

Words Without End

by J.A. Wainwright

Malcolm Ross 1911-2002

Malcolm was always so alive when he was in the Department. His eyes and conversation sparkled simultaneously when he met with his friends and colleagues in his office, in the hallways, or by the pigeon-hole mailboxes on the first floor of 1434 Henry Street. When he first came to Dalhousie in 1968, the Department was located on the 4th floor of the Killam Library, with long echoing corridors and impersonal, box-like offices for each professor. In the mid-seventies, we moved to a row of five houses on Henry Street. They were, with the exception of the new, sky-light lounge, rather run-down, but the offices varied in shape and size, and, most important, all the M.A. and Ph.D. students were in the same buildings where honours-level and graduate seminars were also held. Malcolm taught memorable classes-Milton, Victorian literature, and, of course, Canadian literature-and when he retired as a full-time professor in 1982, he continued to supervise theses in all three areas.

Through his seventies and eighties, former students came from across the country, and from overseas, to visit. His door was always open, and he gave the same attention to those he knew as he did to those who knew only his reputation and sought advice. Like few people I have known, Malcolm listened to you when you spoke of your interests and concerns. He had an endless curiosity about the human condition and constant faith, only occasionally shaken by stupid politicians and bureaucrats, in the potential of humankind for the good. His favourite public topics were culture, politics, and baseball, though, more privately, questions of religion and spirituality came to the fore. Without doubt he was the intellectual foundation of our Department for over three decades, and when he was old and gray, his mind remained as sharp as ever, providing sustenance and hope for us all.

When we moved into the new Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences building in 2001, Malcolm had to share his personal office, and the main office area was not conducive to spontaneous meetings among

colleagues. But, despite a debilitating hip injury he persevered and challenged us to come out of our nouveau architecture shells. Malcolm liked those who were quick and ready to discuss everything from American foreign policy to the latest books by Margaret Atwood and younger Canadian writers to [Page 90] the fate of the Boston Red Sox. When he died on November 4, 2002, the Department took a deep collective breath, and moved immediately from anguished consideration of how we would live without Malcolm to joyful awareness that his influence and example would not leave us. When I think of him, I remember Tennyson's lines from *Ulysses*—Malcolm was generous and self-effacing, but ever "strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

For Malcolm Ross 1911—2002

It was difficult
To take him for granted
Always there
The full measure
Of his mind
The blue highlands
Of his eyes
In later years his cane
To tap mortality aside
As if a student
With a faulty thesis
Or politician—not only Canadian—
With an empty-headed
Gift of the gab.
In conversation
If you worked hard
He made you feel
Better than you were
Your ideas perhaps ideal
Your words
An Areopagitica
To shape the world anew
But always questions
To remind you
Even Milton was blind.
In return he asked
Very little at all
The pulse of music, books

Good walking weather [**Page 91**]

The light of day

For all aggrieved souls

And once, just once

God's grace at Fenway [**Page 92**]
