an existence, even though defeat in the end is certain. Thus his oftentimes too sentimental praise is for these pathetic figures—always isolate—which best exemplify the blind life-force fighting against hopeless odds.... Life, in other words, is struggle, the business of life is to survive, take one's small joys, like Mr. Souster at the burlesque show, and have few expectations, and the longer one fends off the inevitable the better.... I hope I may be forgiven for feeling that Mr. Souster harps a bit too much on this single note. And his is a puritanical stoicism, forced on Canadians by their climate and history, and is but one more index of our national masochism. To put the unanswerable question—why try to grow roses at the pole when they can be grown so much more easily elsewhere? Once we recognize Mr. Souster's stoicism for what it really is, things fall into place. The beggar is here not only for social realism, but because he makes life hard and painful for himself, because he represents an alternative to society, and eschews possessions; he is a hermit, an ascetic.... Sex is actually something quite unpleasant, and is practised mostly out of doors in winter by cats and homeless lovers; when not, it is, as in Mr. Davey, a disagreeable experience—lights go out, hotel rooms get mixed up, sirens howl. A bird with a broken wing, an Indian student with sad eyes, or a blind man is fortunately always around to spoil the purest delight, the fairest day. The book is filled with *memento mori*'s—it is, in a sense, a lament on middle-age. I had long known Mr. Souster to be misanthropic, but the extent of the morbidity of this supposedly affirmative poet in this volume amazed me. Trains invite him to jump under, foghorns, fireworks, and Gwendolyn MacEwen reading her poetry cause apocalyptic visions of dooms, robins [page 91] picking worms, church bells, burning or dead leaves, children playing, an old acquaintance revisited—all remind him

of death and the passage of time; and the flotsam of the harbour becomes the corpse of his long-drowned youth. The past is eternally returned to, not in order to explore it, but to recover one's own youth....

Another part of the familiar Canadian complex immediately apparent in Mr. Souster is the fear of cold, of nature. Mr. Souster is a bit more fortunate than Mr. Davey, and can occasionally walk out on the first warm day on "east side of Yonge Street / to get that toasting goodness of the sun."... I should praise the chasteness and unassuming exactness of Mr. Souster's language, the perfection of conversational tone which rarely falters and without touching rhetoric, is lyrical—surprisingly so at times—the refusal to distort syntax for "poetic" reasons, the unwillingness to use language to dazzle for dazzling's sake, the neat sense of line-division, which he possessed long before breath-groups and juncture-groups began to be talked about by people who didn't understand them or their application. And I must attack his sentimentality, and the petit-bourgeois atmosphere of some of the poems—Christmas dinners, wedding nights, and so on. There is a real danger of Mr. Souster's beginning to sound too comfortably middle-aged and suburban.

Years ago, I thought of Mr. Souster as building up, piece by piece, a great mosaic portrait of his city. Years have passed, and the portrait is now no more complete than it ever was, nor will, nor can it be. Snapshots can't make a mural, nor vignettes a history. They can provide, though, a sense of place, and this Mr. Souster does well. Which is why I say he is not a city poet, since he obviously doesn't perceive, or write about, the city as an organism.

Luella Booth is another Toronto poet, far more suburban than Raymond Souster. In fact, scratch Joan Finnigan, and you'll uncover Luella Booth. That is, take Joan Finnigan's poetry, subtract its modicum of good taste and intelligence, add a liberal dash of hysteria, indiscretion, and negrophilia, and you have *For the Record*...certainly one of the worst volumes of "serious" poetry in years. I make this distinction, because, like Finnigan, Mrs. Booth at her poorest sounds very much like a garden-variety "poets'-page" of "women's-magazine" poet; indeed, the general level of that kind of verse is probably far higher than that of *For the Record*, though at her best Mrs. Booth surpasses the poets' page considerably. At all events, "magazine" verse takes far fewer risks and imposes on itself much greater limitation than those Mrs. Booth accepts, and therefore has a smaller gamut of possibilities of both excellence and badness, so that the comparison [page 92] is not legitimate, although Mrs. Booth might have been wise to confine herself to the poets' page in the first place.

There are, by my count, in the 54 pages and 66 poems of this book, 56 imperative verbs, 46 vocative uses of nouns, 23 occurrences of Oh, Oh, Ah, and Ho, 38 rhetorical questions, and 19 exclamation points. What was a minor blemish in Finnigan—this earnestly rhetorical tone—has here become a fatal vice, and laughable as well.... [T]his points beyond rhetoric to a dangerous archaizing and poeticizing tendency, borne out by the preciousness of spellings and word divisions: “a wilde poem / stung my breastbone / once / when I was little” (Oscar, Mrs. Booth?)...and by the “poetic” inverted word-order of other passages. There is something, moreover, overwrought and forced, and at the same time gushing in Mrs. Booth’s language...this deliberate and repeated distortion of language, verbalizing nouns, making intransitive verbs transitive, which is effective only if done very sparingly, and even then is more at home among the determined sprightliness of the “Flights of Fancy” page of the *Reader’s Digest*.... The forced and exaggerated language is fully matched by a similar emotional exaggeration, a sort of over-response, expressed not with the childlike sweetness of a W. D. Davies, or the unhappy grandeur of a Hopkins (to name a couple of chronic over-responders), but with a dreadful feminine hysteria and an utter lack of taste.... This is poetry to which I’d apply the mealy-mouthed epithet of “indiscreet.” It embarrasses me—for Mrs. Booth. The most extraordinary things are always happening to her. Let her sit in the audience at a summer-stock play and “steel / in my heart’s red centre sings.”... In what is no doubt the only recorded case of such a reaction, she listens to a tape by T. S. Eliot and “my larynx clogs.”... Will none tell Mrs. Booth that the tone of her discourse is just all wrong?...

We discover in Mrs. Booth above all a plethora of colour words...it would not surprise me to find Mrs. Booth is an amateur painter as well as a poet, for she has the painter’s careful eye. This is, in fact, her strong point; she possesses a flair for colour and arrangement of detail in a scene, and when she confines herself to descriptions and imagist fragments, without inserting her egregious personality, she is capable of precision and concision.... I’m interested in her use of colour, however, because it shows, in an especially pathetic form, the Canadian starvedness for colour, for “life,” for everything human. Luella Booth is “grey,” like her Canada, and she wants to be “coloured,” like the beach in Italy, like Bermuda, like the Negro—but she cannot; it’s “too much” for her. Hence the perfervid and emotionally loaded tone. Naturally, she seeks escape in travel, and is overwhelmed by non-grey countries. Naturally, too, sexuality, one of the few [page 93] escapes, is omnipresent in her poetry and prose.... It is quite understandable that the Negro, as a figure of supposed emotional and sexual freedom (and Mrs. Booth believes in all myths)

should figure so prominently and so explicitly in this book....

Surely few books have ever contained so many “family festival” poems, all dripping with approved sentiments.... There are two “grandfather poems” here and one “mother poem” which is just a grandfather poem disguised. This is another minor Canadian poem-type. It is usually dedicated to some Puritanical ancestor, often a “man of God,” who managed despite himself to beget a lot of children or marry three wives, or something like that, and who is tacitly admired by the poet-descendant. As such, this kind of poem is a subtle attempt at justification, through mythification, of our Puritan heritage, implying it to have been less hypocritical and life-destroying than it in fact was, and raising it, by exaggeration, to the proportions of Bunyanesque folklore. It is thus also by extension a justification of those many Puritan elements which our culture yet retains.... Then we have the travel poems—also *de rigueur* in Canadian poetry lately. In the hands of a polished practitioner like Earle Birney, travel poems can be as valid and passionate as any other, indeed, in the circumstances, it is more likely to be, and our poets may soon all have to go abroad for any colour at all in their writings. But Luella Booth gives us diary poetry. True travel poetry is a synthesis, a kaleidoscope of impressions, in which the locus merely provides a starting point, a launching pad for the imagination. Diary poetry is pieces of a travelogue. Luella Booth goes to Bermuda, and, presto, we get a couple of colorful Bermuda poems. Luella Booth goes to New York, and up pops a poem on New York, Luella Booth goes to a Negro bar in Detroit and....

But when Mrs. Booth writes about Canada, one reconsiders and devoutly wishes she would dedicate herself exclusively to travel poetry.... I have given so much time and space to this book of very bad poetry, because Luella Booth is not untalented, and could yet prune her excesses. Besides, I feel it very important, especially in the atmosphere of clique and claque in which Canpoetry thrives, to set this kind of stuff in its proper place. Again, Mrs. Booth’s faults, in a generalized sense, those of many female poets, though I make the point diffidently, wondering when some fools will get it into their heads that whether one is male or female is not the most important matter to be dealt with in reviewing a volume of poetry. Finally, the appearance of books like this augurs ill for the reputation and future of Fiddlehead Books. Of the three Fiddlehead Books I have seen so far, Anne Kekes’s was incomprehensible (partly my fault, but also partly [page 94] Miss Kekes’s, I fear), Joan Finnigan’s was uneven, and the present one should never have been published. I would suggest that the people responsible for Fiddlehead Books give us more selectively and sparingly of their stable of poetesses, or we shall all be exclaiming,

with Mrs. Booth, "It's too much. THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM".

....*The LSD Leacock*...gives off a distinct odour of hydrogen sulphide—understandably, because most of the book is about eggs. Eggs and—like Mr. Souster—animals. At all events, the 49 pages of alligators, peacocks, wasps, spiders, flies, butterflies, moths, worms, moles, apes, piranhas, scorpions, mantises, bullfrogs, lizards, chameleons, birds, bears, Metamorpho, and many more, in this beastly book seem at first a glut of nonsense. In part they are. Much of this is pure verbal high-jinx and tomfoolery—something I don't much care for, unless it's expertly done, which it isn't in this case. But there is a point lost in all this nonsense, the same point—the horror and dislocation caused by the modern city—as Mr. McCarthy makes, sometimes even expressed in similar language.... The difference between this and Mr. McCarthy is the latter's greater moral earnestness and intensity. There is another completely disparate kind of poem in this book, which surprises—simple, conventional, well-drawn observations from nature like "The Delicatessen," "Breakfast," and "The Mole." I note with my usual interest that the author has been "grave-digger," "plumber's helper, Civil Servant, Railway Express misanthrope, welder-fitter" and "dropped out in Grade 10," thus out-Newloving poor Newlove. I don't know what light all these details are supposed to throw on the egg of self—a blue light, I guess. A puzzling, immature collection. Like all Coach House productions, it's lovingly designed, illustrated, and printed, but my advice to the prospective buyer is—try marijuana; it's cheaper.

These six authors I have passed in review have left me rather dispirited. None of the books, except *Smoking the City*, was particularly interesting; none of the poets was "my kind of" poet, nor did they even occasionally write "my kind of" poetry. They are all, except McCarthy, very low-power users of language. I should in fact have liked to review a high-power user, like Leonard Cohen. But it is exactly his high-power use of language—allusive, private, associative, and hallucinatory—that precludes discussing him in the context of the writers collected here. For my consolation, then, I want to mention briefly a book of American poetry, *Love Poems of Elizabeth Sargent*.... I find some of these poems so familiar and beautiful, I suppose, because they're what I'd write myself, had I the talent for it. They deal almost exclusively with the sexual act as communion and affirmation, and have a considerable mystical element.... No Canadian could have [page 95] written, or probably will ever learn to write, poetry about sex of such purity and so little puritanism (we would, characteristically, take refuge in levity or exaggeration, which are

forms of puritanism). So long as poetry like this can be composed and heard, we are safe, even in our times, from the myrmidons.

Edge 8 (Fall 1968)

Poetry Chronicle III

Edward A. Lacey, Pseudonym

Renald Shoofler, *Small Change*, Delta Canada, 1966

Raymond Fraser, *Waiting for God's Angel*, Poverty Press, 1967

Roy Kiyooka, *Nevertheless these Eyes*, Coach House Press, 1967

Henry Beissel, *New Wings for Icarus*, Coach House Press, 1967

Pádraig O Broin, *No Casual Trespass*, Clô Chluain Tairbh, 1967

Eli Mandel, *An Idiot Joy*, M. G. Hurtig Publishers, 1967

Dorothy Roberts, *Extended*, Fiddlehead Books, 1967

Hi folks! Well, gee, it's grand to be back in the fatherland once more, communing with cows, chipmunks, and you other fellow Canadians. It's been quite a while since I'd been around this neck of the woods, and I was even beginning to develop a sort of perverse and misconceived nostalgia for the old sights and the old faces—a type of nostalgia, I might mention, for which the actual *Heimkehr* is usually a swift and decisive cure. Not that there haven't been changes enough to entertain my attention. I note with interest, for example, that the University of Toronto has instituted not only a Latin American program but even a linguistics division—bad news for those of us working in those fields, since the setting-up of a course in any modern discipline in Toronto is normally tantamount to an epitaph on that discipline—the badge of its moribundity, of its passage from being “in” to being “out.” (It has even been rumoured that, when any new course is proposed at Toronto, the University Senate requires a death certificate for the discipline in question. As I understand it, this rumour is unfounded, and all that is actually required is the swearing of a loyalty oath, on the part of those entrusted with “teaching” said discipline, that it is complete *passé*, irrelevant, jejune and incapable of interesting anyone). It may be, however, that my estimation of Toronto's modernity is coloured not a little by memory, and is no longer accurate, since I also note that the *alma mater*, at who knows what expense of spirit, has finally managed to get rid, for a year at [page 96] least, of both Clod and God—Mumbo Jumbo, God of St. Michael's, that is....²

Turning to more transcendental matters—the other day I walked into a Yonge Street beer joint (beverage room, I mean; I'm sorry) and what

should I see? No, no, not Raymond Souster, or even John Robert Colombo. Far worse! People standing up to the bar to drink! I was shocked! Wasn't so in my time. By law, you used to have to sit at a table and drink the wonderful golden-amber liquid. No more than four to a table, by law, mind you, and you couldn't join two tables together, by law, and you couldn't move your drink from one table to another, by law, and you couldn't sing or play any musical instrument, by law, and you couldn't order another beer until you had finished the one on the table before you, by law, and you couldn't eat, by law, and you couldn't drink before 12 noon, or after 12 midnight, or on Sundays or on weekdays between 6.30 p.m., and 8.00 p.m., between which hours you were expected to stop drinking and go home and have dinner like a good little boy, by law. Which all goes to show how awfully lawful we Canadians are, and how much the government worried about you and cared for you. It's interesting to observe, though, since drinking and pissing are rather interrelated (dialectic opposites, like eating and shitting, according to Mr. Layton) that no Ontario government ever tried to regulate by law the position to be adopted in pissing. You could, and still may, piss in any posture (and any quantity) you please, even while playing a musical instrument. So don't let anybody tell you that we don't have liberty here in Ontario. Why, I see that Mr. Robarts's government is even letting people drink on Sundays now. (As well as go to the movies and watch sports events and maybe even, someday—read newspapers!) Drink along with their meals between 1.00 and 3.30 p.m., and 5.30 and 9.30 p.m., that is. Before and after those hours, and between 3.30 and 5.30 p.m., I assume one is supposed to piss, shit, and praise God for Mr. Robarts.

Yes, folks, *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*. One begins to sense small changes—even in the rigidly puritanical, moralistic, and meddlesome nature of our national dementia. The armour of our pretence at sanity may at last be cracking. These changes of course operate more conspicuously among the young, and the first two books which I shall review here are a case in point. *Small Change*...by Renald Shoofler and *Waiting for God's Angel*...by Raymond Fraser are unimportant little volumes, undistinguished in format, modest in contents, suitable to the poet's new, lowered status ("rather like a mason" as Pablo Neruda says) in the age of post-historic man. The authors, too, seem to be rather undistinguished young men, indeed, deliberately try to be. Neither flaunts his learning, his [page 97] sensibilities—or even his sexual prowess. Here are no complex French and Italian verse forms (practically no rime, in fact), no foreign-language quotations or evocations of trips to Europe and the Orient, no poems inspired by paintings, statues, and other poems, no dedications to private friends or public personages, no attacks on other

unknown poets. No more falling on the thorns of life and bleeding than one finds in any other poet—a good deal less, in fact. Nor do we find the claustrophobic, smothering atmosphere of that private world of two from which all external reality is excluded, into which young poets (Roy Kiyooka, whom I shall review next, is a good example) sometimes retreat. These poems...are just simple unadorned statements and reflections on things of importance to young men (and old men, too): women, sex, seasons, liquor, friends, family, death. I must apologize for reviewing the two books together, something I generally avoid doing, since it's unfair to make comparisons which depend really on accidents of publication timing; occasionally, however, as in this case, one chances on two collections so similar that they beg to be compared. And I fear I make my two authors sound more banal than they are. For both these small books are well worth reading. I'm not yet sure whether either writer is really a poet—by which I mean that I don't know whether these poems are simply the product of intelligence, sensitivity, and youthful high spirits or whether God's angel is really involved. But let us be grateful for small mercies, and I am indeed grateful for what is not in these books—for their lack of pomposity and posturing, when one compares them with most first collections.

Of the two, Mr. Shoofler is the more cerebral and runs the danger of intellectualism; his haiku (that most useless addition to our English poetic wardrobe since Adelaide Ann Crapsey's *cinquain*³; though Mr. Shoofler's are not really haiku) and the quotation and title from Donne are storm signals.... At times, Mr. Shoofler passes from mere energy to real wit.... At other times, he seems to be merely imitative, as in "bad weather," another poem from the Souster sausage-machine, or "la bohème," a predictable jape about artistes, or merely clever, in the too cutely imagistic "after the rain." But the majority of these poems possess that most elusive of qualities—charm.

Mr. Shoofler is not always high on "speed." Like other Canadians, he is acutely sensitive to the enemy, cold.... In many respects, he reminds me of John Newlove, with whom he shares a dedication to holy poverty ("vector of lust"), and to nomadism (in Newlove's case, vagrancy, in Shoofler's, motorcycling), and the same concern with the possibility or impossibility [page 98] of communication; fortunately, he lacks Newlove's self-pity and incoherency.

Mr. Fraser is less intellectual, more of a populist, and even more devoted to the ideal of holy poverty. In fact, I think this is his peril—the too easy and too total adoption of a conventional "bohemian" pose. There are in this book just too many beards and pipes and heads

of long hair and small rooms and bottles of wine.... Pleasant, perhaps, for the poet, but the pose can be a bit irritating to the elderly reader like me.... Still, I find in Mr. Fraser a warmth and sensuousness lacking in the colder though more energetic poetry of Mr. Shoofler—a delight in the taste of food and drink, the glow of a fire, the savour of a pipe. This, even with the weaknesses, is very human poetry, endowed fully with what I have for want of a better name, called charm, in Shoofler’s case—a not-too-self-conscious combination of humility, humour, ease, and enthusiasm.... The father-son relation and communication seems important to both Shoofler and Fraser; each has a poem on the topic. Mr. Fraser is particularly hung up on home and family and the “you can’t go home again” theme fundamental in American literature. This probably has something to do with his Maritime provenience, as I shall try to indicate toward the end of this review.

In its low-keyed, almost muted fashion, Mr. Fraser’s is good poetry, in spite, or because, of its almost total lack of technical ornamentation and other fripperies. And it’s not based on syllable-counting or breath-group counting or other substitute silliness, either. Once again, it makes me think of Newlove. Not that I feel his writing has directly influenced these two poets — the discernible influences are the old seminal ones—Layton, Souster (to whom Mr. Fraser has a deserved tribute), Purdy et al.... These two unimportant little books are significant—as slaps in the face of the cold, greedy, stupid, vindictive Canadian people, and its hellish life-ethic.

Roy Kiyooka’s second collection of poems, *Nevertheless these Eyes...* is a slap in the face to my own puritanical notions about book design, format, and, especially, content. This is one of these artsy-fartsy volumes which fill me with a quite unjust rage—unjust, in this case, because the poetry is not that positively bad (though poetry of this extreme “privateness” does make me wonder if the person—was it Robert Weaver?—who stated at a conference years ago that purely personal love poetry was simply irrelevant in our times and should not be printed, was not wiser than he then seemed). Coach House Press, known for its artistic book-designing and printing, has gone overboard this time—starting from the very cover, which, in glittering blue foil, looks like something one would hang up on a Christmas tree. Mr. Kiyooka provides us with the usual [page 99] biographical titbits, not once, but twice—in almost invisible black print on the inside of the glittering blue cover, and in a bookmark-type insert. From these sources we learn that he’s a samurai’s grandson, and that his father, who ran away from the island of Shikoku over 60 years ago, was the black sheep of the family. (I don’t know whether it would interest

anyone, but, since we're all exchanging confidences, and it seems to be so much in vogue—I'm the grandson of a French Canadian doctor, and my father ran away to join the army at the age of 18). Of the book's total of 64 pages (best-quality paper), eight are completely blank, four are taken up by handsome linocuts of mirrors and naked women, four are occupied by very short epigraphs, two are given over to title and dedication, one to a very brief note to the reader, one to acknowledgements, and one to the vital information "Montreal, June 1965, Naramata, July 1966." That's one-third of the book. Well, it certainly makes for quick and easy reading. Of the remaining 43 pages, one contains, arranged in three verse lines, only five doubtless immortal words—"I / am / nevertheless these eyes." Among the other 42 pages (I count by pages, rather than by poems, since with no titles, frequently, no table of contents — why, with so many pages to spare?—and really no difference in mood, theme, or language from one page—or poem—to the next, it is often difficult to know whether what appears on two successive pages is in fact one longer poem, or two shorter), five pages contain 20 words apiece, or fewer, 16 have 40, or fewer, and only 23 contain more than 50 words each. By line-count, 22 pages have 12 or fewer lines of poetry per page, and only six have 20 or more lines. Various epigraphs—whether intended as prose or as poetry, and whether from the author's or someone else's writings, is not clear—are scattered among the volume's three—or is it four?—sections. One section—or is it part of a section?—consists of four *poèmes trouvés*, taken from the writings of Stanley Spencer, to whom the book is dedicated, and defined by Mr. Kiyooka in a note to the reader (which, predictably, takes up a whole page, though only five lines long, and which follows the *poèmes trouvés*—or does it precede them? One can't really be sure) as "shaped from his words, they define some of her attributes, her relevancy as he saw them." So only 39 out of 64 pages really belong even in part to Mr. Kiyooka. I am not trying to interpret in a physical sense Keats' injunction to load every rift with ore. And I do realize that poems must be properly and artistically arranged and spaced on the page, and that short poems exist. But this is overdoing things, and the reader has a perfect right to demand more substance and less show, especially (and I'm afraid that, with my still-puritan conscience, I must emphasize this point) when I read, with some indignation, that this precious [page 100] bauble was published with the assistance of the Canada Council! When the contents of *Nevertheless these Eyes* could easily be compressed into a book one-quarter in size, there may even be a point of morality about murdering innocent trees for sport. Meanwhile I recommend this book as a primer for a first-year course in rapid reading.

The poetry, what there is of it? Not all that bad, as I've said, and not

very good—more lacklustre and featureless than anything else, with few lines that deserve to be quoted, and few lines that are really bad. Very private, timeless, placeless, faceless, and sexy, all about the eternal feminine (the loved one is always referred to as “you” or “she” and is rarely particularized—except in the *poèmes trouvés* from Spencer), communication and mirror. Situated in some never-never land of moonlight and mirrors, where reality never enters (despite references to a Caesarian operation in one poem and to war experiences in another). Rather similar to *Man in a Window*, which I reviewed some time back. And pretentious, pompous in a way in which Shoofler and Fraser could never be—not simply because of all the epigraphs and illustrations and *poèmes trouvés*—though they help—but by its attempts to be profound, while uttering tritenesses.... Though Mr. Kiyooka is an artist, his poetry is remarkably non-concrete, non-visual, and imprecise, appealing more to the auditory sense. The Beloved, for example, “is / resilient bending with / the wind she is / everywhere and nowhere, / she wavers in mind.”... [I]t occurs to me that the fragmentary nature of his poems, and their indefiniteness and insubstantiality may be in part due to an attempt to make language, or words, say more than they really can. Could this be because of his familiarity with Japanese poetic models? I shall ever regard the influence of Japanese poetry on English as profoundly harmful. Not only because some of its poetic forms are based on conventions, such as syllable-counting, which are utterly alien to the nature of the English language and English prosody, and therefore, are not perceived by the reader as ornament at all, in general because, poetry being in any language simply a set of conventions about what you say and how you say it, and the poetic conventions of English and Japanese differing, as they do, immensely, concerning both ornamentation and content, there can be no fruitful cross-fertilization. Japanese poetry prizes and aims at both concentration and obliqueness—the single word doing duty for a group of words, the single, often secondary and peripheral, impression which is able to evoke a whole scene. This is an art of delicacy and understatement. English, on the other hand, in its poetry, insists on length, directness, rhetoric, over-statement, repetition, richness of detail, and clumping, obvious ornamentation like alliteration, rime, and stress-count. [page 101] English is wasteful, Japanese concise. The Japanese influences might be very salutary ones, but I doubt if they are importable. The whole West Coast school, both in the U. S. and Canada (and Mr. Kiyooka, who’s lived in Vancouver, shows its influences) would do well to ponder this matter. There are no poetic—or linguistic—universals.

Coach House Press has done much better by Henry Beissel, whose *New Wings for Icarus*...is a triumph of design and good taste, as are

Norman Yates's fine accompanying drawings. Like Messrs. Shoofler and Fraser, Mr. Beissel is a new poet, but only in the sense of that he has preferred not to publish in book form until now. His poems have been appearing in Canadian literary periodicals for at least a decade. But those who have known Mr. Beissel only through the rather decorative formalism of his shorter lyrical poems will be surprised indeed by the present volume. In one, respect, *New Wings for Icarus*, a four-part, 444-line poem, is similar in spirit to the minor pieces; it is definitely not narrative. This is that *rara avis*, the long lyrico-philosophical poem. As such, in accordance with Poe's dictum, it tends to divide naturally (but not fragment; unity is maintained skilfully through a variety of linkages and repetitions in language and imagery) into semi-discrete sections.... There is really no precedent in Canadian literature for this kind of poem or poetry (Kenneth McRobbie's Jupiter-C missile poem of some years ago is vaguely akin) and, indeed, Mr. Beissel, born and educated in Europe, makes no pretence—mercifully—of being a Canpoet, with the Canpoet's typical limitations and obsessions. Perhaps, therefore, he doesn't even belong in this review. *New Wings for Icarus*'s influences and antecedents are so many and so universal—it is part of a mainstream, rather than a backwater tradition—and any echoes or references in it so deliberate, that it would be presumptuous to list them; but one does note the preponderance of the thought of W. B. Yeats, one of Mr. Beissel's enthusiasms—visible in a certain view of history and mankind, and, at times...in a slightly disdainful anti-populism, or aristocratism.

If Messrs. Shoofler and Fraser are masons, and don't take themselves or their craft with complete seriousness or consider it or themselves too important, Mr. Beissel, who is a very different, and just as valid, type of poet, takes himself and his craft very seriously indeed. He represents the bardic tradition of poetry, and the present poem is both lament and prophecy. Thus the solemn and oracular tone, which sometimes struck one as overdone in his shorter poems and public pronouncements, is perfectly fitting here.

New Wings for Icarus is, basically, a tragic meditation on man, his history, his significance to himself, to others, as a community, in the universe, [page 102] his desires for knowledge and its problems, and his fate. Obviously this is a tall task for the poet, and the poem insists on being judged for what it is—an attempt at major, not minor poetry. That's a tall task for the reviewer, too—one which I fear I shall not be able to accomplish in this brief compass...

Mr. Beissel's villain, who "built a cage for the human beast," is the elemental one, too—authority in all its constituted forms—church (though this is a deeply religious poem, but not a Christian one), state,

technology, all the forms of distortion and tyranny on which man, the organization, and now one's master, the machine, practise on man, the individual. Using a different kind of language, Mr. Beissel's concern is similar to that of Bryan McCarthy's *Smoking the City*.... For both men, technology is death, and Mr. Beissel's symbols are no less metallized and mechanical than McCarthy's.... But Mr. Beissel's repeated and final plea is for song, which is to him the real kind of knowledge or flight, which truly renders us human and provides our victory over ourselves, our institutions, our machines, even over death and time....

There is much more to the poem. The figurative language is astonishingly rich, and so multi-levelled and overlapping are the various allusions and references that many escape even the most attentive, though they are doubtless intended to impress subliminally anyhow. This is a poem that has been worked and reworked; a bard may still be a lapidary. One tires, in fact, of trying to collect and classify the language of a poem like this, for, well-integrated as the symbols and imagery are, their interrelations are poetical, not logical. At the base of the poem is the double myth of Minotaur, the imprisonment (in the body, on earth) of the man-beast, and the flight of Icarus, the man-bird's attempts at flight to escape his bondage. These myths, especially the latter, are of course ideally adapted to the age of the prison camp and the space flight.... The former myth engenders the images of cage and labyrinth that occur in the poem. But basically, everything centres around images of flight: the bird's flight, the flight of the bird-bride, the flight of Pegasus, flight of the rocket, flight of the arrow, the flight of love, the flight of song. The singer, the poet, the sorcerer, whose duty it is to explain man to himself, appears at the poem's beginning and end as a forlorn Wandering Jew-Teresias figure. Poetry is Pegasus, is the lost bride and—as I shall have occasion to repeat shortly when I discuss the poems of Pádraig O Broin—by a mutation natural to the bardic tradition, becomes also the eternal feminine, and love—the lost bride being also Venus and the princess who releases man from the labyrinth and dances with him in flight in part 4. [page 103]

The poem is written largely in a supple free or blank verse of varying numbers of feet in various sections, but it manages to include everything from line-end assonances to internal rime to occasional riming couplets to march-time, a complex pattern of line-repetition in the “creation” segment, and...rime royal. Technically, in fact *New Wings for Icarus* is a brilliant *tour de force*, with an astonishing variety of levels and styles—colloquial, rhetorical, technical, lyrical—without giving any impression of lack of unity. Section melds into

section with amazing ease of transition....

Stylistic defects of the poem? Perhaps most noticeable is Mr. Beissel's discomfort when using colloquial style. His "high style" comes off perfectly; the colloquial comes out a little stiff, or, often as not, oddly mixed with the literary.... These are minor flaws. What do they indicate? A "high" style that is a little too "high," too oratorical, too poetical, and thus slightly mars *New Wings for Icarus*?.... More seriously, should not Mr. Beissel have attempted to deal with a problem barely suggested in *New Wings for Icarus*, except in the death-march section—the reality and nature of human evil? In a poem so all-encompassing, not to try to explain evil, and investigate certain of the activities of the only animal in permanent sexual heat, and the only one (besides the wolverine: we're lucky to have both in Canada) that kills for lust, causes the author the danger of seeming, for all his intelligence, to be a figure out of the eighteenth century, when the perfectibility of man was still believable—if one closed one's eyes to the slave trade. Anyhow, my advice to Mr. Beissel is to cultivate the colloquial, and to keep on cultivating the long poem; judging by this humane, beautiful, and—I think—important contribution, it is his forte.

If Japanese poetic models and styles fail to "take" in English, there is no doubt that those of the Celts, masters of rhetoric and ornamentation, thrive and even naturalize themselves. Just as in Mr. Beissel's case, I doubt whether I shall be able to do justice in a short review to the uncommon excellence and almost *embarrass de richesse* of *No Casual Trespass*...by the late Pádraig O Broin, Gaelic scholar, translator, and poet, yet another of the distinguished expatriates who have in recent years inexplicably chosen to migrate to the City of God rather than to the land of the free and home of the slave. Mr. O Broin and Mr. Beissel share other traits. Though O Broin possesses in abundance that vein of levity, of *espièglerie* lacking in Beissel, and in general, takes himself less seriously, he is even more self-consciously a bardic poet, acting a role. Both men are skilled stylists and craftsmen, both are deeply and extensively read and are thus able to command and summon up an impressive range of references and sources, and both possess a rather Yeatsian vision of man, the world, and modern society, [page 104] though Beissel's viewpoint is more secular and humanist, whereas O Broin finds final solace in Roman Catholicism. Both pursue assiduously the eternal feminine, and tend to mythologize poetry and the poet. The latter appears in Mr. O Broin's work as a madam-seer [sic], among other guises, and poetry, of course, is the white goddess. For the most valid comparison here is not Mr. Beissel, but Robert Graves—naturally enough, since both are, or would be,

Celts, and the always bardic Celtic tradition would infuse their writings with many elements in common, even had one never read the other.

True to his heritage, Mr. O Broin makes lavish use not only of perfect rime, but also of assonance (vowels under stress in two rime-words are the same, while following consonants differ, e.g. “fade: same”), consonance (vowels under stress in two rime-words differ, while following consonants are the same: e.g., “neck: speak”; “fetter: flutter”), structural repetition instead of rime, *rime riche*, half-rime (a Celtic device, not yet naturalized in English, in which a one-syllable word is matched with a two-syllable word, the stressed syllables of both words riming or assonanting [*sic*]: e.g. “two: cool”; “her: learned”). Some of the poems use only perfect rime, some only assonance (e.g. “Striapachas I,” one of the few completely successful assonantal poems I’ve seen in English), only consonance (“Anatomy Lesson”), or combinations of all three, with the other devices mentioned...one never knows what pattern Mr. O Broin is importing from his vast knowledge of literature in Gaelic, and what one he’s inventing, nor what original may lie behind some of these remarkable renderings of the Celtic spirit in modern dress....

Mr. O Broin is consummately skilful in his use of language. A case in point would be the two superb “Striapachas” poems. Apart from the riming and assonantal effects, apart from the audacity of the central image—poet as herdsman and suitor, Gaelic as his disdainful, beloved, English as his harlot—and the consistency with which it is developed, we have, especially in the word lists of “Striapachas II,” the pure play of language delighting in itself, flexing its muscle, with an energy and activity recalling Earle Birney. Who before had ever thought to write about “words / plopping like cattle turds”? These two poems are that miracle—poetry about poetry that is poetry.... [A]ll Mr. O Broin’s spiritual agonies in the section “Other,” over the betrayal inherent in his use of English fail to convince me.... Mr. O Broin’s greater facility in English than in Gaelic may have been a personal tragedy for him, but it was a strike of luck for us. I doubt whether he has had, or will have, much influence on Canadian poetry—even so much, say, as the similarly high-spirited and pyrotechnically gifted [page 105] Patrick Anderson, who briefly revitalized the poetic scene during the ‘40s. To begin with, like Mr. Beissel, Mr. O Broin is not really a Canpoet; he’s much too alive and too lively. And too Celtic, too special, too talented, to have much following in this country. The attempt to ape his Celtic antics and anguishes or even his poetic forms would probably produce ludicrous parody. But it may be that not Canada, but the world, has lost a major poet with the death of Pádraig O Broin.

This exciting book is his monument; it is a pity we shall be hearing no more from him.

No Casual Trespass is divided into five sections, each with its own theme, or set of themes. The themes are few and elemental, the constants of Celtic poetry. Basic to his notions is, as I have mentioned, the white goddess, that bitch-goddess, at once witch, prostitute, and unattainable maiden who, in her various aspects, represents not only poetry but the eternal feminine and, for Mr. O Broin, with his double linguistic fealty, also language, the vehicle of poetry.... The tradition, with its self-absorption in language and the craft of poetry as such, has never appealed much to me, but Mr. O Broin certainly reinvigorates it, especially with the element of linguistic and national schizophrenia (which should win him new readers and heightened understanding among Canadians...with scarcely a handful of weak poems in its whole crowded 113 pages (I could do without “Railing at Byzantium” and “Eenie-Meenie,” though), *No Casual Trespass* should be in line for a major poetic award—albeit a posthumous one.

But bad money drives out good. That sort of award is much more likely to be given to a book such as Eli Mandel’s *An Idiot Joy*⁴.... I have not read Professor Mandel’s previous verse collections; however, if they are similar to the one under review, I can thoroughly understand their—and his—success. *An Idiot Joy*, another handsome Coach House production, bears all sorts of encomia from various reviewers on its dust-jacket, as well as a list of Prof. Mandel’s impressive academic, professorial, and Canada-Council credentials (no worm pickers and black sheep here), and the interesting, anonymous information that this is “a striking collection of visionary poems in which gossips and criminals inhabit a landscape of shrines and moons.” (Gosh, sounds like “Horrors of Dracula”!) Naturally, the book’s epigraph comes from Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*, that in-novel with the *Partisan Review* in-crowd...of a few years back. Where Mr. Beissel and Mr. O Broin were bards, Prof. Mandel has chosen to cast himself in the not too dissimilar role of madman and criminal. This is a historic mask for the poet, and a very fitting one when it comes organically and inevitably, as to poets like Blake or Smart, who really were mad, or Villon and Genet, who in fact were criminals. [page 106]

At all events, references to the insanity of the poet occur *passim* from the opening pages on.... Professor Mandel’s other theme—and he harps on it just as obsessively—is the human and universal nature of cruelty. Nature is cruel, man is cruel and self-destructive (“Manner of Suicide” is quite a breath-taking list of ways to kill oneself), and the

author himself is cruel and mad....In a remarkable fairy tale, “House of Candy,” Prof. Mandel mythologizes the dilemma of means and end in the tale of the woodsman who, ordered to kill the young girl, murders a rat and brings its heart to the wicked queen, instead. But Prof. Mandel’s poem concludes, disturbingly, “I... / Sought out the urgent maiden, warned her of the queen / Then drove my knife into her heart to save a passing rat”.

In the face of evil, and with the human community as it is, the poet is, literally, insane, and *must* become criminal. These are important themes that Prof. Mandel deals with, and one appreciates his effort to come to grips with, and exorcise, them. But he doesn’t. For when one finally asks what this poetry communicates—as distinct from what it states—the answer is—nothing. It seems to have been written by a machine, out of some void where lucubration, enumeration, and recompilation [*sic*] take the place of experience. Prof. Mandel, a prairie academic, is neither mad nor criminal nor, I fear, a poet. He has never really killed anyone, never seen anyone killed, never seen real suffering, never known war, never experienced real injustice, never seen the inside of a jail, never met a gunman, never visited Vietnam, never even left Canada, apparently, though he occasionally ventures as far east as Toronto (where he currently teaches). He probably doesn’t eat cows or chickens. All the madness and criminality and cruelty are but a flowering of language, out of contact with reality, a set of learned and rehearsed reactions—or, rather, re-reactions. The faked surrealism, the mock schizophrenia, are not even second-hand stuff. Canada, and especially Alberta, and particularly the world of Alberta academia, are in fact a very close approximation to an experiential vogue [*sic*], so one cannot blame the man from Estevan (Saskatchewan) completely. His sentiments, even though learned ones, may be good, but where is the substance to flesh them out? And his head may be in the right place, but where is his heart? More specifically, what right does this man have to the role of *poète maudit*? How can we really accept, without hypocrisy on all sides, Rimbaudian stances from someone who has never been a worm-picker or grave-digger, who has never made a single professional misstep, who has risen steadily, rung by rung, along the ladder of professorial success, who keeps his academic bread carefully buttered and on the right side? I grow tired enough of real *poètes maudits* and real madmen and real criminals, and often wish **[page 107]** they would just grow up and take their niches in society and allow us to forget them. But I grow even more tired of would-be *poètes maudits* and fake madmen and criminals. The former have at least the saving grace of their intensity. Prof. Mandel does not have even that.

This sort of poetry is written by academics for an audience of academics, and gives both reader and author all the necessary, self-reflecting, generous sensations; *Angst* and *Weltschmerz* (but not anguish or pain) are generated and shared, noble sentiments and audacious viewpoints are aired, sensitivity is required and displayed, there is the pleasure of planting references and allusions which show one's high degree of culture, and the glow of recognizing them. And of course, it's one more item for the president's publication list. And one has all this without ever entering the real world of cruelty and madness, or descending beneath the \$10,000-a-year associate professor's median salary-line....

Thus it is natural that all should be *cliché* [author's italics] in these poems. If Prof. Mandel thinks of homicidal insanity, up pops Lee Harvey Oswald. If it's human cruelty, Vietnam and napalm automatically move into focus.... Need I go on? If the reader hasn't been made aware of the poverty and triteness of Prof. Mandel's thought, and the purely linguistic excesses he indulges in, to mask them...the *clichés* [author's italics] about junkies and suburban adultery, the sentimentality of the female deer—"she" not "it"—with "mouth as wide as any child's," the flat weary paradoxes of "the library to all who read," etc., the artificiality of the derangement of senses and dislocation of language in "An exact frenzy" or the "mad poems," the accidentally humorous pompousness of "Cows eat grass. We eat cows" or "we are heavy with chickens of a 1000 Fridays / Slaughter is general"), then I have failed in my illustrative purposes.

Scattered throughout, of course, are the proper academic ploys—references to Menninger and John Cook, to McLuhan, to Hebrew and Greek mythology, to Chinese literature and art, a poem dedicated to W. B. Yeats and even a poem beginning with the incredible line "Reading Warnock: Ethics Since 1900." There are the requisite camp references, too—to Houdini and *Mad Magazine*. We can even conjure up a pretty accurate picture of the tastefully decorated suburban study where Prof. Mandel writes his poetry, with the Chinese prints and modern Canadian abstracts on the wall, the carved African idol along with other *objets d'art* over on the bookshelf or the writing desk, and wife and children hidden away somewhere in the rest of the house, bidden not to make noise.... I anticipate two objections. One is, that this contrast, this fluctuation between madness and suburbia, between Prof. Mandel's seething criminal interior and his bourgeois, calm [page 108] exterior, is deliberate, a dramatic—and at times, comic—device. This may be, but I can only say that I don't believe it. The madness is certainly a pose, a device, but the suburbia isn't. It's Prof. Mandel's world, and quite obviously the only world he knows and he

obviously fails to recognize its irrelevance to reality, its insignificance. And one would have to have a better sense of humour, a better nose for satire and the ridiculous than Prof. Mandel seems to possess, to employ the technique successfully.

One might ask, further, what's wrong with legitimate reference to Oswald and Vietnam and napalm and Schweitzer and human cruelty. Nothing, perhaps, if you're really concerned about them. What I find dishonest in most of these poems is the attempt...to link and contrast world disorder with a private disorder which, if it does exist, is certainly not being meaningfully communicated to me, except by cliché and exaggeration, and which, at all events, is certainly minor beside these major human issues with which it's being juxtaposed. There is something worse here, though...[T]o juxtapose and draw comparisons between the real world's very real problems and the farting puerile irrelevancies of Canadian and especially Albertan politics and existence, and to suggest that the make-believe issues of our make-believe world are in some way a reflection of the real issues at stake in the real world, is simply nauseating. When will Canadians learn that we don't matter, never have, and never will?

I'm not really suggesting that Prof. Mandel visit Vietnam on his next sabbatical, or begin associating with gunmen, though it might do his poetry a world of good. I am simply reiterating my own cliché—that poetry must be rooted in experience, or, in its defect, uncommon insight, and neither is present here. Mr. Mandel seems to have had no experience of anything and he certainly lacks insight. What he does have is verbal fluency, and so the words flash and coruscate to disguise the other deficiencies. If he would write about himself and his problems, without all the *Weltsmerz* and cosmic hocus-pocus, I'd be more sympathetic. If he wrote objectively, and forgot about relating himself to everything he mentioned, better still....

Stylistically, I have two complaints. One, linked with a distractingly frequent use of the first-person-singular pronoun (Prof. Mandel's must have a shorter McLandress-dimension coefficient⁵ than even Richard Nixon) is his tiresome habit...of writing line after line with the same syntactic structure, usually subject-predicate-complement, ending normally in a full stop at line-end. The other is the imprecision of language in descriptive passages, where he sounds like, and seems to be imitating, Denise Levertov. For example, in "The Milk of Paradise" "the berries of the sun / inflame the tumbling waters of my limbs" and "wide-eyed / luminous men [page 109] walk through a hairy land / toward a milky glade"—like to paint that scene, anyone?"... Poetry of this sort is often called "suggestive." It's also

fuzzy.

Well, that's all I have to say about this volume of bad verse by a professional bad poet. I don't ask Prof. Mandel to go really mad. I do ask him to settle down and enjoy tenure and start writing poetry about things he knows—or stop altogether.

Dorothy Roberts, a Maritimer and yet another member of the talented Roberts family which has given us so many poets, is quite different from the writers I have been discussing. To extend my overworked metaphor, she is a gardener—a modern nature lyricist of the type of Robert Bly, or, in this country, perhaps D.G. Jones. If there were anything I felt we didn't need in Canada, it would be more nature lyricists, but one revises one's opinion swiftly on reading *Extended*... a very apt title, suggesting as it does the constantly widening range and deepening maturity of the author's work, as well as a certain quality in her poetry that used to be called "metaphysical." If I recall aright, no reviewer has paid much attention to Dorothy Roberts' previous chapbooks and publications, except, naturally, Canada's only critic. But I suppose she has now been "discovered," since I note that some of these poems have appeared in the *Hudson Review*. Discovered or not, *Extended* is a remarkable volume....

This is very Canadian poetry, displaying our usual fascination with cold winter and endurance.... But she is in tune with nature in all its moods. What is unusual in her poetry is just this—the lack of the quality I've violently objected to in most Canadian writers (most recently in Souster, but it can be epitomized in a poem like "The Lonely Land"), that sado-masochistic puritanism, gloating in its own and its fellow's suffering, masking as stoicism (personal) and compassion (for others), that emphasis on adversity and resistance as morally good, on redemption through purifying suffering as man's role, the Calvinist double syndrome of man against nature and man against his own nature. In Mrs. Roberts, a very different spirit prevails—its attunedness to life and nature as they are, a delight, and a celebration.... [I]n general, the message is that man is good, and nature is good, and man's place is in nature, and away with all this talk of our uniqueness. There is something similar to late Romantics like Eichendorff and Francis Thompson. And that's the best explanation I can give of what the word "extended" might signify for Mrs. Roberts.

It is time someone examined in detail what the traits of Maritime poetry really are, for the writers from that geographical area form a group at least as distinct and homogeneous as French Canadian writers—without the linguistic difference. One recognizes Mrs. Roberts immediately as a Maritime [page 110] writer. One finds in

her, as in Carman, Nowlan, Cogswell, Bailey et al, the same sense of roots, the same Anteus-like drawing of strength from the native soil, and inability to endure separation.... The obverse of this attitude is the other Maritime theme, also found here, of decay, desertion, flight, and loss, the children gone off to another world...the ruined farms... abandoned homesteads...country graveyards...an elegiac note. In this elegiac mood, Maritime authors are ever returning to their rural or semi-rural youth, a figurative homecoming....

Her technique is basically a slow, exact, and exquisite choice and accumulation of visual details—a gardener’s even more than a painter’s touch.... Hers is a silent world—silent, I suppose, because real communication is silent,—of plant life, landscape, sleep, night, and snow. “Shadow and light alone move here, the silence /creaks with the weight of the one force, cold, / ...a world / where shadow and substance join hands making shadow the more active / in that it moves with the moon and the rest stays silent / balancing in snow.” (“Shadows and Snow”).... It is pleasant for a reviewer to praise good poetry, but I fear I am falling into mere citation. So let me cut short. The principal stylistic defect that I find in Dorothy Roberts’ poetry is an occasional lack of rhythmic authority or definiteness.... I often feel that, in the main, her lines are too long...or what may be the same thing, too overcrowded with extra unstressed syllables. I further wish the author, or the publishers, had been a bit more liberal with commas; their use would improve reading speed and avoid frequent syntactic double-takes.

A final statement. I have panned a couple of previous Fiddlehead books and poetesses, accusing them of all sorts of defects of style, attitude, and character. I would simply point out the difference between Mrs. Roberts and the other authoresses in question. Mrs. Roberts writes about the same themes as they—natural for female poets—about sex and childbirth and children, homecomings and family reunions, farms and small towns. Yet one finds in her no trace of the terrible obviousness, the sentimentality and the vulgarity of certain of her colleagues. This is feminine poetry as it should be written—human but discreet, warm yet controlled. The ecstasies here are severe ones—no “daffodil happiness.” The secret? That’s for the other poetesses to find out. One clue—there are only five “oh’s” and one “oh” in *Extended*.

Well, that would appear to be all, folks. And, gee, but it’s been fun reviewing these books for an appreciative audience like the 97% -literate Canadian public. But you know, folks, after all this writing, I’m just dying for a beer—or even, Heaven forbid, a cachaço or a tequila—and it happens [**page 111**] to be a 4.30 of a Sunday afternoon

in Mr. Robarts's Ontario. So maybe I'll just mosey on back to Pijijiapan, or Chichiciastenango, or Pernambuco, or even good old Tunapuna, where the literacy rate ain't so high, but I can get a drink of anything I feel like at any hour of the day or night, in any position I please, and I don't have to thank God for Mr. Robarts.

*** The third part of this document will be published in Canadian Poetry 60.**

Notes

1. An allusion to William Blake's term for the God of Christianity in his poem "To Nobodaddy": "Why art thou silent & invisible / Father of jealousy...." [\[back\]](#)
2. Lacey's allusions to the University of Toronto are obscure. "Clod" likely refers to Claude Bissell, President, 1958-71, and "St. Michael's" to St. Michael's College. [\[back\]](#)
3. The American poet Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914) invented the cinquain, a five-line, 22-syllable verse form based on the haiku and tanka. [\[back\]](#)
4. A footnote states: "*An Idiot Joy* did in fact receive (together with Alden Nowlan's fine collection, *Bread, Wine and Salt*) the 1967 Governor General's Award. This review was written long before the Award was made, and may incidentally serve as a comment on the judgment that informs it.—The Editor." [\[back\]](#)
5. A footnote states: "This refers to a spoof written by [John Kenneth] Galbraith about five years ago, purporting to be a serious work of social science, whereby various political figures were given McLandress (the supposed author of the method) coefficients depending on how long they took before pronouncing the word 'I' in speeches; R. Nixon's dimension was, I think, ¼ sec. De Gaulle had no dimension at all, until they discovered he said 'France' instead of 'I'". [\[back\]](#)

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