POETS ON THE HILL

POETS ON THE HILL: A CONTEMPORARY EXPLORATION OF CANADIAN POLITICAL POETRY IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

In this thesis, I investigate Canadian poetry that is explicitly about the political (politicians, political parties, or political policies) written in English. As no research of this type has occurred previously, I begin by defining political poetry and its aims in Canada and then progress through an examination of three collections of poetry and one poem: *The Blasted Pine*; *Howl Too, Eh?*; and *Rogue Stimulus*. This allows for a comprehensive look at how political poetry has evolved in Canada from a pointed and critical genre that aims to mock and argue to a more subtle, playful genre that utilizes parody and wit. It also demonstrates the evolution and complication of voice in political poetry, given that each poem contains not only the voice of the poet and the speaker, but also the public and the political.

I argue that political poetry in Canada is not poetry as dissent, protest, or witness, but rather poetry as inquiry/commission (in the political sense). This definition relies on the fact that Canadian political poetry seeks to ascribe accountability for political actions and decisions and utilizes the poet as spokesperson, speaking for the public to the political (and the public in turn). Canadian political poetry hence arises out of a demand from the public, much like political inquiries do, and through the satirical use of politically correct language and explicit political references calls for action from the political sphere and the public. I further argue that poetry as inquiry also comments on the public itself (including the author/speaker as a member of that public) and that because political poetry is transideological and can operate from any position in relation to the political hegemony, it allows for a critical discussion of all political positions in a relatively bipartisan manner, much like the authorship of political commissions and inquiries.

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As well, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Stephen Brockwell, Stuart Ross, Ken Norris, Gary Geddes, and Endre Farkas in the completion of this thesis - their insight and commentary was invaluable in contextualizing the poems and works referenced herein and I greatly appreciated being able to communicate with each of them about political poetry.

Table of Contents

List of All Abbreviations and Acronyms

AOC -- *Anatomy of Criticism* (see Works Cited)

HTE -- *Howl Too, Eh?* (see Works Cited)

NDP -- New Democratic Party

RS -- *Rogue Stimulus* (see Works Cited)

TBP -- *The Blasted Pine*, as republished in 1967 (unless otherwise indicated -- see Works Cited)

TBG -- *The Bush Garden* (see Works Cited)

TEI -- *The Educated Imagination* (see Works Cited)

Declaration of Academic Achievement

The work contained herein has been written based on research done by myself, Nicolas DesRoches, and hence all opinions are solely my own. Any and all errors are also my own, unless otherwise indicated. This research has been completed under the guidance of Dr. Jeffery Donaldson, Dr. Lorraine York, and Dr. Grace Kehler. The poems found in Appendix 1 are copyright of each respective author and are replicated here for reference purposes. The correspondence found in Appendix 2 occurred between myself, Nicolas DesRoches, and poets as noted with their permission and the permission of the McMaster Ethics Board.

Chapter 1 -- Wellington Wall and the Queen's Gate: Introduction and Terms

It is often said that Canada is a 'mixed salad' country, a nation filled with diverse groups of people who come from all nations and walks of life. It is no surprise then that Canadian poets seem to write, for the most part, with an eye to politics occurring in other countries. Whereas writing and publishing in Canada is hardly a political act or one involving great dissent, writers are often persecuted in other countries for their work, especially if it is critical of the powers that be. To this extent, Canadian poets writing about international issues are enabling a voice that may otherwise be silenced: an international poetic of politics rather than one that is specific to Canada. This act is crucial to the worldwide body of poetics and to political activism and agency, and by no means should it be marginalized or undervalued -- in the contemporary age of the global village and multiculturalism, giving voice to those who have none is just as important as having a voice.

However, my focus will be on contemporary Canadian poems about the political in Canada. While there is no active suppression by the government or powers that be, no public harming of poets or writers who dissent from official government position on the issues 'at home', there is a culture of apathy that resonates from both the general public and the government which effectively acts to silence political poetics in Canada. As Margaret Atwood says in "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never be Written," in Canada you can write about what you want because no one is paying attention to what our poets are saying anyway (ll. 58-60). On top of international political pressures that Canadian writers seek to address, there is the omnipresence of the United States, and

often "[the Canadian poet] must write out of an acute consciousness of a political history that make[s them] both the guardian and celebrant of our difference from the United States and its remarkable homogenizing apparatus" (Geddes 4). Canadian poets then (at least those who choose to engage with the political) often have at least five competing sources of conflict or subject: Canada, the provincial/regional/local, the United States, regions of conflict and suppression, and their familial nation of heritage. There is no prescriptive judgement in choosing any of these sources over the other, and indeed some of the most challenging Canadian poetry deals with issues that resonate within Canada's borders but do not originate there (Dionne Brand's *Inventory* for example). Even Gary Geddes himself, who recognized the effect the United States has on Canadian poets, wrote a critical poem about the shooting at Kent State[1]. This is not to say that only Canadian poets are 'afflicted' with this call to write beyond our borders -- one would be hard-pressed to find poets who only wrote about their own country of residence.

That said, Canada seems to be uniquely situated in that many of its poets do not write about the political events that happen within Canada. Compilations of explicitly political poems are rare, and outside of very localized writing (most notably in Québec), most poets do not overtly speak to the political, or if they do, it is not a frequent practice. It would be incorrect to say that the political is ignored altogether -- some of Canada's most renowned poets such as Margaret Atwood and Al Purdy wrote and spoke to the political in Canada, though they also often noted that the political is a seldom overtly-

[1] "Sandra Lee Scheuer" in *The Acid Test* -- this poem can also be found at http://www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/geddes/poem3.htm

approached subject for poetics in this country[2]. Rather, political poetry as a genre has been relegated to the literary margins, seldom studied and hardly considered its own genre in Canada. In contemporary society, where voice and the power of the individual is paramount and yet equally contested by the dominance of capitalism, what can be said for literature that bridges to the political and considers the political powers that govern Canada, especially poetry?

Despite the lack of academic study, Canada has a strong roster of poets who have ventured into the political field. Poets and writers such as Al Purdy, Irving Layton, Margaret Atwood, Dorothy Livesay, and George Grant all wrote about Canadian identity and political agency, galvanizing and speaking to a generation of the politically active that was more ambitious and outspoken than their predecessors. Their views and comments complicated times of celebration for Canada as a nation and called attention to the degradation of the political systems present in their own respective times. In Gary Geddes' essay on the status of the political poet in Canada entitled "A Perfect Reciprocity" (published in 2009 in *Out of the Ordinary*), Geddes cites and discusses many of these poets and their works, arguing in the end that despite the fact that not many Canadian poets write about Canada in an overtly political way, "Canadian poets have not all ignored the national crisis [of identity], though they are more often given to elegies than to diatribes, denunciations, or analysis. If truth be told, we are a nation of mourners" (12). This comment, that Canada is "a nation of mourners," will be considered as part of

[2] See Margaret Atwood's *Two Headed Poems* and "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never be Written" as well as Al Purdy's "A Handful of Earth" and his efforts as editor of *The New Romans*: *Canadian Candid Opinions of the United States*

the broader focus herein which is those very diatribes, denunciations, and analyses that are presented by Canadian poets. Though the number of political poetry collections in Canada is very low, there are several key anthologies that will be considered here for that purpose, beginning with *The Blasted Pine*, then *Howl Too, Eh?*, followed by *Rogue Stimulus*.

All of the poems discussed in this thesis, and mentioned above, are written in English. Though there is also a strong body of political poetic work written in French (Québec), this thesis will only examine those written in English verse; the purpose of this is not to undermine or devalue Québeçois or French Canadian political poetry in any way, but rather to recognize that it calls for its own complete exploration which would not fit justifiably in this work. While French-English relations will be considered as a factor in some of the poems closely examined in this thesis, poems written in English that specifically deal with this divide are also not a main consideration. Again, these works are crucial to both poetics and politics in Canada, but their evolution is separate from the evolution of English political poems. Though two poets who wrote extensively on the Québec-Canada debate are included here (Ken Norris and Endre Farkas), Québec's political uprisings in the 1960s caused a surge in radical poetic writing, though only in that province. While this provided a plethora of political poetry, its concentrated regional nature means it is precluded from discussion herein, except where French will enter into discussion as a national language of Canada, or as it pertains to political relations, is relevant to poems analyzed.

Though non-intentional, this thesis does not contain any poems written by indigenous writers -- it is however important to note their importance to the field of political poetry. As indigenous writers often need not observe national borders, and because their history has necessitated a politicized writing, they engage with boundaries, politics, and poetics in their own unique way. Indeed, indigenous writers more often engage with the political when compared to the writers considered herein, especially in their own languages[3]; however, their political concerns are more often relevant to their beliefs, nationality, and their unique relationship with the government and their own indigenous political structures (this political engagement has been publically evident recently with the Idle No More movement as well as other demonstrations) [4]. I hope that further writing and research will allow for a concerted effort to include and discuss indigenous writings.

Why have the collections and poems mentioned previously been chosen for discussion? To answer that, a few terms need to be outlined to launch the argument made herein. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'political poetry' will refer to poetry that explicitly deals with political content. Political in this sense does not mean something that is at issue or that creates conflict between two people (which will be referred to as 'conflictual'), nor is it a term used to describe an action undertaken for one's own benefit: rather, the term used is 'capital P' political, the democratic political structure that exists in Canada to govern the nation and its parts. By 'political poetry' I mean that these poems

[3] Examples include Jeannette Armstrong, Rita Joe, Emma LaRoque, Lee Maracle, and Lenore Keeshig Tobias.
[4] More information can be found at http://www.idlenomore.ca/

mention, by name or by direct association, issues, parties, policies, members, or actions of municipal, provincial, or federal political parties or groups in Canada. This distinction is made for a few key reasons, primary of which is to address the power that explicit content, a direct claim of agency and accountability, has in any poem that interacts with the political. The further decision to specify political poetry as explicitly political poetry was made to allow for a discussion of how an event-bound subject could evolve and adapt, and how this evolution came to manifest both strong satirical rhetoric and an engagement with personal and societal politics in a way which does not advocate for one political party or another. In fact, as I will demonstrate, any political stance presented in an explicitly political poem undermines itself and hence the rhetoric becomes transideological. By looking specifically at overtly political poems, the aim is not to map a political or conflictual reading onto a poem, but rather to examine poems that present the political upfront as the overt subject of the poem, and reference this subject explicitly in the body of the work. This focus will help examine and define the history of explicit political poetry in Canada.

This delineation conflicts directly with what James Scully, one of the few scholars to examine explicit political poetry more generally, claims when he says that all poems are political acts. This is not to say that scholars have not examined political poetry or political poets extensively -- however, these discussions typically focus on one poet and their repertoire of work and consequently much of the political commentary is on the author's personal political views. Conversely, Scully examines poems removed from their author's politics, and given that the collections analyzed herein were compiled based on

subject matter and not authorship or personal political views, his research speaks directly to explicitly political poetry. Scully's argument relies on the understanding that all poems inherently evince some form of ideology and that this, in and of itself, lends a political reading to a poem -- this question of ideology will be taken up shortly. That being said, this thesis also operates in conjunction with Scully in looking at how political poetry "talks back" (4) and how "what has been lacking [in the field of political poetry] is [...] a serious, constructive, respectful criticism" (5). Scully goes on to remark that political poetry (or dissident and protest poetry as he divides it) is hardly, if ever, considered in the context of literary criticism and that this wall inherently undermines not only artistic acts of political rebellion, but also the very principles of poetics and expression (5-6). In light of these points, this thesis will map the revelation of the satirical and the ironic in Canadian political poetry, in some cases referencing the political events that shaped some of the poems; however, the political event itself is secondary to the presentation and perception of the poem, and any information the poet chooses to include or infer in their work.

Drafting the British North America Act -- Terminology

As no comprehensive examination of Canadian political poetry has been undertaken to date, it is important that this attempt to do so operate with clearly defined terminology. As this thesis covers a wide temporal range, in an effort to establish a basis for further discussion about political poetry in Canada, it is important to note that political poetry does not operate out of one particular ideological orientation or position and hence

considerations of writing against or in opposition of the current political hegemony are complicated, as will be discussed. Though there are some inherent difficulties in using the linear (extreme left is communist, extreme right is fascist) presentation of political belief for the purposes of this thesis, the typical political mapping will be followed so as to speak generally to the dominant political left in Canada (the NDP), the dominant political right (the Conservatives) and the political centre (the Liberals). As Canada is currently in a place where the political left (the New Democratic Party) makes up the Official Opposition in the House of Commons, even considering Canada's political left to be marginalized would be inaccurate insofar as their political values and platform have more voices in the House than the political centre. With this in mind, and because of the long time period under consideration here, each poem will be considered in reference to the political event mentioned or contextualized in the poem and not as part of a larger ideological argument about the production of creative capital.

To further explain what 'ideological' and 'hegemony' will mean herein, they must be examined through a political lens. Ideological pertains to or relates to, as Freedman says, "[a] substantive, concrete configuration of political ideas" (15), meaning a political mantra or viewpoint that "possess[es] relatively stable centres but rapidly mutating peripheries" (17). Or, as Garry Sherbert says in the Introduction to *Canada Cultural Poesis*: "ideology comes as a result of a claim made by a given social group to legitimize its social, political, or cultural supremacy" (6). This means that such things as Marxism and Conservatism would be considered ideologies -- to this extent, any Canadian political party can be said to operate under its own ideology, which is replicated through the party

platform which is published and altered at the behest of the party's members. It is crucial that 'ideology' and 'party' not be considered synonymous, however; ideologies are, rather, "the thought-products par excellence of the political sphere: they are necessary, normal, and they facilitate (and reflect) political action" (Freedman 19). For the most part in this thesis, the term 'ideology' will be used so as to avoid ascribing any particular personal political ideal (from the author or speaker of a poem) to a given political party, unless otherwise noted.

The term 'hegemony' then is used to assist in delineating the margins from the centre, even as the centre shifts, in terms of political voice and power. This is based on the Gramscian view that hegemony speaks to a "socio-cultural and ethical-political [...] group [that] maintains its supremacy not simply through the direct domination of the coercive state apparatus but also, more fundamentally, through the organized consent of the governed in civil society" (Durst 176). That is to say, in the context of this thesis, the ruling party in the Canadian House of Commons and that party's beliefs make up the political and governmental hegemony at that time[5], operating on the principles of good governance and principles enshrined within the Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, the political beliefs of individuals may not necessarily agree with the political hegemony, and hence considerations of the personal are still valid in terms of personal politics. This societal political hegemony shifts as parties are elected to power and as the political landscape alters -- and, crucially, the political hegemony

[5] It should be noted that, in Canada, due to the structure of Parliament, the ruling party may be in a minority position and hence require the support of the Official Opposition to pass legislation; in such a case, both these parties would comprise the political and governmental hegemony as no one party has complete control of Parliament.

operates separately in diverse regional spheres. Ergo, in Canada, there is a federal hegemony (currently Conservative), provincial/territorial hegemonies (Liberal in Ontario), and municipal hegemonies (typically non-party). Though the pervasive nature of the federal hegemony affects all members of the public and is hence more widely applicable to the poems considered herein, regional hegemonies cannot be overlooked on the whole, though regional Canadian poetics is a diverse and well-established field of study on its own.

Like the use of the word 'political', the use of 'voice' herein is not meant to mean poetic voice. Though this too may be quelled in nations that are in turmoil or otherwise oppressed, poetic voice deals mainly with the way in which poets presents themselves on the page. That is to say, their poetic voice is their own individual style and the way that a poem may be distinguished as belonging to that author (what Terry Eagleton calls "timbre" in *How to Read a Poem*). However, the kind of voice under consideration here is the personal voice, the voice of the speaker of the poem as separate from the poet. Unless otherwise noted, the author of the poem is not usually considered to be the speaker of the poem. This also allows for a clear delineation between the poet, the speaker, and any voices which may be present within the poem; it is not uncommon for political poems to contain quotations related to the politics in question. It should also be noted at this point that voice does not necessarily indicate dissent; this will be explored in a more comprehensive manner later on, though this distinction is typically more critical in a discussion of political poetics in war-torn nations.

The London Conference -- Collections Under Consideration

In considering what poetry to include, I began by looking for a reference that might outline and explain the history of voices of dissent and political agency in Canadian poetry, a body of work that can be considered historical in terms of this thesis' time frame and a source of both discussion and comment for Canadian political poetry that came after. Stephen Brockwell and Ken Norris ("Re: Thesis Research -- Rogue Stimulus" and "Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?") both claim that *The Blasted Pine* is the seminal work in Canadian political poetry, and hence that is where my research begins[6]. Published in 1957, and republished in 1967 (for the centennial), *The Blasted Pine* is self-described as "An Anthology of Satire, Invective and Disrespectful Verse Chiefly by Canadian Writers" and contains many poems that are critical not only of Canadian politics and political bodies, but also of French (France) and British politics that have affected and shaped this nation throughout its history. It is, purposefully, a collection which criticizes, comments on, satirizes, mocks, debates, and argues with politics in Canada. It is a collection which creates political agency for the voice of poetics in Canada, advocating for explicit political commentary through poetics which had hitherto not been undertaken. It is in this light, and through the use of satire and parody, that *The Blasted Pine* has become, since its publication, a source and an inspiration for poets when creating works that are overtly political in nature and subject. This collection is crucial to the development of political poetry for many of today's older generation of poets, but given

[6] See Appendix 2: Correspondence

that it is most often relegated to archives of libraries (such as at McMaster and Hamilton Public libraries), its presence and effect on contemporary poetry is waning.

Through *The Blasted Pine,* it can be seen that the foundations of Canadian political poetry have always been rooted in satire. Contemporary Canadian political poetry, likewise, occupies a space on the edge of commentary, satire, and parody. It is not often written to overstate or advocate for 'heartfelt' political voices or changes, but rather acts to galvanize the reader to consider his or her own voice and the effect that they can have on the political in Canada and what effect the political is having on them and the country around them. In this way, political poetry becomes an agent of poetry as resistance, of poetry as not only the voice of the author, but also the voice of the viewing public and marginalized views in society. It is a medium that is often affected by the political (insofar as decisions made in terms of arts funding and the like) but does not often engage with the political. A quick browse through a local Chapters store will net only a small selection of poetry (perhaps one bookshelf), an even smaller selection of Canadian poetry (one section of one shelf), and doubtfully any poetry within that selection would be overtly political. Indeed, many of the books of poetry considered in this thesis are printed by somewhat marginal presses (Write Bloody, Mansfield, NuAge) and are not within the general reading scope of poetry readers in Canada, let alone the general reading public. While some more frequent and public venues for political poetry exist, such as John Allemang's poetry in *The Globe and Mail*, these are few and far

between and their sporadic publication further speaks to the marginalized nature of the genre, though they are critical in their brief and limited outreach to the public[7].

Here then enter the other collections under consideration. *Howl Too, Eh?* can be found on very few bookshelves (I ordered my copy from India, though a copy rests in the Special Collections in the Mills Library at McMaster), and is a very small book, what might be called a chapbook today save for its laminated cover. Yet, this collection put together by Ken Norris and Endre Farkas engages with the political very directly and openly, seeking to bring together many of the Véhicule poets and their satire on political events and subject matter, such as Québec-Canada relations and the influence of America on Canada. It is of special interest especially given the reference to poems that are found in *The Blasted Pine*. Much more recently, in 2010, another collection of political poetry was published: *Rogue Stimulus*. Published ostensibly as a reaction to Stephen Harper's proroguing of Parliament, *Rogue Stimulus* brings together a wide-range of Canadian poets in a focused anthology which makes no qualms about the way it address as overt political subject matter. The poems in *Rogue Stimulus* are not only abrasive; some of them are hyperbolically bombastic, provocative, cutting, and otherwise antagonistic to the contemporary Canadian political landscape.

This thesis will show that *Rogue Stimulus* and *Howl Too, Eh?* both rely, to varying degrees, on the popular knowledge and proliferation of *The Blasted Pine* in Canadian poetic circles. Other lesser known collections of Canadian satirical poetry (such

[7] John Allemang published poems for the Friday edition of *The Globe and Mail* in the "Focus" section and later collected and released some of these poems in *Poetic Justice;* Allemang's own thoughts and recollection of writing these poems can be found at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/poetic-justice/article1107759/

as *The Maple Laugh Forever*, which notably contains a section on politics) also rely on *The Blasted Pine* as well as formal poetic structures and more canonical poetic examples as their basis. Generally, the selection of authors in these collections is quite varied (as are the time frames of publication), but in conversation with Ken Norris ("Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?") and Endre Farkas ("Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?"), it is worth noting that Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, and F.R. Scott are often cited as those who first took up the mantle of Canadian political poetry, negotiating between the colonial and the post-colonial as Canada developed into its own nation. This means that, in Canada, political poetry started to develop as its own genre of poetry in the early 20th century, though there were no significant collections of this genre before *TBP*.

There may be an inclination to think that political poetry, especially as discussed herein, must to some degree be funny or at least humourous in a way which mocks or otherwise derides a politician, party, or event. Rather, it should be understood that political poetry often makes use of comedy and humour to make a sullen or sombre topic both more approachable and less direct. It does this in a way which invites critical thought from the reader since the material is not presented in a way which might alarm people with the political or social ramifications of the argument. While Canada has been known, especially in recent years, for its bounty of comedians and comic artists of various stripes, Canadian political poetry is often detached from this humourous sentiment.

To exemplify this distinction, one could compare Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* to Barbour and Scobie's *The Maple Laugh Forever*. While *The Maple Laugh Forever* is an anthology, both collections make use of political and iconic Canadian markers to define

their poetry and the subjects at hand, including explicitly political ones. Some of Dennis Lee's poetry is even included in *The Maple Laugh Forever*, though none of those poems originate in *Civil Elegies*. Both collections contain political poems that seek to deconstruct a hegemonic view of Canadian society. *Civil Elegies* is, by comparison, stark and sombre, utilizing dark imagery and drabness to demonstrate how political apathy is leading to the destruction of the environment and of the country, which eventually has ramifications for society as a whole. Though there are lines in some of the poems which are comedic or particularly ironic or satirical, the overall tone of the poetry is concrete and symbolic (in its use of references). Even though many of these poems do not contain the humour found in *The Maple Laugh Forever, The Blasted Pine,* or *Rogue Stimulus, Civil Elegies* is still a collection that contains political poems, poems that call direct attention to the acts of politicians such as Paul Martin Sr.

These political acts are the very basis of overtly political poetry, at least insofar as the poems discussed herein. To being exploring how satire and irony have developed in explicitly political poems, I will progress by examining them in the chronological order of their collections. By presenting the poems in this order, the evolution of Canadian political poetry from personal attack to subtle satire will become evident and my overarching argument, that explicit Canadian political poetry is poetry as political inquiry, will be defined and developed, demonstrating how these poems and my definition have shifted over the course of Canadian poetic history. From direct attack and argumentative mockery to subtle, critical wit, Canadian political poetry has developed into a genre worthy of its own consideration, and it all began with *The Blasted Pine*.

Chapter 2 -- The Centennial Flame: *The Blasted Pine*

As an origin point for Canadian political poetry, *The Blasted Pine* establishes not only what Canadian political poetry seeks to do, but also how satire and irony operate as tools of its rhetoric. *The Blasted Pine* is therefore the canonical base which I will use to discuss political poetry. It not only includes a range of notable Canadian authors speaking directly to the political, but *The Blasted Pine* also underwent its own rhetorical and satirical shift in its republication, a fact I will discuss shortly. It is important to note that all three collections discussed here are anthologies -- while the temporal limitations of each collection will be discussed in turn (and what effect that has and what it says about political poetry), they are considered analogous due to their subject matter and collective composition.

The main changes that are reflected through these collections are a development from ironic mimickings to satirical parody. While this may seem like a reiteration of the same terminology, the distinction is central to how political poetry in Canada has developed over time. While the type of crude humour used in *The Blasted Pine* is no longer a main-stay of political poetry (and hence poems in *The Blasted Pine* may seem much less humourous to a contemporary reader), the political commentary still resonates through the poems. The same can be said for the specific political events, parties, and people that are at issue in these poems: while a contemporary reader may be wholly unaware of the issue under discussion, research (such as is presented here) would allow for a full appreciation of the context of the poem.

This temporal trajectory of Canadian political poetry begins with *The Blasted Pine*, referred to here as *TBP*[8]. Self-proclaimed as a collection which aims to be disrespectful of politics, the anthology collects poems published over a span of more than 100 years, attempting to lionize and link many early Canadian canonical poets who wrote poems that were not favourable to those in a position of authority. As this collection covers such a broad timeline of poets and political issues, it is not possible to examine every poem, but some will be explored in detail herein. As a broad stroke, the poems that are contained in *TBP* aim to mimic or speak out of well-established and dominant poetic forms, depending on the time in which they were written. There is a marked contrast between the poems found in the original *The Blasted Pine* and the re-publication in that the original is full of poems that dealt with colonial issues and the establishment of Canada, as well as a strong focus on the wars and battles that Canada was engaged in between 1830 (the earliest poem's first publication date) and 1967. However, when the book was re-published for the centennial, the later poets sought to focus on the immediate state of Canada at home (as opposed to at war or on the international stage) and instead focused on making pointed fun of the nation or remarking on how the US was already beginning to have a homogenizing effect on Canada and its people.

This notable shift in the subject of poems helps to underscore why and how Canadian political poems have changed. Although *TBP* was considered seminal, its republication demonstrates that political poetry adapts and shifts as social norms do. The

[8] For the purposes of this thesis, *The Blasted Pine* and *TBP* will refer to the second edition which was published in 1967, unless otherwise noted.

ten year interim allowed for the inclusion of poems by Al Purdy, Leonard Cohen, Louis Dudek, and Irving Layton. It is interesting to note that Ken Norris cited *TBP* as a source for his work in *Howl Too, Eh?* ("Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?") and yet his mention of the likes of Leonard Cohen (whom he parodied directly) is not featured in the original publication of *The Blasted Pine*, signalling that even in poetic circles, the original publication is less well-referenced than the re-publication. This, in and of itself, reveals two things about *The Blasted Pine* and its own progeny: the first is that its original publication may have been seen by many as dated (though necessary) owing to its broad temporal range. Second, that its original publication was seminal precisely because it produced a republication. Insofar as many of the newly added poets became known as those that have inspired or driven political poetry to this day, it would be logical to surmise that the main poets of the original publication (FR Scott chiefly among them) were the inspiration for the poets featured in the 1967 republication and their political work, ultimately inspiring future generations of political poets.

TBP, on the whole, blossoms out of a few key passages contained in the "Introduction" written by FR Scott and AJM Smith. They claim that "all of [the poems within], or nearly all of them [...] are sharply critical, in one way or another, of some aspect of Canadian life that has more often been accepted uncritically. They have been chosen because they sound a sour note" (xv), a statement which demonstrates that they seek to inject the voice of the critic where it is often absent (especially through an artistic voice). This seemingly innocuous statement is, by and large, indicative of what political poetry does in linking politics and poetics, two realms which don't often overlap

explicitly: as Endre Farkas says, "[politics] is not really a topic or theme being dealt with by current poets" ("Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?"). Aside from bringing the critic into an often subjugated space, Smith and Scott did not impose any restrictions on what could be included; that is to say, they were willing to include any satirical poems which touched upon Canadian life, regardless of whether they were considered proper or mainstream, or if the way the subject was addressed seemed harsh (rather, this was favoured). The principle behind creating such a collection was that "the poems expose an idea or a form of behaviour to public ridicule, and at the same time assert the superiority of the alternative view applied by the attack" (xvii), which introduces the concept that the poems in *TBP* are meant to be read as offensive -- that is, as "attacks." It also calls to attention that each poem presents an alternative view, a differing position that can be taken by the reader against the hegemonic. This type of ideological stance falls away as political poetry develops further in Canada, as I will discuss.

Scott and Smith go on to point out that in the era of the original publication, satire came from a place of the individual or the revolutionary and sought to sharpen itself against "the established system of convention and privilege" (xviii). This indicates that, as stated previously, they do not simply wish to attack the government, but rather the accepted norms of society and the power structure that operates through those norms. They then say that the poetry of *TBP* is therefore "pessimistic and destructive, and whether on a personal, social, or metaphysical level, they are all subversive" (xviii). What I am most interested in from this passage is the conclusion that the poems are "pessimistic and destructive": is this the voice of Scott and Smith ascribing a level of ideological and

political agency to the poets in the collection, or is this true of early Canadian political poetry? Each term here shall be considered in turn.

Poetry that is pessimistic is not, first and foremost, necessarily cynical, though this cynicism arises in *TBP* and most political circles. The pessimism that Scott and Smith signal remarks upon the imaginative and assumed future of the nation and society based on their own personal views and the views of other members who feel negatively about the current political hegemony and seek to move away from any investment in that system. These other members are often marginal, or at least feel marginalized, and hence their pessimism arises out of the oppression they feel and a fear that this kind of oppression will continue. This pessimism, this view that current socio-political structures are inadequate or undesirable, is a direct result of "demand[ing] or seiz[ing] the right to self-assertion" (xviii), a launching point to speak out against those who prevent such self-assertion. Thus, the pessimism found in the poems of *TBP* is not the kind of personal pessimism one could associate with a pessimistic or cynical person who always assumes the worst -- rather, this is a pessimism based on recognising the negative state of affairs and hoping that, by doing so, the reader will be galvanized to act to subdue both the pessimism and its source -- not at the personal level, but rather by engaging with politics to destabilize and shift the political hegemony.

The aim is much clearer when the "destructive" nature of the poetry in *TBP* is considered. The poetry is not self-destructive of course: rather, the subject and satirical nature of many of the poems seek to destroy the system that is perceived to be pervasive in Canada at that time. It should be noted though that this is not the destruction of an

anarchist movement, or one that means to remove all systems; rather the "destructive" nature is meant to *deconstruct* the current hegemony so that changes and alterations can be made (I think "deconstruct" is a more useful and accurate term here as Scott and Smith use "destruct" not to mean the literal dismantling or obliteration of the subject or object of the poem, but rather how it breaks down and addresses the subject/object). The poetry is deconstructive in that it outlines public distrust, disapproval, and the viewpoints of the alternative. This deconstructive nature is one that also directly complements the way Scott and Smith refer to these poems as "attacks" in that the poems have the ability to deconstruct a political member or party, should they call to attention a particular issue that galvanizes public opinion; however, this ability is, for the most part, latent. Though in a less forthright manner, the poems of *TBP* are also deconstructive in that they do not adhere to the normal separation of art and state and rather entwine political and governmental matters and the poetic in an overt way, hence speaking to both the politics of the art, and also the politics of the state. Likewise, *TBP* contains poems that mimic (and directly report) the words of politicians to undermine their authority. This mimicking will swiftly give rise to an adaptation of political poems into rich satire and parody, a practice which dominates political poetic writing in Canada to this day.

I will demonstrate this mimicking as the poems are discussed, but first it is important to establish and understand what is meant by satire and irony. I draw the distinction between satire and irony in the way that Frye outlines in *Anatomy of Criticism* and is further developed in the work of Linda Hutcheon. Frye separates irony and satire by saying that "the chief distinction between irony and satire is that satire is militant

irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (223), a kind of hegemonic position of irony. It is clear that political poetry, at least the type under consideration herein, is both satirical and ironic, regardless of the specific aims of the poem or the ideology it operates through, and so irony is retained even through the satirical mode. Key as well to the way political poetry uses satire is that satire must contain both "wit or humour" and "an object of attack" (224), or as Hutcheon puts it, "irony always has a 'target'; it sometimes also has what some want to call a 'victim'" (15). Given that political poetry operates on the very basis that there is something to oppose, or at least comment on, due to the very nature of the political as being in opposition to at least some percent of the population (if it is democratic), Frye's definition seems to encompass political poetry quite well. The wit or humour used within the poem may be dark, or even marginal depending on the readership, but the political commentary is always clear and this is what allows the poetry to be both effective and affective.

This form of attack speaks to what Frye calls "satire of the low norm" (*AOC* 226). Since this satire is a function/operation of irony, Hutcheon's statement that irony can only be understood in the context of an interpreter and an ironist (11) is fundamental to contextualizing reader/speaker/author interaction. The interpreter, the reader in the case of political poetry, infers meaning and at this juncture the poems can be read as ironic or not. For explicitly political poetry, this is complicated by the fact that "irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly expressed" (Hutcheon 11); therefore, the ironic must go beyond the political facts and

resonate in conjunction with the reader's interpretation of the facts, their own personal ideology, and any perceived changes in hegemony or other external factors. In that Hutcheon explains that irony is transideological, the fact that irony also "cannot be separated from its politics" allows political poetry to be written from the political margins or under the auspices of the political hegemony.

Irony though is not the only tool used and political poetry often operates through satire as resistance. The agency that is inherent in political poetry is the centre from which satire can emerge because it points out the absurdities that already exist in our contemporary society and advocates for some form of social change. While most political poetry (that is not explicit but rather metaphorical) in Canada is neither inflammatory (to the perception of most) nor particularly revolutionary in its diction and aims, it exemplifies poetic practice that functions outside of the political hegemony due to the wide range of author/speaker ideological or non-ideological stances. Rather, the ideology of the author can be implied, the ideology of the speaker will be apparent, and the ideology of the reader will ultimately define the 'success' of the ironic. As Toril Moi points out, there is a double-edged fallacy for the author in that "the ironist is extremely hard to assail precisely because it is virtually impossible to fix her or his text convincingly. In the ironic discourse, every position undercuts itself, thus leaving the politically engaged writer in a position where her ironic discourse might just come to deconstruct her own politics" (40). This too is a tool for political poetry in that "the transideological nature of [irony's] politics means that irony can be used [...] either to undercut or to reinforce both conservative and radical positions" (Hutcheon 27). In this

way, by directly and explicitly engaging the political through irony and satire, political poetry too is transideological and non-ideological, depending on the interpreter's context. Likewise, the self-undermining nature of the ironic allows the poems to inhabit these ideological spaces without risk of being propaganda since they recognize and ridicule themselves in the process of conveying their political agenda.

As can be seen then, the reader is the interpreter for irony in the poem. In that political poetry aims to engage politically with the reader, this further emphasizes the explicit nature of the political in that "irony's intimacy with the dominant discourses it contests [...] is its strength" (Hutcheon 30). Most poetry, if it strives to address the political, does so in a way that corresponds with what Northrop Frye says in discussing Gerard Manley Hopkins in *The Critical Path* when he states that "a poet's underthought, his metaphorical or pictured meaning, is clearly his real thought, and in a writing culture it to some degree even separates itself from the explicit statement" (68); however, political poetry reverses the typical role of overthought. That is, most poems that express the political do so as an interpreted overthought, typically creating political meaning through analogy and/or metaphor. Explicitly political poems entice the reader's interpretation to be directly political, not metaphorically, though all irony is still simply "*attributed or inferred operative motivation*" (Hutcheon 45, italics original).

If the poems of *TBP* are political and if they mimic previously established poetic norms or styles, in what ways do they escape or not conform to the satirical? In comparing many of the poems included in *Rogue Stimulus* to those in *TBP*, many of the explicitly political poems in *TBP* are sombre and dark, often very pointed and accusatory.

To explore this, I'll look at six poems: Archibald Lampman's "The Modern Politician," Wilson MacDonald's "The Member of Parliament," FR Scott's "W.L.M.K.," PK Page's "Election Day," AM Klein's "Political Meeting," and Leonard Cohen's "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward." These six poems are the most explicitly political in the anthology (as evident in their titles), they are all found in the second section titled "True Patriot Love" and are also presented sequentially (in the order listed above), giving weight to the political overtones and reinforcing the non-partisan messages contained within them. They are flanked by poems about the monarchy in Canada (before) and poems about Québec and Montréal (after), indicating that the organization of the poems in this section was purposeful; hence the sequential cohesion of the poems will be considered in that light.

The first poem I will consider, Lampman's "The Modern Politician" (*TBP* 35), is the most satirical of the four poems that are examined here. The poem is an Italian sonnet in iambic pentameter, though the rhyme scheme is slightly altered as it follows an ABBACDDCEFGEGF pattern. The first section of the poem (the octave) presents the state of society in saying that the days of kings and of kingdoms is behind them (ll. 4-5), and instead they are in a new age -- "the transit age, the age of brass" (l. 6). This transition is also evident in that the volta is not as pronounced as is typical in that it falls in the middle of these lines:

> When clowns into the vacant empires pass,
> Blinding the multitude with specious words.
> To them faith, kinship, truth and verity,
> Men's sacred right and very holiest thing,
> Are but the counters at a desperate play (ll. 7-12)

The tone of the poem is one that aims to ridicule those in power (the "clowns") and make apparent their lack of concern for the common people and the values that are important to members of their societies. Of special note is also the focus on spirituality -- "faith," "sacred," and "holiest" all demonstrate a concerted focus on the religious tension present at the time of publication, such as the Manitoba Schools Question.[9] Sir Wilfred Laurier's solutions to this crisis are echoed in the poem -- Laurier's personal faith (Catholic) helped him quell the issue, whereas Presbyterian Sir Mackenzie Bowell was deemed unable to deal with it, and hence faith became a "counter" of politics, exactly what Lampman is satirizing. The mention of "vacant empires" in turn satirizes two political events at the time: the expansion of Canada westward (through a call for European immigrants) and Canada's engagement with the Boer War (sending Canadians overseas).

The poem thus arises out of a tumultuous time in Canadian history, one through which the speaker seeks to denounce the political hegemony. Given that the poem was originally published in 1900 (*TBP* 126), the strong echoes of colonialism are another important facet of this poem and its political commentary. Lampman was born in 1861 and raised in southern Ontario before working in Ottawa until his death in 1899, the year before the poem was published. As a close friend of Duncan Campbell Scott, Lampman would have had many opportunities to interact with Canadian political figures. Furthermore, Lampman was alive during the forming of Canada and is hence known as one of Canada's Confederation poets. Though he is most well-known for his nature

[9] More information about this can be found in *The Manitoba Schools Questions: Majority Rule or Minority Rights?,* edited by Lovell Clark, published by Copp Clark in 1968.

poetry, it is worth noting that this political poem is, by and large, dissident. Lampman's poem presents a situation where it is easy to ascribe the author's views onto the speaker directly, and hence his poem follows a particular ideological vein more strongly than other political poems. This is notable because despite the strong ideological stance in the poem, it may still be viewed as equally critical of all political parties and stances -- no political ideology is argued as correct or desirable, rather all are equally undermined as failing the Canadian public, and hence the satirical is maintained as transideological.

This personal dissention is a theme which is continued from a poem earlier in the collection, "The Member of Parliament" (*TBP* 14) by Wilson MacDonald. MacDonald's poem was written some thirty years after Lampman's poem, but it too resonates within the colonial realm and makes clear and specific mention of both England and the King (ll. 8 & 24). However, this colonial resonance is deeply ironic in MacDonald's poem, especially in that the poem names the Member in question "Josiah Boyd" (no Member of Parliament with that name has ever served). The speaker of the poem clearly states that using money to buy votes and elections was "a simple thing" (l. 6) and that despite the "void / beneath the honest member's hat" (ll. 11-12) he "felt quite at home [...] / When he sat down in parliament" (ll. 15-16), indicating that the speaker perceives Parliament as being a place where those without higher education feel welcome, here solely because of money. Of special note in this poem, aside from the terse satire and biting rhetoric, is the fact that the poem is written strictly in iambic tetrameter and hence is a ballad. In that MacDonald's poem operates within a formal aesthetic, the poem renders and calls forth the history of the form and its popularity, demonstrating that even with the attack-and-

ridicule nature of the poem, the choice of form is also a part of MacDonald's commentary. As well, by writing a mocking poem in the ballad form, the subject is echoed and reiterated through the form, which makes both the end of the poem (about God and Hell) and the beginning of the poem (about knowledge and books) ironic insofar as they comment on the aesthetic form as well. Intelligence and faith, two presumably desirable traits for Members at that time, bookend a poem about a Member who possesses neither of these traits: Josiah Boyd also uses the name of God in vain, and is notoriously vapid. The twist of "And sang 'God Save the King', like Hell" (l. 24) at the end of the poem renders parliament a mockery and argues that all that is needed to be a politician is money and patriotism (servitude). .

This mockery is not present simply for its own sake; rather, it demonstrates the role of the author/speaker in relation to the political. Through this poem, one can see how MacDonald is fulfilling the role of poet as spokesman. In *The Bush Garden*, Frye claims that "a certain abdication of political responsibility is sharply reflected in [Canadian] poetry, and is by no means always harmful to it" (137); while this is not an absolute statement, the argument is that Canadian poetry does not, generally, take on political accountability or responsibility. While this is often the case, for this thesis I will recontextualize Frye slightly to consider "political responsibility" to mean naming and calling out political parties, members, and actions; thus it is important to understand the poems that contain it for the way that they unite political responsibility and poetic form. Canadian poetry, when it addresses the political overtly, often does so through aesthetic techniques that allows more conventional poetic subjects (love, religion, nature, etc.) to

be read metaphorically, as undercurrents of the directly political. Within these poems, the use of satire, irony, and parody creates another complicating layer, one that strives to use humour and often drastic hyperbole to underscore action that the audience (the author included) can take as a meaningful statement or claim against those in power. MacDonald then is trying to hold politicians accountable on behalf of the public, even if he is not specifically addressing a real politician.

In speaking to the presence of poets as speakers for the public, Frye says that "what the poet sees in Canada, therefore, is very different from what the politician or businessman sees" (*TBG* 146). Like politicians though, poets are tasked with writing/speaking to the public. In the case of political poetry, poets occupy a space where they are speaking for the public to the public, at the behest of the public. Thus, there is and has always been a bridge between the political and the written word, especially if one were to consider the prominence of propaganda and the like as a tool of rhetoric.

Political poetry generally complicates many of the notions analyzed in relation to the understanding of poetry and poetic creation. For example, Northrop Frye says that "in thematic literature the poet may write as an individual," which is where satire resides, or the poet "may devote himself to being a spokesman of his society" which is to say that the society speaks through the poet (*AOC* 54). Political poetry relies on the poet inhabiting both of these spheres at the same time: if the poet writes only as the individual, then the political subject becomes marginalized as simply the poetic subject and the focus of the author. If, on the other hand, the poet writes as the society speaks, he or she will be writing out of whatever political ideology dominates the landscape and hence will not

create any kind of opposition or protest, but rather assume the mantra of the powers in charge. Political poetry then relies on the author balancing these two functions, allowing both to present and yet not dominate the voice of the speaker. As can be seen in MacDonald's poem, there is no particular ideology attached to it and yet the poet/speaker has a clear aim in denouncing what the politician is doing. MacDonald's poem is but one example, and as "W.L.M.K." (*TBP* 36-37) shows, specific and personal attacks also operate in the genre of political poetry, allowing the author/speaker to act as spokesman against individual politicians (though this later because more focused on policies and parties). The poem was originally published in 1957, seven years after William Lyon Mackenzie King's death, and this is emphasized in the second line: "Mackenzie King dead?", a query which ultimately becomes celebratory, though there is an expectation of mourning. The poem, from the beginning, seeks to rally against whatever legacy Mackenzie King may have left and instead argues that "He blunted us" (l. 5). This poem is the most destructive attack poem of the four, directly attacking Mackenzie King's actions while he was Prime Minister and shaming both his character and his lack of charisma or decisiveness. Again though, the presence of satire is severely limited in this poem, appearing only in the last two stanzas of the poem. Up to this point, the poem is sharp and biting and only gives credit to Mackenzie King in pointing out how skillfully he avoided doing what needed to be done, what should have been done (in the opinion of the speaker). To further emphasize the historical accuracy that is evident through the poem, it even includes one of Mackenzie King's most famous quotations: "conscription if necessary / But not necessarily conscription" (ll. 16-17). Including this quotation in the

poem presents it as a statement or submission such as one might find in the report of a political inquiry. This aids in establishing the factual accuracy of the poem (though it is one of Mackenzie King's most well-known quotations) as well as allowing Mackenzie King to have his own voice in the poem (if but briefly), even if it is commented on by the speaker (again, much like a political inquiry).

Though political poems that originate in nations in turmoil or war (such as can be found in Carolyn Forché's *Against Forgetting*) often contain an element of violence, it is unusual for Canadian political poems to do so. "W.L.M.K." focuses on a presentation of Canadian society after both World Wars through the light of Mackenzie King's governance. While the speaker says that Mackenzie King allowed Canada to continue on "as usual" after the wars, this is meant to reveal that the speaker also feels this has halted progress in Canada:

> Only one thread was certain:
> After World War I
> Business as usual.
> After World War II
> Orderly control.
> Always he led us back to where we were before. (ll. 21-26)

The poem then mirrors what Mackenzie King himself did during those times: he simplified the vast political complexities that followed both wars: after both World Wars, Mackenzie King's focus was on conservative domestic policies and culling political support by relying on other parties to form coalitions;[10] likewise, the poem is direct and

[10] A more detailed discussion of Mackenzie King's policies and actions can be found in *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography 1874-1923,* written by Robert Macgregor Dawson and published in 1958 by The University of Toronto Press.

straightforward, a simplified presentation of facts. In this way, Mackenzie King is given a voice at the same time as he is robbed of it, and since this poem was published after his death, the only defence he has is the ramifications of his actions -- exactly the same thing Scott turned against him.

Not only does Scott satirically analyze and portray Mackenzie King's actions, he also ridicules his very presence as a Prime Minister of Canada. The last two stanzas of the poem make Mackenzie King's death significant insofar as this is the crux of satire in the poem, ridiculing Mackenzie King until the end and reiterating the author/speaker as spokesperson for the nation. It also marks where the author enters the poem as part of the collective voice of the speaker: "Let us raise up a temple / To the cult of mediocrity" (ll. 34-35); this is indicated through the word "us," which also signals that the speaker of the poem is the Canadian national collective. Here then is the intersection of three levels of voice: the voice of the author, the voice of the speaker, and the voice of the subject. The voice of the author, nominally absent from poetry unless otherwise indicated, is recognized as a member of the society that, collectively, are the speakers of the poem. This collectivity negates the marginalized nature of the politically dissident and creates a united anti-advocacy. This not only empowers the author and makes his voice relevant to the political agency of the poem, but also empowers the national speaker in that the poet has presented its voice in a public artistic forum. The other voice that arises in the poem, the voice of Mackenzie King himself, is marginalized by the poem and by the collectivity of the speaker, hence reversing the typical political hegemony and instead returning to the

true ideal of the democratic, as the entire anthology sought to do. But is this kind of rendering of political voice typical or atypical for political poetry as presented in *TBP*?

To answer this, one can look at "Election Day" by PK Page (*TBP* 37-38) and "Political Meeting" by AM Klein (*TBP* 40-41). "Election Day" is divided into three sections, denoted by roman numerals, and it chronologically follows a man on an election day. Each section contains three stanzas, and the first stanza of each section deals with the personal, while the second deals with the political, and the third contrasts the human (the personal and political) with the natural world (animals, weather, plants, etc.). The poem is spoken in the first person, and it thus reads in a different manner than the two previously considered. Though the reader is told that the speaker is a poet, there is no explicit connection between the speaker of the poem and Page herself. Rather, a great amount of detail is dedicated to describing the milieu surrounding the speaker as he travels to and from the election station, and even the political imagery is cased in a natural light[11]. This poem, much like Lampman's, operates out of a relatively colonial position, making note of both "Colonel Evensby" (l. 20) and the "gentle overlords / propped by their dames" (ll. 22-23), though it is clear by the original publication date (1946)[12] that this use of colonial terms is meant to be sardonic and symbolic rather than simply indicative. That is, the use of the colonial is a subtle stab at the authoritarian yet hegemonic presence of the political figures that are made reference to generally in the poem.

[11] "Natural" here means associated with nature or the environment.
[12] *As Ten As Twenty*, Toronto, 1946 - found in *The Blasted Pine*, "Notes," 126.

The poem uses this level of subtlety as its main force of attack in that it is sombre and measured. The pronounced repetitive cadence of sounds such as the assonance of the e sound (such as in "leave," "recede," "green," "street," and "trees," all found in the first six lines) create a tone of order and sameness.. The contrast is evidenced through diction; the second/political stanza notes that "everything rushes at me, either fierce or friendly / in a sudden world of bulls. / Faces on posters in the leaves call out / the violent *yes* or *no* of my belief, / are quick or slow or halted to my pulse" (ll. 7-11), while the third/natural stanza tells how the speaker is "woo[ed]" by the weather and how he walks "smooth in my summer legs / I lope through the tall and trembling grass" (ll. 14-15), redirecting the poem from a rushed and confrontational gait to a peaceful, detached one. This shift of diction, from the quiet private to the tense political to the tranquil natural, is preserved through the first two sections and altered in the third section. This shift emphasizes the interpreted aim of the poem which is that the political, in this case votes on acts or propositions, is present in everyone's life -- even should a member of the public not vote, the outcome of the vote affects their lives. This is most evident in the seventh stanza when the speaker says "the districts all proclaim themselves in turn / and public is my room, not personal" (ll. 35-36) and hence the societal political intersects with a private-turned-public space, removing the "personal" and instead replacing it with the public and political, creating a site of tension which reiterates both the tone of the poem and the satirical basis of political poetry.

The collision of two spaces is replicated in the eighth stanza which calls attention to the way the natural is engaging with the political: "Behind the leaves / the faces of the

posters wait and blow" (ll. 39-40). Vitally, this collision of the natural world and the political world speaks to typical considerations of Canadian poetry. Canadian poetry is often noted for its presentation of the natural landscape, but by connecting natural symbolism and metaphors to the political, Page's poem creates a politicized suburban, and at the same time uses what nature there is in the suburban to deconstruct the political. For example, stanza six ends with the lines "past an empty lot where an old dog / appoints himself as guardian of the green" (ll. 30-31); the dog here presents two divergent images: he is not just a natural protector of the space, but he does so during the voting period, a demonstration of the natural protecting itself much like the politicians protect and advocate their own viewpoints in the poem. However, the fact that in stanza nine "The old dog / has trotted off to bed" (ll. 42-43) shows that the willingness to protect "the empty lot" is not out of necessity, but rather is a vocation which can be abandoned at any given time when there is no conflict surrounding that space. These dichotomous images are reinforced by the final line of the poem which states: "Gentlemen, for the moment, you may sleep" (l. 46), an indication that the dog is indeed connected with the ideas of the male political figure (whether politician or otherwise).

"Election Day" is thus not a satirical poem or one of specific attack, but rather a poem that seeks to deconstruct the mindset that the hegemonic political is necessarily also the personal political, and subsequently that the 'typical' Canadian poetic fixation on nature is also necessarily polar to a presentation of the political. The intersection of political poetry and poetry focused on the natural world shows that political and public space are also private space (an ideology that is rampant in leftist critiques of capitalist

dogma) and thus when considered through the "pessimistic or destructive" aim of the collection, one would describe this poem as politically pessimistic. How does this pessimism act, politically, differently than deconstructive political poems? Pessimism in political poems creates a dire, borderline (sometimes entirely) dystopic vision of the present. The poem becomes the alternative, a presentation of the personal political and the anti-hegemonic -- a meditative focus on the current state of political affairs and how this affects both the public and the private space.

Understanding this alternative helps to demonstrate some of the key 'rules' that are in play in *TBP* as its presence as a collection of poetry as inquiry. In terms of purview, the aim of *TBP* makes it clear that there is nothing that is "off-limits," even encouraging attacks, which can end up being personal, as in of "W.L.M.K.". However, even in terms of "W.L.M.K.," there is a clear reference to the broader politics that the person was involved in because, as Hutcheon points out, oppositional irony that is too insulting/offensive loses some of its affective charge (52). This is once again spelled out by Scott and Smith in their "Introduction" and the reasoning behind the poems they have included in *TBP*. To reiterate, Scott and Smith were looking for poems that were not only disrespectful and satirical, but went against the hegemonic political grain and were either "pessimistic or destructive" and in such a way condemned those in power and sought to advocate for change.

Hutcheon's measure of affective charge is important when considering the ironic and political resonance of explicitly political poetry. A poem that is more obviously satirical and thus produces more specific criticism, without devolving into propaganda or

self-depreciating commentary, is easier to interpret for readers through their own ideology. This does not necessarily mean that a poem which is critical and satirical in a subtle way does not have the same amount of resonance, but rather that it does not resonate in such an explicit way, and hence the irony may not be read as strongly by the reader. This contrast will become clearer in later works under consideration, especially *Rogue Stimulus*. In *The Blasted Pine*, "W.L.M.K." comes close to being a kind of reinforcing irony (the least affective), but it must also be remembered that claims against Mackenzie King would have resonated more strongly at the original publication of "W.L.M.K." (shortly after his death). In contrast, "The Modern Politician" contains more transgressive irony and is hence more affective.

But, if one considers these three poems ("W.L.M.K.," "Election Day," and "The Modern Politician") in terms of what ramifications they may have, this explanation becomes seemingly more complex and convoluted. There are two poems which will aid in further explaining the argument presented here: AM Klein's "Political Meeting" (previously discussed) and Leonard Cohen's "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward" (*TBP* 49-50). Both poems rely on the dominance of their aesthetic presentation, as well as the dark satire that they operate on, to present not only their political background, but also the political message that they carry as their poetic overthought. They rely on clear delineations of subject and the opinion of the speaker (Klein's poem speaks to French Canadians while Cohen's takes aim at the USA), and hence speak to a more specific public than has been previously discussed. However, as

will be seen, this focus of subject (and perceived audience) does not alter the way the political poems function in light of the concept of the political poem as inquiry.

Of all the poets included in *TBP*, Leonard Cohen has enjoyed the most academic and media attention -- as Deshaye points out, "Cohen [...] gained a degree of exposure that few Canadian poets have experienced" (78)[13]. His inclusion then in the revised *TBP* signals that Canadian political poetry was, at one time, being produced more frequently by Canada's most well-known poets, or at least the hope that Cohen's literary celebrity might entice more readers to peruse *TBP*. Cohen's poem, "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward" (*TBP* 49), flirts with the edge between serious commentary and drastic parodical satire, and hence can be seen as a launching point for the new kind of political poetics that evolved out of *TBP* (a further discussion of this will be featured about *Howl Too, Eh?*). Cohen's list poem uses the intersection of poet, audience, and speaker to create a poem that sounds much like a rally or a soap-box speech, but one that is meant to confuse the audience. This is evident at the beginning of the poem; while the poem begins with a rally against the US, it quickly shifts to a contentious debate within Canada, to an absurd hyperbole which extends that same debate: "let us dump asbestos on the White House, / let us make the French talk English, / not only here but everywhere" (ll. 3-6). Right away, this introduces the satire that will proliferate throughout the poem, and yet also acknowledges the serious political strife within Canada and the effects that the United States has on Canada and its government.

[13] Some examples of scholarly research on Cohen includes that by Stephen Scobie, Horea Nascu, Norman Ravvin, and Winfried Siemerling.

These three specific issues are echoed multiple times in the poem, often placed before/between serious thoughts and explicit hyperbolized statements. Beyond issues of the French/English divide and the United States, the poem goes on to speak to the union of "Church and State" (l. 26), having "two Governor Generals" (l. 28), the Senate (l. 7), the CBC (l. 13), and various other public politicized issues that are, typically, polarizing in the public sphere (or were at that time).

The irony varies between being subtle and overt, often presenting the same image in both ways. For example, the use of "talk" instead of "speak" in lines 5 and 13 demonstrates a colloquialism often adopted by Québeçois when they speak English and hence this shows the presence of French in English Canadian culture and language; in contrast, the use of "coup d'état" in line 41 is a much more obvious reference to that same proliferation. This use of shifting emphasis on irony or satirical focus builds momentum in the poem and hence the cadence of the poem becomes quicker and quicker, riling up the audience more and more, even though the end of the poem ultimately reveals that what the speaker is advocating for cannot be found yet; regardless, the speaker still ironically advocates for "stony silence" (l. 43). Likewise, by rallying in both directions (in support of and against contentious issues), the poem seeks to unite multiple audiences to find something they agree with in the poem. This allows for a multiplicity of voices to be echoed in the poem and to be evident through the speaker.

That multiplicity is the key function of Cohen's poem and is what ultimately drives the underthought and overthought. By using "let us" to begin half of the lines (and using "our" and "they" in many of the remaining lines), the poem uses the public as

speaker. In this way, it polarizes the average citizen against those who are in power; this is not necessarily confrontational, but as described previously, the poem touches on contentious issues and so some lines intentionally provoke the reader. By both uniting the reader in the poem and by provoking them to have a reaction against the poem, the use of the first person oblique plural acts as a measure of complete inclusiveness, regardless of opinion or political stripe. However, this may be complicated by the fact that "us" only signals fellow Canadians if one considers Cohen himself as the speaker of the poem. Line 22 and 23 emphasize the poem's satirical perception of the United States"(Is it true one of our national leaders / was a Roman Catholic?)"[14], revealing the overthought of the poem: a 'threat' that Canada will join with the United States. Thus, the speaker's nationality is somewhat ironically ambiguous in that they comment on both Canadian and American political affairs satirically, considering North American a nationality more than either national identities.

What difference would it make if the speaker was speaking to only Canada or only the United States? The poem would, in effect, lose all of its bite and satirical wit in that instead of being provocative and using many well-known Canadian and American symbols as landmarks to unite the readership, the poem would instead be a mockery of one country or the other and not their political and cultural relations. While this seems like a narrow delineation, the use of symbols from both nations demonstrates the cultural congruity that is being ridiculed by the poem; ultimately, the poem seeks to demonstrate that the Canadian identity is not easily separable from the American one. With this in

[14] Referring to JFK, the only Roman Catholic President of the United States.

mind, Cohen points out that political events and decisions in Canada are so influenced by American politics that both nations might as well be one: the separation of the two political hegemonies becomes farcically impractical and good governance (for Canada) is reduced to submission. By using national imagery in a darkly satirical poem, and making abstentious and absurd suggestions about how a North American nation might run or be formed, Cohen allows the reader to consider their own personal politics in the light of humour and satire. The level of irony found in the poem itself becomes ironic because, as the poem advocates, a complete lack of political/social action on the part of Canadian society would result in the plausibility of some of the suggestions.

While this is a kind of dark, critical humour, it echoes back to the public in a more jovial and less "attack" nature than poems found in the original publication of *TBP*. The inquiry in this poem then is a presentation of suggestions, a 'conclusion and recommendations' that one might find at the end of an inquiry document. Though it is framed as more of a rally cry than a bipartisan presentation of grounded facts, by making suggestions to the public as to how to act based on the political debates that were occurring at that time, the speaker of the poem both includes and removes himself from the public, the same speaker-voice as previously discussed. Thus, Cohen's poem seeks to integrate public relations with the poetic and the political, but does so in a way which brings in voices beyond Canadian ones, even if it does so ironically. Does this mean that Cohen's poem is protesting against the state of affairs in Canada, or simply commenting on Canada's social and political identity?

To answer that, I will return to Scully's division of political poetry into poetry of dissent and poetry of protest. This division creates a useful model in regards to political poetry because it contains a dichotomous language that allows for further differentiation in the field. However, Scully's penultimate argument in his talk called "Remarks on Political Poetry" is that poetry and criticism cannot operate outside of the "social question" which is the "multilayered web of social relations" (5) that our world operates in and through. However, this very principle causes critical models of political poetry to be limited by their schools of thought in that Scully is saying the social relation becomes necessary to this criticism. Rather, I argue that genre of political poetry should be considered as a dynamic relation between the personal political and the societal/hegemonic political, using political poetry as a stance outside of the web and as an inherent act of personal politics, but one which does not necessarily operate from a particular ideological stance or political vantage point.

Scully, in attempting to further specify the characteristics of political poetry, makes the argument that it must be considered either "dissident [or] protest poetry", though "protest poetry is conceptually shallow" (3). This can be seen as an echo of Frye's argument in relation to the mob mindset (*TEI* 92). Scully goes on to say that "such poetry is issue-bound, spectatorial -- rarely the function of an engaged artistic life, but compensation for a politically marginalized one" (3). Scully defines dissident poetry, by contrast, as "a poetry that talks back, that would act as part of the world, not simply a mirror to it [...] Dissident poetry does therefore observe connections -- say, between social empowerment and valorization and human definition -- that the dominant ideology

declares that 'poetry' must ignore or suppress" (4). The issue with this argument is that dissident poetry, by its very definition, must then work to speak actively against the dominant ideology and hegemony, and while this does not preclude poetry from speaking against other ideologies or hegemonies (as long as they are politically influential), it dictates that poetry must speak from the margins towards the centre in an oppositional way. Political poetry, through this idea, would thus have to exist only as a force of discontent, of the margins, and could not remain neutral or comment on the centre or margin from any ideological position.

Herein lies the issue with Scully's argument, at least in the context of Canadian political poetry. While political poetry must have a critical view and engagement which is explicitly stated and part of the ironic interpretive process, there is plenty of political poetry that seeks to be critical of the general public, those in the margins, the poet themselves, or the writer's position in relation to society. For example, the poetry of Ken Norris and Endre Farkas recognizes their place as generational immigrants (*HTE* 6-9), much of the poetry in *The Blasted Pine* is critical and self-reflexive of the British patronage from which it arose, and *Rogue Stimulus* constantly signals towards public apathy as a cause for the current state of the government. Canadian political poetry has always been self-aware and self-deprecating where the satire or parody calls for it to be, regardless of what the expense is for the perception of the self. Most often, Canadian political poetry seeks to comment on Canada generally (insofar as the public and general society are concerned) just as often as it directly addresses the powers that be. The political, in these poems, is used as evidence as to why members of the public should be

engaging their personal politics with hegemonic politics, or should be engaging with politics at all (through means like voting), and yet comments upon that very lack of action as a political moment, whether or not it is interpreted that way.

This issue is, often, contextualized in relation to Canada's connection to the United States, as appears in Cohen's poem. Frye, in conjunction with Geddes' assertion, says that "if the Canadian faces south, he becomes either hypnotized or repelled by the United States: either he tries to think up unconvincing reasons for being different and somehow superior to Americans, or he accepts being 'swallowed up by' the United States as inevitable" (iv, *The Bush Garden*), furthering the larger argument that Canadian poets write within the realm of influence of the United States. All writers of political poetry, especially contemporarily, must necessarily accept this influence and either choose to address it directly or else subsume it and not include it explicitly in the text. Rather, the crux of Canadian political poetry is the particular Canadian identity that is attached to it. This Canadian identity is often nationally bound, though Frye's argument about the regional nature of poetry is also important in the consideration of political poetry, but political poems that speak to the provincial (outside of Québec) or municipal political levels are so few and far between that they will be discussed under the banner of national poetry.

This also becomes an issue when one considers the principle of national identity, especially in Canada, when viewed from a political standpoint. An identity that seeks to encompass an entire society is hegemonic, but this political hegemony is not consistent in that the dominant political power is constantly shifting (in terms of voting cycles). As

well, due to the first-past-the-post and individual provincial voting systems, Canada is constantly split into many governments, most of which do not represent the actual majority of eligible voters, but rather a large enough portion of those who choose to vote during a given election. This means that Canada's "national unit" (politically) must recognize all of these regional units and consider them independently -- in that the federal government does not have jurisdiction over all aspects of society (education and health are provincially regulated, for example), each government is layered and complicated by the level above and below (when municipal politics are considered as well). On top of this, each level of government necessarily operates on the principles of good governance, building on and re-shaping the actions and policies of the previous political hegemony to maintain a national political course. Since the fundamental basis of government does not change, and each political party ultimately has a mandate to run the country above all else, should they be elected, it cannot thus be said that all political poetry must operate in a way that is necessarily completely representative of dissent. While dissent is an important aspect of political poetry, the shifting hegemony necessitates that political poetry must be able to be written out of any and all ideological or hegemonic stances (whether in support of the current hegemony and their policies or against it, for example), allowing for the speaker's ideology and hegemony to be understood and created by the reader through the inscribed facts in the poem. Thus, political poetry in Canada does not shift in a reflexive relationship with the shifts in hegemony.

Rather, *TBP* serves to underscore the need for a term which has been mentioned previously, and will become more noticeable as this investigation of political poetry

continues: the evidence of poetry as political inquiry. As has been stated, the notions of poetry as dissident and poetry as protest do not fit the genre of Canadian political poetry. Another possible definition already in use is what Carolyn Forché calls "poetry as witness" (30). Forché's discussion is made with regards to the poet as individual, in that the poet is speaking of his or her own personal experience (or translating and hence representing another poet's personal experience). Forché defines it as that which deals with political acts, including those that centre around violence, persecution, silencing, and other forms of oppression and repression (30). Poetry as witness is, for Forché, the collision of the political and the personal. While Canadian poetry often contains a collision of the personal and the political, the general lack of strife and prosecution means that Canadian political poetry does not adhere to this categorization either.

What then is Canadian political poetry? What has been presented, and what I will continue to explore through these collections and poems is Canadian political poetry as inquiry or commission. Inquiry and commission here are used in the political sense, as an investigation into political actions that results in a report of accountability, findings, and a suggestion of how things should be moved forward; the relevant *OED* definition states that a public inquiry is "a formal or judicial investigation into a matter of public concern, *esp.* one conducted by a tribunal established for this purpose under a regional or national government department, and granted jurisdictive powers" (italics original). While political commissions are usually brought about by politicians, performed by arms-length agencies, and presented back to politicians (for them to act on or ignore at their own discretion), political poems empower the public as the politicians. This means that the

political poem is enabled and called for by the public, it is compiled by the poet, and it is presented back to the public for them to act upon or ignore at their own discretion. The key for overtly political poetry is that this information, the results of the inquiry, are presented in an ironic or satirical fashion, providing the information (and any personal political argument) not directly, but in a way which undermines even its own vantage point, making necessarily arms-length from both the political and the public. This enables poets to consider themselves as the public, what Frye calls the poet as spokesman, but also to write out of a space that can consider knowledge of political events that might not otherwise be on the front of the public's mind. They are also thus charged by the public to be both accountable in their poetry and their factual claims, but also to report accurately the accountability of the political back to the public.

In turn, this means that the political defines the poetic in the same stroke that the poetic defines the political. It is the political, without doubt, that causes there to be a cause and demand for political poetry in the first place. Much as political inquiries and commissions cause the public to distrust politicians all the more and hence a broader outcry for these kinds of inquiries and commissions arises (one could consider how many Canadian mayors were charged or removed from office in 2011 and 2012), political poems as inquiry create a point for further poetic inquiries to be completed and presented, especially in light of those that have come before them, regardless of the specific issue or event at hand. And, much the same way as inquiries are based upon precedents that have come before them, so too do political poems establish a new basis all the while being written out of consciousness and acknowledgement of previous political poems. Even in

the use of the word "precedent," fundamental concepts of the legal become apparent, and hence one may question how legal precedence or legal guidelines translate to the practice and writing of political poetry.

As can be seen through all of the examples above, *The Blasted Pine* (in both its incarnations) is fundamental in the establishment and defining of explicit Canadian political poetry. As the first book to bring together many explicitly political poems, *TBP* sets a precedent in engaging with personal and hegemonic politics: explicitly political poetry relies on a presentation of both an ideal political world (the personal political, the ideals and views of the author/speaker) and a dystopian world (or at least dysfunctional one -- typically the hegemonic). Each edition of *TBP* contains a slightly different selection of authors and topics (noted by the section headings such as "True Patriot Love"), but the development between the two editions also speaks to the development of political poetry more generally.[15] In the first edition of *TBP*, the focus of "destruction and attack" as established by Scott and Smith resonates through many of the poems. This creates a tone of not only discontent, but also pessimism about the future of Canada. In terms of poetics, these poems tend to operate on formal structures, taking advantage of the presence of voices in the poem to complicate not only considerations of the speaker, but also who is included in the audience and what voice has the most (or any) pull or validity throughout the piece. In this way, the speaker can present their own personal political views (though these too are undercut by the satirical) and they can allow the

[15] Though this selection could not be said to be either broad nor truly varied as the authors are well, with a few exceptions, white men.

hegemonic to be satirized (by quoting politicians out of context, for example); beyond this, they can also satirize both the views and the action (or inaction) of the audience/reader-public.

This is most definitively seen in the close connection between the author and speaker. While this close relation may mean that the author's personal ideology resonates through the poem, it also allows for the author/speaker to be part of the general public, reflecting on the political persons and structures that govern them. In the same way, the use of explicit quotations from political figures also introduces an element of voice for that political figure, integrating not only political accountability, but also demonstrating that the author/speaker is taking into account political facts relevant to the issue or event at hand (including party policy and media reporting on the event), not simply rallying against the personality of that political figure. This, to an effectual degree, describes poetry as inquiry, or at least its beginnings in relation to Canadian political poetry. As the poems are sure to adhere to facts and maintain accountability (as the speaker sees it), and also allow for the integration of quotations to lend voice to the political figures, they behave like the final presentation of an inquiry demanded by the public and written by the poet. Though sometimes the poet appears to adhere to a particular ideology, it should also be noted that all inquiries and commissions are completely non-biased in the same manner (as in if they present findings against one particular group, they may appear to adhere to an ideology when in fact they do not). More importantly, these poems obey poetic aesthetic principles much as political inquiries obey the boundaries set out by the

law. So too do these poems set precedence, as will be seen in my discussion of *Howl Too, Eh?* and *Rogue Stimulus.*

As well, political poems found in *The Blasted Pine* operate in a complementary fashion to the politically correct language found in inquiries and reports. A key factor of all contemporary political inquiries, and indeed of the politicized nature of contemporary society, is politically correct language. This kind of language seeks to avoid all stereotypical and otherwise prejudiced descriptions of peoples or groups, and hence uses terms which do not offend or provide any kind of judgement on those under discussion. As well, it can be used as an inclusive language, ensuring no one is omitted from discussion or consideration. However, this kind of language can also lead to a diversion from accountability as broad inclusivity may mask the particular parties deemed to be at fault or issue. The *OED* defines politically correct as "conforming to a body of liberal or radical opinion, esp. on social matters, usually characterized by the advocacy of approved causes or views, and often by the rejection of language, behaviour, etc., considered discriminatory or offensive;" this shows that there is a determination of what is "approved" and hence political hegemony and dominant ideology alter politically correct language with each hegemonic shift. Politically correct language is present in Canadian political poems, though not for the same purposes found in purely political uses. Rather, this same language is used to point out the lack of accountability in its typical use and for satirical and parodical purposes, though these often achieve the same ends. Politically correct language has become one tool for political poetry, a type of diction that allows for satirical hyperbole that resonates as a polar usage when compared to political inquiry.

Therefore, in Canadian political poetry, politically correct language seeks to assign accountability and pinpoint culpable groups and persons to achieve the ends of a poetic inquiry, though often in a satirical way[16]. This use further compounds the apparent irony to the reader/interpreter and allows for a direct commentary on those responsible, outside of broad comments on the hegemonic or ideological.

Though political correctness tends to be a more contemporary consideration, sound and diction in political poems often emphasize who is ultimately accountable in relation to the subject in the poem; the key difference is that political poetry seeks to hold accountability by making all parties involved as apparent as possible while politically correct documents often hide those responsible under jargon. To this same length, vulgarity and personal attacks are often included in explicitly political poetry as a means of pointing out those who are culpable and, crucially, communicating the emotional connection and frustration that the public feels (the tension between the personal and hegemonic political). This frustration is, in part, what allows political poetry to be self-perpetuating, and as can be seen between the two editions, political poetry (and satirical and ironic poetry generally) all enjoyed a strong resurgence during the ten year period leading up to Canada's centennial.

This relative surge did not taper off after the centennial but rather continued on in conjunction with the plethora of radical political events in Canada in the 1970s such as the October Crisis. However, in this period, many political poems tended to revolve

[16] An example of this is section 5 of Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* where he berates Paul Martin Sr., the Liberal Party of Canada, and the general public for their response to the Canadian manufacturing of napalm used in Vietnam.

around the local or the regional (especially in Québec or in reference to Québec) and hence the national discussions in Canadian political poetry focused on the French/English divide (such as can be seen in Margaret Atwood's *Two-Headed Poems*). Though these types of poems are outside the purview of this thesis, some poems written in Québec sought to interact with previous Canadian political poems in a more direct, parodical way, and in a way that spoke to the whole of Canada and its international relations. With a nod to *TBP*, the Véhicule poets sought to interact with the political, and so they too compiled a collection of political poetry, namely *Howl Too, Eh?*.

Chapter 3 -- Centre Block: *Howl Too, Eh?*

The 1980s saw a lot of political movement in Canada -- the geopolitical divide between Québec and the rest of Canada, the Repatriation of the Constitution, the failed Meech Lake Accord, as well as numerous tense moments between the United States and Canada, especially on the international stage, such as during the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the National Energy Program. This time period saw the emergence of the Véhicule poets out of Québec, notably Endre Farkas and Ken Norris. In 1991, Farkas and Norris published the collection *Howl Too, Eh? and Other Satires* (referred to herein as *HTE*), including poems by Artie Gold and Tom Konyves. As a bridge between the origins evident in *TBP*, and the more recent adaptations presented in *Rogue Stimulus*, *HTE* occupies a key space in the landscape of political poetry. As will be shown, *HTE* shows how the political poetic shifted and the "destruction and pessimism" of *TBP* evolved into the more subtle satire of *HTE*.

In that the authors of *HTE* note how important *TBP* was for their writing and the publication of *HTE*, it is not surprising to see poems that make direct reference to those found in *TBP*. One of the poems that make most notable use of a poem previously discussed is Ken Norris' "The Only Canadian in Bangor, Maine Turns His Thoughts Homeward" (53), an 'updating' and parody of Leonard Cohen's "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward." Though Cohen's original poem makes use of satire, Norris' poem takes this to a new level, not only parodying Canadian stereotypes and symbols, but also parodying Cohen's original poem. This, in turn, attests that Canadian political poetry is self-reflexive. This self-reflexivity is important in the

continued development of political poetry to this day, and so looking at *HTE* helps to demonstrate where this operation originated, and how the interaction between the personal and hegemonic political continued to be satirized.

To analyze this self-reflexivity, it is helpful to look at how closely the two poems are related. In terms of form and structure, both poems are forty-four lines long, and both poems consistently use the first person oblique plural in "let us," connecting the author/speaker to the reader and the Canadian public more generally. Both poems also locate the speaker outside of Canada; which Cohen makes use of Cuba as the location in his poem (in reference to the Cuban missile crisis no doubt), Norris locates his poem in the United States, just across the border from Québec (Norris himself teaches at the University of Maine, just outside of Bangor). This location change reflects recent events during the times the poems were published: at the time of Norris' poem's publication, the 'cocacolonization' affecting Canada from the United States was thriving as a major concern, as well as concerns of capitalization and globalization; these translate directly into the diction and objects of the poem.

One of the other key differences is that Norris wrote out of Québec, and so there is a strong French sentiment in the poem that is not apparent in Cohen's. While this does not necessarily indicate that Norris supported pro-sovereignty movements at the time, it adds another layer of tension and meaning to the poem which already seeks to address Canadian identity and unity. This is clear from the beginning of the poem: "Come, my brothers" is replaced with "Come my Two Solitudes," an obvious reference to Hugh Maclennan's novel and the divisiveness between Québec and the rest of Canada.

Likewise, Cohen's call for the people of Canada to comprehend the seriousness of the issues facing them (the real ones, not the distractions) in line 3 of his poem, "let us find our serious heads," is replaced by a call of "let us find our serious identity." As a problem that persists to this day, questions of Canadian identity and what it means to be Canadian often appear in political poems, typically with some mention of the American identity as more pervasive than any Canadian consideration. Norris' poem ends on the note that Canadians are selling themselves out and commoditizing their identity, though I will discuss this later on.

So how does Norris parody or 'update' Cohen, aside from using the same aesthetic structure? The parody lies in the way that the speaker of Norris' poem addresses the Canadian public; though the speaker does so in the same way as Cohen's, the speaker in Norris' poem presents a starker, bleaker image than Cohen's. For example, rather than saying "let us encourage the dark races / so they'll be lenient when they take over, / let us make the CBC talk English" (ll. 10-14), Norris' poem reads "let us encourage our natives / to emigrate / so we can build James Bay III, IV, V / let us make the CBC abandon news / and documentaries" (ll. 10-15). While in Cohen's poem, the reference to the "dark races" parodies the discourse of colonialism, the statement in Norris' poem which advocates that Native Canadians should be encouraged to leave their land (that has already been taken from them) so that commodification can take place, and this emphasizes the destructive nature of capitalism and recognizes that a Canadian identity which values the natural environment would oppose this commodification, which is the inherent aim. In the same way, by satirically calling for the CBC (a publically funded broadcaster) to abandon news

and documentaries, the poem also underscores the need for media that is non-partisan to present facts and uncover the 'truth' rather than simply sell out to American networks or advertising.

This recognition of Native Canadian voices is also an indication of the increasing visibility of Native Canadian writers and poets, especially to other poets. Though I have made mention of a few authors previously, it is worth noting that in a synchronous way to Forché's concept of poetry as witness, some political poets in Canada advocate for Native Canadian voices without making an attempt to subsume them (such as can be seen in Cohen and Norris' work). Rather, by marking the existence of such voices and allowing them to be pulled into their work, these poets are recognizing the vital contribution of Native Canadian writers and also demonstrating a speaker/author belief in the rights of all Native Canadian peoples, especially given their political history with the federal government. In the case of Norris' poem, Native Canadians are presented satirically as simply pawns for the Canadian government to move around at will and once again to remove them from their own land. This in turn shows people, especially Native Canadians, as a means to capital and as a resource that can be exploited for financial gain.

These themes of capital and the political manoeuvring of capital dominate the rest of the poem, evident in calls to trade Newfoundland, sell Canadian politicians, and unite English and French in debt (ll. 19, 20-21, 25-26). While this is not a thesis on the effects of capitalism on Canadian political poetry, the evolution of Canada's (and the world's) economy to one of materialism and capitalism has strong ramifications for Canadian political poetry. This is because of the influence of the United States over Canada; since

political poems in Canada are poetry as inquiry, the influence of the United States is under consideration in many political poems if it is perceived that a specific political member or party is allowing itself to be controlled by American interests. In Norris' poem, this idea of control and sale echoes again through the call to "threaten to join the USA / and at the last moment do it" (ll. 35-36) and in the final lines that read: "let us stand on guard / for another year or two, or until someone makes us a better offer" (ll. 42-45).

This theme continues to be seen in two other poems by Endre Farkas in *HTE*, namely "The Maple Leaf Rag" (23-26) and "Au Canada!" (48-52). These poems are both written in reference to talks that were ongoing at the time that would lead to the North America Free Trade Agreement and are highly critical of Brian Mulroney specifically. Both poems also rely heavily on Canadian imagery and symbols to indicate that what is being sold, politically, is not only Canadian identity but the very way the public in Canada understands itself. Their presentation of poetry as inquiry revolves around their aim to blame Mulroney for the perceived sale of Canadian identity and resources, as well the inherent claim that they are speaking to the best interests of Canadians generally. Further, both poems also advocate for both English and French voices through their inclusion of French passages, and because they also include mention of immigrants and Native Canadians, these poems seek to be truly national voices.

The main difference between these two poems is the portrayal of the speaker of the poem. In "The Maple Leaf Rag," the speaker is speaking about his own interests and concerns, evident in the use of "I" and "We," and the poem makes it clear that this

concern is simply an individual portrayal of what all Canadians should feel. The main concern in this poem is Canadian identity on the whole, and thus this individual portrayal becomes a portrayal of Canada as "I," an inhabitation of the public as the true Canada. However, this public is at odds with itself: it not only wants to save Canadian identity and stands proudly behind it -- "we thought very different thoughts, / me of Canada Canadian from sea to sea to CBC" (ll. 8-9) -- but the public also yearns to sell itself to the United States at every possible chance. This is best demonstrated through the constant tonal shifts which first seem to proclaim Canada's greatness only to shift to proclaim how great it would be to sell. For example, the ninth stanza reads:

> So I grabbed up the eviscerated maple leaf
> and held it like an offering
> and stood on guard with Big Chin
> and declared to all: Yes!
> We are dead, bleak, dusty, imageless Canadians
> we are hyphenated,
> we are failed Americans,
> are for sale, reduced to clear. (ll. 68-75)

As can be seen, "standing on guard" quickly shifts to undercutting the Canadian image in relation to the American image. Through this, it can be seen that Canada and Canadians are being satirized more drastically than Americans are for the purposes of "waking up" the public.

This undercut is turned on its head in "Au Canada!" in that the United States is satirized a great deal more than Canada. Rather, the speaker of the poem in this case is speaking *to* Canada, speaking to the public, constantly asking questions that are direct and genuine (ll. 5,8,9,11,13,14 etc.); again, these questions and much of the poem revolve

around the resonance of popular Canadian images and symbols (such as the CBC). Like in "The Maple Leaf Rag," this poem also makes use of the first person through "I" and "we," but also speaks more broadly to "Canada" as a subject. By doing this, the speaker can satirize the United States in such a way that makes it appear as a complete consumer-culture, one that is more obsessed with capitalism and trademarks than any kind of meaningful partnership with Canada. In the same breath, the speaker can then praise Canadian symbols and advocate for their long (and Canadian) life, such as the "Canada Front Page Challenge" (l. 73) or the stereotyped symbols of the tuque and skidoo (ll. 117, 118).

This is where the real call to action lies in "Au Canada!" -- in the advocacy for preserving what Canadian identity is left, and speaking out against NAFTA; the poem advocates so clearly for this cause that it even contains the lines "Help. / Canada this is serious" (ll. 97-98). Does this explicit mantra and position mean that this poem does not qualify as inquiry? Given the almost-cyclical shifting of political hegemonies in Canada, it is essential that political poetry be written from any vantage point and that the 'validity' of the poem's political ironies can be interpreted by an evolving readership. Poets then, as spokespersons for the public, may write with their own ideology in mind and their own perception of the hegemonies as their intended ironic target, but ultimately the interpreter will interact with the poem and its presentation of the political through their own personal political stance and mindset, meaning that the satirical rhetoric must allow for a transideological reading. Thus, in a time where scandals continue to rock every level of government (the Charbonneau Commission, the Senate scandal, robocalls, 'Crackstarter',

and the gas plant cancellations in Ontario to name a few), the satire found in political poems arises in a more specific way -- often, the best way to address the political is to 'attack' the personal. Political poems attack policy decisions and platforms through individuals rather than attacking the ideology directly because it is often how the individual acts that defines or redefines how policy is applied. Taking issue with the way a party or person is dealing with an issue or with what they have said they would do is another matter entirely, and is the basis for most political poetry in Canada. Though there is fervour and a level of justified animation in these political poems, it must be noted that the poems are not, in and of themselves, manifestos for a political ideal that does not exist or propaganda advocating for a particular political party.

Chapter 4 -- The Peace Tower: *Rogue Stimulus*

Public apathy towards the political continued and continues to be addressed in Canadian political poetry. When Stephen Harper prorogued parliament for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games, many political commentators were unsure how the public would react: they expected a mixed response, but nothing that would resonate with the public for a lengthy period of time. When the news of the prorogation was made public in the media, the outcry was immediate; though, as predicted, the Olympics quickly quelled the voices of dissent as the nation joined in patriotic cheering for our athletes. Not everyone was quieted by the quest for gold, however, and poet Stephen Brockwell's frustration quickly snowballed into the publication of *Rogue Stimulus* (also referred to herein as *RS*). Brockwell, as noted in his "Preface," called friend and colleague Stuart Ross and after a lengthy discussion, they both approached Mansfield Press and pitched the idea of a book of poetry about Stephen Harper and with approval of the publisher, set out to call for, collect, comb through, and compile the poems they would use for the book in a matter of five days (an extreme deadline even for the best of editors -- most books take a minimum of six months to go from approval to publication). Surprisingly, the book came together and *Rogue Stimulus* was published on January 29, 2010 -- just one month after Stephen Harper prorogued parliament.

This fact is crucial to the main drive of the book -- to comment upon the actions of Harper and the federal Conservative government. Often, political poems are hindered by the fact that they are quickly outdated: they make reference to events that have long passed from short-term mass memory, politicians who have changed stances or no longer

hold office, or policies that have shifted to reflect public outcry. The specific aim of *Rogue Stimulus* meant that the issue at hand had to be stated up front (*Rogue Stimulus: The Stephen Harper Holiday Anthology for a Prorogued Parliament* is the full title) and it had to be dealt with in a timely manner for it to have any kind of effect on the publishing market. Though this fact is necessarily complicated by the general lack of popularity in the public for reading poetry, the most powerful effects could be achieved with a swift publication.

The poems in *RS* are the result of Stephen Brockwell and Stuart Ross approaching colleagues and poets, and also putting out calls for poems on lists and websites, as well as on CBC Radio (12-13). Though Brockwell and Ross refined and selected the final poems that ended up in the collection, this fact still creates a duality in the book, a balance of well-known and renowned authors (such as George Elliot Clarke) as well as generally unknown poets. Within this collection, their voices are all given equal weight and agency and hence any consideration of public popularity or "standing" within literary circles is removed (though the presence of higher-profile writers does help the collection stand out in the book market); instead the subject matter of the poetry (and the quality of the poems) becomes the total focus. Likewise, by organizing the book in a straightforward, alphabetical order, *Rogue Stimulus* becomes simply an analogous collection rather than a commentary on the authors and the poems inside (such as could be achieved by promoting the most well-known authors to the first few pages).

Not all of the poems in the collection are overtly about Stephen Harper or the prorogued parliament. Indeed, some of them are only read metaphorically in that regard

because of the overall aim of the collection and the content of the poems that surround them. For example, Joanna Lilley's "Something is Rotten" (61) does not mention Harper, parliament, or proroguing at any point during the poem. However, given the context of the collection, the final two lines, "Who among us doesn't postpone / what we most dislike?" (ll. 20-21) becomes a critical (and somewhat supportive) question in direct reference of the proroguing of parliament, stating an ironic and satirical view that the government itself does not enjoy sitting in the House. This metaphoric connection does not take away from the poem (or the collection) however in that the work is contextualized, much like each poem in Stephen Price's *Anatomy of Keys* would be contextually altered without the presence of the rest of his poems about Houdini. Poems such as "Something is Rotten" aid the collection, as a whole, in not fixating on a pointed judgement against the government in such a way that creates a limited, antagonistic stance for the book as a whole. However, they also detract from what Norris says makes a political poem effective in that they need to be direct and call the specific into focus ("Re: Thesis Research -- Howl Too, Eh?").

By and large, the poems of *RS* clearly present either Stephen Harper or the prorogued parliament as part of the title of the poem or integrate them into the body of the work. Since this is so prevalent, the poems in *Rogue Stimulus* need to be analyzed using alternative criteria that seek to understand how these poems address political subject matter. In such a light, what poetic elements, what types of diction or tone repeat in the poems (if any) and how does this engage with the elements noted in *The Blasted Pine, Howl Too, Eh?* and other political poetic works? How do the poems in this collection play

with forms that are generally beyond the realm of the poetic (or comment upon them)? These questions will be most evidently answered through the concept of poetry as inquiry, and also through considerations of the voice of the speaker in each poem.

It is not just the speaker that needs to be considered in poetry as inquiry -- indeed, like all poetry, the aesthetic choices the author makes effect the presentation of satire. Scully says that "there's a tendency to separate aesthetic quality and political poetry into mutually exclusive categories. [...] Assertions that poetry and politics don't mix are not disinterested statements but political interventions in their own right" (1), signalling that not only are the political and the poetic intertwined, but so too are their aesthetic concerns. This is the point at which satire and parody become necessary constructs not only of subject or object for political poetry, but also for formal structure. As has been shown, parody and satire are fundamental to the development and expression of political poetics, and thus the way their integration takes place is also crucial to political poetry. Given that parody cannot exist without an original source from which to launch, and that satire often uses popular tropes and symbols to achieve its ironic ends, political poetry as a whole relies on that which has come before it -- whether it be a reactionary event, an earlier piece of literature, an item from popular media, or the like. This means that political poetry is not only temporally dependent and is often considered to operate within a limited life span (Sartre says that "[w]orks of the mind should be [...] eaten on the spot"), it also means that most political poetry is specifically referential in a way that

seeks to combat hegemonic views of the original source material or event, as well as the explicit thought contained[17].

One of the first things to note is the way in which form is used for satirical purposes. In terms of non-poetic forms, the first poem to bridge this boundary is Steven Artelle's "Findings: Commission of Inquiry into the Supernatural Animation and Fatal Plunge of the Centre Block of Parliament into the Ottawa River" (17). Though the poem itself is presented as a fictional narrative in a free form, the composition of the title lends the poem a governmental formality that goes beyond subject and complicates the general understanding of "Commission of Inquiry," purporting that these commissions and their findings are in fact also fictional and presented as a kind of story to the Canadian public rather than a critical document as they are designed to be. This implication is reinforced in the poem with the lines "unable to honour its Bills / and mad with grief upon the crib death of another Order Paper" (ll. 9-10 -- on why the Centre Block of Parliament committed suicide) and "*Where there is no vision, the people perish*" (l. 21, italics original -- from the suicide note Parliament left) where Parliament (the building) is personified and given agency and, quite literally, voice, denouncing the acts and lack of action by the government.

In the context of the overall argument of poetry as inquiry, this poem joins with this argument at the most fundamental level: the poem is literally meant to be an inquiry. Hence, this poem uses language that is more politically correct than many of the other

[17] From "For Whom Does One Write?" in *What Is Literature?* published by Harvard University Press in 1988 (pg 75).

poems, and also operates on a structure that mimics actual inquiry reports. Notably, the poem does not make any actual recommendations as to what should be done about the fictional event in question. That stated, the completely fictitious event speaks to a broader interpretation: as discussed, poetry as inquiry does not directly follow the principles of political inquiries. By formatting this poem like an official inquiry, and using the form to guide the aesthetics and the 'force' that it carries, Artelle has created an aesthetic that further emphasizes the fantastical but also the satirical and critical nature of the subject. In doing so, the poem unites the aesthetic form with the subject of the poem, and given the collection that it is featured in, the resonance of the poem is amplified to a point where the poem is not only commenting on the state of affairs in Ottawa (such as the repeated defeat of motions and bills), but also demonstrating something about inquiries at the political level. By using political inquiry as an aesthetic form, the poem underlines the availability of poetic language, or at least poetic forms of language, in documents that are supposed to be bereft of any such language.

On the contrary, it also points out that the poetic is at an odd intersection with the political aesthetic form. In regards to the prevalence in political inquiries of long, objective sentences which purposely avoid the use of demonstrative and direct pronouns, the inquiry as aesthetic creates complications in terms of creating a voice for the speaker. This issue is addressed through the creation of a fantasy event where a fictitious commissioner must report on the very building in which political acts in Canada (at the federal level) take place. The speaker is not only meant to be completely bipartisan, they also must submit what Parliament has said in its suicide note. The inquiry/poem thus

gives voice to the very seat of politics and political power in Canada at the federal level. By writing a poem about the death of the Parliament building itself, and framing the poem as an inquiry, Artelle comments on the perceived corruption and death of Parliament as a political body. The poem is speaking, directly, to the death of the government as a body able to operate on the principles of democracy and good governance. Ironically, the death of the Parliament building and the ensuing inquiry would need to be reported to Parliament, and thus the reader inhabits the place of the politician in relation to the poem. This reversal not only demonstrates the possible poetic language of inquiries, it also emphasizes the voice and agency of the reader in terms of their own political clout.

The poem "Dear Mr. Harper," (81) by The Poets of Nova Institution, also acts to give voice where it is not typically ascribed[18]. In writing their poem in the form of a letter, much as a formal complaint to an MP would be written, the poets create a sense that their poem is crafted in a stronger vein of protest than many of the others in the collection. It is, fundamentally, a representation of poetry as resistance -- advocating for governmental change from the position of a public spokesperson. This resistance is complicated by the agency that the poem provides -- it is presented as questioning prorogation through the analogy of a prison, and given that crime laws have been under constant revision under the Harper government, the poem takes on a strong point of criticism, especially combined with the fact that prisoners are, in Canadian society, a voice that is often unheard in any kind of public or governmental consideration (prisoners

[18] "The Poets of Nova Institution (Truro, N.S.) is a group facilitated by poet and spoken-word artist Ardath Whynacht at Nova Institution, a women's Federal Correctional Facility; members have published in various venues and performed as spoken-word artists and storytellers while in prison and on the outside" (*RS* 103).

cannot vote, for example). Further, like the majority of the poems in *RS*, the poem becomes heavily satirical in that the prisoners are not only left to run the prison themselves (with all of the staff prorogued), but the prisoners actually do so, making their food and governing themselves in such a way that they continue to run the prison as it always has been. While this creates a portrait of the prison and of the people within it as newly self-governed, it also presents a binary in that the prisoners, despite how they are considered by the government, do not riot and try to escape the prison but rather maintain the very system they are part of. The prisoners, despite their status at those who have been judged to have gone against some principle of peace or order demonstrated by their incarceration, actually replicate good governance rather than oppose it. This not only allows for a re-imagining of prisoners as key members of organized society (as opposed to the frequent public view that prisoners are a menace to society), but also demonstrates that peace and order can be shown as secondary to good governance. This, in turn, satirizes the government further because it cannot uphold its own constitutional mandate while those it holds complete dominion over can, and do so of their own free will. Indeed, when the prisoners meet to try to figure out what happened (treating their situation like employment rather than incarceration), they are brought back to their own focus on self-preservation when they are asked "'Why are we talking about the warden? We've got lunch to prepare. / We don't need no boss, nor his laws in here" (ll. 17-18). This pair of lines also introduces strong rhythm, the presence of interior and slant rhymes, such as "mix" and "Smith" at the end of lines 13 and 14; "tobacco" at the end of line 16 and "no;" "prepare" and "here;" and "tools" and "rules" in line 21 as examples. This section also

contains consonance and assonance, arising out of and aside from the rhymes and slant rhymes previously stated. The effect of these rhymes and sound devices is to create a strong sense of rhythm, of boots on concrete or of the kind of whistling, singing tune that is often associated with hard work such as working on the railroad (which connects to that dominant Canadian symbol). This measured gait, with strong resemblance to Dorothy Livesay's "Night and Day," is concretized in the poem in line 22 which reads "They came together, each in stride," further cementing the presence of the prisoners as united, constructive, and productive members of society, even though in the case of the poem it is simply within their own environment (which is the point).

This theme of imprisonment ratifies what political poetry is generally aiming to do in pushing against the established systems. The presentation of prisoners as subjects, and as a subject that is given agency by authors who are imprisoned themselves, in a form that normally advocates against or for campaigns in terms of the government, signifies the satire that is at hand. The address of the letter, though directed to Stephen Harper, inherently seeks to speak to the public by giving voice to marginalized prisoners (in this case, used in opposition to Conservative values). Though it does not take a particular political stance contrary to the Conservative incarceration policies, it associates accountability with Stephen Harper himself. As spokesperson and leader of the hegemonic political party, Harper is individually accountable for the actions of the party, especially since he was internally elected by members of the party. In Harper's case specifically, given the media coverage indicating his control over his Ministers and backbench MPs, Harper becomes the key individual responsible for upholding the

principles of good governance, and hence both the application of his party's policy through their hegemony, but also the constitutional basis that hegemony is built on. This practice, the assigning of accountability to the leader (in this case, the Prime Minister), is common in political poetry. This sense of assigning agency is the polar reaction to giving agency to marginal groups and to voicing personal dissent against political policies.

The use of poetic forms (limericks, ballads, sonnets, etc.) creates a historical bridge that allows for the subject of the poem (the political) to be presented through forms that are typically not, by definition, explicitly politically charged. Most poems in *RS* seek to be critical and satirical without explicitly outlining a course of action for the reader or the public. Generally, Stephen Harper is presented as the 'ruler' or 'King', a totalitarian representation of him as the leader of the government. This departs from the way that political leaders are addressed in Lee's *Civil Elegies*, but resonates with the original representations of the British and the Crown in *The Blasted Pine.* As such, the democratic is ironically suppressed to better allow for voices to come from within democracy. This portrayal is followed in "Dear Mr. Harper" in that there is a turn at the end of the poem where it reads "So, dear Warden..." (l. 23), transforming Harper from the objective Prime Minister into the warden, therefore also metaphorically turning the people of Canada into the prisoners and the nation of Canada into a prison under his policies. The poem ends on a note of explicit resistance and confrontation with the political, saying "And we dare you to try and get in" (l. 27), signalling that the people of Canada will stand up to the government and create their own sense of belonging and nationhood outside of governmental control.

This same tonal shift is present in another formal poem, Jonathan Ball's "O Stephen Harper" (19). The poem is presented in mostly non-rhyming couplets each beginning with "O Stephen Harper," followed by a comma and then a dependant clause. The poem is also broken into two sections, with each section containing eight full lines (four pairs). The first four pairs, lines 1 through 8, appear to be abject praises and compliments towards Harper, spoken in the first person and directed from the speaker to Harper. The second half of the couplets take on the voice of society, and rather than continue the thinly veiled praise for Harper, instead there is a clear tonal and metaphoric shift that demonstrates that Harper is not only minute compared to the masses, but also subject to the changes that the whole world undergoes, not only as a mortal man, but as the leader of Canada. As well, the end of the poem inserts religious imagery in noting the coming of a "second death" and that there is something "walk[ing] on water" (ll. 13,15). This collision of a repetitive fixed structure, a point-of-view shift, a tonal shift, and a metaphoric apocalyptic ending represents the shifting view of Harper and his governmental policies in the general public. The poem comments upon the public reception before, during, and after an election. By first advocating for Harper's success and celebrating his victory, as well as asking for personal promises from him ("this boat could use a bailout"), the poem outlines the political campaigning that goes on during a federal election. The second section, in this same way, is true to how some members of the public react after a period of time has passed after the election: with promises unfulfilled and a world economy that is struggling, Harper is portrayed as someone who cannot stand against the tide of change as he claimed, and he is caught in the undertow of

a tumultuous economy just like everyone else. This portrayal extends to the metaphoric representation that he is, despite his efforts, merely a harbinger of the end of days rather than one who will see Canada through them, a motif which is often portrayed in satirical comedy such as *The Rick Mercer Report* and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*.

This type of satirical comedy (one that deals with the chosen subject as an evil messenger) is especially present in Mike Buckthought's poem titled "Caesura for the New Caesar" (26-27). There is a brief epigraph which notes that the poem is "in the manner of Res Gestae, by Augustus," a funerary inscription that was created by Augustus to celebrate his accomplishments as Emperor of the Roman Empire. The poem's stanzas follow sections found in *Res Gestae* and present Harper in the same light -- for example, the first section of *Res Gestae* reads "In my nineteenth year, on my own initiative and at my own expense, I raised an army with which I set free the state, which was oppressed by the domination of a faction" ("Res Gestae") while the third stanza of the poem reads "At age nineteen and by my own decision, I came to study / economics. I proceeded on the path to duty and deity / in the services of Albertans" (ll. 5-7). Notably, the poem previously establishes that Harper's name is "Stephanus Arpinus Ottavian" (both Arpinus and Ottavian pointing to historical towns in Augustus' Roman Empire) and that he is "imperator of the empire" (ll. 3-4), an interesting twist in that imperator meant, when Augustus came to rule, someone very high in the power structure of Rome, but not necessarily the Emperor himself. This fact can be argued to demonstrate that Harper is a democratically elected leader of Canada and hence not a supreme ruler, though the rest of the poem acts to destabilize this view.

The poem also calls attention to many facets of Stephen Harper's job as Prime Minister and gives him (as the speaker of the poem) a degree of agency that is satirically presented against him. Rather than give Harper a voice the same way that the Poets of Nova Institution gave prisoners a voice, Buckthought uses Harper's voice to make him seem tyrannical and power hungry, much like Roman Emperors are purported to have been. By connecting the existence of the Canadian Senate to that of the Roman Empire, as well as noting the Olympics, Buckthought's poem syncopates Canada with Rome in terms of an Empire -- however, all battles and any mention of vanquishing foes are relegated to politics and general voices of dissent, indicating that Harper is not only fighting those in political circles and other political parties, but also the will of the public should it fail to align with his own wishes. The poem also extends into the future, claiming to have been written by Harper when he is 76 (which would be 2035), a point at which he has "extinguish[ed] all civil discord" and "excelled all / in all authority" (ll. 30, 33-34), and thus advocating that Harper is personally evacuating the principles of good governance and 'abusing' his hegemonic position, reducing the freedoms of the people of Canada and their own personal politics.

This latent radicalism (writing from a hypothetical and political future) is a useful component when considering political poetry. While a sense of agency in the temporal present is necessary for the kind of satirical commentary that is normally present in political poems, a presentation of the future (generally a kind of apocalyptic determinism or "what if") not only resonates through the tone and cadence of the voice of the speaker of the poem, but also speaks to what the poem advocates. Given that such a small

percentage of political poems praise the current modes of power (if they did, they would often be labelled propaganda and hence ignored), this futuristic view causes a rupture in linear thinking about the political subject in that a radicalization of the future causes a reflexive view of the present. That is to say that a temporal shift not only affects the time progression present in the piece but also the tone and metaphor upon which the poem operates: a shift of tone from praise or criticism to a negative future view creates a cyclic poem (one that changes reference upon being re-read) and the metaphor of the issue at hand is brought back into a realistic understanding in terms of the argument for change. This function within political poems complicates satire in that the commentary is actually made more real and present the more it takes a satirical approach in terms of time. Though satire is often made more concrete the further away from the real it strays, this element of a temporal variable takes on a unique position in a political commentary, especially given that in a democratic society, the oft-portrayed effects of supreme power into the future (or of a continually degrading economy) are not feasible nor applicable unless a radical shift in public perception and law were to occur.

Sometimes, the position of the hegemonic leader is used as a satirical vantage point for a poem. This can be seen through another closed form used in the portrayal of Stephen Harper: the sonnet. The most prevalent example in *RS* is Jesse Patrick Ferguson's "Or Whatever: A Sonnet by Mr. Harper" (51) -- once again, the poem seeks to give voice to Stephen Harper as a composer of art. In this poem, because it is a found poem (comprised of quotes from *The Globe and Mail* and *The Star*), Stephen Harper is, to a limited extent, the actual speaker of the poem, though he has no control over content or

context; rather that is determined by Ferguson and the mandate of the collection. In the digital media age, this kind of found poetics, restricted to a closed form, is often found at the site of parody (i.e. internet mash-ups and dubbing). This type of vocal agency is removed one step further in that the quotes found in *The Globe and Mail* and *The Star* are often presented from video or interview transcripts, meaning that the original words were vocalized, then recorded, and then altered into this poem, and thus re-vocalized; in this way, the poem allows for a re-creation of the voice of the speaker (in this case Harper) but also makes a comment on the availability of the public record and how even political remarks and media sound bites can be turned into poems that may completely repurpose the words of the politician. If the words do not come from Harper himself through this type of live, vocal source, they can be assumed to be released from his Press Office to the media, and hence his control of content or context is removed even further, and yet by including direct quotations (albeit bastardized ones), they are his vocal words, not simply the words that are ascribed to him, and hence he maintains some personal authority (though, of course, the poem aims to undermine this very fact).

The poem is also a collision between art and artists (as a source of creation and agency) and what Harper has said, although his voice is, as noted, beyond his control. This creates a problematic dichotomy for the poem, one which appears often in considerations of political poetry: where do satire, parody, and criticism end and where does propaganda begin? Propaganda, by definition, promotes and ascribes to a very particular viewpoint (often political) and seeks to change the minds of the public through mass distribution. Propaganda is used almost exclusively as a negative term in that it does

not promote free thought or advocate looking at multiple sides of an issue, though it is most often not the popular view. Political poetry, because it often rallies against the political norm and often presents an opposing view (though it is rarely a drawn out, explained view that could manifest as its own stance without acknowledging the presence of the opposite) can be construed as propaganda if it presents a vein of political ideology that is at odds with the established governance. However, a polarity of ideology does not necessarily inscribe something as propaganda, and hence *Rogue Stimulus* and other works considered here are not defined as such: rather, they are artistic forms of inquiry into the powers that be in Canada.

This delineation becomes less clear in a work like "Or Whatever: A Sonnet by Stephen Harper" because the poem specifically calls Harper's choices to cut funding to the arts into question. In this way, the poem/poet is advocating against something which affects him directly -- however, this statement should be taken in light of the form. Prior to the satirical claim that "it doesn't mean you're slashing funding to some artist" (l. 13), the volta in the sonnet appears in the middle of line 9. The volta appears as a literal break in the poem with "All" appearing on a new line after an ellipsis on the line before. This break thus becomes both a tonal and literal break in the poem, causing the shift to be rectified as a physical manifestation. This also causes the shift to appear as if in an interview -- by this it is meant that the speaker (Mr. Harper) seems to have gone off of his 'written notes' and is now bringing the conversation back to the message he wants to convey. Given that the line before the break reads "people at, you know, a rich gala..." (l. 13), it is clear that the poem represents a detachment from the inscribed values of that

line, which are inherently presented as Conservative values and values associated with capitalism and fiscal gain. As such, when the tonal shift emphasizes that government spending has actually gone up and that this spending is subsidized by taxpayers, the poem undercuts the very value that it portrays taxpayers as having, in that they pay into these programs. Rather, the poem demonstrates a portrayal of the public as miniscule and their views as unimportant aside from their fiscal contributions and that their complaints are what, in turn, cause spending to go up. This air of nonchalant commentary harkens back to the title of the poem and the dissidence and apathy that it presents as a forefront to the subject matter of the poem.

Apathy, whether metaphoric or representational, is often present in political poems. This political facet of society is often addressed in such a way that aims to demonstrate to the reader that the general public is apathetic to the actions of governmental leaders and that governmental leaders are apathetic to the will of the general public. In this way, resistance poetics and the enabling of voice and agency calls out not only the public figures who make the decisions, but also those who elect the public leaders and fail to hold them accountable. This creates several parallels in terms of poetry as inquiry: first, there is an equal share of concern as to all those who are part of these decisions, meaning that the public is as intrinsically linked as politicians to any and all 'blame' linked to political apathy. Second, there is the desire to hold individuals accountable; this desire is directly connected to the aims of an inquiry, especially in light of the poet presenting this inquiry as a demand from the public. By speaking through the poem not only as a member of the public, but as a non-partisan third party, the poem can

present findings regardless of who it appears to discredit. Thirdly, by giving voice and agency, the poems further act under poetry as inquiry in that inquiries often seek to alleviate a wrong levelled against a group of marginalized people; even though the speaker-subject of the poem is not marginalized, the poem can integrate marginal voices and groups in order to present an alternative view point. Finally, this apathy also echoes the periodical results of an inquiry after it is presented to a governmental body: they do not always take all of the recommendations under consideration or act upon them, indicating a possibly apathetic response to the inquiry, much like an apathetic voice in poetry as inquiry.

With this in mind, political poetry not only satirizes the actions of political leaders and acts as a form of resistance against those decisions, but it also satirizes the public and the general population of voters in order to attempt to galvanize them, to get them to engage with both art and politics, and encourage and inspire thought about the issue at hand -- usually, in the case of Canada, to do with non-violent fiscal choices that operate within Canada's democratic society. This is not always the case, as Dionne Brand's *Inventory* points out, and arguments have been made as to why a view inwards (to one's own nation) could be considered simple "navel gazing," especially in light of the modern global village and international considerations.

Rather than overtly state that this type of voice needs to be heard, political poems often use satirically colonial references when speaking to political agents in Canada and how they 'rule' the country, In *RS*, an example of this would be Christopher Doda's "To His Royal Highness" (41). As in previously explored political poems, Stephen Harper is

objectified as a self-proclaimed royal ruler of Canada, though his name does not appear directly in the poem; rather, the poem makes reference to his act of proroguing parliament in the first line of the poem, "Because, like you, I too am both pro-rogue," a play on also being in favour of completing an unpopular act and a reminder of the title of the collection. Doda's poem departs from previously discussed works in its heavy use of consonance (which turns into alliteration), specifically with the letter p. This device creates a dominant sense of rhythm, of a consistent sound on the ear which, in its function, acts as a reminder of subject and accountability. That is, Prime Minister, Harper, Parliament, and prorogue all contain pronounced p sounds. In this way, though the poem doesn't not contain the words "Harper" or "Prime Minister," there is a prevalent harking back to these terms as over-arching subjects of the poem and a remarking that these terms are under commentary in the poem itself. Given the collection that the poem is part of, and the clear understanding of whom the poem is about, the sharply satirical metaphors used, such as "deadlines at work" (l. 8) and "[g]etting a real job" (l. 18) seem more grounded, present, and explicit than in some other poems which actually contain Harper's name. As well, the poem contains "because you're a progressive-conservative" (l. 6), connecting the political ideology to the text.

The presence of vulgarity, "A real fucking *pro*" (l. 8), signals a shift in the poem from a blatant conversation with the actions of Harper and the speaker's distaste for them to a list/itinerary form of poem that mentions all of the things the speaker is avoiding doing. What this section accomplishes is to demonstrate that Harper's act of proroguing parliament is a luxury which should not be afforded, and this is achieved through the

sarcastic portrayal of mundane concerns that are more likely to affect an average member of the Canadian public -- and, since that member could see that they are not able to put off things as Harper is able to do, it causes a tonal inclination towards a view that the Prime Minister should not put parliament on hold (or any other political item for that matter) simply because it is what they desire to do, but rather that all actions should take place in a timely manner. The list creates a consistent but building sense of rhythm, a sense of cadence moving faster and faster as the rhythm becomes more noticeable, replicating the feeling of snowballing stress and the multitude of deadlines the average person deals with day to day. This cadence is hampered and though it gets faster, each beat takes place with a heavier foot and a more sarcastic tone centered on the juxtaposition of a "real job" compared to the life of a politician. The items in the list shift from demonstrating a typical or even below-average quality of living: "fixing the leaky / Faucet," "an appointment with my loan shark," "paying the stripper," "[g]etting a real job," and "that final / Chemotherapy treatment" (ll. 9-10,12, 14, 18, 18-19) to the possible lifestyle of someone who would be addressed as "your Royal Highness" such as "my knighthood" and "taking the Mensa entrance test" (ll. 11, 16). This dichotomy emphasizes the satirical nature of the poem and calls to attention the highly rhetorical in the political.

This list ends with the beginning of a concentrated section of alliteration. In the last ten lines of the poem, thirty five words start with the letter p, each line containing the letter at least twice (excluding the last line). The presence of all of these p words creates a crescendo finale to the poem, utilizing the weight of the list described above to make the final lines read like an avalanche of words, accusations, and a marked contrast between

the aims of a poet as performer and revealer and the speaking abilities and promises of a politician. These accusations call Harper a "prophet" who uses "propaganda" to "spin this prorogue pronto for your prominence" (ll. 26-27), which calls not only his actions into question but also what kind of media spin Harper's office and party put on his decision to prorogue. The end of the poem, in combination with the previously stated facts, shifts the cadence and implied opinion/subject of the poem once again, which is evident through a shift in sound. The final two lines, "And though you protest and prosecute (maybe sue), like you, / I too brook no interference" (ll. 28-29) slow the rhythm of the poem down considerably and also depart from the prominent p sound, instead ending on the assonance of the oo sound, ending the poem on a standoffish, critical note that sounds soothing but both undercuts the criticism in the lines above and reinforces the personal politics involved.

This shift and departure, and the words in the final line, bring poetry as inquiry into clear focus. If one considers the poem in the structure of a published inquiry or commission, the end of the document (typically the "Conclusions and Recommendations" section) breaks away from the presentation of data that comprises the main body of the report. In such a way, the conclusion slows down and shifts the way the information is presented, instead seeking to point out the meaning of all of the information contained within. The conclusions section also departs from the body of historical and statistical information, and hence the style of writing shifts as well, as mirrored in the poem. This is also evident through the line "I too brook no interference" (l. 29), indicating that the speaker of the poem does not wish to be personally involved in the situation that he has

outlined in it. This can be seen in one of two ways: either that the speaker is trying to remove himself from any culpability in relation to the subject of the poem, or else that the speaker is making no judgement against Stephen Harper (or at least not a partisan one) despite what the poem says. While both readings present the speaker and the poem differently, the second way is most viable -- this is mainly because the speaker has already taken culpability into account by presenting the poem and making the poetic and subject choices that they have.

So what does it mean that the speaker is making no, or at least a non-partisan, judgement? Again, this connects back to poetry as inquiry. Just as commissioners are to avoid personal involvement or bias from any groups, so too does the speaker of the poem. As well, the use of sound devices and the alternating cadence of the poem demonstrate a relation to the varying sections of an inquiry report, and also show how the legal-political/aesthetic-poetic principles are linked and operate in political poetry. In this poem, by repeating the same sounds throughout, there are echoes of repetitive use of 'buzz words' which are often found in political documents. Beyond this, the poem features many of these types of words (notably all beginning with 'p') to re-iterate that diction can be manipulated to work in the favour of the speaker, regardless of the aims or restrictions placed upon them. However, sound devices are not the only demonstration of the aesthetic-poetic at work in political poetry.

Exemplified through "To His Royal Highness," list poems are a formal structure often used in political poetics. As a more concrete example, one can look at Jeanette Lynes' poem "Fifteen Things to Do in Winter if You're Prime Minister of Canada" (ll. 63-

64). Lynes' poem is divided into fifteen numbered items, and beginning with 7, the items on the list begin to build in a linear fashion, allowing each new point on the list to comment on what has come before it. In this same way, the items listed in the poem also get more and more farcical, radicalizing the list from a possible list of chores or to-dos into an openly satirical mockery of Stephen Harper and the few personal details that are well known to the public (and commented upon by satirical media). The best example of this is 13 which states:

> Go through the *wife's closet*, find pink boa from
> Charity Costume Ball. Pour a healthy shot of brandy
> in *curvaceous snifter from diplomat whose name still*
> *escapes you*. Fling boa over your cashmere leisure
> sweater. Seat yourself comfortably at *piano*. Play *golden*
> *hits from the seventies* while *waiting to hear back from*
> *George W.* Think of *old girlfriends* while tickling the
> ivories. Enjoy the gentle movement of the boa's faux
> feathers in the refined air of the drawing room; (ll. 35-43, italics added
> to signal subjects already mentioned in previous points)

At this point in the poem, many of the previously mentioned items culminate in one scene, a play-by-play of Harper's actions which allows for a reading of not only what Harper is doing, but also what mindset he is assumed to possess. The items which are re-mentioned are made important by this repetition, but they are also signals of what is known about Harper (such as playing the piano or wearing a boa), or what is often wondered about public figures (such as old girlfriends or what music they like). This collision, in turn, acts not only to demonstrate that Harper is a 'regular' person with his own oddities and unique likes and characteristics, but also points out the kind of 'fantastical' pitch his life takes on through his office as Prime Minster. As well, evidence

of such events as the boa-wearing arise from mass media video sharing, a function which both promotes and complicates the personal lives of public figures.

This complication is also an introduction to the public into the domain of the private. Much like Page's poem "Election Day," the intersection of the personal and the political is key for political poetry in Canada, and is especially important as well for the type of investigation allowed through poetry as inquiry. In political poetry, the public enters the private space to arrive at a definite conclusion of accountability. Much as a politician's personal life would not be excluded from an inquiry if it was relevant, the legal principles that govern inquiries in this manner are the same principles that complement political poetry's choices when it comes to including the personal. Though political poetry has evolved away from such works as "W.L.M.K." that are outright attacks against a particular member, *RS* on the whole demonstrates that political poetry now signals a much less obvious, satirical, and humourous analysis and presentation of the lives of politicians and their parties. What else does this intersection show? It also recognizes the personal stakes of politicians and of individual members of the public in poetry as inquiry -- though the poet is often silent in the poem, or else represented through the speaker, each of the voices that sound off through a political poem all have a level of accountability that are typically maintained or else explicitly ridiculed for the poem to comment critically on the political.. The poet must not only balance their portrayal of the public (who demand the poem as inquiry), but also their portrayal of his or her own ideologies and the voice/ideologies of any political members that are subjects

or objects in the poem; poetry as political inquiry means that each voice is given its own space, and thus each voice submits their own statement to the poem.

Rogue Stimulus, with its political and temporal focus, allows for an in-depth conversation and intersection of the poetic and the political. In Canada, such a collection is rarely produced, and the nature of its publication further outlines the importance and time-bound relevance that are at play in Canadian political poetry. By focusing on the actions of one political figure (for the most part), *Rogue Stimulus* demonstrates the evolution of Canadian political poetry from either generalized commentary on the political as a whole or aimed personal attacks, such as seen in *The Blasted Pine*, to a genre dominated by satire, specific and personal references, and the allocation of voice and agency to those who are normally 'silent' in poetry. Likewise, *Rogue Stimulus* allows for a discussion of political poetry as inquiry, as I have outlined, as well as investigations into voice and the aims of the poet as spokesman and as individual.

Chapter 5 -- Parliament Hill: Conclusion

To restate, political poetry, in the context explored here, does not align with any one particular political viewpoint, nor is it ascribed to any dominant or marginalized group or region, but is rather transideological, as Hutcheon suggests. This fact, in and of itself, separates political poetry from other poetries that have been considered widely in Canada. However, much as any writer can write a poem about nature, so too can any poet write an explicitly political poem, and hence political poetry escapes (or attempts to escape) the restrictive effects of poetry that is defined, in some way, by who the author identifies as. Rather, political poetry relies on explicit external political references (understood or not by the reader/public) and poetry as inquiry to attain a uniting principle which is not relegated to a particular political viewpoint.

This is, to a large degree, why political poetry will continue to have progeny and be relevant in a poetic and political landscape. Like the inquiries that are published by independent agencies and auditors, political poetry is non-partisan to the degree that it is the voice of the public (which, being such a large body, cannot have one dominant political ideology ascribed to it). It also strives towards what some might call a level playing field, at least within the literary field -- a place where all authors are on equal footing and it is what they have to say, not even necessarily how they say it (Scott and Smith acknowledge they included some "bad poems" in *TBP*) that unites them and allows all of them to write. While this may seem so broad as to encompass mundane and extremely radical views, the definitions surrounding poetry as inquiry limit this kind of poetry to say that it must be based on fact and seek to achieve an end that is not directly

partisan -- should a poem strive towards a particular ideology, it is either an ideological poem or poem as propaganda, but not a political one (for the purposes here). As detailed earlier, ideological subscriptions undermine the value and quality of a political poem, rendering its force both muted and unattainable to a portion of readership simply based on ideological differences.

The way that ideology and propaganda are avoided is through the use of satire, irony, and wit. Political poems, from their first notable collection in *TBP*, relied on at least some minor form of satire and irony (and usually a degree of mimicry) to express their political message. This is the most distinct departure from political inquiries that poetry as inquiry features; however, it also demonstrates that the public is willing to engage with political inquiry that they have demanded in a way that is not wholly 'dry' but still adheres to the facts of the situation(s) at hand. The poet as auditor or commissioner is thus allowed to ask whichever questions they please, and though the political sphere has rarely (if ever) responded to this kind of public inquiry, the use of quotations from politicians and other media sources creates a voice that functions through at least three distinct positions: that of the public, that of the politician/party, and that of the author/speaker. While these three positions can be and are often muddied and inseparable in political poems, the humour, irony, and satire involved in political poetry demonstrate that this intertwinement does not, ultimately, attempt to remove blame from any particular position (should blame be ascribed). Rather, the opposite is often true: the speaker often makes it apparent that not only does the politician or party need to act to rectify what

they've done, but so too does the public need to act to make their opinion known (the author is folded into the public in this case).

This is the main reason that poetry as advocacy, poetry as witness, poetry as protest, and poetry as dissidence cannot be used to accurately describe Canadian political poetry. Poetry as protest and dissidence arise out of conflicting or at least separable ideological points: protest is a term that radicalizes and objectifies what is being protested against, and also necessarily ties the protest to a specific event or person and hence is reactionary. Poetry as dissidence, protest, and witness all rely on some form of 'rebellion' or action that must come from outside the hegemony and, with the exception of poetry as witness, typically center around an ideology or a political gain that can be had by an interested party, whether or not that is the aim of the poetry in and of itself. The principles of peace and order are (from the hegemonic viewpoint) typically opposed by these types of poems; they seek to be disruptive and radical. They do not, by and large, consider the hegemonic in a bipartisan way -- the aim of these poetries is to simply present the personal political or the oppositional, not undermine it satirically in the same way that explicit political poetry does. Poetry as inquiry seeks to explore the relation between the hegemonic (in terms of party/policy), the personal political, and the political and constitutional framework that Canada is built upon, offering a plethora of political and societal viewpoints without carrying the banner for one ideology or another.

Poetry as inquiry/commission is hence more suitable as a terminology which encompasses and describes Canadian political poetry and its evolution. Political poetry evolved from the attack nature seen in *TBP* to a more muted, public-facing questioning

seen in *HTE* (with deference to the USA). In more contemporary renditions, Canadian political poetry comments and criticizes both the political and the public in a way which ultimately holds all parties responsible for their part in the political landscape, regardless of ideology or hegemony (though the political hegemony is criticized most often). In this way, political poetry has become not only an avenue for the poet as spokesperson to speak to the public (themself included) and express their own political views without creating propaganda, but it has also becomes a tool of political accountability and I, for one, hope that Canadian political poetry continues to evolve and propagate in Canada's strong poetic traditions.

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Appendix 1 -- Poems

"The Member of Parliament" by Wilson MacDonald (*TBP* 14)

In years he hadn't read a book
And boasted this at every chance
But he possessed a knowing look
And silver jingled in his pants.

And when bright silver jingles there
Election is a simple thing;
But you must love the Lord and swear
You will be true to England's King.

And honourable Josiah Boyd
Could wave a flag and all of that
And this made up for any void
Beneath the honest member's hat.

Sometimes he squirmed when cultured men
Revealed his grossness with intent;
But he felt quite at home again
When he sat down in parliament.

He banged his desk as any lad
And loved to make the page-boys run;
And hoped the galleries would be glad
To look at him--their favourite son.

He stole, and boasted of his swag.
And, when his victims would rebel,
He wrapped himself in England's flag
And sang, "God Save the King", like Hell.

"The Modern Politician" by Archibald Lampman (*TBP* 35)

What manner of soul is his to whom high truth
Is but the plaything of a feverish hour,
A dangling ladder to the ghost of power!
Gone are the grandeurs of the world's iron youth,
When kings were mighty, being made by swords.

Now comes the transit age, the age of brass,
When clowns into the vacant empires pass,
Blinding the multitude with specious words.
To them faith, kinship, truth and verity,
Man's sacred rights and very holiest thing,
Are but the counters at a desperate play,
Flippant and reckless what the end may be,
So that they glitter, each his little day,
The little mimic of a vanished king.

"Election Day" by PK Page (*TBP* 37-38)

1

I shut the careful door of my room and leave
letters, photographs and the growing poem--
the locked zone of my tight and personal thought
slough off--recede from down the green of the street.
Naked almost among the trees and wet--
a strike for lightning.

And everything rushes at me, either fierce or friendly
in a sudden world of bulls.
Faces on posters in the leaves call out
the violent *yes* or *no* of my belief,
are quick or slow or halted to my pulse.

Oh, on this beautiful day, the weather wooing
the senses and the feel of walking
smooth in my summer legs
I lope through the tall and trembling grass and call
the streaming banner of my public colour.

2

Here in this place, the box and private privet
denote the gentleman and shut him in--
for feudally he lives and the feud on.
Colonel Evensby with his narrow feet
will case his blue blood ballot for the Tory

and in the polling station I shall meet
the smiling, rather gentle overlords

propped by their dames and almost twins in tweeds,
and mark my X against them and observe
my ballot slip, a bounder, in the box.

And take my route again through the lazy streets
alive with all-out blossoming, through tress
that stint no colour for their early summer
and past an empty lot where an old dog
appoints himself as guardian of the green.

3

Radio owns my room as the day ends.
The slow returns begin, the voice calls
the yes's and no's that ring or toll;
the districts all proclaim themselves in turn
and public is my room, not personal.

Midnight. I wander on the quiet street,
its green swamped by the dark; a pale glow
sifts from distant lamps. Behind the leaves
the faces on the posters wait and blow,
tattered a little and less urgent now.

I pass the empty lot. The old dog
has trotted off to bed. The neighbourhood
is neatly hedged with privet still, the lights
are blinking out in the enormous homes.
Gentlemen, for the moment, you may sleep.

"W.L.M.K." by FR Scott (*TBP* 36-37)

How shall we speak of Canada,
Mackenzie King dead?
The Mother's boy in the lonely room
With his dog, his medium and his ruins?

He blunted us.

We had no shape
Because he never took sides,
And no sides

Because he never allowed them to take shape.

He skilfully avoided what was wrong
Without saying what was right,
And never let his on the one hand
Know what his on the other hand was doing.

The height of his ambition
Was to pile a Parliamentary Committee on a Royal Commission,
To have "conscription if necessary
But not necessarily conscription",
To let Parliament decide--
Later.

Postpone, postpone, abstain.

Only one thread was certain:
After World War I
Business as usual,
After World War II
Orderly decontrol.
Always he led us back to where we were before.

He seemed to be in the centre
Because we had no centre,
No vision
To pierce the smoke-screen of his politics.

Truly he will be remembered
Wherever men honour ingenuity,
Ambiguity, inactivity, and political longevity.

Let us raise up a temple
To the cult of mediocrity,
Do nothing by halves
Which can be done by quarters.

"Political Meeting" by AM Klein (*TBP* 40-41)
(for Camillien Houde)

On the school platform, draping the folding seats,

they wait the chairman's praise and glass of water.
Upon the wall the agonized Y initials their faith.

Here all are laic; the skirted brothers have gone.
Still, their equivocal absence is felt, like a breeze
that gives curtains the sounds of surplices.

The hall is yellow with light, and jocular;
suddenly some one lets loose upon the air
the ritual bird which the crowd in snares of singing

catches and plucks, throat, wings, and little limbs.
Fall the feathers of sound, like *alouette's*.
The chairman, now, is charming, full of asides and wit,

building his orators, and chipping off
the heckling gargoyles popping in the hall.
(Outside, in the dark, the street is body-tall,
flowered with faces intent on the scarecrow thing
that shouts to thousands the echoing
of their own wishes.) The Orator has risen!

Worshipped and loved, their favourite visitor,
a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets,
full of wonderful moods, tricks, imitative talk,

he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome,
not snobbish, not of the *Grande Allée! Un homme!*
Intimate, informal, he makes bear's compliments

to the ladies; is gallant; and grins;
goes for the balloon, his opposition, with pins;
jokes also on himself, speaks of himself

in the third person, slings slang, and winks with folklore;
and knows now that he has them, kith and kin.
Calmly, therefore, he begins to speak of war,

praises the virtue of being *Canadien*,
of being at peace, of faith, of family,
and suddenly his other voice: *Where are your sons?*

He is tearful, choking tears; but not he

would blame the clever English; in their place
he'd do the same; maybe.

Where *are* your sons?
        The whole street wears one face,
shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
the body-odour of race.

"The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward" by Leonard Cohen (*TBP* 49-50)

Come, my brothers,
let us govern Canada,
let us find our serious heads,
let us dump asbestos on the White House,
let us make the French talk English,
not only here but everywhere,
let us torture the Senate individually
until they confess,
let us purge the New Party,
let us encourage the dark races (10)
so they'll be lenient
when they take over,
let us make the CBC talk English,
let us all lean in one direction
and float down
to the coast of Florida,
let us have tourism,
let us flirt with the enemy,
let us smelt pig-iron in our back yards,
let us sell snow (20)
to under-developed nations,
(Is it true one of our national leaders
was a Roman Catholic?)
let us terrorize Alaska,
let us unite
Church and State,
let us not take it lying down,
let us have two Governor Generals
at the same time,

let us have another official language, (30)
let us determine what it will be,
let us give a Canada Council Fellowship
to the most original suggestion,
let us teach sex in the home
to parents,
let us threaten to join the U.S.A.
and pull out at the last moment,
my brothers, come,
our serious heads are waiting for us somewhere
like Gladstone bags abandoned (40)
after a coup d'état,
let us put them on very quickly,
let us maintain a stony silence
on the St. Lawrence Seaway.

"Maple Leaf Rag" by Endre Farkas (*HTE* 23-26)

I walked across the polluted St. Lawrence and sat
under the rusted shadow f an abandoned VIA
locomotive to look at my country through
constitutional committeed-out eyes
and wondered why.

Brian Mulroney sat beside me
on his conservative behind.
Countryman, we thought very different thoughts,
me of Canada Canadian from sea to sea to CBC,
you of a Canada franchised from sea to sea
to oil-spilled sea.

The oily water mirrored the for-sale sky, in which the
for-sale sun crossed the for-sale Prairies, and sank
behind the for-sale Rockies.

Look at the maple leaves, I said
(no not the hockey team).
There was only a shadow against the sky,
pock-marked like Sudbury,
smelly from a dead branch plant.

I rushed up--horrified
it was my first acid maple leaf,
it evoked visions of a Canada past:
savages like Leif the Lucky
other Europeans like Cabot and Cartier,
looking for La Chine and Indy
and Brébeuf and his brethren
fishing for redskin souls
coureur de bois chasing beavers in the woods,
hewers of wood, drawers of water,
planting their seeds,
Susanna roughing it in the bush,
Laura and her cow cross-border spying,
Fathers of Con-federation sugaring off,
and like Nature of Things,
when suddenly I had another vision
on television: images of our politicians
meeting at Meech Lake; custom-tailored men
dressed as real estate agents
selling our century 21.

And the gray maple leaf flag against the foreign sky
fluttered obediently over a castrated beaver.
And waiters sang
"When Irish eyes are smiling"
As they carved up the country
Like a sugar pie
For the voracious multinational mouths
My maple leaf! O little beaver!
I dropped my guard!
Je me souviens
that once upon a time
the land was the natives'
that is, no one's,
...but not for long.

This new Jerusalem,
these quelques arpents de neiges,
this country that God gave to Cain,
this obstacle on the way to the Orient,
this accident, has always been up for sale.
And the bottom lines and pin-striped eyes
filled with U.S. envy are again calling for tenders.

I see The Chin That Walks Like A Man
and his patronaged senators deal this land
from the U.I.C. of Bonavista to the Arctic sea spills,
from the clear-cut forests to the Great Lakes sewers, and
sing that this land was made for the U.S.A.
And they are right!
I want in on the deal!

So I grabbed up the eviscerated maple leaf
and held it like an offering
and stood on guard with Big Chin
and declared to all: Yes!
We are dead, bleak, dusty, imageless Canadians
we are hyphenated,
we are failed Americans,
we are for sale, reduced to clear.

We are blessed with an identity, I think.
We are beautiful, brilliant maples
grown from seed
into sturdy maples
ready to be cut and shipped
from the glorious Group of Seven landscape.
to the homes of the brave and tarriff-free! [sic]

"Au Canada!" by Endre Farkas (*HTE* 48-52)

Canada we're given it all away
and now we're nothing
Canada $00.86US December 1990.
We can't understand our own languages.
Canada when will we end this maudit guerre?
Mange la merde! All dressed!
I don't feel good, lâche pas la patate!
Canada when will we be a mosaic?
When will we take off our winter tires?
When will we look at ourselves on CBC?
When will we be worthy of our Native Canadians?
Canada why are our libraries full
of American bestsellers?
Canada when will we teach CanLit to our MPs?

I'm sick of our Royal commissions.
When can we go to any province and feel at home?
Canada, after all, it's moi et toi,
qui sont perfectly bilingue.
Eh/n'est ce pas?
Our selling out is too much for me.
Who wants to be Canadian? To be or not to be?
There must be some other way to settle this debate.

Mulroney is in the States.
I know he's on their payroll.
Are you becoming the 51st state
or is this a Free Trade joke?
I'm trying to come to a consensus.
I refuse to give up my Canajunism.
Canada Stop/Arrête. I know que je fais hostie!
Canada the acid snowflakes are falling.
I won't read the Globe & Mail, just Croc.
Every day somebody goes on to become a senator.
Canada I feel sentimental about Pierre Trudeau.

I don't know the words to the national anthem.
Canada I used to be an immigrant when I was a kid
now I'm an allophone.
I have bilingual vision and multicultural vibrations.
I dance ethnic dances every chance I get.
You should see me reading Canadian poetry.
I am talking to myself again.
My friends think I'm perfectly crazy.
My mind is made up for me.
There is going to be a referendum.
Canada I still haven't told you what you did
to la plume de ma tante
...after class

Are we going to let our cultural life be run by
ABC/NBC/CBS/PBS?
We're obsessed with ABC/NBC/CBS/PBS.
We watch them all day
Their logos stare at us whenever we channel hop.
We sit in our homes for days and watch
As The Stomach Turns, Arsenio Hole,
The Price is Wrong, and the Grossout Whorero shows.

Hungry America likes to eat out.
Wants to make us eat Ronald MacPoutines.
Wants to take the musical ride out of our Mounties.
Needs Canadian Time & Life.
Wants our auto plants shut down
Wants to see the USA in our Japanese Chevrolets.
Wants us to fill up at Uncle Sam's,
wear its L.L. Beans, buy at its factory outlets,
some its Camels, and drink
its Real Thing 24 hours a day.

They're always selling us the American dream.
Canadians are serious about the American dream.
Canadians are serious.
Everyone is serious but me.

Au Canada
how can I write my litany
in your maudit sell out mood?
Canada Front Page Challenge must not die.
Canada we are the Dionne Quintuplets.
Canada when I was six poppa took me to the Forum
and the game was good
and everyone was a Canadiens fan.
It was all so magnifique.
Je me souviens, I remember
how good the team was in 1976.
Guy Lafleur was in bloom.
Every year was a Stanley Cup.

Oka is rising against us.
We haven't got a Loto of a chance.
We'd better consider our national resources.
Our national resources consist of
two official languages,
billions of debts,
a not-withstanding clause
Ben Johnson on steroids
and millions on the dole.

I say nothing about the too few rich
Who are GSTing us to death.

whose money hides in tax shelters abroad
in numbered accounts under lock and key.
Who are abolishing health care programs.
The education, she is next to go.

Help.
Canada this is serious.
Canada is this you I see on Newsworld?
My ambition is to be Canadian
whatever that means.

Canada you don't really believe
that there is such a thing as Free Trade.
It's like Free Lunch.
Comme Libre Service and Free Ride.
It's like Free Speech.
Canada trade Mulroney!
We don't believe our officials' comments anymore.
We're too farsighted.
We have seen the future and it is
Canucks.

Au Canada, ça suffit!
OK! Allons-y hostie!
OK! Let us go, you and I!
Let us turn our backs on this,
Let us put on our mukluks and our tuques
Let us mount our skidoos and ride proudly
into the glowing Northern Lights.

"The Only Canadian in Bangor, Maine Turns His Thoughts Homeward" by Ken Norris (*HTE* 53-54)

Come my Two Solitudes,
let us save Canada Bonds
let us find our serious identity
let us dump maple syrup on the White House
let us make the English speak English
        in Québec & French everywhere else
let us torture our senators
        by making them stay awake,

let us purge the Bloc Québécois
let us encourage our natives
        to emigrate
        so we can build James Bay III, IV, V
let us make the CBC abandon news
        and documentaries
let us entice Florida to separate
        and become our eleventh province
let us destroy tourism
by having road signs that mean nothing,
let us trade Newfoundland for St Pierre et Miquelon
let us trade our politicians
        to Latin America
(Is it true one of our national leaders
        is intelligent?)
let us capture and terrorize Detroit,
let us unite
        French and English in debt,
let us do it on skidoos,
let us have ten Prime Ministers
        at the same time,
let us have no official languages,
let us give Canada Council grants
        to the most ignorant MP
let us determine who that might be
let us teach joual in Westmount
let us threaten to join the USA
        and at the last moment do it,

My two solitudes come,
our sovereignty is waiting for us somewhere
north of Sault Ste Marie
south of St Louis de Ha-Ha
let us find it quickly
let us stand on guard
for another year or two,
or until someone makes us a better offer.

"Findings: Commission of Inquiry into the Supernatural Animation and Fatal Plunge of the Centre Block of Parliament into the Ottawa River" by Steven Artelle (*Rogue Stimulus* 17)

abruptly the civil gothic
heaved against its impaired foundation
and spewed the irregular nourishment of armed guards and tourists
across the lawn

the final undigested assembly
watched with its astonishment at half-mast
understanding the emaciated pile was starved for company
and ruined by the recurring failure of business
unable to honour its Bills
and mad with grief upon the crib death of another Order Paper

the Centre Block crouched
sweating gargoyles
every shard of stained glass inhaled into its vacant chambers
before the final howl rang down the Hall of Honour's empty
throat
        This time I bring myself down!
and the blameless Library shrieked
as the building vaulted its entire mass over the cliff edge

only stray cats were fearless then
peering down at the Psalm
inscribed on the Peace Tower's western face
a suicide note half sunk in the dark brown water
        Where there is no vision, the people perish.

"O Stephen Harper" by Jonathan Bell (*Rogue Stimulus* 19)

1.

O Stephen Harper, I am moving to your riding,
tell me what wine I should bring.

O Stephen Harper, I am casting my vote
in bronze to await your majority.

O Stephen Harper, if a fisher of men
then your nets will be choked with such fish.

O Stephen Harper, if there are bailouts
then this boat could use a bailout.

2.

O Stephen Harper, what can you do,
you are only one man and I'm an ocean.

O Stephen Harper, with your thimble
you must move my beach from here to here.

O Stephen Harper, there is a second death
and it's coming and everyone's waiting.

O Stephen Harper, something walks on the waters,
it looks human and we are all scared.

"Caesura for the New Caesar" by Mike Buckthought (*Rogue Stimulus* 26-27)
(in the manner of Res Gestae, by Augustus)

These noble deeds of deified Stephanus are recorded
on two bronze pillars set up in Rome.

Thus may it be recorded how I, Stephanus Arpinus Ottavian,
came to be imperator of the empire.

At age nineteen and by my own decision, I came to study
economics. I proceeded on the path to duty and deity
in the service of all Albertans.

I waged many battles against internal and eternal foes.
I was acclaimed imperator, the dictatorship granted to
me, I held the consulship in perpetuity.

I elected the members of the Senate. The Senate duly
decreed that rituals were to be undertaken by consuls,
and political games were celebrated.

I presented spectacles of athletes summoned from every land.
This was a time of spic skiing in Whistler, of heated debates
before melted mountains.

Following no truce, enemies were vanquished on the
frontiers of empire, ragged Parthians and Germanic tribes,
barbarian invaders all.

By decree of the Senate, my name graced the national
anthem, my portrait was hung in every portal. The senators
decreed that I should hold tribunician power as long as I live.

May the streets be silenced, the voices in the Forum
reduced to a whisper in worship
before my name.

The Senate consecrated the altar of Fortuna Alberta
before the Exxon Gate, for Albertan oil
is worth all.

I marked my sixth and seventh consulships
by extinguishing all civil discord, and controlled
all affairs by universal consent.

After the passage of time, I surpassed the passage of all
legislation, I excelled all
in all authority.

As I write this, I am in my seventy-sixth year,
I, Stephanus Arpinus Ottavian.

"Stephen Harper as Himself" by George Elliot Clarke (*Rogue Stimulus* 31)

A pasty-faced, milquetoast, lumpy doughboy,
As icky as egg white and just as dull,
This professor of snow jobs oozes, slides,
From incline to decline in hole, shedding
Blizzards of dried shit and confetti'd lies,
Or slithers in grey areas, shady,
Like a right abominable snowman
Who's leery of sunlight. His Canada

Is cold as a morgue: a deep-freeze Parliament,
With policies the Ice Age fossilized.
        Our Howdy Doody in a flak jacket,
Pres. Harper strives to ape Richard Nixon,
To play his dreary replica, to slouch
Unpardoned, unloved, into infamy.

"To His Royal Highness" by Christopher Doda (*Rogue Stimulus* 41)

Because, like you, I too am both pro-rogue
And prone to procrastination, I'd like
To provide a few other things to put off
In your grand style because I simply don't feel like doing them
That you might find useful in your majestic promotion
Because you're a progressive-conservative who has
Apparently forgotten the *serve* part,
A real fucking *pro*, so: rehab, deadlines at work (works for you),
Cleaning the barbeque, talking to mother, fixing the leaky
Faucet, Christmas, changing the cat litter, Monday,
The engagement party, my knighthood, an appointment
With my banker, an appointment with my loan shark,
The New Years' Day hangover, taxes (I'm sure you
Understand), that trip to Sudbury, paying the stripper,
Going on Facebook, drinking to your health, renewing
My driver's license, taking the Mensa entrance test,
The release of the next Coldplay album, turning in my badge,
Getting a real job, meatloaf Thursdays, that final
Chemotherapy treatment, selling out and anything else
That a propertied Protestant protagonist of the outer
Provinces would find provocative, a promise, a prognosis,
A profuse progression of proletarian (your least favourite) prose,
While I, poet, perform, preface, write poems as prologue
To proliferate among provocateurs, a proprietary promiscuous
Prolix of my pro bono profligate projections but you promulgate,
Propagate a pronged propaganda (not proofread), you prophet,
Spin this prorogue pronto for your prominence
And thought you protest and prosecute (maybe sue), like you,
I too brook no interference.

"Or Whatever: A Sonnet by Mr. Harper" by Jesse Patrick Ferguson (*Rogue Stimulus* 51)

To do it just on the side, a little,
to the point where you're just abandoning
the artistic things I've enjoyed doing
(when I do it). But I get so wrapped up--
think: when ordinary working people
are constantly reviewing your spending
in government programming overall.
On the other hand, you don't get to the point where
people at, you know, a rich gala...
All
those subsidies have actually gone up
in governmental programming overall. It's
all subsidized by taxpayers claiming
it doesn't mean you're slashing some artist
or you're slashing farmers, or whatever.

From transcripts in The Star *and* The Globe and Mail

"Fifteen Things to Do in Winter If You're Prime Minister of Canada" by Jeanette Lynes (*Rogue Stimulus* 63-64)

1. Closet Purge: if last time you wore that off-white linen suit was the Transylvanian Embassy, pitch it;
2. Ditto for dubious boxer shorts: the Tim Horton's doughnut stain never did remove from the last birthday pair, biff them;
3. Skate on canal;
4. Dust piano;
5. Crack down on brandy snifters; if last time you sipped from the woman's-torso-shaped one (a tacky gift from a diplomat whose names escapes you) was at the Bohemian Embassy, donate it to a charity in a good neighbourhood;
6. Paint moustaches and horns on random group of Canadian writers;
7. Having realized it's really quite *cold* skating on the canal, and having long secretly wondered what all the fuss and sentimentality is about (logically, it's just a river under ice), email George W. Bush whose hands

are filled with free time these days now that that nasty business in Baghdad is over; see if he'd like to meet in Palm Springs for a round of golf;

8. Continue closet purge while waiting to hear back from George W.--if you haven't worn those khaki shorts since the last time you golfed in Palm Springs, donate them to charity;
9. When the wife is out for her daily motorcycle drive, dig out your high school yearbook and facebook or google old girlfriends;
10. When sure the hired help have gone home, children are asleep and wife is out, play *Greatest Hits of Queen* on piano. Sing along lustily;
11. Decide not to give the tacky brandy snifter to charity after all;
12. Realize singing voice is not half-bad;
13. Go through wife's closet, find pink boa from Charity Costume Ball. Pour a healthy shot of brandy in curvaceous snifter from diplomat whose name still escapes you. Fling boa over your cashmere leisure sweater. Seat yourself comfortably at piano. Play golden hits from the seventies while waiting to hear back from George W. Think of old girlfriends while tickling the ivories. Enjoy the gentle movement of the boa's faux feathers in the refined air of the drawing room;
14. When one of the children who can't sleep tiptoes downstairs into the drawing room where you, intent at the keyboard, play an Elton John song with great passion and sing along with equally great passion, boa draped dapperly over your shoulder, asks *what're you doing*, reply, in stern but kind prime ministerial tones: *music helps me think in these challenging times;*
15. Return the boa to the closet and make the kid promise not to say anything about it unless he wants his allowance prorogued for the next year.

"Dear Mr. Harper" by The Poets of Nova Institution (*Rogue Stimulus* 81)

If I can't dance, it's not MY revolution
--Emma Goldman

Dear Mr. Harper,
What would you do if the warden prorogued the prison?
If we awoke in the morning to find all the guards missing...
If the prisoners arose to make their own breakfasts
Left their pods, cracked open segregation
Put on music and smoked cigarettes?
If we went into the sunshine and had fights with tasers
In bullet-proof vests
Before pirating the intercom (profanity abounds)
And a collective meeting was called in central prison grounds
To convene our first shift briefing
"Why would the warden do this?"
"Was he caught up in the mix?"
"Did the press find out about the death of Ashley Smith?"
All of a sudden in the background a quiet voice arose
Hoarse, speckled with age and rough with tobacco:
"Why are we talking about the warden? We've got lunch to prepare.
We don't need no boss, nor his laws in here"
The room fell deathly silent
The inmates began to organize
Stopped using jailhouse tools to dismantle jailhouse rules
They came together, each in stride
So, dear Warden...
Perhaps we'll see you and Harper in March
When your white-collar holiday ends
But you find our doors locked
And we dare you to try and get in.

Appendix 2 -- Correspondence

Ken Norris

Transcript of correspondence with Ken Norris:

I have been known to tell my creative writing students to switch the methodologies for how they think they should write love poems and political poems. That is, that political poems should be very specific, and detailed, and name names, and describe acts, and give as much information as possible, while love poems should have more of a generic, vague quality, allowing a reader to read their own experience into the love poem.

Howl Too, Eh? probably takes up parody first, and satire second, and politics third. Though, of course, there are places where all three intersect. But parody seems to be very important to that book, towards satiric ends, with an often political purpose.

F.R. Scott, *The Blasted Pine*, and Dudek's *Laughing Stalks* are in there somewhere as sources. Dudek does a number of parodies in *Laughing Stalks*.
I think there is a fair amount of political content in my work, and I think I tend to tackle that content head on, rather than in any kind of abstract manner. Take a look at "In the House of No" or "Work Poem" in *In the House of No*. "Work Poem" kind of counters Wayman's argument about the dignity of work with an exploration of the workplace as a place of exploitation. "In the House of No" is both political and aesthetic. Poetry as resistance, and also poets as being members of the devil's party, dissidents.

There is a political dimension in most of my books. It tends to be incorporated into the fabric of the book as a whole. But I don't think that my politics travel much to an abstract place--I think they stay very specific and situational.

What's going on in the politics of my individual work may have very little to do with what is going on in *Howl Too, Eh?*, where Endre and I carve out a collaborative space, possibly working towards a different end in cobbling together that collaborative voice. We are "stealing" from all across the poetic landscape. All of those poems are, to some lesser or greater degree, parodies of well-known poems. Probably the only stuff that isn't rooted in parody are the "guest appearances" of Artie Gold and Tom Konyves. Though "See/Saw"
is sort of a postmodern parody of the Marx Brothers in places. Invokes a comic tradition. Invokes *Duck Soup*, which itself is parody and satire.

Again I refer you back to *The Blasted Pine* for precedents.
Satire is a definite winner in terms of dealing with political content. The best thing to do with political folly is to mock it or laugh at it. Once you are laughing at a political stance, or successfully mocking it, you have, to some degree, disabled its authority.

"Heartfelt" political poems sometimes have a lesser success rate, BECAUSE they are heartfelt and serious. Making a mockery of something is the best way to discredit it. I have always commended Klein for writing *The Hitleriad*.

You can see me mentioning Scott, Smith, Klein, Dudek as predecessors in Canadian satire, parody, and political poetry. I think I took a lot of my cues from these poets. I suspect that Endre did as well. When we parody in *Howl Too, Eh?* we use a lot of Ginsberg and Cohen. One of them is Canadian.

Often poets write love poems in which there is "too much information." An erotic outline is often more compelling than an erotic blow by blow. On the other hand, political poems that have "too little information" tend to be slogany and uncompelling. Information in a political poem will inform and persuade. Generalities in political poems tend to be unpersuasive. Specific information carries the political charge.

It's my observation that a lot of love poetry tends to be overburdened with "too much information" and a lot of political poetry suffers from being underinformed, or underinforming the reader.

I know Al Purdy was a big fan of Gary Geddes' poem about the Kent State student. I am less of a fan of that poem, but to the degree that I think that it succeeds it is because of its specific information about a specific girl who was murdered by the National Guard. The poem is a complete and rounded statement. I probably find its delivery system a bit too neat and tidy, but I respect the attention to pertinent details in that poem.

Nobody is going to get thrown in jail for writing *Rogue Stimulus*. As Atwood says in her poem, in Canada you can write what you want to because no one in Canada is paying attention to what poets are saying anyway.

Because we were in Quebec, Endre and I got involved in "language politics." That seemed relevant and important at the time. I appreciate the efforts of F.R. Scott and, to a lesser extent, Louis Dudek and Irving Layton in making Canadian politics and politicians seem important enough to write poems about.

I can't claim to be "up to date" on current Canadian political poetry. I live outside the country and a lot of that stuff just doesn't reach me.
Love poems can go off the rails a thousand different ways. And I think that is true of political poems as well. "Balance" is really important in both love poems and political poems. Layton's "tighrope walker" seems like an apt metaphor for the poet attempting to write a love poem or a political poem. There are other forms
of poetry that are a lot more forgiving and in which the poet has a lot more elbow room and room in which to make mistakes.

I am maybe not the best reader of my own work. I think most of my political poems tend to be about things I have seen in other countries. Because there is a lot more blatant injustice in other countries than there is in Canada. Canadian society is, by no means, perfect, but it a lot better than a lot of other places.

I am sure Endre would have quite a bit to say about the status of the Anglo community in Quebec, and how it has fared since 1977. I have far less to say about that, but I stopped living in Quebec in 1985. Nevertheless, "language politics" is probably a big part of *Howl Too, Eh?*

RE: "heartfelt" political poems--I would rather talk about political poems that succeed. Even though it was published quite a while ago, Atwood's book *True Stories* continues to impress me. I return to it a lot in my teaching.

F.R. Scott taught me that politics and satire often go hand in hand. I think that's what I took away from *The Blasted Pine*.

In *Howl Too, Eh?* politics and satire and parody go hand in hand in hand.

Endre Farkas

Mr. Farkas' response to a questionnaire:

1) **What is your opinion of Canadian poetry that is explicitly about the political?**

I haven't seen much of it lately. Maybe it's my own lack of reading it, its unavailability or it is not really a topic or theme being dealt with by current poets. I remember reading poems that were overtly political by Gary Geddes, Dennis Lee and Tom Wayman in the seventies and eighties but not much since. In the eighties, in Quebec, in English, Tom Konyves and I were the only poets who dealt with the Quebec/Canada issue. Tom did it through his video poem "SeeSaw" and I did it via my performance poem "Face-Off Mise au Jeu." The only other poetry book I read after that that dealt with political issues is *October* by Carolyn Marie Souaid.

2) **Why did you choose to write poetry that specifically deals with political issues, parties, or persons?**

I think I have always been conscious of poetry's political aspect or responsibility . Part of it comes from my background and earliest exposure to poetry. I was born in Hungary to survivors of the Holocaust (see *Surviving Words*). I went only as far as grade one there but poetry in Hungary is introduced as early as that. Hungary has a national poem as well as a national anthem so subliminally; we were learning poetry even before we got to school. There is a myth associated with this national poem. Sandor Petofi , a "Romantic Period" poet, a Byronesque figure, supposedly first recited this rousing nationalistic poem in a tavern standing on top of a table before riding off to a glorious death for the freedom of Hungary in 1848. So kids, early on, learned subliminally if not consciously that there is something noble and powerful in poems and that poems have an important role in the mythology, culture and politics of a nation.

My parents and I escaped during the 1956 uprising. In our town the revolutionary cry was "Kill the Commies and The Jews." I may have been only seven but that experience has had a lasting effect. My first book *Szerbusz* as well as *Surviving Words and* my plays *Surviving Wor(l)ds* deal with the effects of that time. Even my play *Haunted House (*about A.M. Klein) has politics as one of the central themes.

Since 1956, I have lived in Montreal mainly as an English writing allophone poet. Talk about being a minority within a minority within a minority. This 3rd and 4th solitude experience is another contributing factor to my political poetic side. As well, in Quebec, on the French side in the 70s, a lot of the poetry of important poets such as Gaston Miron

& Gérald Godin was political. And of course Michele Lalonde's *Speak White* became part of the can(n)on. On the English side there was only Frank Scott and he was sort of quiet by that time. Irving Layton did fire some salvos but he always considered himself more a "prophetic" than a "political" poet.

And finally (maybe not) my association with poets of exile and through them the growing awareness and belief that poetry is more than an exploration or probing of the personal contributed to my conscious decision to write "political" poetry . I think it is a necessary creative engagement with the world I live in.

3) **Do you think the field of poetry about politics has changed significantly in the past thirty years? How so? Why do you think this is so?**

I think it has moved from the left/right, conservative/liberal, and working class/ruling class kind of approach to a more fragmented, special interest-groups focus. It is more about gender, race and language-writing focused. Spoken word is probably the most overtly political and probably the most popular & populist and perhaps the most important but most of it doesn't translate onto the page.

4) **How do you think this type of poetry resonates with the public? With the political?**

The "poetry public" is very small and speaking to them is speaking to the converted. The political public doesn't read or listen to poetry so it makes no never mind to them. Deconstructed gender writing is mainly inaccessible to most, (even the feminists). Same goes for language writing. And as I said the Spoken Word stuff is accessible, popular, aimed mainly at the young and "rap" crowd but transient. In one ear out the other.

5) **What is the goal of writing this type of poetry or working to edit a collection of this type of poetry?**

First it is the response to living in a certain time, certain place under certain conditions. Political poetry is "timely" the great ones are "timeless" but most are "timely." Since it is timely it is a git prop and the idea is to reach a wide audience and affect them to either go out to make changes or reinforce in a creative way their own values and in the rare cases make them re-evaluate their own ideas. It is to declare that the emperor has no clothes. It is to protect democracy. When poets/artists/intellectuals fall silent voluntarily or involuntarily, that is a warning bell about the loss of democracy. It is also about leaving a record that you did speak out, you weren't silent. Here in Canada speaking up, speaking out, speaking truth to power is not too dangerous of an act but in many countries, it is a

real act of courage and heroism. And perhaps we should look to them to understand this kind of poetry's importance. I also feel that it is part of poets' responsibility to speak out on behalf of those who aren't allowed. So it is the responsibility of poets who aren't in danger to speak out on behalf of those who are and write about political actions that endanger freedom.

6) **Why do you think many poets do not engage with this kind of subject matter?**

In Canada, things don't seem to be too bad so poets don't feel the need to speak out. It seems that there is no need to. Also most poets are academics with grants to protect or tenures to be gained. Also as academics in many ways they are removed from the struggle of the underclass or poor working class.

7) **Is there something important I forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about poetry that deals with the political?**

History of *Howl Too, Eh?*

The book *The Anglo guide to Survival in Quebec* was published by Eden Press in 1983. It was a huge success. They wanted a follow up book about Baby Boomers and asked Richard King co-owner of Paragraph Bookstore to edit it. Richard asked me to contribute. I agreed though I didn't have anything in mind. I don't really remember how the idea came to me but it did. I had read *Howl* and was a fan of the Beats. *Howl* is a celebration and an indictment of a generation. Somehow the idea of using the structure of *Howl* as a vehicle for a critique of the hippies gone yuppies came together. *Howl Too, Eh?* is not only satire but a parody.

Satire is an important poetic and political tool, greatly underused and undervalued in Canada. Frank Scott might be considered the father of it in Canada. Satire punctures pomposity, stupidity and power. It can make those in power seem like buffoons. And that is one thing those in power can't stand. Being attacked "seriously" is one thing and in one way easy to deal with. But being made fun of is another. Just look at the power of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. I mention these two people and their shows because a part of their success is that they are also parodies as well. So is *Howl Too, Eh?* Parody gives satire a recognizable framework. The audience/readers have something familiar to relate to. It makes their engagement easier. "It's like…"

For me having a format or framework made the work easier and a lot of fun. I didn't have to worry about form, just fitting the content. The breaking it (*Howl Too, Eh?*) into decades gave it a chronology that only required researching/mining my, Ken Norris, and Ruth Taylor's memories. Ruth Taylor was a poet born just at the end of the Boomers coming of age who contributed to the piece but was never given credit for her input. She never let me forget it either. So here I want to make amends. She contributed some text and a good deal of editorial advice.

Although I began *Howl Too, Eh?* and did most of the work, Ken contributed a fair share of pop, rock, cultural, psychological references and lines. Whose was which line is impossible to say now. I consider it a McCartney & Lennon (& Ruth Taylor) collaboration.

Richard liked the idea but unfortunately, Eden Press folded before the book could see the light of day. I was ready to put the poem with other never to be published pieces but Richard suggested that I try to get it published. I told him that it was too long for any poetry magazines and I didn't think any Canadian publisher would be interested in it. He being a good free market bookstore owner said that I should send it to the States and screw poetry mags, I should go for the bucks and send it to *National Lampoon*. I thought he was nuts but he kept at me so finally I said sure why not? Eh?

So I sent it off and within a month I got an enthusiastic acceptance letter and wanting to know if I wanted to be paid by the page or a flat fee. To be accepted by *National Lampoon* and be paid??? Where do I sign? I believe that up to that point at $1500.00 US when the Canadian dollar was at 60 cents, made *Howl Too, Eh?* the highest paid poem in Canadian history. And with a circulation of 2 or 3 million, made it the most widely read or at least scanned poem.

It also turned out that the editor was a friend of Ginsberg and showed him the poem and he loved it.

The way *Howl Too, Eh?* became a book is also a come by chance accident. Karen Haughian, a friend was the publisher of NUAGE editions (now Signature Editions) needed a title for her Canada Council publishing grant application. She didn't have one. I suggested publishing the poem and a couple of other pieces. I suggested using the city light books format for form and content continuity/recognizability and this way it would meet the 48 page count poetry book requirement. She agreed. Now the only problem was

that we didn't have the other poems (except for Artie Gold's "Pumpkin Eaters" and Tom Konyves' & Ken's "See/saw" poem and Ken's "Hypermarche in Quebec" previously known as "The Supermarket"). So Ken and I set about writing.

I had been involved in writing about the French English conflict in performance pieces so the "Language Cops" was not a new thing. When you try to protect one language by suppressing another then it is not only stupid but dangerous. But I want to make it clear that "Language Cops" is not a satire of the Quebecois but of the absurdity of bureaucratic meanness & pettiness. The other poems "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Au Canada" deal with the selling of a country and that I think is certainly worth writing about.

I have continued writing similar poems, "Love in Quebec" and "Harper's Robbin De Hood" are two that come to mind. "Love in Quebec" has been aired by CBC radio a number of times and I made "Harpers Robbin De Hood" into a video. I am currently making "Language Cops" into a video. I mention these because I think that using the new social media and technology is an important tool that poets should start using. They are perfect for political poetry.

Stephen Brockwell

Mr. Brockwell's response to a request to converse with him about *Rogue Stimulus*:

Hello Mr. DesRoches,

What a wonderful, exciting thesis! I'm delighted to offer whatever assistance I can. I'll review your bibliography and thesis statement and put a few thoughts together. Of course, you must dig up *The Blasted Pine* (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/3276793-the-blasted-pine-an-anthology-of-satire-invective-and-disrespectful-ve?auto_login_attempted=true). I'm not sure any inquiry into this topic can be undertaken without it.

Such a huge topic for an MA thesis! Congratulations on it.

Please say hello to Professor Donaldson for me. He's one of the very best we have.

Regards,

Stephen

Stuart Ross

Original email sent to ask for submissions for *Rogue Stimulus*:

Subject: Let's topple Harper. Or at least give him something to read.

Comrade poet!

Since Parliament has been prorogued, you're probably just sitting on your hands, bereft. But things are looking up!

You are invited to submit a poem for consideration for a new anthology to be published by Mansfield Press just in time for the reconvening of Parliament on March 3.

The collection is titled *Rogue Stimulus: The Stephen Harper Holiday Anthology for a Prorogued Parliament*. We're looking for poems of up to 75 lines: your tender musings on Stephen Harper.

We have to move fast. The deadline is midnight on Tuesday, January 19. Payment for your contribution is one copy of the anthology. It's gonna look good and it's gonna be full of good poems.

The editors of *Rogue Stimulus* are Ottawa poet Stephen Brockwell and Toronto/Cobourg poet Stuart Ross. Denis De Klerck, publisher of Toronto literary house Mansfield Press, is oiling up the machinery for quick action, to ensure the anthology's timely release.

Please email your poem (preferably as a Word attachment) to: harper@mansfieldpress.net

We look forward to hearing from you.

Stephen and Stuart

Follow-Up email sent to successful poets:

Subject: Rogue Stimulus: The Stephen Harper Holiday Anthology! INFO NEEDED NOW!

Hi there!

Please excuse the mass mailing, but we're in a race against time.

First, thank you so much for submitting a poem to the Mansfield Press book *Rogue Stimulus: The Stephen Harper Holiday Anthology for a Prorogued Parliament*. We received about 350 poems and accepted 72 — including yours!

Here's what we need from you, and we need it fast (today would be ideal):

- Your name and mailing address (so we can send you a copy of the finished book)
- Your name as you want it to appear with your poem
- A one-sentence bio to include in our Contributors' Notes (we may edit); if you have a day job, please let us know what it is in the bio (if that's OK with you)

We're very grateful to have your poem and to make it part of this vital project.

We've been getting a lot of press; we're planning some great launches; and we have a beautiful cover by Gary Clement, which you'll soon see.

Best,

Stuart Ross

(for Stephen Brockwell & Stuart Ross)