CANADA'S FORGOTTEN POETS:

THE VALUES OF EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CANADIAN POETRY

IN ENGLISH

By

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ABSTRACT

Early twentieth-century Canadian poetry has largely been ignored by critics and scholars of Canadian literature. The thesis serves to rectify this omission by concentrating on the values of this poetry, since the period has been neglected due to a negative evaluation of the poetry by the generation of poets who immediately followed those who came to artistic maturity between 1900 and 1936. Rather than imposing yet another evaluation on the period, however, I ask what values early twentieth-century poets chose to express in their verse. From this starting-point, I went on to develop a model of poetic value pertaining to the period in question.

In the first, introductory chapter I discuss values in poetry in general terms, explain the nature of the negative evaluation of the period by reference to critical statements made by A. J. M. Smith and others and conclude with a description of intellectual and social values as they were understood at the time. Chapter Two concerns the verse of Tom MacInnes, Wilson MacDonald, Audrey Brown, G. H. Clarke and Arthur Stringer. Chapter Three is devoted to the work of Marjorie Pickthall and W. W. E. Ross. In chapters two and three I am chiefly concerned with the poetic value of beauty as it is expressed in the poetry. Chapter Four treats the value of
prophetic truth as this value emerges in the poetry of F. O. Call, Arthur Bourinot, A. M. Stephen and the poetic and critical writings of Raymond Knister. In the final chapter I discuss a conflict between the values of beauty, truth and order as this conflict appears in the Canadian odes of the time, in a number of highly structured and unusual books of poetry and in the religious poetry of the Reverend Robert Norwood. Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of E. J. Pratt's poetry, in which I maintain that the conflict in values is inevitably resolved in a poetry of order.

In addressing the values of poetry as they were expressed in Canadian poetry in English in the first decades of the century, I render the poetry accessible to contemporary re-assessment and re-evaluation. The thesis not only treats a period of literary activity that has been neglected for too long, but also brings forward the question of values in literature and in life.
PREFACE

This study of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada is somewhat unorthodox in its approach. As a critical history of a period in Canadian literature that has been neglected by the critics, the thesis attempts to analyze a number of œuvres and individual works as expressions of literary value. For reasons presented in the Introduction and further developed in following chapters, the poetry written by the generation of poets born in the last decades of the nineteenth century has a reputation of being good examples of what was bad about poetry in Canada before the advent of a modern Canadian verse. Yet this now almost forgotten body of verse enjoyed large audiences in its own time and well into the fifties. A question of values thus naturally arises in Canadian literary history. Is the poetry really all bad, and if it is, why were so many of its practitioners so popular in their time? Obviously, the large audiences of poets such as Wilson MacDonald and Marjorie Pickthall suggests that these readers found some merit in what they chose to read. What was a good poem by yesterday's standards? How can the same value be the mark of a bad poem today and a good poem then? The thesis attempts to answer these questions and other related questions concerning a history of literary value in the first decades of the century, a period that has received very little attention from Canadian critics and scholars.
However, a study of values and valuing instantly becomes problematic, even when such a study is tied to a specific period in Canadian literature. Value, like love or 'poetry' itself, is one of the most difficult and nebulous concepts around which to build any kind of interpretive pattern. Nonetheless, since the critical tradition in Canada regarding poetry has accustomed us to think of early twentieth-century poetry as lacking in any real relevance to contemporary life and thought, and since poets and critics of the time believed just the opposite, the question of value, specifically in poetry, would seem to be an appropriate starting-point for a re-assessment of the period. What did literary value mean to MacDonald or Pickthall? What did it mean to their readers? And, in what ways, moreover, does our understanding of values differ from theirs? Apparently simple questions such as these are perilous for any critical history of verse because the central idea, the notion of value, whether as aesthetic judgement or as concepts of beauty, truth and order, is open to perhaps as many definitions as there are people to define it.

In my first chapter I address this problem by coming at it from three or four different directions in order to circumscribe the problem and suggest its complexity. These directions are, first, the area of cultural values in the context of Canadian literary and critical traditions. Under the general heading of 'detachment,' I discuss how cultural
values and aesthetic judgments are not always easily separable. The detachment is an idea of specifically Canadian cultural value that I derive from the writings of A. J. M. Smith. When Smith negatively evaluates his immediate predecessors he also denies that they had anything worthwhile to say about what is Canadian in Canadian verse. Thus, in critical writings that are important to an understanding of the period, the search for cultural values includes decisions on the aesthetic quality of individual works. At this point I go on to discuss value as it is understood in the philosophical traditions of Europe, the United States and Canada, as far as this thinking is relevant to the period, and as far as my limited command of the traditions allows. In the pages that I devote to summarizing these concepts I mean only to point out that the question of value has this broad and diverse significance. In my discussions of poems I refer to values as abstract concepts only when a philosophical idea of value seems to influence a particular poet's art. In Chapter Two for instance, I discuss beauty as an absolute good in Pater because I argue there that Pater's thought in this regard clarifies some of the Pickthall's attitudes toward poetry.

Thus, in the beginning of the thesis I approach the concept of poetic value from the standpoint of cultural values, aesthetic judgments and the philosophy of value. However, I also show in the first chapter that Smith's literary discernment is not only tied closely to cultural
values but to what might be described as economic, social, even political conditions as well. In the course of the thesis, I suggest that for us, for Smith and for the poets of the period, values are always reflected by the market-place. Here we are confronted by a thorny question of causality, which I have treated as an open question in the thesis. Do values as ideals intrinsically good in themselves determine what acquires value in the market-place, or do values as objects of desire instrumentally determine what society chooses to regard as absolute values? Is "good" society writ large, or is the best in life the good writ small? On this question I choose to balance the Marxist or materialist view against an idea of value, in which what is good in life is an expression of an absolute good originating if not in God, then in some as yet not fully known order and purpose in the universe.

For my purposes, then, the concept of value is loosely and variously defined. The thesis is intended primarily to ask the following kinds of questions in a study of the poetry of the early part of the century. What is the value that this poem expresses? Would we value the poem differently today? Can a connection be drawn between the value a poem expresses and a particular cultural value as expressed by history? Is there a connection between the aesthetic of a poem and the market conditions of the time? By asking these kinds of questions the thesis can re-assess early twentieth-century poetry in its own terms.
Accordingly, I am chiefly concerned with determining what qualities defined a poem as a poem in the times of MacDonald, Pickthall, Ross, Knister and Pratt. However, I am also concerned as a literary historian with whether or not ideas or economic and social conditions are significantly involved in this decision. Thus, in my treatment of the poet, I might refer at one point to ideas and at another to the historical situation, and at other times to matters of aesthetic judgment that are expressed either in poems or in critical and scholarly writing about them. Aside from this, I make evaluative judgments of my own, though sparingly regarding certain qualities of poems indicated for the sake of a chapter's continuity, but which do not participate in the overall discussion of literary values. For example, in Chapter Two I praise a poem by G. H. Clarke in the course of my argument that his verse expresses a form of the value of beauty. In Chapter Four I point out that some of the qualities of Knister's poetry exhibit a young apprentice-poet's self-consciousness about his art, which probably amounts to a negative evaluation. Such remarks are 'stylistic departures from the limitations my argument places upon me and can be taken with a grain of salt.

There are two major consequences of this line of inquiry. The first concerns the manner in which I treat oeuvres and individual works in the course of the thesis. In order to describe the value a poem expresses and how it is
expressed, I have presented the poems critically. I employ close readings of varying lengths to suggest that particular values are prevalent in the work of a poet, and in the works of poets that I group together as poets of beauty, poets of truth and poets of order. In this way I avoid a discussion of texts in which only names and titles appear. I believe that this method offers a more comprehensive approach to the poetry written in the period. Moreover, surveys already exist in which interested students of Canadian verse can find mention of the names, titles, the most significant themes, technical elements and so forth, although these studies tend to be cursory regarding the poetry of the first decades of the century. In-depth studies of poetry in Canada between 1900 and 1936 do not exist, and this is a gap that should be filled, however the verse is assessed.

The second consequence is related to the historiographic aspects of the thesis. I endeavor to spell out early twentieth-century cultural, aesthetic and market values from the ground up, in a literary history that attempts to discern which values were dominant in the poetry of the time. I have found it convenient to formalize the concept of value to the extent that I speak of 'Beauty, Truth and Order' as the three dominant values of poetry in the period. The poetry itself, as revealed in my analyses of the poems, testifies to the validity of this claim. The thesis is arranged in such a way as to indicate the emergence of a primary value of beaut
in Canadian verse, which is followed by the emergence of truth or prophetic truth as a value for which many poems were written in the period. I suggest in Chapters Two and Three that beauty shapes and colours truth in the sense of one formalized category having an effect upon another. However, prophetic truth -- once it has emerged -- retroactively creates effects in that earlier value of beauty. Eustace Ross's poems, for instance, aspire above all to be objects of beauty, yet they also express prophetic truth as a value that the poet regards as justifying his writing of a poem. In Chapters Four and Five I describe what I see as a dynamic, shifting interplay of the three dominant values, beauty, truth, and order. I suggest finally that Pratt's work achieves a certain resolution of these three, in the only poetry of the period that is still considered relevant today.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Norman Shrive, for the patience and encouragement that he has shown me in the course of my research. I would also like to thank Dr. John Ferns for his generous editorial assistance, and Dr. Carl Ballstadt for his comments and suggestions. I want also to thank my wife, Rozmin Kizuk-Devraj, without whom the project could not have been completed.
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Introduction:
On 'Eclectic Detachment,' Markets, and Values

What separates modernism from romanticism as periods of literary history in Canada is also that which binds them together: a complicated pattern of contradictory and yet detached responses to the poetry itself. In the period that immediately followed the lyric revival of Pickthall's time, several new literary periodicals appeared relatively suddenly. This event corresponded with the growth in importance of the poets' milieux as a way of communicating individual if not radical views to those readers who received the new poetry into society. The periodicals of A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott and Leo Kennedy at McGill functioned to establish a platform from which the audience of poetry could be addressed politically. The poets sought to effect change in the reading tastes of their audience. Control over their own periodicals was necessary to launch a poetic movement that would culminate in what the poets considered to be a resuscitation of Canadian verse. Regarding themselves as the first Canadian modernists, these writers determined to challenge and ultimately to abrogate a reorganization in poetic values. This re-shuffling, however, had already begun in Canada when the country entered the first of the two eras of rapid, pervasive change that mark...
the boundaries of this study: the Laurier Boom of the turn of the century and the Great Depression.

What has been understood as the last stages of Canadian romanticism culminated in an era of periodical wars. Initially, the student magazines of McGill University in Montreal and the University of Toronto assaulted the sensibilities of The Canadian Magazine (1893-1939), The Canadian Bookman (which became the official repository of the Canadian Authors' Association in 1921), and a number of monthlies and newspapers which sported a literary page. This initial attack was carried out in the editorials and editorial policies of the McGill Fortnightly Review (1925-27), The Canadian Mercury (1928-29) and The Rebel in Toronto (which matured, after three years of student control, into The Canadian Forum in 1928). The elder generation, however, was strong in numbers and well-organized. The Canadian Authors' Association was founded in 1921 and created The Canadian Poetry Magazine in 1930, the first publication devoted exclusively to verse in Canada that was available to poetry-readers across the nation. The Canadian Forum, though modelled on the American Nation and New Republic, served to continue the literary aspirations of The Week (1883-96), in the sense of a dedication to high standards of literary taste and an informed critical stance. The Forum in fact refereed the intensifying struggle between "modernists" and "romanticists." Though the McGill Movement was out-numbered and crushed in terms of public recognition,
the poets refused to go underground. F. R. Scott helped a small band of young poets, among whom were Patrick Anderson and P. K. Page, to re-ignite the literary terrorism of the McGill periodicals in the pages of Preview (1942-45), which carried on the fight during the Second World War.

By this time, battling the sensibilities of one's literary precursors had come into vogue. First Statement (1942-45), edited by John Sutherland and supported by such poets as Layton, Souster and Dudek, appeared alongside Preview. In an unpublished autobiographical fragment among Sutherland's papers at Sir George Williams University, Sutherland explains why he had quoted Nietzsche on the title-page of the first First Statement:

"Ye say it is the good cause which halloweth war; I say unto you, it is the good war which halloweth every cause." By this George [Sutherland himself] meant to imply that the literary disease of Canada was the brotherly love which authors forever spouted over the tea-cups and beer-mugs; the only thing that would put Canadian literature on its feet was a first-class literary war.

This was the situation in which Sutherland found himself as the would-be editor of a literary magazine in 1942. As the battle raged on, the original cause — le romantisme est mort; vive le moderne! — was lost sight of. Sutherland eventually attacked the cosmopolitanism of Smith's group, and Smith's counterattack, while it did not silence Sutherland, effectively destroyed the prestige of the Canadian Authors' Association, in that the controversy between "native" or a "local
pride" and "cosmopolitan" or "neo-colonial" led readers to believe that the issues at stake must be essential to the values of poetry in Canada. Thus, an opposition between internationalist eclecticism and a concern for poetic articulation arising from one's own locality displaced the poetic values of vision -- truth and beauty -- and the values of a poetry of order, as they had been expressed in the pages of The Canadian Poetry Magazine (absorbed by the Canadian Author and Bookman in 1969), many newspapers' literary pages, Maclean's (1896-) and Saturday Night (1887-), as well as The Canadian Forum, which printed "escapist" and "modern" in equal proportions throughout the Depression despite its leftist stance.

Some of the poets, such as W. W. E. Ross and E. J. Pratt, though not actively engaged in the 'cause' to which many of their contemporaries were committed, were nonetheless found to be useful to the election of a new poetry. The decision to include Pratt in the 1936 anthology, New Provinces, and not Ross or Livesay, for instance, was essentially a political decision on the part of the editors who hoped to win over the large conservative audience of Pratt's work. Souster's 1956 and 1968 editions of Ross's poems were similarly motivated. Souster hoped to convince the Canadian public that a poetry more responsive to American influences was a better choice than poetry favouring British precedents. Since Ross's early influences were American and not British, Marianne Moore as opposed to Eliot or Auden, Ross's poems
served his publisher's political interests. Thus, readers of poetry were instructed in the new values of a modernist poetic.

In this chapter I explore the complicated relationships between the values of poetry as they have been understood by the writers, editors and publishers of the period. I begin with an analysis of an ironic contradiction lodged in some of the major texts relating to the history of poetry in Canada in the first decades of the century, in order to separate questions of value from the more political aspects of how poems are received into society. I then discuss the problem of values in terms of the social, economic and intellectual conditions of the time. By cutting into the history of poetry in Canada in this way, the infrastructure and superstructure of our accustomed manner of understanding the period may be prised apart, as it were, and the question of values in poetry elevated to a level at which poems that have been neglected for some fifty years may be addressed in terms of the values the verse itself aspires to express, as opposed to the values of earlier and later generations of poetry. There is more at stake here than changing fashions and trends in literature. Today, literature is everywhere faced with the prospect of an absence of objective values with the one exception being perhaps the value of simply being different from one's predecessors and contemporaries at any cost. To retrieve the values of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada will not only supply
much needed criticism of the period, but may also help us to recollect what it meant for a writer to hold "objective" values in a way uncommon today, and reassess the role that values have played in the construction of poetic statements.

The Detachment.

In A. J. M. Smith's introduction to his anthology, *The Oxford Book of Canadian Poetry* (1960), Smith gave the publication-dates of Pratt's *The Witches' Brew* and *The Titans* (1925 and 1926) as the beginning of modernism in Canada. Smith pointed out that there was "a great flurry" of poetry written in the modern style during the 'twenties, and though some of it was published in magazines, the poets who wrote it were not to produce their own volumes of poetry until the early 'forties, "when Toronto publishing houses suddenly became receptive to work in the modern manner." The "Introduction" suggests that this change in the publishers' editorial policy might have been effected by the success of Pratt's works, which indicated to publishers that a market for the modern manner existed among Canadian readers. Pratt, as the earliest of the poets Smith believed to be modern, "reached the widest audience" through large-scale narrative poems that treat the theme of power ambiguously, presenting an "ironic solution" to a central conflict between natural, human or demonic power and man's survival and significance. Smith wanted to believe that Pratt's success was due to an absence
of moralizing in his poetry and the absence of static abstraction in the exposition of his theme. Smith insisted, however, that Pratt's faith, good humor, compassion, and his enthusiasm separated him from "his younger contemporaries of the thirties and forties," whose "divided and disillusioned, spirit" forced them to regard such virtues as "somewhat alien." The value of irony in Pratt's work, in Smith's view, paradoxically paved the way for the reception of modernist verse in Canada, while remaining an element from which those whom Smith called "the new poets" largely felt alienated and detached.

Pratt's verse is often regarded as spanning a decrepit and hollow period in Canadian literature, devoid of a poetry of any value. Similarly, the poetry of W. W. E. Ross and Raymond Knister is considered to be transitional, often in an uncharitable sense of being deficient in the values of both the Confederation Poets and the moderns. The paucity of criticism on Eustace Ross's works indicates that in his case there exists a level of opinion in Canadian literary scholarship at which Ross's poetry is seen to be irrelevant to the themes and techniques of poetry in Canada. Critics have been more forthcoming with Knister, but this has been largely due to the romanticization of his death and an enduring interest in his prose. A complete edition of Knister's poems -- which contains a demythologizing statement on the manner of his death by his daughter -- appeared belatedly in 1983 under
Knister's original title for his manuscript, *Windfalls for Cider*. The qualified acceptance of Pratt, Ross and Knister as transitional figures in Canadian modernism is contradictory in itself, being as it is both an acceptance and a denial.

The marginalization of the works of these three poets as transitionally modern, has prevented them from being entirely neglected. Other poets published by Toronto publishers at the same time and at considerable financial risk have been denied even equivocal status. Surveys of Canadian poetry entirely ignore or give very brief mention to the minor Imagists of the 'twenties, the work of the Song Fishermen in the Maritimes, or the long poems of Robert Norwood. Munro Beattie, in the *Literary History of Canada*, discusses the appearance in the 'thirties of the younger generation of poets in the *Canadian Forum*, but fails to mention that of the verse printed by the *Forum*, 270 pieces, or 49%, was of the "romantic" variety. Beattie's survey of the 'twenties, however, does provide the names of some of the early twentieth-century poets and their books. Beattie's paragraphs on early modernist experiments in verse -- Pickthall warrants a sentence -- clearly demonstrate that for him it was a poor poem that did not attempt free verse and the sensibility that captivated the McGill group in the 'twenties.

In the *Literary History of Canada*, it was given to Roy Daniels to describe the period from 1880-1920. Daniels's sentences on the minor poets pointedly avoid being apologetic.
and this despite his belief that the subject "may be usefully be considered as a chorus to the tragi-comedy of Canadian cultural decline." For Daniels, a poem is valuable for what it reflects of the nation's culture; hence he is rather more interested in the reasons for the popularity of Service and Pauline Johnson than in Pickthall, for instance, whom he takes to represent a general "loss of momentum, weakening of grasp, reduction of resonance," too many removes from "the original sources of strength." Thus, in the standard view of the period 1900-1936, a concern for issues such as colonialism, the unifying coherence that Confederation brought to the elder poets, Imagism, modernism, and the Marxist flirtations of the thirties led Canadian literary scholars away from the problem of values, as it had been expressed, for example, in the criticism of Lorne Pierce and John Daniel Logan.

Literary scholars in Canada chose to ignore what early twentieth-century poets have said or did not say or could have said. As Fred Cogswell complained in 1979, writing about Canadian verse for an Australian audience, one of the dangers of modernism is that of the separation of serious artists from their potential public. Canadian adaptation of Eliot and the Imagists drove a wedge deeply into poetry in Canada that was held in place from the beginning of modernism in Canadian verse, and of necessity, by an academic establishment that "always has a vested interest in preserving any doors to which it has the only key." Poetic schools as a rule do not wish
the verse of others to be taken seriously by the reader. Hence, E. K. Brown, writing from a modernist standpoint in his On Canadian Poetry of 1943, ridiculed Pickthall with such malicious conviction that it is not surprising to find Lorne Pierce, whose appreciation for Pickthall knew no bounds, rescinding his evaluation of the poet in the same year. It was left to Desmond Pacey in 1953 and 1957 to deliver the coup de grâce, not just to Pickthall but to early twentieth-century verse as a whole, by first stating that Pickthall was the only poet of her generation "with any claim to artistic distinction," and then—having seen Pierce's volte face, which was re-published as the introduction to her Selected Poems, edited by Pierce in 1957—effectively condemning her work to silence in an embarrassed paean to her unreadability.

The minor Imagists of the period have received some critical attention, as some have wished to point out that modernism in Canada actually began rather earlier than 1936, when Scott published New Provinces. The tentative experiments of a few poets have for this reason been saved from oblivion, but there exists no such redemption for the poetry that by Canadian standards enjoyed large and appreciative audiences in the early part of the century. The books of such prolific poets as Wilson MacDonald or Arthur Bourinot might as well not have been written, while Arthur Phelps's Bobcaygeon, or Lawren Harris's Contrasts, survive as curios on the border-line of modernism. A long-standing desire in Canadian litera
criticism for the establishment of a canon of Canadian Masters has helped to install the poetry of the generation of the 1860's more or less permanently in the curriculum of Canadian universities. As anthologists, Smith and Gustafson have established a tradition among anthologies of Canadian verse in which a few of the best poems of long-forgotten poets, such as Marjorie Pickthall, are preserved.

A corresponding interest in preserving the poetry of the minor poets as oeuvre and as an object of historical and critical study has not surfaced in Canadian literature. One must return to the publications controlled by the Canadian Authors' Association, to William Arthur Deacon's reviews, and to the periodicals controlled by the new poets, to read what others have thought about the poems of MacDonald, Pickthall or Bourinot. The new poets and the Authors' Association were engaged in a running fight over precisely which values ought to be expressed in a good poem, in the sense of which values allowed one to say that a given poem was worth reading and writing about. Deacon is the most unbiased of the reviewers, though he leaned toward the values of the Association (achieving the presidency in 1946). Yet between the guerrilla warfare tactics of the new poets, armed with the attitudes, diction and the cadence of T. S. Eliot, and the Association's supreme indifference to modernist values, however, no really clear picture of the situation of poetry in those early decades can be discerned without returning to the verse itself.
Moreover, it cannot be said that the theme of power which contributed to Pratt's success was completely lacking in the popular poetry of the first third of the century. The same audience that guaranteed the success of *Titans* and *The Witches Brew*, also guaranteed the popularity of Pickthall, Robert Service and Tom MacInnes. The market for these poets' works was substantial enough to encourage the chronically financially troubled Toronto publishers to risk their capital in the publication of hundreds of volumes of now forgotten local verse. Canadian literature is a small item by world standards, and this proliferation of the poetic impulse in the first decades of the century is a remarkable literary event in itself. The country's population then was about that of New York State, and in 1941 nearly half the Canadian population lived in rural areas. Few nations can recall a period as rich in readers and poets as the period that the new poets struggled to bring to its "foreordained end."

Pratt's "ironic solution" to the conflict inherent in his theme of power must in some way have been present on both sides of the division that criticism later imposed on Canadian literary history. The discontinuity which appears to separate the generation of poets born in the 1860's and the generation born between 1899 and 1919 has for the most part been placed there by the decree of the latter. As the self-proclaimed legislators of Canadian literary values in the 'thirties, the new poets succeeded in inserting a silent lacuna in the palim-
psest of our literary history. Through their magazines and anthologies, and in the political tenor of their attack on the values of their immediate predecessors, the Montréal group of poets led by Smith and Scott — later joined by Leo Kennedy and A. M. Klein — managed to attach to the verse then widely read the derogatory connotations of romanticism, late-Victorian or Edwardian imitativeness, the Georgianism ridiculed in Pound's Mauberly, and so on. However, it was not only by editorial tactics that the older poetry was silenced. In their criticism — which rapidly matured into a variety of American New Criticism — the new poets brought a sense of purpose to Canadian literature and an invigorating manner of articulation in their pursuit of fresh and rigorous standards of artistic excellence.

This criticism was published in the poets' own periodicals, the McGill Fortnightly Review, its successors The Canadian Mercury and Preview, and The Canadian Forum. These articles distributed the news of Eliot's interests in the French Symbolists and seventeenth-century English poetry and provided valuable commentary on contemporary literary developments in England and the United States. But in their articles and reviews, their editorials and editorial policy, they never tired of attacking the old school. The spirit of controversy helped a great deal to draw attention to themselves and direct it not only to their own poems and satirical verse, but also
to the issue of judgement: by what criteria does one consider a piece of writing worthy of being received into society as a poem, and not a piece of percolating self-fashion, "Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales," as F. R. Scott said about the poets of the Canadian Authors' Association in the often anthologized "The Canadian Authors Meet." Scott's unknown "Virgins of sixty who still write of passion" nonetheless enjoyed more readers then than he and his group ever has.

In 1961, Smith felt it was necessary to clarify a phrase he had used in the closing sentences of his introduction to The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (1960). In an article in Canadian Literature called "Eclectic Detachment: Aspects of Identity in Canadian Poetry" (Sum. 1961), Smith argued that the newness, vitality and sophistication of the poetry of the 'forties and 'fifties (the poetry of Layton, Avison, Reaney and others) made it imperative that a new criticism should arise to assimilate and evaluate it. Smith acknowledged that the "new poetry and the new criticism have had their effect on the poetry of the past," through the establishment of "increasingly severe standards of judgement," which encouraged critics to discard the earlier poets "to the junk pile." Smith called for a "more tolerant point of view" in this regard, but it is clear that for him the "poetry of the past" came to an end with Roberts, Lampman, Carman and D. C. Scott. Though he criticizes the habit of Canadian critics to "nullify their praise of the earlier poetry with "qualifica-
tions that precede it" and laments that critics seem unable to "assume a scholarly stance before the verses of the Confederation poets," he nowhere suggests that the minor poets that wrote in the decades between the Confederation school and his own school should also be treated in an unbiased and scholarly way. Though he felt that "something valuable may be lost" in this situation, Smith was unaware of the contradictions implicit in his attitudes toward poetry and criticism in Canada.

Smith wrote this article to defend the validity of "eclectic detachment" as a useful tool with which to penetrate the distinctiveness of the best modern Canadian verse and to define its "essential quality." He meant to uncover what was Canadian about Canadian modernism. The article is also a defense of his principle of selection in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Poetry*, and his division of modern Canadian poetry into "Native" and "Cosmopolitan," a categorical division expressed in his earlier anthology of 1943.

I do not mean to belittle Smith's importance as a critic nor the importance of his anthologies, which together with Ralph Gustafson's anthologies have had a powerful influence on how Canadians view their poetry. Far from it. In the survey-anthologies, traditional and modern works are given equal attention, and the selections are chosen for their economy of expression and form, completeness and wit. In Gustafson's edition of a special issue of the Boston periodical, *Voices: A Quarterly of Poetry* (Spring 1943), he presented
Canadian moderns to the American audience in their best light. New Provinces performed the same service for Canadian readers in 1936. The two men had met in New York just before the war, and while the new poetry and literary life of the city had its effect on them, they discovered that they shared a concern for tradition and literary excellence. Over a period of twenty years, their anthologies served to cull and straighten Canadian verse. They believed this was necessary because earlier anthologists tended to base their selections on subjective pleasure alone. Ironically, the editorial policy of Harold Vinal's Voices, in which Gustafson had presented Canadian modernism, insisted upon the "subjective source and quality" of a poetry that would preserve or rescue its values from "surrender" to the harsh realities, "the modern distemper," which threatened the sensibilities of the best poetry.

It was not Smith's ear for sound, lapidary verse that John Sutherland objected to in First Statement, on seeing the 1943 anthology, but rather Smith's division of modern poetry in Canada into regionally oriented poets and poets who wished to be seen as part of an international literary scene. To Sutherland this was an invalid principle of assessment and evaluation. Sutherland was the self-appointed spokesman for a number of poets younger than Smith's circle who were allied to currents in American poetry that produced William Carlos Williams's answer to Eliot's sophisticated cosmopolitan wasteland. As editor of the group's house organ, First Statement,
Sutherland worked to expose Smith's essential colonialism — that Smith's cosmopolitan school had merely substituted Eliot and Auden for Tennyson or Keats. Sutherland's magazine is, of course, open to the same charge.

Smith's distinction between native and cosmopolitan suggests a hierarchical paradigm that places the cosmopolitan above the native, the modern above the colonial, the intellectual and universal above parochial descriptions of nature, the world of literature seen as a company of great men above a view of writing as a cottage industry, and so on. The hierarchy generates a principle of evaluation by which what may be seen as a nationalist value in a poem automatically eliminates that poem from what may be considered good poetry. As a tool of aesthetic judgement, it devalues the poetry published during the period by the Canadian Authors' Association, for example, by situating such verse at the negative end of the scale. Thus, editorial policy participated in the ideological background against which poetic values are defined.

In 1943 and 1944 Sutherland had insisted that an identification with nature was essential to what is most distinctively Canadian in a poet's work. Smith countered by arguing that the best modern Canadian verse was characterized by a cosmopolitanism that reflected the same "disintegration of values in religion, politics and morals" which had forced American and European poets to be "anything but complex, divided, erudite, allusive, and sometimes obscure." For
Smith, the Canadian poet had the advantage and the distinction of an "eclectic detachment" that enabled him to select and adapt poetic attitudes and techniques from a global treasury of poetic language and convention. This detachment was a product of the Canadian poet's "position of separateness and semi-isolation." Implicitly, this quality also justifies the echoes of other works in a poem, thus rendering irrelevant any critical determinations of imitativeness. As a defense against the charge of neo-colonialism, and as a refinement on the native and cosmopolitan division, the closing paragraph of Smith's "Introduction" to the *Oxford Book* of 1960 was meant to define what is distinctively Canadian about modern cosmopolitan poetry in Canada.

Smith made it clear, however, that his conception of eclectic detachment should not be confused with aloofness: "Detachment surely does not imply in this context detachment from the Self or from personality." The Canadian poet is not detached from himself, but rather from those influences among which he may choose. He may be passionately committed to his art, to a cause, to nationalism or to his family while at the same time be a free agent in the world of literature. As this detachment and eclecticism is part of the poetic process, it forms the poetic self, and contributes to the poet's personality; it is "actually an affirmation of personality." For Smith, eclectic detachment specified not only what is distinctively Canadian about the new poetry, but also what is
distinctive about the new poets.

Smith's article suggests that eclectic detachment would be useful to critics and scholars in their studies of an "almost classic instance of an easily isolable phenomenon: the quick and almost forced development of a compact and self-contained literary tradition -- arising from the practice of the poets -- and of an orthodoxy (rather rapidly changing) -- arising from the sensibility of readers and the cognition of critics." Eclectic detachment would be a more specific way of pin-pointing the difference between this sudden, forced orthodoxy and the cosmopolitan tradition itself. This distinction, he believes, is necessary because the native and cosmopolitan traditions in Canadian poetry may go back as far as nineteenth-century "establishers of a literary orthodoxy," such as W. D. Lighthall (in his "Introduction" to Canadian Songs and Poems of 1892). The compact and self-contained literary tradition to which Smith refers is that of the poets himself had labeled as cosmopolitan in the 1943 anthology: himself, Scott, Klein, Page, Avison and others -- the phenomenon of Canadian modernism, or the new poetry. The elder tradition, Smith indicates, held that the characteristic note of Canadian poetry is the "heroic and mythological rather than personal and lyrical." Its "blatant nationalism," and -- it is implied -- its technical awkwardness, remained "dominant until the late twenties," the period designated in The Book of Canadian Poetry as "Varieties of Romantic Sensibility."
The article calls for a serious criticism of the older poetry "because it shows us what our ancestors were able to do when they tried their best." As anthologist and critic, Smith's position is central to a view of Canadian poetry that claims for itself the highest standards of criticism, and an authority commensurate with those standards. The centrality of his point of view is amply demonstrated by the critics he cites in support of his argument: Northrop Frye, James Reaney, Malcolm Ross, and Milton Wilson. His tone is unmistakably patronizing, urging contemporary criticism in 1968 to forgive the older poetry for being unable to "provide us with a tradition," since the older poetry did not have the advantage of having read "Hulme or Eliot or Dylan Thomas." Before Smith's circle liberated Canadian poetry, he is saying, there is nothing much really worth reading, but it would be unscholarly not to record what they -- misguided, dear bad poets that they were -- had tried to do. Those earlier poets "simply show us what it feels like to live here in 1840 or 1860 or 1890." 15

It is here that the contradiction appears. — in the marginal area between 1890 and the first substantial successes of the Montreal poets' vociferous and militant opposition to the poetry of their immediate predecessors. Smith's remarks on the "forced development" of modernism in Canadian verse actually glosses over the fact that the new poets virtually hounded the "native" poets out of the public ken through anthologies and magazines. Smith implicitly excuses the
imitativeness of the new poetry by virtue of eclectic detachment, yet does not go so far as to suggest that the literary contexts of the older poetry may be similarly excused. Smith reveals his bias when he suggests that the only tradition that Canadian verse has ever had began in his milieu. The absurdity of his argument comes to a head when he criticizes the elder generation for not having read poets who were not yet born in their time. The essential contradiction of Smith's view perhaps goes back to his vitriolic "Rejected Preface" to New Provinces, where he regarded detachment as that which was definitively bad about the native strain: an irresponsible, "self-absorption that served the evils of capitalism blindly," and lacked the will to "combine power with simplicity." In these writings, Smith represents what became in fact an orthodox position in Canadian literary circles, characterized by contradictions and dilemmas created by forcing literary traditions into being by essentially political means.

The new poets did much good for Canadian poetry when they banded together during the Depression and the war years, but their methods and practices created a gap in the history of Canadian verse in which a reader may not know what it felt like for poets "to live here" in 1900, or 1910, or 1920. In effect, the creative and critical achievements of the new poets rendered this knowledge inaccessible in a manner falling not short of a prohibition. Such a large body of poetry should not be repressed because it does not fit into the pattern of a
critical debate, however worthy that debate is in itself; yet the contradictory nature of this debate helps to point out unexplored areas in the literature that can be studied in greater detail. What is needed is not a reconciliation of contradictions, nor a debate on what the "true" orthodoxy might be. We may not find "our sense of identity" in Smith's eclectic detachment, since in the context of Smith's criticism what is distinctively Canadian emerges from the specific circumstances surrounding the radicalism in literary taste of an intellectual élite among the young of the twenties. Nonetheless, though questions of national character in literature are answerable, perhaps, only in the long view, a nation's pride in its values, as expressed in literature, cannot be entirely ignored even when those values are compromised in retrospect. Moreover, the silence that Smith's orthodoxy seems to impose on the study of poetry in Canada spans over a quarter of a century, a period much too large to ignore in a literature so small in years.

Smith offered eclectic detachment as an alternative to those terms by which analyses of Canadian poetry are sometimes focused. Neither provincialism, regionalism, colonialism, modernism nor cosmopolitanism are specific yet generic enough to be widely applicable to the many different varieties of verse in Canada. Negative connotations adhere to provincialism, regionalism and colonialism which distort analysis and lead to apologetics. Scholars and critics today grow increasingly
uncomfortable with modernism when speaking about the poetry of the past. Cosmopolitanism, as the upper half of a hierarchy comprising two mutually exclusive traditions, became controversial at its inception and may well have been conceived by Smith's milieu for just this controversiality. Detachment, on the other hand, as an experiential nut-shell enclosing the polemic, has no such negative coloring about it. Its implicit separateness and semi-isolation is a historical and even mundane condition to be neither touted, silenced nor reserved for one's own. As a product of our origins as a colony and the client relationship that Canada must have with the United States, the term suggests a more balanced attitude toward a literature that has never been completely free of American and English literary traditions. The term allows one to reverse Malcolm Ross's judgement that Canadian literature "does not have, did not have, will not have writers as specifically and identifiably Canadian as Whitman and Hemingway are specifically and identifiably American," by insisting on the impossibility of Canadian literature to be anything other than what it is, an enterprise characterized by a detachment not unlike that of clients and consumers. Neither jubilation nor despair, however, should accompany the contention that we are, have been and may well remain literary buyers and not sellers, at least of new departures, in the world-market of literature.

In the years since Confederation no country has had a monopoly on the reading tastes of the international market.
The concept of an inevitable detachment, in countries such as ours, offers an even-handed approach to the historian of a literature from which many forms of expression can emerge. In my view, the detachment is not restricted to the new poetry of the thirties, forties and fifties and cannot be party to the notion of a revolution in poetic taste, techniques or choice of subject matter. It can, however, represent the background against which the power-struggles of aesthetic values can be seen responding to social and economic conditions through time. Smith's valuing of revolt in the thirties may be seen as a political and ideological process by which the poetry of beauty, truth and order, as supported by the Canadian Authors' Association, was compromised.

Poetic values have come and gone within the detachment, but at its heart the essential contradiction has remained the same. Irony is its only necessary absolute, since no poem that must respond to a temporary and perhaps even arbitrary collection of foreign influences can at the same time be said to be words that are spoken from the native heart. It was perhaps this ironic element that led Smith to claim the detachment for his own. The dilemma of this irony is that the detachment functions to articulate and integrate a poetic consciousness that can never be anything but its own centre. The detachment is self-centred, seeing other cultures in relation to itself. Yet it can never be wholly self-conscious, since its attention is focused on what is other than itself. Its theme is the
ability of the individual poet to enter into negotiations -- like a Third World country, as it were -- with poetic powers that are always different if not greater than his own. As a process of selection and adaptation, detachment seizes upon what is expedient at a given moment in time, but always in relation to the individual vantage-ground. The controlling parameters of this process may be a commitment to an aesthetic or social position, or the narrative will impose order upon a reader's perception of reality, but changing historical circumstances always determine these parameters. Societies with peaceful colonial origins must eventually institute, perhaps, such ironic processes as constant, driving forces behind the production of native aesthetic values.

Markets and Values.

There is no mistaking the political implications in the anthologies and periodicals, the editorial policies of the three movements in Canadian poetry that crystallized out of Canadian verse during World War II: the publications of the Canadian Author’s Association, the McGill and Preview poets (including Patrick Anderson and P. K. Page), and the First Statement group (Sutherland, Layton, Dudek and Souster). Yet none of the ideologies implicit or explicit in these movements could have been possible without the constant, yet continually shifting undertow of poetic values arising from the milieux. Values such as beauty or irony emerge from a ground of poisi-
bility from which any number of values might arise. The dominance of order, beauty and prophetic truth as values specific to the period reflects the process of selection and exclusion that Smith called eclectic detachment, and which D. M. R. Bentley has more recently described as an ideological process that has resulted in an “ecology” of creative writing in Canada characterized by the adaptation of foreign example and the mutation of it by local content. This process, however, is shaped and coloured by the availability of a market for its expression. The poetry of the early part of the century was silenced in criticism not only because of a change in values, but also because of a change in markets.

Poetic values, like the site of a city, are never absent from the human experience of growth and organization by which a city becomes an expression of an order in space and time. Yet, as such, values are responsive to economic, social and cultural factors. The dominance of beauty, order and truth or prophecy in early twentieth-century poetry in Canada reflects the intrinsic worth of these values, the ways in which these values were rationalized by Canadian readers, and the market-conditions for poetry at the time. In the 'twenties, readers of both popular and serious verse demanded poetic beauty from the poets, and in large quantities. This situation was related to post-war euphoria and a general sense of well-being—and promise encouraged by victory and improving economic conditions. Strictly axiological concepts were
coloured by the nationalism and commercialism of the time. Though complex and contradictory attitudes developed in the thirties regarding the values for which poems were written, Canadian readers had nonetheless begun to recognize in far greater numbers than before that pleasurable thought and feeling could be found in their indigenous writers. This "discovery" of a living Canadian literature was the product of a situation in which aesthetic values were inextricably combined with the values of the market-place.

The proliferation of Canadian poetic works in the period between the Great War and the Depression was due, at least in part, to the relative prosperity of Canadian publishers at that time, since they had done quite well in war-book sales before, during and after the war. This market continued to support Canadian publishers after 1917. Canada's participation in the war led to renewed nationalism, and Canadian publishers capitalized on the sense of a new nation holding its own among the greater powers by fuelling this aspect of post-war optimism with aggressive advertising techniques learned from the practice of American publishers. A ground-swell of public interest in the nation led to an interest in books of and about Canadian history, geography and institutions. On the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, for example, several books about Canada appeared and sold well. J. O. Miller's *The New Era in Canada* (1917) made the non-fiction best-seller lists. Such sales helped to support a market for
Canadian verse that did not regain a comparable size until the Second World War, an even more profitable time for the Toronto publishers. During both wars, the adjective "Canadian" before an author's or a publisher's name, or before a description of content in the reviews, became a common feature of advertising. This later disgusted readers such as A. J. M. Smith, Morley Callaghan and the editors of the Canadian Forum, who felt that patriotism as a selling-point was beneath the dignity of literature.

During the depression of 1891-1898 and the boom period of 1898-1913, Canadian publishers had struggled to assert themselves in the book trade. The Canadian market, however, was dominated by American and British houses. What in publishing circles is called the trade public had supported Canadian publishing as an aspiring reprint industry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (the trade public creates best-sellers; the serious public maintains low sales over longer periods of time). The ambitions of the Toronto publishers were based on an understanding of this market, which some believed to be the highest percent per capita in the world at that time. The trade public turned In Flanders Fields into a best-seller in three countries and bought such quantities of non-fiction books that J. Murry Gibbon remarked that, in 1910, "the war seems to have uncovered a new Canadian reading public just as much as it has brought new writers to birth," and with the publishers' advances in advertising and printing.
techniques, "there was never a more appropriate moment for a new Canadian literature."

During World War I, problems of communication and transatlantic shipping led to increasing publishing costs for the British publishers, which led in turn to a decline in their interest in the Canadian market. As the prominence of British imprints declined in the fierce competition for control over the growing market for cheap reprints, the Canadian publishers were forced to rely more heavily on the American houses. Canadian publishers had little choice but to import the American editions, since the Canadian market was regularly included in the American when contracts were drawn up. The reason for this is that the Canadian publishers were small operations and needed the profitable business of printing and distributing foreign books as agents of the large American and British houses. The war made it cheaper for Canadian publishers to follow the American trend; by the end of the war, Canadian readers were accustomed to the American style of publishing, with its lower price, colourful jackets and glowing blurbs.

The financial successes that the wars brought to Canadian publishers enabled them to evolve from a reprint industry to agency publishing, which was for them a transitional stage between mere book-selling and independent publishing. The popular reprints of Ralph Connor's books, Wilfred Campbell's *The Beautiful Rebel* (1909), Nellie
McClung's *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908), Robert Service's *The Trail of '98* (1910), as well as reprints of foreign authors, financially stabilized Canadian publishing and helped to develop a practical self-awareness among writers in matters of copyright, contracts and sales, which pragmatism became institutionalized in the Canadian Authors' Association in 1921.

The Association worked in close liaison with the Canadian Association of Booksellers and Stationers, established also in 1921, and the Association of Canadian Bookmen, founded in 1925 as a bridge between the business concerns of publishers and the literary concerns of authors. The Authors' Association was encouraged in the beginning by Hugh S. Eayers of Macmillan, Lorne Pierce of Ryerson, Donald G. French, literary editor of McClelland and Stewart and Jack McClelland, all of whom were welcomed as members of the Authors' Association. The founders of the Authors' section were Stephen Leacock, Pelham Edgar, B. K. Sandwell and John Murry Gibson, who became the first president. Sandwell, as secretary, also edited the *Canadian Bookman*, through which the publishers presented their views. Both sections worked together to lobby against copyright legislation that was unfair to both the Canadian publisher and the local writer, and to drum up business in the market for Canadian books. Though they were attacked by the academic public of later generations for "maple-leaf boosterism," shoddy reviewing, mediocre writing, and low standards of excellence, they nonetheless succeeded in
educating the Canadian reader on the value of indigenous writing -- something the academic critics could never have accomplished in the same space of time, though American and British firms, well into the fifties, continued to set readers' tastes and trends, to determine which Canadian authors would enjoy publication and to dump excess in poor production on the Canadian market. A sense of solidarity existed between writers and their publishers in the first decades of the century, and though it may not have produced great writers, it helped local talent see the possibilities, remunerative or otherwise in writing for the local market.

Since the publishers depended on the trade public, the values of idiosyncrasy and experiment had to be put to one side. Though the profits acquired as agents of American houses were sometimes used to underwrite the sales of local books, and some writers were beginning to "write Canadian," local ventures were still regarded in most cases as needless risks unless the Canadian books were marketable abroad (Canadian best-sellers might sell up to 5,000 copies, whereas a hit in the United States might sell as many as 100,000), as Fisher Unwin remarked in the Bookseller and Stationer:

it was "to be regretted that authors are not more attuned to national interests when they permit their agents to sell the rights of their books to an American publisher and at the same time throw in, by way of a makeweight, the Canadian market."
markets in Britain and the United States with the formula-writing of L. M. Montgomery, Charles William Gordon (Ralph Connor), and others. In order to secure and build upon their ambitions of independence from the foreign publishing houses of which they were merely local agents, the Canadian publishers needed to expand their operations in the British and American markets. These publishers required financial growth in order to survive and become truly independent. Thus, it was necessary for them to take only those Canadian books which promised good sales in foreign markets. Post-war pride in all things Canadian infected the publishers as much as anyone else, and they are to be commended for the service they performed for Canadian literature at the time. However, being the astute businessmen they were, their editors and readers had to sift books submitted for publication for qualities that might be exportable: qualities such as the Leacock's humour, Service's brand of adventure, the pleasures of Pickthall, or the certainties of Pratt. For a country so small in numbers, the publishers discovered a surprising wealth of such qualities. In its essence and due to the economic situation of literary marketing and distribution at that time, literary values were tied to commercial success. As the dominant value in the earlier poetry of the period was a variety of the beautiful as a function of subjective pleasure, the intrinsic value of beauty was translated into a commodity: an exportable delight.
In the United States, as Earle Birney has pointed out in an article on "E. J. Pratt and His Critics," a tradition of benevolent American attention to Canadian literary activity, though coming to a close in the twenties, still made it possible for publishers to acquire a joint Canadian-American imprint for many Canadian books that promised good sales, as well as a few Canadian books which were not aimed exclusively at the popular market. Among poets who were both serious about their work and popular at the same time, Roberts, Carman and William Henry Drummond were favorably received by American readers and publishers in the early years of the century.

Birney, like Smith in the "Introduction" to the Oxford Book of Canadian Poetry, sees the appearance of Pratt's narrative verse as coincident with a qualitative break in the history of Canadian poetry. Birney argues that Pratt was not better received outside Canada due to "the indifference or fashionable snobberies of British and American critics." In order to make his case that Pratt's "The Cachalot" and "The Great Feud" ought to be regarded as the precursors "of a new taste in poetry," Birney describes "the generally poor literary reputation Canada was suffering at the time Pratt arrived on the scene".

In 1926, the date of Titans, the only living poet identified with Canada in the minds of American readers was Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, and his verse was plainly of the Georgian or even Victorian past, imitative of greater British predecessors, and untouched by the new and quite different poetic
movement headed by Pound and Eliot. Carman and Service, whose best work was done in any case, were alternatively referred to as Americans, by American readers of popular verse who liked them, or dismissed with some justice as regionalist Canadian rhymesters, by the new metaphysicals. Lampman, who had been hailed by William Dean Howells as an important new poet as soon as his first book appeared in 1889, was long since dead; and dead too was the tradition to which Howells as editor of Harper's had been devoted.24

That the popularity of Roberts and others derived at least in part from a particular American audience is significant. The growing financial strength of the Toronto publishers coincided with the departure of this generation of American readers. As a result, publication of a new Canadian writer such as Pratt, "without a joint imprint abroad," might rescue the writer "from oblivion only to doom him to years of purely Canadian (and highly unremunerative) fame." At the same time as Canadian books began to develop a strong local market, no American publisher would accept a contract with a Canadian writer unless the writer was well-known in the United States.

Marjorie Pickthall's reputation at home was also built upon publication in American periodicals. Her appearance abroad guaranteed her reception by serious readers of Canadian verse. Lorne Pierce's list of her magazine publications shows that she published locally in newspapers, young people's and university magazines, while it was "through the pages of the Atlantic Monthly," and other American periodicals like it, such as McClure's, Scribner's, and Harper's, that Pickthall had won "her undisputed place in the literary world." Residing and publishing her fiction in England during the war, Pickthall...
could expect a positive reception in Canada.

Pickthall's publishing history is instructive of the kind of relationship that existed at the time between writers and the Canadian agents of their American and British publishers. After Pickthall published her third collection of poems, *The Lamp of Poor Souls* in 1916, she wrote to Jack McClelland asking McClelland and Stewart to take over her publication rights from S. B. Gundy, Toronto agent for John Lane of London and New York. She wanted McClelland and Stewart to secure the Canadian rights for her poems because she received no royalties from Gundy. As she was content with her arrangements with Methuen and Hodder and Stoughton of London, the publishers of her fiction, distributed in Canada by Musson, their Toronto agent, she had to be persuaded that it was in her best interests for McClelland and Stewart to handle all her rights, including any future rights pertaining to volumes of selected or collected poems. Since at this time the Canadian Authors' Association had not begun to lobby and eventually win the case for an author to own the rights to his books, McClelland was quite proper in insisting that only a blanket contract, the publisher owning all rights, would bring Pickthall the best returns for her poetry. Control over the Canadian rights would enable the Canadian agency to negotiate what royalties should be paid to the author.

The arrangements that were finally made are obscure, but it appears that the contract was not air-tight, since Jack
McClelland had to write to Pickthall's father after her death in 1922, for permission to do a collected volume. Her literary reputation was at its height when she died, and the Toronto agencies were eager to acquire these rights. Arthur Pickthall replied to McClelland's letter that he had already granted permission for a volume of poems to Ryerson, but he accepted McClelland and Stewart's offer provided that McClelland and Stewart delayed its appearance for a suitable period. The Complete Poems of Marjorie Pickthall, compiled by her father, was issued in 1925. Pickthall had earlier appointed Lorne Pierce as her literary executor, and Pierce edited and wrote his memorial volume, the Book of Remembrance, to be issued by Ryerson in the same year. McClelland and Stewart gave Ryerson permission to use Pickthall's poems, provided that Ryerson understood that McClelland and Stewart retained all rights to published and unpublished works. Control over rights was essential to McClelland and Stewart's ability to realize a profit from Pickthall's books at home and abroad.

An elder nostalgia for orderliness and conservative compromise influenced Canadian detachment at the time. Unlike American genteeelism and British Georgianism, the detachment could look upon the prospect of Canada as a protected colony within the Empire with approval and fondness. However, American magazines were given the right to tax-free distribution in Canada in the twenties. Being more financially secure, these periodicals tended to monopolize the market for poetry,
and threaten the survival of the few Canadian outlets for new verse that then existed. The response of the Canadian magazines was to imitate their more successful competitors, which lessened fondness for the colonial in Canadian life and letters and intensified the ambivalent client relationship between Canada and the United States.

The editorial policies of Canadian magazines like Wilson's Monthly were coloured by a certain nineteenth-century awe of Empire. However, in line with nationalist enthusiasm for commercial enterprise, The Canadian Magazine and the house-organs of the Canadian Authors' Association sought to improve the practical conditions of Canadian writers by encouraging a form of protectionism in matters of copyright and distribution. This aspect of the nationalist strain tended inevitably toward an envious regard for the profit and popularity that writers in the United States and Britain could hope to enjoy due to their larger markets. The Authors' Association resented the fact that foreign publishers monopolized the attention of their prospective Canadian audience, while at the same time desiring the prestige and sales that publication abroad might bring them. On the other hand, the more conservative strain tended to value poetry that upheld decorum and refinement of taste as the highest of literary standards.

The critical tradition that welcomed Canadian poets into the American roster included a gentlemanly literati and the wives and children of these well-read gentlemen. It
was expressed in such periodicals as *The North American Review*, *Harper's*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. William Dean Howells, who contributed so much of his genius to the character of the *Atlantic Monthly*, succeeded James Russell Lowell as its editor-in-chief in 1871. In the 'twenties, however, the tradition that Howells might be said to symbolize had become eclipsed by a new wave of American experimentalism in verse. Its most eminent poets were deceased before the close of World War I: the Echo Club of New York poets led by Bayard Taylor, which had challenged the New England tradition of Bryant, Emerson, Longfellow and Lowell, and the Harvard group of poets, which had produced Edwin Arlington Robinson's innovativeness and Santayana's philosophy.

The elder poets of a tradition friendly to Canadian poets were removed by death before the turn of the century, and when Howells left Boston for New York in 1890, the New England literary scene lost its dominant position in American letters. By the 'twenties, Howells had been labeled as genteel by his successors H. L. Menken's criticism and Sinclair Lewis in the novel. Taylor's Echo Club was a short-lived attempt to refine American poetry into channels that were both popular and profitable (an enterprise that echoes what would happen in Canada, but on a much smaller scale). Robinson, the youngest of the Harvard poets, did not receive critical recognition until after 1910, when President Theodore Roosevelt helped Robinson secure a major publisher for his fourth book of
poems (and it is for the craftsmanship, irony and the persistent but darkened New England transcendentalism of this book, *The Town Down the River*, that he is chiefly remembered). George Santayana largely abandoned poetry in 1901, when he published *A Hermit of Carmel*.

The serious readers of Canadian poetry in the first quarter of the century often felt justified in valuing a poet who had found an audience in the American poetic tradition that included Lowell's poetry, Howells as an editor and arbitor of literary taste, and the aesthetic values that Santayana and his generation passed on to the reading public of the 'twenties in Canada and the United States. As this tradition and its demise is related to the current critical neglect of early twentieth-century verse in Canada, it may be well to review some of its major characteristics.

Aesthetic values in Santayana's thought may perhaps be best understood in connection with the notion of happiness. In *The Life of Reason* (1905-06), valuing is always based on beliefs about the future that derive ultimately from experiences of pleasure or pain. Such experience is occasioned when men "park in the same part of space" as a physical object and fuse experience and the object into the process of knowing. Values thus obtained benefit society through the agency of reason, which makes a harmony of a community of desires and renders this harmony morally and meaningfully authoritative.
through reason’s ability to rarify the “actual tendency of nature” to aspire toward its perfection. Beauty is identical with desire; it is good because it is desired. Beauty can be desired in many different ways. Its value is a product of the interaction of human psychology and the materials, the forms or expressions of objects that are inherently desirable. Hence, one’s capacity for belief in future happiness in the real world derives from subjective pleasure.

When this aesthetic is put into practice, the resultant criticism will be very similar to Lorne Pierce’s work on Pickthall, for example. For both Santayana and Pierce, subjective sensation is understood to be transformed into the objective qualities of things, “feeling is objectified by a psychological trick, an exhibition of mental legerdemain, a case where consciousness deceives itself.” In Elijah Jordan’s The Aesthetic Object (1937), from which I am quoting, the beautiful object is, with Santayana’s trick, analysed into colour, tone, colour-tone, cadence, line, design and so forth.

In order to show that such ideas concerning poetic values were at least adapted by Canadians, one may note the similarity between this practice and Pierce’s analysis of Pickthall’s “sanctuary of loveliness” into cadence, colour, contour, 28 favorite words, and imagery. A large market for such sanctuaries existed in Canada, England and the United States in the early part of the century. Such poems were understood by the readers in a kind of happy mix of subjectivity and
objectivity, the poem as a magical conduit between eternity and the here and now analyzed into its parts.

Lowell, born in the same year as Whitman, 1819, had been the editor of The Atlantic Monthly and the North American Review, and was deeply involved in American politics as a minister to Spain and England. In his poetry, he differed from Emerson in having no interest in nature as the sensible frame of transcendence. He regarded the world as an screen on which history became a confused outpouring of settings and events. For Lowell, despite Whitman's example, the incoherence of time could never be reconciled within the personality of the poet as prophet. Lowell became a public poet, "a noter of occasions large and small, and a commentator on them." The primary value of his poetry was not self-realization within change, but rather the visionary value of a momentary raid on incoherence, which provided temporary "refuge and refreshment." This reconciliation was available through a subdued vision that reduced "the sense of unique crisis imposed on the present" by the apparently sudden rise of cities, the importance of science and the ever-present Darwinian threat to traditional ideas of order. Lowell sought poetic resolution in the public figure of a poetic genius, who, in Lowell's own words, humanistically and romantically "kindles, lights, inspires, and transmits impulsion to other minds" through moments of revelation in which readers become aware "that they too may be parts of the controlling purpose of the world," however transient
and compromising that purposiveness might be. In a way, he was a very "Canadian" poet. For Americans, Lowell was a minor alternative to Whitman's grander and more intimate conception of the poetic self; Sidney Lanier's valuing of the beautiful in the music of poetry, and Dickinson's deftly inward-probing conceits.

At the turn of the century, the situation of poetry in the United States was no less impoverished than it was above the forty-ninth parallel. The modern world was changing too rapidly for poetry to accommodate the stumbling and rearrangement of events, the physical settings of life in the cities or the exigencies of politics and economics. The traditional value of nature could no longer be sustained in poetry. Poets like Whitman, Lowell, Lanier—and among the Canadian poets, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts in his poems on "The Unknown City," the Elevated Railroad and the Brooklyn Bridge—endeavored to master their doubts and fears by an act of will, which tested the poets' powers to reconcile, even briefly, an immediate awareness of inhuman process in nature and a desire for the coherence that had enabled Emerson to make sense of religion, reason, literature and society all within the compass of his first little book, Nature, in 1836. Emerson's optimism faltered and was eclipsed in American poetry, yet like an American variety of detachment, it reappears in the figure of Howells as a man-of-letters.

Howells, who met Lowell, Hawthorne and Emerson during a
visit to England in 1860, became their heir and representative to the modern world in the pages of The Atlantic Monthly on his return to the United States. His popularity and his reputation as a critic came to be so highly regarded by the American public that virtually any writer he chose to praise was assured of success. Until 1920, his values dominated the American literary scene in articles for The Atlantic, the North American Review and Harper’s. By the turn of the century the curiosity and openmindedness of his criticism was crucial in the American reader’s acceptance of realism and naturalism. Howells epitomized the role of the American “quality” magazines as a power of judgement and interpretation and as a liaison between the public and the high world of literature.

However, in the months prior to the appearance of Harriet Monroe’s Poetry, in 1912, the American periodicals “which most persons thought of as ‘good’ magazines,” The Atlantic, Scribner’s or Harper’s, “carried from two to five verse tidbits a month, generally of highly vapid character, sentimentally designed.” Almost totally blind to the paroxysm of conflicting and contradictory values that poetry was beginning to express in America, The Atlantic “exhibited during 1912 only one piece of verse by a poet (Amy Lowell) new to the American scene.” The American literary tradition that was friendly to Canadian writers, and which guaranteed the publication of works on the basis of a joint Canadian-American imprint, sailed, “in impervious smugness,” serenely through
the poetic revival of Robinson, Alice Meynell, Lindsay, Eliot, Aldington, H. D. and Pound, printing the same now-forgotten poets until well into the thirties. The notion that "modernism" arrived late in Canada due to some sort of "cultural time-lag" is thus demonstrably false. Modernist experiment was everywhere confined at first to a radical elite. On a per capita basis, as I will show in later chapters, such experiment was as much alive in Canada as elsewhere in the early part of the century.

What poetry in Canada lacked was a local magazine like Poetry (Chicago), which was intended initially as an organ of challenge to the literary establishment, and expressed for the first time in North America a modern dialectic between serious and popular writing. This enterprise was repeated at McGill by A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott and Led Kennedy in the McGill Fortnightly Review and The Canadian Mercury. Had there been a market for the experimental verse in Canada, the work of poets such as Wilson MacDonald, F. O. Call, Arthur Stringer and even Pickthall might have developed along far more recognizably "modern" lines. The fact remains, however, that the vast majority of readers in Canada and the United States continued to read for those values that had been expressed within the market as described above, characterized by a detachment that readers admired in men like Howells and Lowell as particularly accommodating to the Canadian experience.

In the United States, the dominant values of poetry
included both a public and a private concern for the self, equally intense in Whitman and Dickinson. These values, eventually led to an attempt to understand the public self through incorporation of the environment in W. C. Williams and Charles Olson and to the later psycholical pro邦gs of the private self in the confessional school of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath. In Canada, the values of poetic vision and order, lacking these alternatives, redoubled in intensity, leading to a poetry that remained critically detached from the environment and the role of self within the environment. Under these conditions, perhaps only a poet like E. J. Pratt could have so successfully satisfied the Canadian audience's desire to find celebration, revelation and reason in their reading.

Where one does find a qualitative break in American verse with the rise to prominence of the contributors to Poetry, we may find a historical continuity in Canadian poetic expression, the arguments of Smith and Birney notwithstanding. A borrowed sense of discontinuity contributed to the logic of Smith's hierarchy, but the negative side of the scale only encapsulates a real and current continuity between the 1860's poets, Pratt and the poets of Sutherland's milieu. The old problem of contraries -- in a Canadian context -- was given new force by Sutherland and Smith in the notion of a poetic revolution and internecine strife. However, in the poetry of such poets as Pickthall or George Herbert Clarke, the literary echoes of their precedents communicated a pleasurable sense of
continuity to the readers of poetry in the early part of the century. This continuity sustained a measure of detachment from the modern world, so that Canadian writing to some extent circumvented the modernist myth of fragmentariness. Such detachment could be a characteristic of national literatures that develop from peaceful colonial beginnings. Perhaps the lack of a revolutionary break with inherited traditions tends to preserve a kind of peaceableness -- as a background, or an ecology in Bentley's sense -- against which poetic values are defined in indigenous contexts. For both serious and popular writers and audiences even now, detachment in some form may be communicating the colonial origins of countries like Canada to the contemporary literary scene. A fundamental divisiveness within the detachment in Canada, however, may be a factor of geography that Sutherland's "literary war" merely reflects. Yet prior to the time of the warring literary schools of Sutherland and Smith, a certain uniformity of sensibility can be seen in the audience of poetry in Canada, England and the United States when one looks at the market conditions of the book trade in the first decades of the century.

As I do mean to imply that literary values arise solely in the context of dialectical materialism, I conclude this introductory chapter with a brief discussion of the philosophy of value, and how specifically poetic values could be the subject of a literary history. There are a number of options available that one could pursue in answering this question.
Ought one to describe the values of a popular poet such as Service in terms of a class-struggle in which the values of his verse engage those of any serious writer? This view enables one to deal with both kinds of values at the same time, but perhaps only to label them as proletarian, bourgeois, or mandarin. Another approach might be based on a subjective theory of archetypal patterns or the phenomenological perspective. One might say, for example, that the comic-strip Superman is sponsored by an orientation of values that also produced Milton's Gabriel. Such an orientation, essentially Platonic, will have its origin in an concept of absolute truth beyond mere historical determinism. One could go further and hold that the existence of all and any values serves to generate and maintain the presence of an origin and first cause whose seat is located at the centre of human thought and experience, a centre which is circumscribed by the act of knowing. One might even elect to turn this situation on its head, which Heidegger, for instance, seems to have been concerned with from 1925 to 1972: the attempt to deconstruct the concept of a first cause in the philosophical tradition by means of his critique of Nietzsche's "transvaluation of all values."

Should one then engage dialectical materialism and the philosophy of presence together with its critique in a dialogue that would reveal the manner in which metaphysical ideas of value operate within the ideology of a nation or a culture?

In 1952, John A. Irving conducted a re-examination of
Canadian philosophy, taking as his point of departure T. S. Eliot's remark that the problem of values is "the central philosophical issue of the twentieth century." Irving's book was a response to a modern blossoming of intellectual concern over the problem of values, whose first blossoms in English appeared in the works of the Americans Wilber Harlan Urban, Ralph Barton Perry and John Dewey in the first quarter of the century. These writers brought the fundamental duality of values rooted either in a transcendent or in an experiential reality to bear on North American life and thought, arguing that a value can be either instrumentally good as means, or intrinsically good as an end in itself.

The Americans were partially inspired by subjective or intuitional trends in German philosophy and by Hugo Münsterberg's pioneering works in applied psychology at Harvard. The British philosophers F. H. Bradley and G. E. Moore were aware of the growing interest in value as an object of German philosophical inquiry, but values in themselves played a small part in their ethical and moral ideas at the turn of the century. Moore later devoted a chapter of his 1922 Philosophical Studies to "The Conception of Intrinsic Value" in which he disagreed with the Austrians. For Bradley and Moore, values were objects of desire manifested in appearance or cognition. Bradley's process of "self-realization" and Moore's analytical philosophy both allow and attest to the presence of an origin of the good in an Absolute. Thus, whatever is intrinsically...
good will be accessible to man in transcendence of appearance 
or by virtue of the role played by goodness in an aggregate of 
things. Bradley's thought on value went back to T. H. Green, 
and before him, to the debate on the utility principle between 
John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Green's close friend, 
Edward Caird, communicated this tradition of thinking on "the 
greatest happiness for the greatest number" to the Canadian 
philosopher John Watson, whose thought on values was deeply 
influenced by Caird's Scots reformist variety of Idealism. 
Watson became one of the most prolific Idealist philosophers 
in North America.

Canadian philosophers before the Great War regarded 
their time as an era of social crisis in which traditional 
values were swept away by accelerated social change. Despite 
the "facile attempt by the Canadian Mercury in 1928 to dismiss 
the Victorian period in Canada as one of "no real social 
criticism and no real quest for human values" the years 
before and after the war were marked by an intense "intellec-
tual turbulence." The desire to preserve the values of 
religion, as an ideal of moral conduct, engaged the values of 
science and the challenge of evolution with enthusiasm and 
rigor. Canadian thinkers avoided following the Americans into 
the Pragmatism of William James and John Dewey, and the many 
subsequent "isms" of American thought:

The urban blight with its 'inferior' immigrants and dreadful 
sweatshops were frequently seen as a harbinger of American
decadence, as were political corruption and the ethos of 'commercialism.' Many Canadians sought an antidote in the venerable British tradition, a mystical blend of Anglo-Saxon superiority and ancient political wisdom. For many, this cultural imperialism became one facet in a general spirit of reform. 35

A similar anti-Americanism was felt among the poets, who regarded free verse experimentation as "Yankee" after the demise of the older tradition friendly to Canadian verse. This desire for continuity with British traditions, seen as morally superior to "American decadence," has been traced by D. M. R. Bentley through Nathaniel Benson's Modern Canadian Poetry anthology of 1930, W. W. E. Ross's Sonnets and the verse of the McGill group to Dennis Lee's more recent alignment with George Grant, whom Lee sees as an antidote to American colonization of Canada since the 'fifties. In Watson's time, however, British traditions could offer little certainty to philosophy, and the Canadians were forced to their convictions, knowing that their ideas were not based in a widely-held system of beliefs. Thus, Canadian intellectuals followed their own inimitable path, which was generally more inclined toward Idealism despite the early empiricism of James Mavor, the achievement of George Brett in intellectual history and Harold Innis's later social philosophy.

In the United States, Ralph Barton Perry's General Theory of Value (1926) maintained that a value is "any object of any interest," whether moral, religious, artistic, scientific, economic, political, legal or the interest of social
customs. Objects are valued because they are desired. For Perry, values originate in human subjectivity. For Bradley and Moore, in the British tradition, objects are desired for their value, their access to an absolute good. From both the objective and subjective points of view, however, values are regarded as identifiable objects of desire in the real world of human needs and cognition. For the Canadians, the objective relationships between values and history became paramount.

In terms of Canadian thinking on values, with its pluralism (John Watson) and its ecological sensitivity (George Blewett), one might say that values are translated into objects of interest by means of rational thought, keeping in mind what consequences this process has in the real world. For Watson this "real world" is a world of alternative orders, in which objects are distinguished from each other by virtue of the value resident within an object. It is the duty of alternative orders such as society, reason or religion to facilitate the fullest development of that value. Blewett went further to insist that objects in nature retain their inherent value irrespectively of orders of thought such as transcendence or self-realization. George Brett continued this line of attack, insisting on the inherent values of ideas and their paramount role in history and the formation of man's creative achievements. In Harold Innis, values are produced by the ways in which men organize their experience of developing and imposing mastery over space and time, art creates its own
ought to value in order to know the meaning of human behaviour such as a city's rise or the writing of a poem. In the course of this study, I will be working within the conceptual framework suggested by Canadian thinking on values.

My purpose in this study is to provoke new interest in a period of poetic activity in Canada that has been neglected by Canadian critics. Today, we are accustomed to think of the work of these poets as bad in every way. Yet this judgment was at least partially instituted for the sake of political advantage in the struggle between the Montreal milieu and the Canadian Authors' Association. To continue to assess the poetry in this way would be unscholarly. Consequently, I am concerned with recovering a historical context for the values this poetry held in its time, and the various ways in which these values were rationalized and expressed. This historical context could serve as a forum in which interested parties might debate claims that I make in the course of the thesis. Ideally, the thesis would suggest a number of other ways in which the period might be re-assessed and re-evaluated by Canadian scholars and critics.
Notes to Chapter One


7. E. K. Brown, *On Canadian Poetry* (Ottawa: Techumseh Press, 1977), p. 67, for example, criticizes Pickthall thus: "When she thought of what the war was fought to preserve she symbolized what she valued by a daffodil. The "Naturism" of Pickthall's "exquisite little details... could go no farther. She had worked "the last and smallest lode. It was time for change." Lorne Pierce, *Marjorie Pickthall: A Memorial Address given at Victoria University, Toronto, April 7, 1943, in commemoration of the twenty-first anniversary of the poet's death* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943), p. 5: "With Marjorie
Pickthall's theory of the old poetic tradition in Canada may be said to have come to its foreordained end. Moreover, she "carried the old tradition perhaps as far as it could go, or was meant to go, and certainly as far as the transplanted Celtic motif was desirable in the new world." (p. 6).


John Sutherland, "Three New Poets," *First Statement*, 1, No. 12 [1943], 3; and John Sutherland, "Literary Colonialism," *First Statement*, 2, No. 4 (Feb. 1944), [13].


31. Parvis Emad, *Heidegger and the Phenomenology of Values: His Critique of Intentionality* (Glen Ellyn: Torrey Press, 1981), pp. 49-103. I chose Heidegger as an example of the possibility of approaching the problem of value in a deconstructionist manner mainly because much of his work on Nietzsche stems from the period.


The Detachment in Lotusland:

MacInnes, MacDonal, Brown, Clarke and Stringer

Oh Wilde; Verlaine; and Baudelaire,
their lips were wet with wine,
Oh poseur, pimp, and libertine! Oh
cynic, sot, and swine!
Oh votaries of velvet vice! ...Oh,
gods of light divine!

-- Robert Service

Cultural detachment is probably not an autochthonous
twitch in the face of Canadian identity, but rather a local
expression of a sense of the fragmentation of authority that
enters the intellectual history of the western world during
the nineteenth century. The Idealist thought of Watson and
Bléwett, for example, was an attempt to uncover an order and
purpose among the fragments of alternative orders and ecologi-
cal regions in the minds and the living space of the Canadian
people. Their Idealism was a means of disengaging the
estrangement of philosophy, in the Hegelian sense of "Spirit,"
from the challenge of the modern world, and as such an expres-
sion of the same detachment that produced the intuitive and
speculative philosophies of Bergson and Whitehead in the first
decades of the century. The international phenomenological
rejection of both the analytical and the metaphysical as
grounds of knowledge, in favour of the immediate experience of
individual consciousness, launched by Husserl as the editor of
the Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung (1913-30), may well mark an apogee of this detachment. Thus, it is not detachment itself, but rather the degrees of intensity and the variety of its expression that have contributed to the distinctive complexion of Canadian art and culture.

The detachment is merely one way of translating values into ideas and systems of beliefs and practices. The Victorian alternatives of retirement and engagement with life that can be seen in Confederation poetry or the sensibility expressed in Bliss Carman's "open road" motif could be rationalized equally in terms of alienation and isolation, survival.

Various forms of nationalist exegesis, the terror of the soul facing a non-human environment that resists man's attempts to find a co-ordinating vision of his world, and so on. The value of a poetic vision in the verse of Tom MacInnes or Wilson MacDonald may be readily regarded in terms of a "garrison mentality" composed of MacInnes's Chinese philosophy and MacDonald's assimilation of the theosophy of Madame Blavatsky. To say that their vision is a factor of their detachment is only to look at the relationships between poetry and the generalities of culture from another angle. Thus, it is important to understand what vision meant to them as a value in and for itself.

Poetry in Canada was no less smug and genteel than much of the popular verse written abroad, but what seemed to be lacking on Canadian soil was the passionate and troubled
engagement of the self with problems of modern life that one finds in a Wilde, Yeats, Edgar Lee Masters or Eliot. Canadian verse seemed content to be popular, and the complacent optimism, the stability of its conservative nature, were seen as signs of immobility by the younger generation coming to maturity during the Depression. The elder generation of poets, however, born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were fully aware of those questions that were eroding the foundations of authority and that sense of certainty an individual needs in order to cope; whether science could destroy the fundamental tenets of religion, whether the historical process must operate in nature entirely separate from any influence of human morality and ethics, and whether civilization had reached a stage of inevitable decline in which the future would offer nothing but dissolution. What is remarkable about the works of Tom MacInnes, Wilson MacDonald, George Herbert Clarke, Marjorie Pickthall and others, is that by virtue of forcing a certain aesthetic distance between the values of their poetry and the faltering of traditional values in general, they collectively achieved a form of literary reality that served to provide an alternate world for their audience. This literary world perhaps reflected a kind of beatitude rooted in the fundamental Christian belief in another reality where death and sin are excluded.

Literature, in the sense of an alternate reality in which pleasure and consolation may be found, ceased, in the
early part of the century, to be a pursuit of an elite, cosmopolitan few. The orthodoxy that William D. Lighthall, Andrew MacPhail, Archibald MacMechan, and John Daniel Logan had developed in their thought and literary works was eclipsed by an elevation of literature to the level of the popular. The means by which the market for local writing could be increased became a cause to which authors, publishers, and journalists—critics like William Arthur Deacon passionately dedicated themselves. In the creation of this popular literary world, early twentieth-century poetry in Canada was no less adventurous than American and British experiments with technique and subject matter, by which writers confronted the problems they faced in modern life and society. Today, we feel that the Keatsian sweetness of the verse, and the commercial goals of the Canadian Authors' Association, may be dismissed as an embarrassing episode in Canadian intellectual history, in which writers demeaned themselves by catering to a demand for sentimental escapism. By making distinctions between the aesthetic values of poetry and the values of popular literature, to which early twentieth-century poetry in Canada responded, however, it may be possible to achieve a more sympathetic appreciation of a period that has not received sufficient critical attention.

The values of poetic vision and order sustained at least three kinds of poetry until at least the mid-thirties: poetry of decadent beauty and prophetic truth, and a narrative
verse that attempted to order the fragmentary meaningfulness of early-twentieth-century life and thought. In the latter case, detachment takes the form of a concern for the power of the imagination to determine how the audience will perceive the world in which it lives. A poetry of truth was the concern of poets who affected a prophetic capacity to hear a "voice" speaking from their locality (the totality of environment and human habitation), whose truth could pierce the conceptual pallisades that separated them from physical and psychological reality. The most popular poetry of the period, however, was that of a lyric cry in which the voices of Swinburne, Baudelaire, Walter Pater and Oswald Spengler were translated into a native idiom. A common motif of the "aesthete" or "decadent" post-Symbolist poetic is the dream-world in which nature is reduced to the pleasures of an artificial paradise hung with precious stones and metals in fantastic and mythological settings. As in Pickthall, for example, these sterootypes formed the basis of a preference for the world of reading, they did not function to suppress the awakening of desire circumscribed by Eliot in the hyacinth garden and chess-game of The Waste Land. The poets of beauty welcomed it, confident that their values would hold against the widening gyre of authority's relevance to everyday life and pleasure.

As a value for which poems were written, aesthete or decadent beauty spans a hiatus between two transitional stages in Canadian poetry occupied by such poets as Francis Sherman.
Helena Coleman, Theodore Goodridge Roberts, Agnes Ethelwyn Wetherald and others on one side, and later poets such as those anthologized in *New Provinces* (1938) on the other. The verse written between these margins describes a lotusland from which poetry in Canada awakened in the thirties to defend itself self-consciously against angry voices of dissent among younger poets like A. J. M. Smith, the "Prufrock of Montreal," as Leo Kennedy had dubbed him in *The McGilliad* in 1931. Nonetheless, much of the verse of the period 1900–1930 does sustain a re-reading today, and in this chapter I concentrate on the manner in which Tom MacInnes, Wilson MacDonald, George Herbert Clarke, Audrey Brown, and Arthur Stringer conceived of the value of poetic beauty in their verse.

Thomas Robert Edward MacInnes (born McInnes, 1837–1951) turned to verse in his early forties after having built a successful law career in British Columbia. When he was thirty in 1897, his father became the lieutenant-governor of British Columbia. Through his father's connections, MacInnes's law practice was furthered by positions in government such as drafting immigration and anti-narcotic legislation and "performing valuable secret missions to China," as his friend William Arthur Deacon put it. As a member of "society," MacInnes was interested in the sort of business dealings that can make or break a man financially. Deacon recorded that in China, in his fifties, "MacInnes determined to make money by
system of modern transportation." Deacon suggests that with the confidence man's gift for persuasion, he convinced the city of Canton of its need for streetcars. Canton advanced MacInnes two thousand dollars for a trip to Vancouver to prepare estimates and subsequently enounced him as director of the Cantonese railway company.

Like MacDonald, MacInnes was bitterly disappointed in the Canadian public for not granting him financial success from the sales of his books. However, in MacInnes's case, his concern for poetry may have been eclipsed by his business interests in China. His collection of ballades, in 1918, was his last book of verse aside from a collection of poems written in old age and published in 1947. His bohemian mystique as a poete-poseur was a product intended for the cosmopolitan glitterati of his time; a strata of Canadian intellectual society that was known to the public through photographs in popular magazines and celebrity-news reportage of upper-crust functions and soirees. MacInnes's society greatly influenced the value of poetic beauty in his verse.

MacInnes hoped to capitalize on an expression of beauty that his audience seems to have valued ideologically as a portal on transcendence. The idea of beauty in his verse promised consolation in the higher unities of man and truth, yet it also functioned unconsciously as a subliminal conduit for the release of libidinal pressures. The transformation of
the romantic concept of beauty into the decadent aesthetic as a vehicle for desire was first elaborated by the French Symbolists. The aesthetic was later disseminated by the English decadents published by John Lane's The Bodley Head. This notion of beauty is the foundation of MacInnes's poetic, overlayed by an opportunistic adaptation of Service's language, and the philosophy of the *Tao Te Ching* in which MacInnes found self-justification for aesthetic attitudes some might have regarded as amoral in his time.

MacInnes became interested in Taoist philosophy while in China, which he first visited in 1916. The distinctiveness of his poems derives from his combinations of Lau Tse, the verse form of Villon's *ballades*, and Service's highly successful adaptation of Kipling's language. MacInnes was in the Yukon as a lawyer for the government when Service's *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907) was at the height of its popularity. MacInnes's *Lonesome Bar*, published in Montréal in 1909, attempted a departure from the poetic fantasies of his earlier poems, modelled on Keats and "The Lady of Shalott," through Service's muscular use of language. The earlier immature work had not then been published in book form.

In "Nocturne," an early poem published in *Amber Lands*, MacInnes describes the casual seduction of a Mexican señorita at a turn-of-the-century cocktail-party. This poem is as pleasing today as it was meant to be then, perhaps, to a lady-friend of the up-and-coming lawyer from B. C. The hostess...
leads MacInnes to "That orchid-maid" who so entrances him, standing alone among "those Northern flowers," that he is transported. The poet hears the mandolins of bronze-skinned Mexicans playing a love-song of Spain, and extemporizes in indirect quotation on the woman's beauty, and the beauty that their pleasure could consummate:

"Lo, this garden of the rich
Made wide for us, and free!
With all the crescent witchery
Of a night in June!"

MacInnes subtly draws the image of the love-bed from the stereotypes of romance with which he hopes to please the lady:

"And lo, the over-arching trees
That cover us from sight!
O Senorita of Delight!
Here--alone!"

This is skilled seduction-poetry, and had MacInnes been content to work toward becoming a Canadian Wyatt or Herrick, he might have been hailed as the father of the sexual revolution in mid-century Canada. He was not content, however. In poems that now require a suspension of contemporary distaste for the deliberately pleasing in image, sound and rhythm, such as "Edgar Allan Poe," "In the Afterdeath," and "Underground" in *Amber Lands*, MacInnes participated intellectually, and with originality, in the gradual awakening of western societies to the darker powers of intuition, Lawrence's "dark gods." This side of MacInnes's poetry took the form of the decadents'
fascination with the borrows that may be dredged up from an analytical view of human desire.

In "The Tiger of Desire," one of the better known villanelles, MacInnes declares his belief in unrestrained concupiscence. As the tiger, MacInnes aspires to take his pleasure "By the leave o' God" from "The innocent of all the World." In this fantasy, his prey is "resistless," and his passion drives him "Mad with agony and fright." In "Zalinka,"

another often anthologized poem, MacInnes shows to what extent his idea of desire requires not so much the "leave o' God," as a dream-world in which social disapproval would be inappropriate. This world is evoked by means of the recurring motifs of an entirely artificial Edenic background in the sense that it is composed of the cosmetic paraphernalia, precious stones, jewelry and décor of a woman's boudoir:

I was glad that she slept for I never
Can tell what the finish will be:
What enamoured, maelstrom endeavor
May end in the killing of me:
But, in the moonlit, obscure
Of that, silken, somniferous lair,
Like a poet consumed with a far lust
Of things unapproachable fair
I fancied her body of stardust—
Pounded of spices and stardust—
Out of the opulent air.

"Zalinka" is poised at the threshold between reality and fantasy. The poem records the poet's choice of a dream-world "at right angles to time." MacInnes wonders if either or neither of the lovers "were properly there" and decides that
since he is "subject to queer aberrations," he can have no
"adequate base to compare" the world of poetry and the world
in which we live. The poem expresses an intellectual conundrum
in which recollected pleasure is an opiate, reducing reason to
nodding repetition. MacInnes must pause and parrot the
"utterance futile" of his verse, "In delight of my own, and
for nothing." When MacInnes rounds out the poem by repeating
the opening quatrain, he suggests that wholeness of poetic
form derives from the effect of pleasure upon recollection and
its expression in poetry.

MacInnes's fantastic paradise abrogates the first
injunction not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and
evil. In the "Ballade of Woeful Certainties," MacInnes insists
that the "jungle law is over us," and for "any man who cares
or sees," man must murder if he would create; notions of life
after death, to be won through righteousness, "to the mass are
fantasies." Yet for all this there is a God in MacInnes's
poetic world: In "Content," we learn that God is the poet's
"Playfellow," and God is clearly in collusion with the poet in
"Tiger" and "Zalinka." In "That Other One," light verse on
Nietzschean topics, God is "Some One who'd fix old Eden up,
and would never be jealous of a "Golden Calf or two." In this
renovated paradise "there wouldn't be any Forbidden Tree," and
social discord would be settled by war.

As with the Symbolists, MacInnes believes that in order
to glimpse transcendence one must go beyond the merely human,
and endeavor to hear, as he says in "The Inkling," the headpiece of Amber-Lands, "Some undertone of happier melodies, Or rhythm falling from enchanted spheres." "The Clue," from Lonesome Bar, is a remarkable sonnet in which MacInnes binds fantasy, detachment and desire into a poetic credo. MacInnes tells his lady-listener that to make "the great escape" beyond death and change, one needs not "all Time's experience," but only "Unmeasured Love and sheer Indifference." In the sestet, MacInnes tells his beloved that his verse is unable to draw her closer to him. It is therefore without meaning and value because she, the object of desire, is "the Clue." This is a seduction tactic, of course, and as such the poem at once defers and makes possible a hope for pleasure and the beauty of pleasure in the future.

In MacInnes's work, the literary world to which poetry transports the reader is chiefly composed of stereotypes of the post-Symbolist manner. However, his interest in Taoism, the Chinese philosophy of "the Way," functions to open a conduit between desire and transcendence. This conduit is sustained by MacInnes's cosmetic expressions of beauty, but the maintenance of the way is the primary value to which his poems aspire. The strict formalism of MacInnes's sonnets and French verse forms reflects the poet's will to envisage an alternate and literary reality. The beauty of this poetic world, alone, can withstand what MacInnes called "the moulding and the compression of the average" in the poem "To Walt Whitman," but in "The Clue."
MacInnes and his beloved are fellow-pilgrims "on the formless Way," where words are merely formal representations of that which must for truth's sake deny the way.

Two tenets of Tauism are crucial to MacInnes's poetic, the amoral wildness of the superior man and the ultimate truth of formlessness, "the Uncarved Block." Hence, when lovers meet in reckless passion, they are on their way to the formlessness of Nirvana. One approaches the sacred through sensuality and the loss of self that is concomitant with sexual release, drunkenness and poetry. Finally, in order to achieve this higher release, one must be able to detach oneself from physical pleasure. In "The Way of Beauty" and the "Ballade of Detachment," MacInnes develops Carman's motif of the open road along the lines suggested by his late-Symbolist imagination, and his Tauist beliefs. In "To Walt Whitman," he insists that Whitman was a fellow-traveller in the way, and "not so very far ahead." Both himself and Whitman are compromised by words, since beneath their words, "anybody's words, and the words of the rolling worlds," there lies inviolate and inviolable one formless word "never uttered." In this poetry we may find a philosophical justification for detachment in which the beauty available to fantasy is enjoyed unsullied by the ugliness, doubt and materialism of the modern world. The flexibility of this justification allows MacInnes a degree of detachment even from any doubt he may have had in the appropriateness and veracity of his own words and verse-forms.
The ambivalent feelings toward transcendent poetic beauty and the materialism of a desire for popularity that one finds in MacInnes may also be noted in the verse of Wilson Pugsley MacDonald (1886–1967). Such aesthetic materialism might be explained in terms of an exchange value of beauty in the market-place. An attitude toward art emerged in western culture in the nineteenth century in which transcendence and the beauty of saleable bric-a-brac were close to par.

MacDonald's annoyance with his public for not officially recognizing in him a laureate for his time is curious perhaps in the light of such works as *Comber Cove* (1937). This collection of character descriptions of people in an imaginary small town, rendered in the forms of popular light verse, is a snide condemnation of the."I love Jesus-ers' who drag down the loftiness of a sacred name with a sentimental, gushing, meaningless phrase." MacDonald hated what this meant to him — the lack of desire to hear "angels dance the wind/ Along the choric roof" — and saw the Christians of his day as no better than lotus-eaters. At the same time that *Comber Cove* attacks the materialism of his characters, the book obviously attempts to capitalize on the success of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* (1912), as his earlier *Paul Marchand and Other Poems* had appealed, in 1933, to the readers of William Henry Drummond.

For all this, however, MacDonald did seek images of a poetic vision in his work. Pierce understood that in MacDonald beauty
is less an abstraction than "the reward of man's quest for truth and the fullness of life." To Pierce, the consummate connoisseur-critic of poetic beauty in the period, MacDonald's Out of the Wilderness (1926) was "Canadian to the core." The slight poem "Judge Bilk's Daughter" in Comber Cove, despite its being modelled on Judge Pepperleigh's daughter Zena in Leacock, is one example of the individuality he could bring to the popular aesthetic. This originality has not been properly recognized in the criticism of poetry in Canada.

Lady Joan Roberts, in 1948, adroitly categorized MacDonald's poetry into three or four main lines of development. Traditional verse of "pure lyric ecstasy" in the manner of Lampman and Sir Charles Roberts constitutes his major achievement in Lady Roberts's estimation. Related to this group are MacDonald's love poems. Another group consists of his dialect poems, satirical verse and the poems of social rebellion, in which his premise, according to Lady Roberts, is "that civilization has been proved an evil, and his deduction is that man's only salvation lies in a return to the soil—neither a very deep nor original analysis of the situation."

Lady Roberts was perhaps alluding here to Oswald Spengler's international bestseller of the nineteen-twenties, The Decline of the West (1926-28), which prophesied that before things could get better, they would get a lot worse. Related to this group in a critical way are MacDonald's patriotic pieces, one of which was handsomely published and distributed by the
Canadian National Railway as a tribute to the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, 2 July 1927. Another group contains MacDonald's religious poems, sincere and intensely personal poems such as the autobiographical "Song of the Undertow," and what Lady Roberts considers MacDonald's magnum opus, the "Saga of Immortality." Lady Roberts points out that MacDonald's shyness vanished on the stage, and that his vocal renditions of his works on reading tours were "dynamic."

The trip to England on a cattle-ship in 1902 that "The Song of the Undertow" describes was MacDonald's gift to himself of an adventure after having completed his education at McMaster University, then located in Toronto. MacDonald came from a devout Baptist background and had been encouraged at McMaster to pursue a literary career by Theodore Warding Rand, editor of A Treasury of Canadian Verse, published by Dent in London and Briggs, Dent's agent in Toronto, in 1900. Rand's influence on MacDonald may be found in the poet's determined fondness for the musicality and colourfulness of nineteenth-century romanticist verse. The colour and music for which MacDonald's poetry is remembered today may have been influenced as well by his adopted theosophical beliefs. In 1901-02, William James explained in his Gifford Lectures that the appeal of mystical writings was essentially the same as the appeal of music, which "gives us ontological messages which non-musical criticism is unable to contradict." Citing Swinburne and Madame Blavatsky's Voice of the Silence, James
argued that such musicality appeals to optimistic, pantheistic and anti-naturalistic or other-worldly states of the mind.

After his return to North America, MacDonald tried banking and travelled in Canada and the United States, spending lengthy periods in the U. S. A. In 1911, he met Albert E. S. Smythe, who was active among Canadian followers of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant. After the Great War the membership in the still unofficial Theosophical lodges in Canada increased dramatically. The Toronto lodge, founded in 1891, spearheaded the establishment of an official Canadian Theosophical Society. In 1919 Smythe, president of the new Toronto lodge, became general secretary and editor of The Canadian Theosophist. MacDonald was a member of the Society as was Lawren Harris, the painter, and William Arthur Deacon. Nationalism dove-tailed for these men, eccentrically but neatly with the theosophist belief that universal brotherhood could be founded through oriental thought and mysticism. In 1918, Smythe wrote an introduction to MacDonald's first book, The Song of the Prairie Land, in which he praised MacDonald's versatility in art and business, approved of MacDonald's experiments in free verse, noted that as an inventor MacDonald had "patented several profitable devices," and concluded that the poetry was most impassioned "when he lifts his voice as the prophet of truth to his age." MacDonald's patriotic, religious and lyric poems all depended on his ability as an orator to impart through prophetic fervor a promise of an
imminent golden age of material and spiritual glory. Hope for prosperity and transcendence were not contraries among Theosophists, but an apocalyptic synthesis.

MacDonald's transitory popularity depended too much on the dynamism he could muster before a live audience. He undoubtedly knew that this ambience was connected, in the mind of the public, with their willingness to be close to literary celebrities such as Pauline Johnson or Bliss Carman, who had also enjoyed considerable success with reading tours. MacDonald misunderstood the nature of this intimacy. In his "Song of the Undertow," he placed himself before his audience as an ordinary, hardworking man in whose life God had intervened to provide him with proof of divine guidance in three great crises that confounded the forces of skepticism. MacDonald expected his poem to demolish "the fad for unbelief" and the "multitudinous contradictions" that had threatened his faith when he was a young man; and thereby win accolades from reviewers across the country. Identifying with Christ and Christ's three temptations, he felt he could present the truth in plain words, stained with the grime and soil of the many odd employments he had taken when, as he said in his preface, his verse "would not sell."

The value of truth or prophecy in MacDonald's "Undertow" pales on the printed page. Too long to benefit from a skilled stage-production, the poem comprises fifty-eight lyrics in common-measure that are unified by colour symbolism,
a conflict between red and pale, and by the narrative of the
three epiphanies that occurred during MacDonald's adventure in
England. In his "Prelude," MacDonald substitutes learning's
musty soul and pale art with a "Red life" that is meant to
infuse his lines with sacramental divinity. If he dreamed in
his youth, he says in the third lyric, if "My soul for beauty
hath implored," then he dreamed "a dream of bread," he
dreamed that God was dead:

Black are the days that yawn between
The Cross and the Open Tomb;
For every soul who mounts to Christ
Sleepeth three days of doom,
And in this winter lies the seed
Of joy's eternal bloom.

During the voyage, this "seed" is represented by Bill McCord,
a wretched tramp whose frail flesh is yet "gold." The tramp
supports MacDonald's faith in humanity through a hard crossing
made unintentionally amusing by MacDonald's bathetic treatment
of sea-sickness conditions on board ship. In the twenty-eighth
lyric, Bill is described in terms of a traditional figure of
the common man -- whose earliest precedent in English poetry
include Langland's Piers -- on whose simple faithfulness the
salvation of the community depends:

Bill's mouth was full of broken teeth,
And he has grass-like hair,
And, when he grimed, his flapping ears
Drove beauty to despair,
And yet no maiden's smile to me
Seemed ever half so fair.
When on your ears the woes of life
Sound like the crash of doom,
Some humble soul, like Bill McCord
Will wander through the gloom,
And straightaway mend your broken faith
Upon a golden loom.

As we read on we find that the three epiphanies are kindnesses
paid to MacDonald when he was hungry, playing the vagabond, in
the streets of London. Bill McCord, however, as I show in
chapter five, belongs to a large complement of such figures of
the common man, amounting to a cultural motif in the period.

The fifty-seventh section of the poem, and the prose
commentary on the facing page, suggest that MacDonald was
aware of his failure to create a prophetic synthesis of the
values of beauty, "bread" and a public recognition of his work
as a voice of mystical truth. He blamed his audience for
being too blind to see the truth. Canada has its poetic seers,
but it is as deaf as the Romans at Calvary, the gloss states.
In the verse, he speaks of his country's inability to "leave
tradition's night" and embrace red, raw life:

I love my land too well to speak
The lie she loves to hear.
I know she has a painted cheek,
And callous is her ear.
And the bard who sings of pleasant things
Is the one she holdeth dear.

Taking into account the lengths to which he had gone in his
works to supply popular demand for the pleasing in forms of
commodity-art, one must admit that MacDonald in effect
compromises the poem's close.
MacDonald wanted his audience to accept the man behind the performance. The audience wanted beauty to be presented with the least suggestion of the personality manipulating their emotions. It was important for the readers and the listeners of the day to be able to concede that the poetic presentation afforded an access-point through which transcendence might be tasted. MacDonald made the most of this expectation on the part of his audience, literally inserting his presence on stage between the desired dream-lands and the idea of a palpable poetic beauty that he considered to be true.

One aspect of this idea can be viewed in "When Commerce Walks with Beauty," a poem MacDonald wrote after visiting a new Eaton's store in Toronto:

Here space is heedless of this passing hour  
But waits on great to-morrows. Here I find  
A sense of largeness and unhindered power—  
The dreaming of some visionary mind.

MacDonald's native optimism, combined with certain theosophical beliefs, allowed him to value beauty as both commodity and prophecy. In his second book, The Miracle Songs of Jesus, published privately in 1921 and in a Ryerson chapbook in the same year, MacDonald had worked out a cogent rationalization of the inevitable leveling of art and product in his verse.

The Miracle Songs is an essay in verse containing some narrative elements, considerable metrical variety and a deft use of the caesura. Its thesis is that the true value of
Christ was not his miracles, the Virgin Birth nor even the message of the Sermon on the Mount, but rather the "miracle word" of "This brave young poet of Nazareth." As a poet, Jesus fashions "the light in His lyric hands" and sings "His truths in a lyric story. Even the poor could understand." Jesus flees the "fear of art" among the "pedant school" of High Priests, King Saul and the critics of "the Grecian way" and "Roman chart," because every time Jesus sings, he kills some cherished rule of art "in his poem's strange new sound." As a working-class bard, snubbed by the elite, Jesus goes into the wilderness, which calls to Him "with her silent lure."

0 poet of thoughtless Nazareth
Come out to me with your starry breath.
And His white reed yearned for the moon-washed sands
Where the frayed flowers curve
With their gypsy hands.
But he turned His face
From the silent place,
With the comrade stars above,
As we all have done,
As we all have done
From a maid we dare not love.

Jesus resists and exchanges his white reed for the red life of under-privileged humanity, only to be mocked by Saul's "fiery tongue." Jesus, however, embraces the king, "Knowing the beauty the man should wear/ At another time, in another place." Though He has allied Himself with the common man, Jesus is a king and his songs are kingly. Hence, He must "lower His power" to the level of the "miracle deed," that "the mob" follow Him, "When they heard the miracle man would
perform." By this "strange, new law" they learn that "dead men breathed." Thus, the poet must condescend to his audience, though the silence of pure lyric ecstasy is his true home.

In *Out of the Wilderness*, published in 1926 by Scribner's in New York and the short-lived Graphic Press in Ottawa, poems such as "He Has Kept Faith with Beauty" and "The Undying Beauty," express the belief that beauty descends directly from God, and is therefore the poet's salvation as well as proof that an unchanging order exists in the universe. These poems were singled out as excellent by Lorne Pierce. Northrop Frye, reviewing the ninth printing of *Wilderness* in 1957, preferred the substantial lyric "Exit" for its enduring and eloquent expression of the modern tragic sense — pain, loss, alienation and waste:

Easily to the old
Opens the hard ground:
But when youth grows cold,
And red lips have no sound,
Bitterly does the earth
Open to receive
And bitterly do the grasses
In the churchyard grieve.

MacDonald's vision of transcendent beauty helped to justify his presentation of a personal mystique as a nominal form of prophecy. As these values were cherished by the audience for poetry in the first decades of the century, they sustained his popularity for a time. His originality and craftsmanship, however, were never understood as expressions of his values.

In *A Flagon of Beauty* (1931), MacDonald split beauty
into three categories, represented by red wine, wine with
bitters and white wine. The middle section aspired to a beauty
informed by his pose as a disapproving prophet. The third
section is devoted to the concept of beauty then most desired
by the public, the transcendent beauty that had guaranteed the
success of Marjorie Pickthall in the twenties, which he later
called "pale art" in "The Song of the Undertow." "A Flagon of
Beauty," however, the title poem and headpiece of the first
section, may be MacDonald's best expression of beauty as
MacDonald himself understood it. Though its imagery and rhythm
recall Carman, Whitman and Vachel Lindsay, this lyric outcry
contains the essence of MacDonald's achievement within the
limitations of his tradition. Here, poetry in Canada is
offered for the first time a concept of the self as a force of
cohesion in a world of multitudinous contradictions. In the
headpiece of the "white wine" section, "Bras D'Or," the self
is displaced skillfully by lip-service to his conventions.

MacDonald's poetic and personal re-evaluation of beauty
rode against the grain of the detachment that allowed poets
like MacInnes or Arthur Stringer to situate their personali-
ties within the confines of poetic beauty, without at the same
time disrupting the emotional conduit, between the pleasing
and the transcendent, by which the audience customarily
received poetry into society. In his later years, MacDonald
became an aloof Spenglerian and a bitter satirist. In the
close of "Song of the Undertow" he consigned his "broken cry"
to an "immortal vastness," the dream of a serene and benign ideal listener, somewhere out in space.

The audience for which poets such as MacInnes, Service, Pickthall, Arthur Stringer, George Clarke and others wrote was considerably more terrestrial. In fact, Clarke, Katherine Hale, Pickthall and Audrey Alexandra Brown were poets who wrote not so much to their audience but rather to the literature their readers carried in their heads. The early Imagists, Stringer, F. O. Call, Louise Morey Bowman, Eustace Ross and others appealed to their audience's knowledge of contemporary verse, yet their detachment from the actual lives of their readers was no less intense. Before the crash of 1929, poetry in Canada was a literary dream-factory whose raw materials were drawn from the resources of books. During the Depression flirtations with Marxism merely substituted one fantasy for another — the intrinsic value of aesthetic labour for the dream-worlds of literature. When one thinks of the agony suffered by writers in Europe such as Rimbaud, T. S. Eliot, or Malcolm Lowry to name a few, and the sheer resilience of the American sense of the self as a poetic value among writers such as Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Frost or William Carlos Williams, it is hard not to see Canadian verse as a lotusland in the first decades of the century.

The verse of the period remained detached from pain, very much involved with the problems of commercial success
while at the same time insisting on the value of a fictional
world above and beyond the vision of reality that began to
seep into the works of Raymond Knister, Dorothy Livesay, A. G.
Bailey and others as the century entered its third decade.
However, the same might be said of a contemporary narcissis-
tic, self-reflective literature of exhaustion that we read in
terms of abstract intertextual relationships, anxieties of
influence, structures and ideologies abstracted from texts.
Poetry has never been more confined to a world of words, and
it is time to re-evaluate the poetry of the Canadian aesthete
imagination in the light of our own experience of literature.

In the verse of Pickthall and Brown, and the early
poetry of those who later abandoned the ideal of poetic
beauty as their raison d'être for writing -- Call, Bourinot,
Livesay and others -- Canadian poets excelled in reaching that
degree of decent sensuality that readers liked to call
Keatsian. Before the time of Raymond Knister's criticism --
whose historical novel on Keats can be seen as a critical
response to the dreamy appreciation of that poet in his time
-- the critical reception of poetry in Canada suffered for the
lack of a proper terminology with which to address poetic
works beyond the level of the review. The ubiquitous Keatsian
quality of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada appears to
have been a label applied to a domesticated, middle-class
variety of decadent or late-Symbolist poetry in Europe and
England.
The English decadents were seen by many as following the French lead in their exploitation of the shocking, the use of those qualities that the public considered to be not only licentious but also an impertinent and presumptuous offense against the sensibilities of the middle class. The proper subject matter of poetry had been stabilized in an entirely satisfactory way in the public's mind by the achievements of Keats and Tennyson. Changes in subject matter and new techniques were not welcome. Pickthall and Audrey Alexandra Brown were particularly successful in stripping the subject matter of Swinburne and Morris of the more worrisome or "indecent" elements (Swinburne's Froserbine poems in particular spawned a number of Eleusinian poems that were enjoyed by the large and appreciative audiences of MacDonald, Pickthall, Stringer and others). From the point of view of the majority of readers abroad, such works seemed a refreshing respite from a continuing assault on literary taste. Pickthall illustrates the reading habits of the majority in 1908, dismissing Ibsen's plays with a girlish giggle as "a sort of mental clinic upon the nastiest diseases that afflict human souls."

When the English decadents began to publish in The Yellow Book, a periodical which first appeared in April, 1894, sporting Aubrey Beardsley's cover and title designs, readers of decent literature were outraged on both sides of the Atlantic, though the English decadents had agreed that traditional forms and restraint "were suitable to a British man of
letters." The leading periodical of the movement, The Yellow Book, was published by John Lane's company The Bodley Head, which had established a name for itself as a publisher of decadent literature. In 1913 and 1916, Lane became Pickthall's British publisher for The Drift of Pinions and The Lamp of Poor Souls. Many perhaps felt that these volumes redeemed Lane somewhat from the stigma of The Yellow Book -- which Wilde was reported to have held under his arm when he entered the courtroom for his arraignment in 1895.

Long before MacLeish announced that a poem must not mean but be, in 1926, European decadence in poetry had already elevated form over all other aspects of writing. American expatriates residing with the exception of Eliot, as MacLeish had done between 1923 and 1928, mainly in Paris, combined the American genius for technical inventiveness with the European preference for artifice. Some would say that this hybrid produced the modernist template. In Baudelairean terms, the cosmetic was a supreme virtue by which evil and the "nastiest diseases that afflict human souls" in the natural world could be transcended through artifice, the attainment of an artificial timelessness. Pickthall's ambivalence toward historical reality echoes decadent and modernist attitudes to time.

Pickthall once criticized Yeats's early plays for being able to express the regeneration of his country only "through the power of the past."

MacLeish's "Ars Poetica" insisted that a poem be
"palpable," an image-centred and ahistorical representation "equal to" present reality, but "Not true" to the world of extraneous fact. The definition serves quite well for the formal lyricism of Clarke, Pickthall and Brown. Indeed, one of the most significant features of the works of MacInnes, MacDonald, Brown, Katherine Hale and the rest is the formalism in which the concept of beauty is expressed. While in the United States formalist poets such as Edwin Arlington-Robinson or Wallace Stevens were in the minority, in Canada formalism in poetry shaped the main stream, albeit clinging to the stereotypes of the decadent imagination with apparent desperation. These stereotypes were the fantastic, the artificial paradise, mythical settings, and nature as a site for elemental reverie. In the latter case, nature is presented as stripped of anything that is not conducive to pleasure.

The popularity of Audrey Alexandra Brown (born 1904) attests to the power invested in decadent stereotypes. Her five volumes of poems are consistent with an early work such as "Laodamia," in which the mythical setting, musicality and mesmerizing cadence, clearly decadent, contributes to the literary resonance of the verse. Her success in the thirties and forties indicates that large audiences continued to enjoy these devices despite the influence of the Depression, World War II and the small but determined band of dissenting poets then publishing in the Canadian Forum, Preview, First Statement, Northern Review and Alan Crawley's western-based
Contemporary Verse. To Crawley, for example, their verse was less than serious in thought and expression, yet MacInnes, MacDonald, Brown and Pickthall each in their own way prepared the ground for an appreciative audience for verse in the West. MacDonald and Pickthall were Toronto poets who spent considerable lengths of time in British Columbia, whose climate and sublime terrain appealed to them. MacInnes and Brown were permanent residents. When Crawley's magazine brought out its first issue in 1940, the British Columbian audience of poetry knew how to appreciate self-enclosing literary worlds spun from the pens of local writers.

Brown's "A Dryad of Nanaimo" (1931) draws aside the veil from a time-forgotten space "untrodden by human feet," located within and yet beyond the natural setting. Brown's dryad, a spirit of innocence and beauty, dwells in the bole of a maple-tree, safely insulated from the street and "the bitter ring of steel," drawing "lovely life" from the "lovely death" of the seasons. The dryad is an elemental spirit, and the poem approaches her through the symbols of an artificial paradise: jewels, precious metals, "jonquil-colored light," "elfin buds that burgeon in a dream" and so forth. The poem is designed as a form of resistance to harshness and meaninglessness in life, and aspires to transcendent beauty by means of fantasy. The stereotypes function to negate death and doubt regarding the afterlife and the soul. In her later poem, "Challenge to Time and Death," Brown laughs in the face of death and time from
the safety of "The cup and bell and star," a poetic domain in which she dares to be blind and deaf to time's material concerns.

In 1948, Clarke wrote of Brown's choice to "live in Books." Praising her courage in the face of the illness that confined her to a wheelchair at the age of twenty-two, Clarke compared her to Pickthall and Christina Rossetti, criticized her need for reduction and revision of Keatsian excesses, and pointed out the "real merits" of her best work: her delicate responsiveness "to the symbolisms of life and nature and to the music of language." Clarke approved of what he called traditionalism in Brown, as opposed to modernist experimentation, and condoned her condescending tolerance of modernists who quarreled with a romanticism by which, as Brown declared before a meeting of the Canadian Authors' Association in 1941, life is "transfused and irradiated." What is irradiated in this view is not life but rather an eclectically determined set of literary resonances that create a barrier between itself and reality.

If might be useful to note at this point that the chief difference between MacInnes and Clarke, or between MacDonald and Pickthall, is that the latter poets are ambivalent in their works toward transcendence. For MacInnes and MacDonald, poetic beauty remains a way of seeing into the soul, a way of moving beyond the hands of chance and change by following Tautist or theosophic-Christian signposts. Reading Pickthall
and Clarke, however, the sense of coming up against a solid wall composed of a certain type of literary awareness is inescapable. With the early Imagists and in Leo Kennedy's *The Shrouding* (1933), the wall merely becomes denser.

The poetry of George Herbert Clarke (1873-1953) has been noted for its elegant traditionalism. In nature poems such as "Sunset Off Spanish Bank, Vancouver" or "Brackley Beach," one overhears what can only be an echo of the eighteenth-century sublime. In garden poems such as "A Lavender Lady" or "Rory in the Garden" Marvell's garden-green world shines in the background. In their harmonious ordering of parts and clarity of expression, the "Hymn to the Spirit Eternal," Clarke's most impressive effort, and the patriotic-Imperialist "Ode on the Burial of King George the Fifth," seem patently Augustan. In poems whose subject is beauty, "Over Saleve," "Sun!" and "Santa Maria del Fiore," Clarke expresses the notion that true beauty results from lyric praise of the Godhead, however compromised our understanding of His design may be. These poems are probably Clarke's richest works. All of these poems, however, reflect the values of the literary templates that stand behind their forms of expression.

In his *Hymn to the Spirit Eternal* (1937), Clarke asks what is man that Eternity is "mindful of him? Is he a purpose part" of the eternal spirit's act? Or is man "some ambiguous presence" to be forgotten, cousin to the brute? Formally, the poem reflects the qualities of the great Romantic odes of
Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, yet its content is drawn from astronomy and evolutionary theory — to an extent that it borders on science fiction. In his apostrophe to Eternity, Clarke asks if there are less ambiguous, nobler species on other worlds. "No answer comes" because man is is prevented from understanding by his mortality. Man's only recourse is to praise the "Light of Light, shining too far away." Order-making, such as the making of myths and fictions, is inferior to praise. "The vestibules of being — birth and death — Bear interchanging legends" that teach man "his need of sense," but the most reason can offer is to scan the unrolling pageant of "multitudinous galaxies." Beauty merely veils Eternity's "primal form" in deluding dreams. "The soul we know not," but that man "Would praise the loveliness thy skies have worn" ennobles him. The hymn is itself ennobled by it's praise of "the cycles of the atom and the star." Clarke praises the tides as a visible sign of the angry, self-renewing power of Eternity in nature, thus:

Who knows save thee the rhythm of their rise
   And slow dispersal? They are not and they are —
Surgent, resurgent! From scented Malabar
To the bleak Arctic, each billow wheels and dies
Within thy tidal compass: surf and spume
Fulfill the wave, the striving wave of the sea,
   In cadenced change and high, harmonious plan;
Thy firmamental womb
Conceived them, uttered them and bade them be
   Lords of the deluge and Leviathan.

In the close of the poem, Clarke only asks that man become extinct in peace should he have no further role in this plan.
The "Hymn" is remarkable in the unity it fashions between formal poetic beauty and modern scientific doubt.

Clarke earned a distinguished career in American academe as a professor of English literature and literary editor (at one point of the Sewanee Review). On his return to Canada in 1915, at the age of fifty-two, he became the Head of the English Department at Queen's University, editing Queen's Quarterly until 1952. His cosmopolitanism is reflected in the American, British and Canadian publishers of his verse. Aside from two youthful volumes of apprentice-work, Clarke's mature poetry was written in the 'thirties; he was sixty-four when Macmillan published the "Hymn." His work as a correspondent at the front during the Great War -- and in the War Intelligence Department and the Ministry of Information -- led to three anthologies of war poetry meant for "the boys" overseas. He is remembered for these anthologies today, and for one often anthologized poem.

Clarke's "Halt and Parley" is an interesting example of the direction taken by the main stream of Canadian verse in the early part of the century. The poem demonstrates that even without the influence of decadent stereotypes, poetry in Canada required a formal expression of beauty as timber for its garrison on the frontier of the fragmentariness of modern life. The poem is concerned with the transcendent and its epistemological frame in confrontation with death. Clarke's poetry in general aspires toward the completeness of a formal
beauty in which the harmony of a poem and its parts is enough in itself. Clarke's language does not communicate a sensuous beauty felt with passion, as one finds in MacInnes or MacDonald, but rather a clarity of thought and the precise execution of that thought.

The poem begins dramatically and sustains a powerful sense of drama throughout. A pair of travellers, "Body and Soul," come upon the keeper of a tollgate who appears to them as an ancient, brooding anchorite, paying no heed to their approach. The sudden menace of the keeper's entrance to the dialogue emphasizes the drama of the ensuing exchange. The travellers ask "the lawful toll" and the keeper avoids this question. Instead, the keeper inquires of the travellers how long they have journeyed "together thus," and they reply, "All Day, and nothing shall sunder us."

How have you fared? Was the roadway rough?
Some miles were stony and steep enough.

But why have you toiled and suffered so?
And whither is it that you would go?

Our goal is a vision that vanishes;
To pause is to perish: devouring Death
Would slow our pulses and choke our breath:

The rhyme, varying between couplets and triplets, is deftly handled. The rhythm is traditionally metrical, yet varied like the rhymes in such a way that the poem is saved from monotony. Alliteration stitches the verse tightly together; assonance is
spare. Clarke's poem does have something quite startling to say, at least in the context of how God and Darwin were reconciled in his day, but its most pressing concern is essentially a formal one in which poetic vision becomes a conceit: a variety of dramatic irony that is not felt but rather puzzled out in the mind.

The dialogue dispenses with a view of nature and transcendence in which man shall play any significant role. When Body and Soul state that nothing shall part them, they initiate the proposition that there is no life for the soul after the death of the body. Another poem, "Debate," explicitly states that this problem is resolvable by reference to the hypothesis that "the Real" and "the Whole" compose a design that "the Weaver" slowly weaves through the evolution of creation. Man, however, is merely one stitch on the tapestry, "And 'life' is a symbol of Life behind." In the close of "Halt and Parley," Soul, whom we realize has been speaking for both travellers all along, cries out "Let the toll be taken!" Death answers that Body, a "Poor clod," has already paid the full fare, "while you've parried and parleyed out there." Ironically, the travellers have reached their goal and the vision vanishes with Body's death. Soul has no choice but to "gallantly dare/ The dark passage," and return to the domain of non-human design.

In the course of their dialogue with the gate-keeper, Death makes it clear to the travellers that their vision is a
property of life that vanishes because both life and man are mere accidents in an evolutionary system created and maintained by God. Man is not wise enough to be able to perceive "the Real" and "the Whole" because he has been "Torn with a doubt since Time began." Death, however, admires man, "the afraid, infirm, impure," for his capacity to love and arise again, "Victorious victim of passion and pain" --

Motley the breed that mount to my Gate,
They fear their fate, yet they face their fate,
Of Radiant Heat and Primal Slime
Engendered, hither they creep and climb,
Ether and earth, perverse, sublime!

From the vantage-point of God, the "Ongoer," man's pilgrimage is meaningless. In the hope that nothing will sunder body and soul, man clings to a curtain of opposites out of which is generated the vanishing vision of man's compromised position between ether and earth, man's tragic flaw. Man's imagined goals have no direct relation with the sublime, since man perceives his goals from a human perspective, sufficed by his origin in "Primal Slime." Man must pay the lawful price, "quittance from clumsy, cumbering gear." What lies beyond death is a shrouded way, "unposted, unkenned," where "Time's phantasies fade" and the true, non-human reality impends. Human history is a delusion threatened by a pluralist conception of reality. "The Reals" are knowable only to Death, God's deputy on earth; human life is only one more dream passing meaninglessly through time, and time itself is merely one
reality among many in "the Whole" that extends beyond time.

For Clarke, it is enough to encapsulate the question of
man's preoccupation with the purposive in life in a dramatic
frame whose resolution is measured against how well the poem
compares formally with a traditional form. His conception of
the Ongoor's design and ironic attitude toward man's ability
to perceive this design resembles contemporary systems of
thought designed in Canada to reconcile God and Darwin such as
the pluralism of George Blewett, born in 1873, the same year
as Clarke. For both Clarke and Blewett, God is neither
immanent nor transcendent, yet the absolute good of God is
somehow resident in time, however it may be understood. The
transcendent is an unknowable labyrinth in Clarke's vision;
there is no way out because there is no way in. Though man's
abstractions from time -- such as praise or a well-wrought
poem -- may only hope to ape the Ongoor, human history and
traditions nonetheless make for an intelligible coherence.
Clarke, like the figure of Death in "Halt and Parley," knows
that this coherence is insignificant from the point of view of
God, yet admires the brave beauty of man's achievements.

Clarke is one of the few poets of the period to try to
come to terms with a modern world meaningful only in its
fragments. In the main, poetry in Canada struggled to reduce a
rapidly changing world to a lyric epiphany of the beautiful
that relied for the most part on varieties of fantasy. Clarke
rejected the influence of the decadents as did E. J. Pratt and
several other poets discussed in later chapters, but the essential reliance on beauty as a defense against modern doubt and change is still firmly in place in his work. A kind of intellectual pleasure arising from achieving excellence in traditional forms gave Clarke the fortitude to embrace a humbling vision of man. Within the literary resonances of his work, however, the poetic value of beauty functioned no less as an enclave in reality than the fantasy-worlds of MacInnes, Pickthall or Brown.

If it can be said that desire is the generative force acting within fantasy, then one could say that poets such as Brown and Pickthall succeeded in sublimating desire, while poets such as MacInnes, MacDonald and Arthur Stringer redirected desire toward a concern for popularity and remuneration. The eventual saturation of beauty by economic concerns led to formation and continuing strength of the Canadian Authors' Association, whose major functions were to advertise Canadian writers in collaboration with their publishers and to lobby for new copyright legislation in parliament. The notion that poetic beauty could have an exchange-value in the market-place sustained the careers or resolve of many Canadian poets of the period and reduced that which in Clarke is an intellectual pleasure in knowing the truth to varieties of the pleasing.

This development was not specific to Canadian art and culture in the early part of the century, though its effects
may have been more insidious elsewhere. The modern opposition of serious and popular -- or more specifically between poetic beauty as a portal on transcendence and beauty as a ticket to fame and comfortable living -- perhaps reflects a demographic shift in the audience of poetry. An interest in art increased as the urban middle-class came to enjoy greater amounts of leisure time. At any rate, the consumer-value of beauty rose to the surface in the Cubist, Dada and surrealist artists of Europe, who created collages and decollages from bric-a-brac dredged from the vast flea-markets of the twentieth-century city. The use of surrealist art by manufacturers of printed fabric and wallpaper represents a certain reciprocity between conceptions of artistic beauty and saleable commodities. Ultimately, the Pop art of Francis Bacon and Eduardo Paolozzi in London; Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol in New York, exhausted the notion of an exchange value between art and product from the artist's point of view. At the same time, however, the purchase of art as a means of investing enormous sums of capital has become a routine practice of the very rich.

The disappointment that many Canadian writers felt toward their audience led to a organization into an economic and political interest-group. However, this was merely one phrase in a symphony of change that affected modern attitudes toward aesthetic values in the western world. Hence, MacIhnes, MacDonald, Stringer and others desired the success enjoyed by
Service, Pickthall and Ralph Connor or Leacock in prose, (success that may not have made anyone rich with the exception of Leacock perhaps, but which allowed writers to forgo pursuits other sources of income). Under these conditions, it is not surprising that Arthur Stringer neglected his substantial promise as a poet in favour of the more lucrative market of adventure fiction. Nonetheless, some of Stringer's poetry does retain a certain freshness today.

As a boy, Arthur John Arbuthnot Stringer (1874-1950) was encouraged in literary pursuits by his paternal grandmother, Margaret Arbuthnot. He was fortunate to have been befriended at the age of twenty by T. H. Warren, a printer in London, Ontario, who published Stringer's first three collections of verse. After graduating from the University of Toronto, Stringer spent a year at Oxford during which he travelled through Europe. Returning to Canada, Stringer worked for a time at Saginaw as a clerk for the Pere Marquette Railway. Occasional newspaper articles resulted in a position on the staff of the Montréal Herald, which he left to write for the American Press Association. At this time he moved to New York. His first novel, The Silver Poppy (1903), made him a literary star at the age of twenty-nine. He married Jobyna Howland, "the original Gibson girl," and settled down as a writer and fruit-farmer on the north shore of Lake Erie. Stringer later divorced his first wife, tried his hand at ranching in Alberta and returned to his birth-place, Chatham.
Ontario, to marry his cousin, Margaret Arbuthnot. The second marriage co-incided with the writing of his most "spontaneously popular" novel, _The Prairie Wife_ (1915). Stringer continued to support himself as a writer of serialized adventure novels, short stories and journalism. In 1921, he bought land in New Jersey where he lived and wrote until his death. Like Service, he worked for a time in Hollywood. His mature poetry begins with _Hephaestus and Other Poems_ (1903), and continues through over a dozen books. _The Woman in the Rain_, his best book, appeared in 1907, and was republished simultaneously in Toronto and Boston forty years later.

Stringer is most often remembered today for his 1914 volume, _Open Water_, which Munro Beattie described in the _Literary History of Canada_ as "almost wholly unmarred by 'poetic diction'," displaying economy and directness, and wider in scope "than other Canadian books of the period."

Beattie acknowledged Stringer's attempt in this book to emulate the verse then beginning to appear in Harriet Munroe's _Poetry_, but did not consider his poems to have the "unity that good free verse can attain to," being "mostly gatherings of prose sentences arbitrarily divided into lines." The unity that Beattie misses here is the formal quality that does not permit what Cleanth Brooks called "The Heresy of Paraphrase": an inseparable unity of form and content in which the poet intuits whatever statement the work may make through its formal structure. Beattie declines to mention that Stringer
was popularly regarded in his time as "The Keats of Canada" and a master of blank verse. He dismisses the mythological verse plays and the facile and sentimental Irish poems, upon which Stringer's reputation as a poet were based. Yet Stringer's one "un-Canadian" experiment with free verse cannot be read in isolation from his work as a whole.

The tensions between the values of Stringer's art were mediated by a third factor, his sensitivity to language as sensuous speech. This factor can also be found in other poets of the period such as Pickthall, whose tentative experiments with dialect verse may well have been inspired by her friendship with Stringer. Unlike Pickthall, however, MacInnes, MacDonald and Stringer strove to insert their personalities into a poetry of beauty. Stringer's verse does not succeed in attaining a unity separate from personality, and his verse lacks the autonomy in form and thought that can be found in Clarke, Pickthall or Eustace Ross. Like MacDonald's, Stringer's prefaces and afterwords to his books of verse document the artist's relationship with his craft.

The Irish poems that Stringer wrote in his later years were probably a play for the popularity of the sort of dialect poetry with which William Henry Drummond was so successful. In this light verse, Stringer attempted the humour, animation and invention of the older poet but lacked Drummond's psychological penetration into human character. Stringer considered his dialect verse as a sort of experimental poetry. In the preface
to his first collection of Irish Poems (1911), Stringer explained that his poems were not a replica of the Irish brogue, but rather a hybrid that would represent a "method of speech too elusive to be captured and tied down to an inkpot." Like Drummond, Stringer felt that there were essential poetic qualities that could only be grasped in the way men and women speak outside of books. Yet the poetic worlds created by these works of Stringer and Drummond are entirely imaginary fantasies in which humanity and humour are highlighted. Having once made a walking tour of Ireland, Stringer knew as little of the essence of Irish speech as did Drummond of l'idiome bâtard spoken at Bôrd-à-Plouffé, where Drummond spent his teenage summers.

In "The Modern Speaks," Stringer declares that death will not destroy his sense of self, though it take the rest:

When I, who have joyed in my work,
Who have loved, have taken my fling,
Have hungered, forgotten, been glad,
Have hated the hand that would shirk
The honey of life for the sting,
Have housed with the good and the bad.

These aspirated rhythms communicate the poet's determination to have everything life has to offer, and to face its loss in the final reckoning armed with speech, the "might of a man," a "strength that is mine as yet":

In the core of me, conquering still,
This man's good might shall remain;
And none of me, me shall you break.
Here one may note the difference between Clarke’s academic response to doubt and the meaningfulness of human life, and the more popular form of consolation to be found in the manly optimism of such poets as MacInnes, MacDonald and Stringer. In poems such as "Non Omnis Moriar," "The Wanderers," "The Man Who Killed," and others in *The Woman in the Rain*, Stringer’s emphatic ego repeatedly sounds a note entirely characteristic of his time and place. "Morning in the North-West" is another example:

> What care I here for all Earth’s creeds outworn,  
> The dreams outlived, the hopes to ashes turned,  
> In that old East so dark with rain and doubt?  
> Here life swings glad and free and rude; and I  
> Shall drink it to the full, and go content.

In "Gifts" and "Northern Pines," he pays homage to his friend and fellow expatriate Bliss Carman, and the openness to life Stringer saw in his verse.

*The Woman in the Rain* contains a number of epigrams that would be difficult to fault for their wit or execution. These pieces and the longer non-mythological blank verse poems display Stringer’s ability to reconcile a reliance on speech to the strictures of prosody, in a manner not unlike that of Robert Frost, though without Frost’s darkened vision. Stringer’s preference for *parole* as opposed to *langua*, prose sentences as opposed to "poetic diction" in Beattie’s sense, however, is clear throughout his work. The epigram "Philosophies," for instance, records his disdain for writing that is
not infused by living breath:

We know not what doth lie beyond the Door.
But in captivity behold us grown
Enamored of our cell, in scrolling o'er
With signs and legends strange each mural stone!

Both, the mythical verse dramas and blank verse narratives are,
for their time, rather audacious explorations of concupiscence,
though the theme is decorously couched within the conventions of the aesthete or decadent conception of beauty
(in both choice of subject and manner of presentation). Poems such as "A Woman Sang," "The Final Lesson," "Keats," "When Closing Swinburne," and several others in ballad-measure, all deal explicitly with the value that beauty holds for Stringer.
The title poem is, however, a curious and troubling analysis of the predicament of modern urban life.

In "The Woman in the Rain," a bag-lady is Stringer's symbol for the lost continuity between present desolation and past certainty: a huddled heap of rags, a "timeless thing of mumbling unconcern," with burned-out eyes and breasts fallen in. The woman-city holds the embittered lives and ghostly loves of men "coffined in its agued bones." She whines and wheezes before the young, the gay and the rich: how beautiful she once was, how wild she used to be. Stringer changes tack vigorously and often in this poem, alternating between a carpe diem format, in which the woman is referred to as "she," and a more philosophical vein, in which the woman, in her decrepi-
tude, is referred to as "it." The bag-lady is also a sphinx-like embodiment of speech: the beauty of young women will "flash through many-teared". Dark cities, tongues with records like to her." Her "mumbling unconcern" (the phrase is repeated in the close) symbolizes a modern loss of graceful music fashioned from the birth of time, the "breathing music of lost Nineveh." Ironically, this "desolately sterile" figure paces, begging under the "April thrill! Imperative" of rain and the dripping green of leaves. Her former beauty, which "through her velvet veins once musically/The mad life sang," once held the power of living speech to wrest consolation -- mystery, peace and life's redemption in the "golden chain of Birth" -- from the laws of time, death and change. This figure is the antithesis of the powerful and triumphant image of the self in "The Modern Speaks." Her whimpering, with which the ancient music of life ends, cannot attain to that penetrating and sensual voice, which, as Stringer says, in "The Wordless Touch," evinces on-going life "beyond the bourne of words."

Stringer was cosmopolitan enough to be aware of the situation of poetry in English outside Canada, yet his optimism, enthusiasm and sensuality, his particular species of brig, insulated him from the changes in attitude that were to make ideals of poetic beauty suspect in Canada at the end of the times of A. J. M. Smith and Irving Layton. In Stringer's work, the self is presented by means of the living voice of the poet, but it is not explored. The voice merely presumes an
individuality that arrogantly intrudes on the decadent concept of beauty loosely assembled in the eighteen-nineties by the initiates of Mallarmé's "Tuesdays": the "gospel of correspondences," the importance of music, the use of free verse, a constant concern with technical detail, philosophical idealism, a predilection for the world of dream and legends and a confused notion of transcendence in which solipsism, Emersonian rationality inherent in nature (revealed by artifice) and various forms of occultism all play a part.

Thus, in the light of his cosmopolitan and sophisticated literary tastes, it is not surprising that he would try his hand at free verse in Open Water, and write the manifesto for which he is chiefly remembered today. On the basis that man must be satisfied with "worshiping what has lived and is now dead" if he would "worship beauty only as he has known it in the past," Stringer's "Forward" champions the emancipation of poetry from outmoded prosodic conventions. In order to return poetry to emotional expression, intimate moods and subjective experiences that are "characteristically modern," poetry must shake off the immuring traditions of rhyme and meter. The intellectual timidity by which poets view the world "mathematically" imprisons poetry in a "geometrically designed mould" of prosody. Technical formalism has forced on the poet "an instinctive abhorrence for anything beyond the control of what he calls common sense." Stringer suggests here, and demonstrates in some of the following poems, that the poet must
return to the "more open movement of the chant, which is man's most natural and rudimentary form of song." The chant or breath line that Stringer develops in *Open Water* may be, however, at some risk of going beyond legitimate criticism, as much a means to divest himself of violent emotion perhaps resulting from the failure of his first marriage, as it is a "first step towards freedom" for an avant-garde in poetry.

In "The Revolt," Stringer's first step towards the liberation of poetry begins with the strong, chant-like rhythm that is characteristic of his verse in general. The poem falls into two parts, one self-assertive and the other self-deprecating. Stringer says that he has tinkled and jangled and piped, and is now "sick of the game." The phrase "I want" is repeated in a catalogue of desires that ends in this way:

I want to sit down with my soul and talk straight out,
I want to make peace with myself,
And say what I have to say,
While there is still time!

Stringer wants his verse to be free from the "chain of song," "Rough and unruly and open and turbulent-throated!" He has been too long in the dungeons of song and, "after my moment of light," he admits that he wants "to go back to the dark. Since the Open still makes me afraid." Ultimately, what Stringer wants is to be seen by his audience as an adventurer and pioneer in the high world of poetry.

The decadent love of artifice appears everywhere in the book in images of women's cosmetics and precious stones and
metals, moonlight and water and the plant-life of dreams.

"Sappho's Tomb," actually a choral epilogue to Stringer's magnum opus, the verse play Sappho in Leucadia, is a study in concupiscence within the limits of classical decor and decadent cosmetics. Although the play was published in 1903, it was entirely rewritten for the 1949 edition. Stringer failed to assimilate the fundamental presupposition of post-
Symbolist free verse, an underlying acceptance of the "wholeness" of things, the red wheelbarrows and cool plums of everyday existence. However, in "Autumn," "Faces," "There is Strength in the Soil," and to a lesser extent in the poems "The Life on the Table" and "At Charing-Cross," Stringer demonstrates a feeling for landscape reminiscent of Raymond Knister's rural poems. Other poems in Open Water are sentimental longings for home or expressions of love, loss and regret in which the verve of Stringer's breath-line degenerates in nursery-rhyme rhythms. In "Milkweed," Stringer manages an admirably lyrical and imagistic chant on his homesickness among the foothills of Alberta. "Chains" and "The Steel Worker" identify industrial technology as a corrosive evil in modern life. The chant-line seems strongest in those poems, cathartic of violent emotion, as in the passionate, visceral "Ultimata" and "Atavism," and a number of poems that explore the relationship between love and hate.

All of the cardinal points of Stringer's poetic appear in this free verse sport of Stringer's middle years: decadent
beauty, the effects of a desire to be popular on this value and the consequent importance of personality. In Stringer's case, a sensitivity to living speech unusual in the first decades of poetry in Canada informs his best work. In "The Echo," Stringer acknowledges that it is not reality or even the self that he needs to express. Poetry is an "eternal failure," "a note in the chorus... a wave on the deep!" all he struggles to utter has been uttered before. The book closes with a number of poems on dreams in which Stringer insists that he loves the soul and that God is with him even though he seeks the soul through the flesh. In "The Surrender," which closes the volume, Stringer decides that it does not matter if his songs are ruined by time or judged to be fit for a child, since true poetry will be known only once "the soul falls broken," and drowns in the flood of time and death. In the "Afterword" to Dark Soil, twenty years later, Stringer recanted his challenge to convention, saying that "Time teaches us that this shifted fetter known as Freedom is not always the final solution of the artist's problem."

For Stringer, poetry is written for the sake of achieving a form of beauty that is maintained within the powers of literary fantasy. Such verse presents the public with an alternate world. MacInnes, MacDonald and Stringer desired to insert a representation of themselves within that
alternate and marvellous domain. Other poets of the period such as Brown and Pickthall preferred to think of their poems as spiritual songs in which beauty was valued over and above an expression of the self. MacInnes’s expressions of self-loss manage to present images of self and an ineffable but fantastic beauty at the same time. Clarke chose spiritualistic rationalism over the mystical faith of his contemporaries, but the essential formalism of an artificial poetic world is common to all these poets. Stringer’s "Some Day, O Seeker of Dreams," in *Open Water*, reveals how much akin he can be to Marjorie Pickthall when he declares that dreams and song are the Appeasers of Death and the Bringers of Light from some future time, "when Silence and Dreaming and Music are one!"

This notion that one need only "wait and be wise," since time and change are merely appearances, for man to be redeemed from modern errancy in a re-assertion of the eternal verities is a measure of the poets’ detachment. The value of beauty as proof and mainstay of Truth, as opposed to Reality, however, was being eroded from within. Reliance on artifice and fantasy gradually emptied the value of beauty of its transcendence, so that only a formal and technical excellence, and a certain elevation of the popular, remained. In the works of Marjorie Pickthall, one observes this twilight darkening into night.

The poems I have been discussing could be described as elements of a literary reality that at once assimilate and detach themselves from the reading-world, the literary
competence of the poets and their audience. In Canada during the first decades of the century this competence was greatly influenced by the decadent imagination, yet distinctive preoccupations such as Clarke's labyrinthine vision of coherence and Stringer's sensuous speech were incorporated into the conventions and the values the poets wished to emulate and express. Other poets expressed the values of poetic vision and order in terms of a prophetic strain and a preference for reality or the life-world. Still others sought to express these values in narrative poetry that engages with the world of writing, a writer's concern for myth-making in his craft. These values and modes of expression have not received the attention that their significance in early twentieth-century poetry in Canada demands.
Notes to Chapter Two

1. Leo Kennedy, "Prelude of Montreal, Que.," The McGilliad, 2 (Feb./March 1931), 87-88.

2. William Arthur Deacon, "Tom MacInnes," Leading Canadian Poets, pp. 137-38. See also: Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), pp. 88-91. Pacey laments that MacInnes attempted to be "a serious moralist and apostle of 'Beauty'...". Pacey notes that MacInnes was "at the centre of the active, aquisitutive life of his period," and that his bohemian pose was a kind of rebellion against Victorian respectability.

3. "Nocturne," Complete Poems of Tom MacInnes, pp. 27-29. MacInnes's poetic career was brief but prolific. In 1908, Desbarats of Montreal published A Romance of the Lost, and republished it with additional poems as Lonesome Bar. A Romance of the Lost in 1909. New York's Broadway Publisher's brought out In Amber Lands in 1910. Rhymes of a Rounder was published by Broadway as well, in 1913, and Vancouver's Sasmat Pub. Co. republished it in 1935. McClelland and Stewart published A Fool of Joy (1918), and Ryerson published Roundabout Rhymes and the Complete Poems in 1923. Ryerson also handled The Old of My Age (1947).


7. "To Walt Whitman," Complete Poems, pp. 131-13. Lionel Stevenson believed that this poem attests to the effort of poetry in Canada to come to terms with Darwin in praising
individualism as an important implication of evolutionary theory. MacInnes's "jaunty philosophy is thoroughly evolutionary" in its unconventional sense of fraternity and individualism: Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Macmillan, 1924; reprinted Norwood Editions, 1977), pp. 92-93.


9. MacDonald's problems with his public are mentioned by Pacey, noted below, and appear in Wilson MacDonald's Western Tour 1923-24: a collage of letters (to, from and about Wilson MacDonald), newspaper clippings, poems, drawings and miscellaneous MacDonaldiana (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1975). Lady Roberts, "Wilson MacDonald," Leading Canadian Poets, pp. 125-34. See also: Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, pp. 117-18. Pacey notes a kinship between MacDonald, Brown and Pickthall and suggests that he ought not to be neglected by critics as a reaction to his being over-praised by reviewers in the mid-twenties. An example of this "over-praise" may be found in J. D. Logan and Donald G. French, Highways of Canadian Literature: A Synoptic Introduction to the Literary History of Canada (English) from 1798 to 1924 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), p. 297. Stevenson correctly sees in MacDonald's poetry a combination of the values of vision, ideas and humanism but insists that he and Pickthall are essentially Keatsian and "concerned with picturesqueness nor philosophizing but with quintessential beauty" (Appraisals, pp. 13 and 46). Stevenson's appraisal of MacDonald's musicality is sounder than Pacey's evasive statements when he notes MacDonald's control of lovely words and emotional power, "but few of his poems are free from traces of the poet's personality" (p. 115). MacDonald's best books are Out of the Wilderness (Ottawa: Graphic Press, 1926) and A Flagon of Beauty (Toronto: Pine Tree Pub. Co., 1931. Both these works were often reprinted into the mid-'fifties. McClelland and Stewart published the first book, Song of the Prairie Land in 1918 and Ryerson printed a second edition in 1923. MacDonald published The Miracle Songs of Jesus privately in 1921. Ryerson picked it up in the same year. MacDonald followed this aspect of his work in Greater Poems of the Bible: Metrical Versions, Biblical Forms, and Original Poems (Toronto: Macmillan, 1943). His dialect verse, Paul Marchand, was published variously in Canada and the United States, under
the titles Armand Dussault and Quintains of 'Callander',
between 1933 (Toronto: Pine Tree Pub. Co.) and 1958 (Buffalo:
Broadway Press). Aside from the light satire of Comber Cove,
MacDonald also published Caw-Caw Ballads, first privately in
1930, and later with Broadway Press, 8th printing, 1958. The
Song of the Undertow and Other Poems appeared in 1935 with
Saunders of Toronto and Broadway of Buffalo.

10

William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A

11

Clara Thomas and John Lennox's William Arthur Deacon: A
Canadian Literary Life (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press,
1982) records Smythe's role in literary circles of the time
(pp. 11-12), MacDonald's reception as a major poet and his
petulance with his public (pp. 43-44, 65). Albert E. S.
Smythe was regarded as a notable philosophical poet in
Pierce's Outline and Stevenson's Appraisals; Logan and French
had most to say about him in Highways (pp. 224-26).

12

"Prelude," "The Song of the Undertow," Song of the
Undertow, pp. 11, 19, 71-75.

13

"Song of the Undertow," p. 143.

14

"When Commerce Walks with Beauty," A Flagon of Beauty,
99-100.

15

The Miracle Songs of Jesus (author, 1921).

16

"He has Kept Faith with Beauty," "The Undying Beauty,

17

"A Flagon of Beauty," "Bras D'Or," A Flagon of Beauty,
pp. 13-14, 141-148.

18


19

Lorne Pierce, Márjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance
(Toronto: Ryerson, 1925), p. 52.


22 Pierce, Book of Remembrance, p. 51.


26 George Herbert Clarke, "Audrey Alexandra Brown;" Leading Canadian Poets, pp. 38-39. Dryad was republished in 1934 with eleven new poems and an introduction by Pelham Edgar in which the kinship between Pickthall and Brown is noted. Edgar had been trying to help Raymond Knister during this period as well as Brown, as Birney records in Spreading Time (p. 24). Macmillan handled Brown's first three books, Dryad, The Tree of Resurrection and Other Poems (1937) and Challenge. She went over to Ryerson for her last two volumes: V-E Day (1947) and All Fool's Day (1948). These latter books were published for the war-book market. Clarke and Pacey (Creative Writing, p. 134) both see "Laodamia" as Brown's best work (Dryad, pp. 14-38).

27 I use the term "decadent" more or less as "Keatsian," "traditional," "romantic" and sometimes "Georgian" are used in the criticism. I believe it is more exact, not only by reference to the Symbolists but in the wider sense as well. In Frye's "Conclusion," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klink (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), Frye speaks of cultural individuation or identity as a "genius for compromise" (p. 825) that has led to
bewildermnt in the face of reality, in that Canadian literature perceived the wild through borrowed lenses (p. 827). Frye then speaks of small isolated communities which separate themselves from a physical and psychological frontiers by means of a garrison mentality that also provides all "distinctively human values" (p. 630). This mentality is inward-looking and allows for no sense of society as external to the individual artist. This split between collective and individual good Frye calls "the razor's edge of detachment" (p. 839), detachment here in the sense of existentialist alienation. Frye believes that a realist or ironic literature could not have existed (anywhere) before such a split between subject and object had occurred. I am not using the term detachment in this way. My use of the term assumes rather a split between how one desires to see the world and what simply is. In my view, detachment does not presuppose an inability in an artist to feel alienated from society; MacDonald, Brown, Pickthall and others responded to the detachment by alienating themselves from society within the security of fantastic worlds. My use of the term speaks of the abstract relationship between perception and reality. Frye's thought is based on the belief that the Word, or an order of words that derives from imaginative creativity, constitutes the "true" reality. Frye's theory sets up a solid wall between what simply is and what artists wish to see there. This perhaps always alienated will to imagine the world is what I am calling "detachment."

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31
"Debate," Selected Poems, pp. 6-7.

32
Blewett's influence continued to affect thinking people in Canadian Universities long after his accidental drowning in
1912 at the age of thirty-nine. Moreover, Queen's University, where John Watson left his mark, and Victoria College, University of Toronto, where Blewett worked, were then the leading centres of theological and philosophical debate in which Christianity was infused by secular rationalism: A. B. McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), p. 211.


34 Munro Beattie, "Poetry 1920-1935," *Literary History of Canada*, p. 725. In Logan and French's *Highways*, Stringer's Irish poems are singled out (pp. 213, 226) as representative of the "Vaudeville Period" of poetry in Canada (p. 278). He was dismissed as a novelist by Pierce in *Outline* (p. 101).


38
"Philosophies," Woman in the Rain, p. 27.
39
40
Pierrot: The Decadent Imagination, pp. 5-6.
41
42
"The Revolt," Open Water, pp. 94-96.
43
44
Beautiful Apostrophes:

Marjorie Pickthall and W. W. E. Ross

In the poetry of W. W. E. Ross and Marjorie Pickthall, beauty of form and expression determines the content of a poem. Pickthall metamorphoses an aesthetic consciousness of the past and the present into a portal that opens out only onto itself by an act of sheer will. In Ross’s work, past and present are combined dialectically. In the work of both poets, the past is absorbed into a poetic consciousness that is entirely sufficient unto itself. Technical excellence, though differently defined, constitutes a kind of poetic resistance to chance and change that might be described as an apostrophe to beauty. Pickthall draws upon an arsenal of literary conventions and attitudes with which to build a coherent and fantastic barricade against the fundamental incoherence of modern life. Ross develops a method for the expression of beauty that relies on his trust in the ability of language to measure immiscible and fragmentary moments of meaningfulness that are self-sufficient and necessary to his idea of poetic value.

In this chapter I discuss Pickthall’s lyrics as a species of modern poetry as it existed in Canada before the New Provinces poets established irony as a primary value and before the audience of poetry split into two camps: the
serious readers and everybody else. In the second part of the chapter I discuss Ross’s lyrics in terms of how the value of poetic beauty was affected in the work of a poet who chose to be serious under these conditions. Studying the verse of these two poets side by side, one sees that the values of beauty and prophetic truth unfold from a deeper valuing of the poetic imagination. As their verse has been neglected in the study of poetry in Canada, special attention is now due to them.

The Forgotten Electra.

In her time, Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall (1883–1922) was recognized as an important young poet even before her first collection, The Drift of Pinions, was published in an edition of one thousand boxed copies that sold out in ten days of November, 1913. In Canada and the United States, her reputation had grown out of publication in such periodicals as the American “quality” magazines — Harper’s, Scribner’s and The Atlantic Monthly — and the prestigious, imperialist and conservative Canadian magazines of the time: Andrew Macphail’s The University Magazine at McGill and The Canadian Magazine, which had been patterned despite its loyalties to the Empire after the model of the popular American monthlies. Her girlish winsomeness attracted the encouragement and friendship of Helena Coleman and Professor Pelham Edgar in literary matters and A. E. Lang, the librarian at Victoria College, University of Toronto, in the matter of an appropriate job.
Pickthall assisted James in his annual bibliography of Canadian poetry, just the right thing. It was through the "personal solicitation of Sir Andrew Macphail," as Lorne Pierce records in the *Book of Remembrance* (1925), that she began collecting verses for her first collection.

At the age of seventeen, in 1900, Pickthall attracted "unusual attention" among university people by winning a *Mail and Empire* Christmas competition with her poem, "O Keep the World for Ever at the Dawn." In this precocious poem, characteristic of her most popular verses, a relationship between beauty and time is expressed in which beauty stands as a defense against whatever the millennium may promise or threaten:

> Hold every bird with still and drowsy wing
> That in the breathless hush no clamorous throat
> Shall break the peace that hangs on everything
> With shrill awakening note.
> Keep fast the half-seen beauties of the rose
> In undisturbed repose.

Time and reality are excluded from consciousness by a refusal to countenance the plain light of day; and by a desire to know the world through a waking dream. This secondary world must remain forever young and pleasurable, "Yet, keeping so, let nothing lifeless seem." Life in this imaginary reality is breathless with delight in itself as a container of beauty, yet this seeming life is like a Chinese box in which contemplation of half-seen beauty excludes all else.

Where Clarke's verse is formal and Stringer's is
emotional, Pickthall marries feeling and formality; she values technical perfection within the compass of her conventions, yet at the same time her cadence, colour, imagery and major motifs seem to communicate a consciousness turned inward upon itself and self-enclosed. As an expression of consciousness, poetry is confined to a limited metaphorical domain in which flowers, precious stones and metals and the like predominate. This domain excludes all harshness in order to sustain a close relationship between beauty and the pleasing. Pickthall brings to the period a new emphasis on the subconscious processes of imaginative creativity. Unintentionally, her work survives as a window on an unusual awareness, rosy panels of stained glass illuminated not by the light of day but rather from within, by the psychological tensions involved in an imaginative will to hold the panels together. Not until we come to the poetry of Raymond Knister do we find a similar emphasis on consciousness. However, unlike the psychological realism of Knister and unlike the psychology that Pratt uses in his narrative verse, Pickthall's psychology manifests itself neither as a form of knowledge nor a search for truth, but as a completely self-sufficient poetic world of fabulous beauty.

For other poets writing in the period, the belief that the truth lying beyond beauty was ineffable and inexpressible continued to be an affirmation amenable to faith. Clarke's philosophy, MacInnes's Tauism and MacDonald's Christian theosophy each function intellectually and emotionally to support
faith. Their poetry of beauty affirms faith as a coherence that might compensate for the sense of a fading transcendence. In their works, beauty mediates between two views on time, human history unfolding through mere chance and history unfolded through God's purpose and design. In Pickthall, the inexpressible is entirely denied. Faith becomes a kind of hollow delirium in which the exotic and the fabulous constitute a displacement, in the poet's consciousness, of the hollow left behind by an absence of the affirmative capacity for belief. What Northrop Frye calls her "Biblical-Oriental pastiches... not so unlike the kind of thing that Ezra Pound was producing at about the same time," could be regarded as psychological deformations of the poet's historical sense. Her poems derive a sense of unity, completeness or coherence by means of shoring up the ruins of her desire with the cadence and imagery of a poetic world that, in the words of Freud, "owes its convincing power to the element of historical truth which it inserts in the place of the rejected reality."

The elements of historical truth one finds in her poems are mainly drawn from the Old Testament, Classical mythology and Canadian history. Despite Pickthall's adherence to late nineteenth-century aesthetic idealism, her poetic marks a point in Canadian poetry at which transcendence, in either Emersonian or Baudelairean terms, was cut loose as a value for which poems might be written. Her preference for artifice, technique, beauty and the pleasing -- over history, the urban
environment and physical desire -- participates in the drift of poetry toward a more modernist reliance on aesthetic formality as a substitute for absolute values.

Canadian readers perceived this impersonal quality as the most important virtue of her work. On her death, the Montréal Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association saluted her as one of the best poets in the English language, "having achieved in line after line that supreme miracle, poetry needing no signature but its own melody to declare the name of its maker." The Canadian reading public in general approved of the impersonal detachment of Pickthall's work, as did her contacts among the academic elite. Thus, the beginnings of formalism as a value in Canadian poetry may be sought in this response, which valued and took pleasure in the ambiguous and unparaphrasable nature of Pickthall's verse. Moreover, formal literariness was a popular value.

The split in the audience of poetry had begun much earlier in England than in North America, dating perhaps from the late-Victorian condemnation of Swinburne as "satanic." What shocked the audience of poetry in the early part of the century, first on moral grounds and then with regard to standards of technical excellence, became inverted in Pickthall's craft. In Canada, the cosmetic became decorous and the shocking became pleasing in a wholesale domestication of English decadence. The pleasing tended toward an autonomy of
form and style and was perhaps more self-sufficient in the economy of its expression than European and English decadent poetry, since in many cases the shocking was arbitrarily employed as a principle of poetic construction. The shocking revolted and divorced middle-class readers from poetry that spoke of evil, perversity and disease. With the pleasing as a principle of poetic construction, the opposite is true, binding the poet to a contract with the reader in which poems become more and more a saleable commodity. The intensity, however, of the pleasure that Pickthall's writing communicated to her audience derived from the reader's sense of meeting an unusually accessible aesthetic consciousness. Though this intensity would never offend middle-class sensibilities, it was nonetheless a complex denial of nineteenth-century idealism in aesthetics as well as ideas of materialistic science and progress. If the shocking tore open a seam in middle-class complacency, the pleasing stitched it back up again in a manner that allowed pleasure a certain respectability. The decadent poets put the reader in the streets, among the tramps, beg-ladies and prostitutes. In contrast, Pickthall's intensity, tamed and made formal through craftsmanship, presupposed an armchair and a large library.

One effect of the pleasing was to bring aesthetic values under the influence of material concerns. Pierce summarizes the commercial side of the question in his description of the effect that Pickthall had on other writers in her time.
The presence of Marjorie Pickthall in Canada, her eminence as a poet and writer of short stories, the legend of the fabulous sums her fiction brought, her wish to be associated as a founder-member of the newly formed Canadian Authors’ Association, all this had an astonishing effect upon our writers. Greater pride was taken in craftsmanship, for the frequent appearance of Marjorie Pickthall’s lovely lyrics shamed casual and shoddy work. Canadian writers began to turn out short stories better than any they had ever done. The entire writing fraternity felt that a bigger and better day was ahead, and that if one were good, even though a Canadian, the markets of the world were open.

Pickthall’s work showed that the pleasing could support an art that was at once marketable and aesthetically respectable. Writers began to believe that a formalist ideal in craftsmanship should determine how the quality of a work would be assessed and rewarded remuneratively. The “higher” purposes of art were lost sight of, as well as Pickthall’s particular quality of intensity. Art for art’s sake thus developed a material interest in Canada and a serious concern for poets as different as Pickthall and Earle Birney.

The public responded favourably to Pickthall’s impersonal lyricism, but it was her intensity that stood in place of the idealism upon which the optimism and complacency of poetry in Canada was based. A connection between intensity and idealism perhaps goes back to Pater, whose “Conclusion” to the Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873) had become the Bible of English decadent writers such as Arthur Symons, Wilde, George Moore, Lionel Johnson and Yeats. Pater understood physical life as a series of semi-autonomous,
infinitely divisible intervals or "moments" circumscribed by the natural elements and the principles of things that science names. The Heraclitan flow of time blurs the intervals; so that what is multiple seems singular; yet the intervals can be opened in the body of life by the hard, gemlike scalpel of beauty. All that is real in life "fines itself down" to singular, sharp impressions of these intervals, and to burn with the pleasure of this process, "to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life." The world is unreal and dead outside of such moments of ecstasy, but within them the artist can declare "let nothing lifeless seem."

What Santayana would later call the life of reason was not sufficient to Pater's "literary sense," which alone could make an incision in inchoate time. Thus, an intense passion for beauty becomes the absolute value of art and song, conferring nothing but the highest quality to passing moments of aesthetic pleasure, valuable simply for those moments' sake. This value, for all Pater's moral discomfort, came to dominate the poetry of the English aesthetes and decadents during the eighteen-nineties. This poetry made its greatest impact through the works of the Rhymers' Club, and the contributions to periodicals such as The Hobby Horse, The Rose Leaf, The Butterfly, The Dome, The Pageant, The Cameleon, The Yellow Book, and its successor as leader of the movement, Arthur Symons' The Savoy, "the forerunners of our 'little magazines' today. -- presenting for an interested public the
new trends in art and literature."

Unlike the English decadents, Canadian poets publishing
in the house organs of the Canadian Authors' Association
correctly interpreted what in Pater is an essentially moral
point of view. Pater's conception of intellectual pleasure
allowed for the development and perfection of the personality
through "a life of constant and eager observation." In this
Pater is the direct antecedent of Bradley, Moore, Edward
Caird and through Caird, the Canadian philosophers John
Watson, George Blewett, Andrew MacPhail and John Daniel Logan.
Logan, the chief spokesman for ideal beauty in the period,
articulated the Canadian position in an article called "The
Source and Aesthetic Value of Permanency in Art and Litera-
ture" (1901). In MacInnes and MacDonald, for example, moral
self-realization tempered the hedonistic interpretation of
what Pater called wisdom, "the poetic passion, the desire for
beauty, the love of art for art's sake."

Pickthall did not practice a poetry in which moral
self-realization could occur but rather a poetry of consciousness
in the sense of Pater's "swarm of impressions," every one
of which contains the impression of the individual in his
isolation: "the mind "keeping as a solitary prisoner its own
dream of the world." As European and American expatriate
poets began to be more and more concerned with writing that
addressed society, either in language that would shock the
audience, or in language closer to what was spoken outside of
books, Pickthall wrote from a space of literary impressions, in a manner that must be overheard. "'Overhear,' is, I think, the right word," as Duncan Campbell Scott said on the occasion of her death, "for there was a tone of privacy, of seclusion, in her most individual poems."

The experience of overhearing what Pierce called her "quietly beautiful thinking" had a remarkable effect on many readers. To Pierce it was a "deep aesthetic experience," to disregard any attempt "to account for or explain a poet's genius," and "behold here a shy, simple, lovable girl busy with paints and poetry." Desmond Pacey once confessed "shamefacedly," that Pickthall's adolescent wistfulness "still has the capacity to bring tears to my eyes and a choking sensation to my throat." Clearly, the intensity that her poetry communicated was unconsciously seductive, and appealed to the protective parent in her reader and a nostalgia for childhood innocence.

In 1912, Alfred Gordon, a young English poet and devotee of the decadents, was so struck by Pickthall's "The Little Fauns to Proserpine" that he wrote her a warm letter of appreciation, beginning several years' correspondence. Pickthall felt that Gordon's poetic creed was entirely opposed to her own. "For instance," she wrote to him, "you hold the form of a poem of supreme importance; I believe in the supremacy of thought." For Pickthall, the music of poetry was
more important than the "heavy mechanism of verse." Strict adherence to form was "ruinous to the temper." One year before her death at the age of thirty-nine, in 1922, she was "more firmly rooted than ever" in her opinion that rigid schemes of construction and melody were "fatal" to poetry in the English language. Her idea of thought in poetry amounted to the musical reverberation of a wide range of literary contexts, examined by W. E. Collin, her best critic. This allusiveness caused her to be dubbed "Pickthall the Obscure," indicating that the form and not the "music" was the more marketable.

Though her intense lyricism, her "supremacy of thought," the sense of a music with a life of its own, would constitute a stricter formalism in her work than any set of conventions, Pickthall sought a certain freedom from form. In her second volume of poems, she had begun to experiment with free verse. "Improvisations on the Flute" may suggest a direction her work might have taken had she survived:

She has gathered darkness to build her a nest
And the little leaves of cloud.
She crouches with her breast against darkness,
And hides as a hare in the meadows of night.
It covers her like long grass
Whose blossom is all of stars;
Crocus-stars, stars of anemone,
Where cling the moths that are the longings of men.17

The poem concerns visitations of desire upon the sleeping poet and the relationship between desire, death and timelessness. Desire is a guest and a shadow born in the evening, when "dead shepherds hear the sheep cropping;" it is slain by the
morning. Organized around a will to mortify desire, the poem is characterized by careful manipulations within form. This freedom would result from Pickthall's desire to lyricize reality, decently loosening repression, but the poem works against itself, releasing desire into a form that must nullify it. Thus, the free verse is self-consciously enclosed by two rhyming quatrains.

Pickthall's most experimental poetic fantasy happens to be one of her best treatments of the decadent stereotypes, in which magic, dream-like settings, allusions to exotic literature, Biblical, Greco-Roman and Nordic myth had been reduced to "systematic and ultimately uninspiring allegories" by the time Yeats met Pound. "From a Lost Anthology" is a prose-poem that belongs to a tradition stemming from the Symbolists, 18 Baudelaire's Spleen of Paris, for example. In tone, mood and literary setting, as with many of Pickthall's fantasy-poems, "Lost Anthology" is reminiscent of Pound's earlier poems on legendary themes. Like Pound's elided "Papyrus," the poem's ten pieces are fragments of an imagined, literary experience.

THE ROSE

Above the ashes of me, Rhodora, they planted a rose,
but it died. Pity me that I died also who was also a rose.

Here, the music of literary allusiveness communicates an aesthetic, intellectual pleasure by which the poetic value of beauty is achieved. Her concept of beauty differs from Pater's in that the interval sought does not open to transcendence.
A DEAF GIRL

Here lies Chryseis, my bride. She was beautiful, but the gods of life denied her hearing. Nor have the gods of the dead been kinder. In proof whereof I come here daily and call her,--Chryseis, Chryseis. Witness thou, O stranger, she hath not heard me.

Not human love but the relationships between the signs of an artificial poetic world, her pleased and pleasing awareness of them, carries the value of beauty in such "overheard" forms.

Pickthall did not seek to represent reality, but rather to create a reverberation of images and literary contexts that would express a relationship between things imagined, and the act of consciousness which brings imagined things into being. Such "music" demands much from the reader's understanding of her allusions and willingness to allow the music to reverberate in his mind. Nonetheless, the resulting poems are autonomous in Scott's sense of an overheard poetry, or Merle Brown's more recent concept of "twice-told" poetry in contemporary American verse. They are poems that sing to themselves, that are small player pianos, as it were, which require from the reader only an initial impulse to start them going. What parts the stream of time in Pickthall's work, at its richest, is not a window on divine order and purpose in the universe or a prospect on the meaning of the here and now, but rather the folding in upon itself of past and present that is characteristic of fantasy.

As in any variety of fantasy-writing, pleasure func-
tions to produce a substantial relationship between the world that is imagined and the act of imagining it. Pleasure is also a product of this relationship. The language used to express fantasy may be elevated and it may be a freedom-song of libidinous drives and attachments, but it cannot promise more than a mental picture of an imagined world. The coherence of such worlds can derive from the formal arrangement of mental properties rooted in the materiality of narcissism and wish-fulfillment. Ideal beauty, the primary value of fantastic poetry in Canada during the period, however, was very rarely substituted for the values one associates with fantasy today: adventure, science-fiction speculations about the future, and so on. Poetry strove to force an idealized, sempiternal present into the flow of time and change, and fantasy was naturally the best vehicle for this.

Pickthall’s most popular poems exploited her readers’ desire to experience vicariously the “elasticity of probability” of the fantastic strain in decadent literature, which “sought escape in the life of the imagination.” This desire was conditioned by pessimism about the modern world and the continuing power of idealism in readers’ sensibilities. Her literary, exotic and legendary settings, decorated with flowers, small animals and silver, “echoed the deepest desires of the fin-de-siècle soul,” as Jean Pierrot says of the French decadents, “because they are always located in a distant or long-past world, at once unreal and vague, [which] satisfied
the desire for escape experienced so intensely by the collective spirit of the age." This nostalgia denied the real past and avoided the future by preferring an idealized present. Pickthall's lyrics house-trained the decadent imagination, so that it could be accepted intounctitious middle-class living-rooms.

Pater's metaphysics are pertinent to Pickthall's attitudes toward beauty, because what he called "speculative culture" must perceive and disseminate a reality of "the inward world of thought and feeling" where the flame of perception burns "more eager and devouring." Readers liked to overhear the apostrophes of a poet such as Pickthall, spoken as if by a dreamer in sleep, because by virtue of his idealism they might come a little closer to the sources of faith, or to those intervals between things and the principles of things, which Pater had called beauty. From Emerson to Pater, Bachelard and Poulet, however, this inward world has gradually come to be understood in material or substantialist terms. The fantastic settings of the decadent poets served more and more often as mere scaffolding of psychological states in which mimetic representation of nature was rejected in favour of what Pierrot calls "paradis artificiels," in Baudelaire's phrase. This preference for artifice came to dominate the most popular verse of early twentieth-century Canada. Listening closely to Pickthall's "twice-told" lyrics, one appreciates
that beauty is valued as a means of excluding rather than containing both mundane and more spiritual perceptions of reality, in favour of a literary consciousness.

In "The Immortal," Pickthall evokes the re-creation of the world by Beauty, "still immortal in our eyes," following an undefined apocalypse. Beauty is personified as an artist upon whose grace the creative power of God entirely depends:

Beauty that rosed the moth-wing, touched the land
With clover-horns and delicate faint flowers,
Beauty that bade the showers
Beat on the violet's face,
Shall hold the eternal heavens within their place
And hear new stars come singing from God's hand.

The decadent artificer is always behind her descriptions of the natural world, and in her poetic world God is displaced by the creative power of the artistic imagination. In "The Tree," the poet identifies with a tree that outtops the forest. The tree is a "lovely thought" of an unnamed beloved, "Unknown of anyone," seemingly, and a guardian of an "enclosed ground," "by the cunning seasons builded fair, with rain's masonry/ And delicate craft of air." The tree is capable of towering to the stars, the "lovelier need," not because it has grown above the "lowly stuff" of nature, but because it is not a tree at all. The tree is no more than a crafted poetic figure, and pleasantly conscious of itself as such. Recalling Diderot's story, "Ceci n'est pas un conte," or Magritte's famous design of a brier, what we might overhear this poem saying today is, 22 essentially, "This is not a tree." When we come to the
poetry of Eustace Ross, we will see that the rhetorical structure of denial suggested here has become the backbone of Ross's poetic credo.

After the Great War, Pickthall settled in British Columbia, and the rain-forests quickly became a faerie-land in her imagination. Pater, we should recall, had said of Rossetti that "dream-land" is "a real country," placing an increasingly solipsist "emphasis on the power the artist may exert over nature" in his later writings. In poems such as "The Sleep-Seekers" and "The House," Pickthall writes of sleep and dream as women who live only within a creative as opposed to a created forest, an imaginary place accessible to the "you" of the poems only by means of the threshold of art. Though she writes of affection and desire for the addressee, the "you" must clearly dissolve into a figure of fantasy before she can respond. In "Adam and Eve," Pickthall suggests that after the Fall, man was redeemed from "the clear silence" by Beauty, who "taught them heavenly words." These words and no other provide the world-parents their only light, their only bond and their only grace, cooling their passions at her stream. Adam and Eve sleep "as the beautiful must," but only once they are dead. Beauty blossoms in "their dust." Beauty, understood in terms of the decadent imagery of Swinburne or of Beardsley, is in Pickthall as well a matter of cosmetics applied to a fantasy-world whose boundaries are marked by a fear of modern realities and a concomitant denial of normal human relationships.
In Pickthall's most popular verse, poems like "The Immortal" are marked by a separation of song from any uncom-
forting sense, an ideal of formal presentation from irrelevant moral, social and historical elements. In "Quiet," we are able
to eavesdrop on the dreaming poet's employment of beauty's
heavenly words to create for herself a paradise that is
entire in itself, and total in its rejection of life and time:

Here in the immortal empire of the grasses,
Time, like one wrong
Note in a song,
With their bloom, passes.25

Pickthall's detachment from the modern world went beyond her
sources and precedents in the aesthetes and decadents of the
Rhymers' Club, who paid no heed to Pater's warning that
"gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and
touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories," on to
acquiesce in any orthodoxy, including Pater's own. Pierce
says of her:

As for her contemporaries who boasted every conceit,
and raucously descanted, saying that they have "lived," she
had no use at all,...she took no part in the established
systems of politics, sociology or religion, namely, that her
chief desire was for liberation from all abstract ideas,
systems and forms:26

She attempted to free poetic artifice from the idealism that
spawned it by liberating artifice from Pater's self-
realization, but also from the moral commentary and
the decadents' choice of subject matter, which led:27
against the moral complacency of the middle-class. And if the
decadents eventually found themselves in Yeats's foul rag-and-
bone-shop of the heart, Pickthall's art became enclosed by the
heaped texts of her reading: a closure that, toward the end of
her life, she attempted to re-open by violent means.

No one could have slighted Marjorie Pickthall for an
lack of wholesomeness, or that aspect of decadence devoted to
the shocking of bourgeoisie sensibilities. However, though she
adopted the dreamy medievalism and eroticism characteristic of
this school, she adapted the method of rarifying Baudelairian
correspondences between a "forest of symbols" drawn from the
natural world through artifice, and the source of their beauty
in an essentially Platonic spirituality, to a poetry of formal
beauty. Though she was exuberantly perceived as a singer of
spiritual songs in her time, her sensitiveness to literature
was ultimately the first cause of these songs. She read the
Old Testament for the same reasons she read Homer, nineteenth-
century English verse, Islamic and Japanese literature,
Canadian History and "creepy" stories about vampires — "a
lovely one about a French-Canadian priest turning into a were-
wolf" — that is, for a setting. Within the dream-lands of a
fantastic but material literary awareness, Pickthall fled from
fallen nature and waking life, which she saw only as a place
of silence, dust, poverty and death.

The poetic value of beauty in Pickthall's art departs
from any programme of moral self-development. Based on fantasy, her poetic allows no in-roads into the social arena in which moral qualities are tried. Thus, her œuvre provides no sense of a personality struggling toward an ideal of perfection, or at least a clear understanding of one's failings as one finds in Yeats, or in Wilson MacDonald's work. On the contrary, her poetry is marked by a certain regressive drift toward self-isolation.

In "The Lamp of Poor Souls," Pickthall writes of the grief of a poor man over the death of a small child. The speaker's prayer, as an articulation of the poor, can be beautiful and hence worthy of poetic expression only because the speaker is asleep and dreaming. In "St. Yves' Poor," a saint's reverie renders his Christian compassion for the poor into art. In a later poem, "Sleep," Pickthall attempts to accommodate the privileged artifice of dreams to a Christian vision of brotherhood. Here, she beholds all mankind asleep within the confines of a dream-vision. She becomes a dreamer within a dream in order to envisage mankind dreaming of oneness under God. The figure of a dreamer within a dream enables Pickthall to envisage "the Lamp that gave them light." This light, however, though "lovelier than the dreams of night," still needs Christ's grace, "Christ's own heart, laid here to heal it." The light that enabled the dreamers to dream of brotherhood is the poet's own flawed imagination; wounded or sick, it cannot emanate from a transcendent source.
Pickthall could not rest content with faith in Christ's redemption. In "The Chosen," she admits that the Christian path is "a way too high for me," and prays:

Break up the vision round me, Lord, and thrust
Me from Thy side, unhoused without the bars,
For all my heart is hungry for the dust.
And all my soul is weary of the stars:

I would seek out a little roof instead,
A little lamp to make my darkness brave.
"For though she heal a multitude," Love said,
"Herself she cannot save."

Thus, in her best-known religious poem, "Resurgam," Pickthall imagines that after death she will be re-united with Christ, her "brother" in work and sleep, in a land of music, "Song that is fresh as sunrise, light that sings." Death is the "gate" to this land, and on this side of death (in the world outside of books), one may know only silence and an absence of satisfaction.

Pickthall could not face the reality of poverty and suffering in the world without transmuting that reality into fantasy. In poems such as "Wanderlied," "The Pool," or the later poem, "The Naiad," images of nature and the elements are merely applied cosmetically to the surface of an imaginary world where questions of morality and self-realization are irrelevant. In "The Gardener's Boy," the boy feeds on lilyed thoughts of a loved one, falls asleep, and dreams "on the sunburned sod, / Smiling beside the agony of God." Her search for the pleasing eventually produced an elemental poetic world
in which settings informed by religion or moral problems were displaced by a setting in which death alone formed the ground from which song could spring. In "The Naiad," she laments that she is as sick with grief as the lives of men and gods; for without the elemental world of her dreaming, which alone gives her pleasure in life, there is nothing but "an undesigned despair:"

Sad smoke of sacred fires along the lands,
The burdened vine, full gourd and goldening ears,
The labourer's song among his olive trees,—
What care I for these?

The naiad asks that her "sweet banks" break open and release her fountains, "To lose immortal sadness in the sea," to die and to "know no more."

Throughout her work, one overhears the sad and disillusioned songs of speakers who are dead or old and spent. In later poems such as "Exile," "The Foolish Brother" and "A Western Window," there seems to be a certain relinquishing of her pleasure in the elemental world; a recognition of her withdrawal from life amounting to a desire for death; and an acceptance of her dream-song as "The song of the old dead dreams and the death of the dreams to be." Alongside such poems as these, a few poems such as "When Winter Comes," "Riding," "Again" and "Finis," written near the time of her death, appear to grasp at the life of the natural world she had so assiduously and meticulously excluded from her life's
work. In "When Winter Comes," the setting is free of the fantastic, the natural images are true to the British Columbia landscape, the rhythm is fresh and bracing and the pleasure of the poem's optimism is real and strong. Toward the end of her life, as W. E. Colliin noticed, reading Pickthall's notes for her last, unfinished novel, Pickthall had decided to "Can the fantastic." Her search for the pleasing gradually matured into psychological withdrawal and a longing for death.

When Marjorie Pickthall published her poetic tributes to Swinburne's Proserpine poems, the naughtiness that the reading public felt had scandalized the ideal of poetic beauty when Swinburne published his "pagan" Poems and Ballads (1866) were not to be found. Like T. S. Eliot, who thought Swinburne would not have had so much fun with vice and sin had he known more about them, Pickthall was "dreadfully disappointed in Swinburne for his teacup wickedness... Words, words, words. But, oh, the 'Hymn to Proserpine'!!" She felt that the place of wickedness in literature was the gothic romance, and that it must be "never merely horrid and never -grubby."

A great deal, but not all of Pickthall's verse was from the beginning conditioned by an understanding of the sort of craftsmanship and mystification that her audience expected of her. Thus, in "Little Fauns," the meticulous playfulness and literary allusiveness of her verse was put to the task of achieving an appealing simplicity such as one finds in some.
kinds of good children's literature:

Brown as the hazel-husk, swifter than the wind,
Though you turn from heath and hill, we are hard behind.
Singing, "Ere the sorrows rise, ere the gates unclose
Bind above your wistful eyes the memory of a rose." 33

The chief elements of Pickthall's most ethereal poems are to be found in the fauns' song: sleep -- in the sense of a dreaming flight from life -- silence, flowers and deftly mesmerizing prosodic control that re-activates the suggestiveness of her stock, Anglo-Saxon adjectives:

Through the dark reeds wet with rain, past the shining foam Went the light-foot Mysian maids, calling Hylas home, Syrinx felt the silver spell fold her at her need. Hear, ere yet you say farewell, the wind along the reed.

The profound religious doubt, however, central to Swinburne's "Hymn," is deliberately concealed by the poem's ambience of adolescent nostalgia for a time when faith could be imagined as less deprived of the marvelous and splendid. There may be two reasons for the deception going on in this poem. The first concerns doubt; the second concerns dread.

When Pickthall confronted doubt, as in "Imperfection," she makes it clear that neither life returning in the spring nor "music echoing where the saints have trod" can teach her "What heaven may be." Rather, "the nipped bud," "the weak voices," "Lost vision; stammering prayer" and unhappiness in love are those things that make her think of God. Lost innocence and faith, and errant desire are also the stuff of
fear. Pacey has said that "Miss Pickthall was afraid of life," and that "this fear was fatal to her as a poet." The destruction of her critical reputation among a new breed of "serious" readers in the 'thirties and 'forties, however, had less to do with her fear than with a reaction to the success of her personal mystique as an idealistic and personable young girl. This reaction led to her neglect in the assessment and evaluation of poetry in Canada at that time, so that the darker side of her work now requires further consideration.

The darker side of Pickthall's poetic world can be found in the second Proserpine poem, her substantial poem, "Mons Angelorum," and in lesser poems such as "Inheritance":

I, before I fronted pain,
Felt creation writhe and strain,
Sending ancient terrors through,
My small pulses, sweet and new.

As Lacan has said, "In what could the unconscious be better recognized, in fact, than in the defenses that are set up in the subject against it, with such success that they appear no less real?" In "Inheritance," as in most of Pickthall's work, one is aware that the poem addresses an imagined reader, and that the "I" of the poem is an imagined subject. The repetition of the pronoun in the construction "I, before," in each of the three stanzas, reads as a defensive stance in the face of terrors that are archetypal. A tiny drama takes place, thus, within Pickthall's poetic world, here located at birth,
and "a few summers gone from birth." The drama is presented to us within the formal properties of the "overheard" form: told once as an apostrophe to fear within the landscapes of fantasy and told twice in the sense that it is written down. What we overhear from the safety of an armchair is that the trauma has robbed the speaker's body of her will to live. As a defensive measure against Pickthall's profounder depths, the lyrical transformation of reality acquires a rather different context than that of ribbons, parasols and chiffon.

Pickthall was preoccupied with death from the beginning, but came more and more to understand her art of the pleasing in terms of an interplay -- always resisted and impeded -- between poetic devices and their origins in death. The fiat "let nothing, lifeless seem" does not presuppose the body of life but a dreaming corpse. The earlier poem "Mons Angelorum" is one of the richest responses I have come across to the intellectual tumult that characterized the period and the decadence that preceded it. Man's Edenic origin and transcendent destination having been challenged by science, Higher Criticism and Darwin, faith in the afterlife became problematic. In Pickthall, death became the single most important challenge to the values of her art. Here, questions of the authority of the law, represented by Moses in near perfect blank verse, is subtly challenged by the disillusionment of Joshua, who has been broken by the "burden of the Lord" and who represents on-going life.
Moses’s knowledge of the law as a formal set of rules has robbed him of all his “desires and cares.” As he nears death, he can only recollect the Egypt of his boyhood, “Full of warm buds,” and Isis’s dreams of love. In contrast, Joshua is a man of sorrows who takes Moses’s sword, but cannot aspire to the spirituality of the “Master of Law.” Joshua is a warrior and carries a bright-burning flame of fury within him; Moses’s wisdom consists in “far-flung visions of despair.” A darkness moves between them, and a sky “Full of vague voices,” terrifying Joshua, which Moses calls “the wind of death.” Joshua leaves, the darkness unchains “the imprisoned pinions” of the soul’s “blind bird” and bids Moses’s life to recede, “A bubble before the advancing wave of death.” The darkness has a “music in it,” which the poem aspires to express.

Moses is visited by angels of darkness, light and dreams. The first calls life a harp with no voice, the second considers himself above life, “less and greater,” and the third calls life an errant affront to “Peace”:

Mine are the wings of silence
Folded in silver sleep before my face;
This is my hand is the golden fruit of Eden,
Whose scent is sleep; its flame-white flower grew
Along the glades where Adam walked with God.

Moses soliloquizes that in the darkness there is no star nor “lingering love of day”:

But the soft dark
Folds inward as a flower, enfolding me,
My length of little days, wisdom and grief,
Light as a drop of rain.

The angel of dreams demands surrender to the darkness. "This
dream-encompassed city," whose limits are "tenderer far," but
the angel of darkness offers recognition of the sovereignty of
the law and of Moses' right within that power. If Moses opts
for darkness, when it "Takes substance/ In domes and depths of
mightiest design/ And seals him from the world," then life
will have no meaning and light, "no name or place." The angel
of light offers nothing in this exchange. Darkness, "the
firstborn angel," triumphs, and the law is subsumed finally by
an "eternal" darkness that veils the thoughts of God. In this
darkness, "the breath of chaos," there is neither memory,
hope, reason, happiness nor despair. Life is meaningless and
the artist-angel of dreams cannot match the mighty designs of
darkness. At Moses' passing, the voices of Israel cry out that
there is nothing between them and their God. Nothing, that is,
in the sense of a nothingness that may not be traversed.

The second Proserpine poem, "Persephone Returning to
Hades," probes the Eleusinian motif more deeply than "Little
Fauns." Here, the "sad untimely flowers," the "Dread
daffodils" that the daughter gathers in the "gathering-place"
of shadows, "Slip from my hands and are but shadows too." As
in "Mons Angelorum," the land of shadows is described as a
city, "vast gray suburbs of the dead," and Pickthall's defense
against the darkness, nature transformed into fantasy,
reappears in the last line, "A small brown faun who follows me and weeps." The poem creates a literary fantasy out of the poet's defensive preoccupation with death and dread, and within this poetic world Pickthall chooses to follow Persephone into the darkness.

Pickthall accepted the Eleusis myth as a gathering-place for her ideas on art and death in 1910, immediately following the death of her mother, which had inspired a melancholia from which she never completely recovered. She never married, had few close relationships and never showed a great deal of affection for anyone except her father and the dream-figures of her verse. Pierce felt that melancholy marked most of her work and that it "must not be confused with mysticism." In 1919, she wrote from London, disheartened by her small contribution to the war effort and the slow progress of her second novel:

To me the trying part is being a woman at all. I've come to the ultimate conclusion that I'm a misfit of the worst kind, in spite of a superficial femininity -- emotion with a foreknowledge of impermanence; a daring mind with only the tongue as an outlet, a greed for experience plus a slavery to convention -- what the deuce are you to make of that? -- as a woman? As a man, you could go ahead and stir things up fine.

In British Columbia a year later, Pickthall was struggling with a conflict in her fiction between ironic realism and romantic fantasy. The last two years of her life were years of declining health and artistic crisis.
As Pierce says, "Pickthall had begun to feel "that her true forte was in the field of the short story," in which she had enjoyed financial success. She had been frustrated by her second novel, The Bridge (1922), which was weak in plot, psychological characterization and its overwhelming sentimentality. Despite these weaknesses, the novel shows that she was straining to combine fantasy and a realistic style culled from reading Balzac. The setting she chose was that of her father's summer home on Talis Island, near Toronto. Sometime in 1920, two years before her death at the age of thirty-nine, she sent her father a booklet of verses tied up in green ribbons. The speaker of the poems was Palome, one of the novel's characters. She wrote in the "Preface to this Very Private Edition":

My dearest Daddy,

I am sending, for you, and you only, to see, some of the little poems left by Palome, and found long after by Adam Laurent and Jenny Hurst....

Their place in the story I cannot show, but they will stand alone.... I am sending them to you, a little foretaste of "the Mountain."

I hope you will be pleased with them.

Your very loving

KITSY DAUGHTER

In the verses Palome cries, "Now we have back our heritage of Time." She tells her lover to be very silent, or "Death will hear." he kisses her "and she changed into story," as a "thousand blades had blossom on her mouth."

The mid-life crisis that culminated in her death may perhaps be characterized as a split in her commitment to art between a more assertive fiction responsive to life, and the
persistent exclusion of her fantastic defenses. The shift from
dream to story, from the values of beauty to those of narra-
tive order-making, uncovered a level of brutal violence in her
imagination. As a spin-off of her effort to find a reconcilia-
tion in her fiction between "curt matter-of-fact detail" and
what she called the "beautiful wild harvest" of a romantic,
North American "white man's myth," she produced what Frye has
called the "violent, almost brutal" verse play, "The Wood
Carver's Wife." Written before she left England in the spring
of 1919, the play had "rather made her gasp, .... being so
43 entirely unexpected!" In this work, as in "Mons Angelorum,"
the deadly conflict between authority or the law and the
freedom of dreams and desire is resolved in death. In poems
such as "Isaac Jogues," "Two Souls," "Chanson de la Tour" and
in the dramatic "murder party" of "The Wood Carver's Wife" one
witnesses the violence of Pickthall's poetic world growing in
intensity as she approaches the history and the reality of her
country through the truth of her inner life. As Bachelard
says, "culture complexes are grafted upon the deeper complexes
which have been brought to light by psychoanalysis." Such a
cultural sublimation can prolong the subject's "natural subli-
mation," because readers would renew the latter in themselves,
and demand it from their authors. Thus, "a sublimated image
44 never seems beautiful enough." Pickthall's images, however,
became an embarrassment to the next generation of poets.
A Rhetoric of Transcendence.

In the poetry of W. W. Eustace Ross (1894-1966), form and content are at odds with each other. Formally, his poems constitute a rhetorical denial of the stereotypes of the decadent imagination. As a result, an inversion takes place in his meaning. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1932), Yeats was forced to concede his displeasure with the legendary in his own work, lying down "where all the ladders start." What Ross does, so to speak, is to lay Jacob's ladder down horizontally on the page. Where Pickthall struck out violently against decadent conventions near the end of her life, Ross attempted from the beginning to shape his attitudes toward language into a destructive weapon to be used against the clichés prevalent in the poetry of his time. Raymond Souster's Experiment edition of Ross's poems -- a typescript published in 1956 -- contains the poem "Narcissus," for example, in which Ross probes the relationships that held in the early part of the century between legendary themes, beauty and subjectivity.

The poem expresses the poetic value of beauty as an epistemological void, a kind of seizure that immobilizes one in rapture. Narcissus symbolized the decadent imagination "in its flight from the coarse world of reality, and from the vulgar contact of women, in order to delight in its own subjectivity and its purely internal world." Ross's poem transforms the clichéd disregard of conventional morality.
into an exercise in Imagism-qua-analysis in which the sheer violence of prosodic dissection disrupts the narcissistic vision. This violence also elevates the ordering power of Ross’s feeling for language to the status of a certainty and authority sufficient in itself. The original image of Narcissus’s face in the pool breaks up even as the presentation of the image is shattered by the typography. The disconnectedness between the image and the language used to represent it are placed in the foreground. However, despite the fact that the poem negates the cliché, the cliché is still very much present. If the image grew in pure mind because complete, in Yeats’s phrase, it is here dismantled analytically in order to show that the meaning may remain intact even when the language that has contained it is destroyed.

In the pages that follow, we will see that in Ross’s Laconics and Sonnets the decadent imagination that informs the poetry of MacInnes, MacDonald, Stringer and Pickthall remains in place as the negative side of a visionary dialectic between transcendence and empiricism. In Ross’s vision, the conception of poetic beauty dominant in his time suffers at the expense of what he believe to be true. In Pickthall’s work, the value of truth, as a value for which poems are written, was dispersed in her literary awareness. However, these two versions of the poetic imagination are recto and verso of an approach to literature that has been summarily dismissed by critics of poetry in Canada.
In the first two decades of twentieth-century poetry in Canada, publishers encouraged poetry as a profession in order to develop a market for local verse in the reading habits of the public. Writers' organizations in several cities and the regional chapters of the Canadian Authors' Association, working together with the book trade, encouraged readers to "buy Canadian" through conventions, "Book Weeks," advertising and reviews in which the advertising element was often more significant than the critical. What this meant to poets such as G. H. Clarke, W. W. E. Ross and, later, Leo Kennedy, A. J. M. Smith, Ralph Gustafson and others was that they had to choose between being a career-poet or a poets' poet. During and after World War II, the First Statement poets regretted this division among their contemporaries. At a writer's conference in 1955, Desmond Pacey summarized the position of Irving Layton and Louis Dudek when he rejected Smith's contention "that the writer should not expect or care to reach a large audience." Roy Daniels agreed with Pacey that Smith's "gadfly" concept was "inadequate to describe the poet's full function" and deplored the inevitable and widening separation of poet and public. By mid-century, writers felt that publishers did not push their books vigorously enough, and that their audience was too much "localized in academic circles." One of the few poets of the period to completely reject the attitudes of the career-poets. In "A Note on
Poetic Style" written in 1957, Ross saw the division between "serious" and "popular" poetry as a matter of stoic acceptance of what he called an inevitable "smothering flood-tide of time." He wondered which was better for a poet, to acquiesce in anonymity or to go "Down lashing out frantically waving flags, similes, metaphors." If an absence of change or self-development marks the oeuvres of the popular poets (and their flag-waving readers), changes, re-adjustments of commitment and personal growth are the key-notes of serious poets like A. M. Stephen, A. G. Bailey or Dorothy Livesay. However, though never widely read outside academic circles, Ross and Clarke had clearly thought out their attitudes toward poetry early on, and diverged little from their initial positions.

The Great War probably delayed Ross's first appearance as a poet. He was twenty-nine when he began to publish in The Dial and Poetry (Chicago), six years after returning from England. The bulk of Ross's poetry published in his lifetime was written in the next ten years, though he contributed sporadically to literary periodicals and anthologies until his death in 1966. Throughout the 'forties and 'fifties, Ross revised and polished poems begun much earlier and experimented with some new poetry. Little of his later work has been printed aside from the 1968 selection in Shapes & Sounds, edited by Raymond Souster and John Robert Colombo. Many of Ross's poetic sequences, "hypnagogisms," literary parodies and translations have yet to be culled from his letters and
papers. *Laconics* (1930) and *Sonnets* (1932) were privately printed, by "E. R.," and received little critical attention. Ross mailed his own review copies to periodicals that he respected. Bruce Whiteman, who has edited Ross's correspondence with Ralph Gustafson, remarks that Ross's inclusion in Gustafson's *Penguin* anthology brought him before a large public for the first time. However, despite the fact that "Ross's work is generally acknowledged by poets and critics as having an important place in the early development of modernism in Canada...little study of the poetry has been made and even less is known about Ross's life."

Ross is remembered today for a small number of often anthologized poems, "The Fish," "The Diver," "The Dawn; the Birds," "The Snake; Trying," "Pine Gum," "The Creek," "If Ice," "The Walk" and a few others. In an early draft of Ralph Gustafson's "Introduction" to *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse* (1958), Gustafson explains that the thrust of Pratt's personality onto the poetic scene in the 'twenties served to distinguish Canadian poetry as Canadian for the first time, but aside from this influence of Pratt's personality:

A modern awareness, with its concomitant experimentation with technique, a reduction of Canada, of the quality of Canada, were entering into Canadian verse. W. W. E. Ross' "northern" poems were written almost entirely in one night in April 1928, in northern Ontario. They captured precisely, with wonder and freshness, a distinct Canada. The rural parallel, is Raymond Knister.51
What Gustafson meant by technical experimentation and "the quality of Canada" may be discerned from a letter he wrote to Ross in 1945. Gustafson had "puzzled long" for a definition of Canadian verse and said to Ross: "I really cannot think of your work without 'northness' in it -- and I may add that that has been a pivot of my definition of Cdn. poetry." Disapproving of the poetry then appearing in the Northern Review, successor to First Statement, Gustafson felt that a "Chiselled lyricism seems incapable of sprouting in Cdn soil." Ross's conception of what form and content should be proper to a modern poetic excellence, however, went beyond Gustafson's notion of a well-wrought snow-shoe. In his later years, Ross wondered why the early "northern" poems were always sought whenever he was asked to submit for periodicals and anthologies, "Was my best work really nearly my earliest? Seems so!"

One of these northern poems is "If Ice." A careful reading of the poem reveals that technical experimentation and northness are merely contingent in terms of the values for which the poem was written. Here, the life of the mind is expressed in confrontation with the finality of death, and life itself is subjugated to Heraclitan temporal flow. The mind controlling technical experimentation and choice of subject excerpts itself from time:

If

ice shall melt if
thinly the fresh
cold clear water
The order of things that may be objectively observed in the present has become the only order that there is. Contraries are expressed by Ross as merely observable elements in the order of nature. Freezing and melting, the rigidity of ice and the flow of water, life and death are the measure of all we know, but this is not a static measure. The poem insists on a temporal process in order to suggest that as ice becomes water and as the fundament may be likened to a field of stars, perhaps death and life, too, are merely poles in a natural continuum governed by the flow of time. However, in contrast to this natural condition, and inserted into it, Ross posits a non-natural set of intellectual alternatives: either that life returns after death or that life continues after death, in which latter case life must belong to a different order from death. Ross has contrasted two alternative views on immortality — re-incarnation or the immutability of the soul — and made this uncertainty regarding a continuity between life and death the physical centre of his poem.

The full "if," "death" and "may" rhymes underline the
poem's preoccupation with the questions of uncertainty and life after death. It is the nature of the afterlife -- as a cyclical continuum, or a higher order -- and not its possibility that is in question. The resolution to this problem cannot be found in time perceived as duration or as a linear progression, and because this problem determines the poem's form, the poem's organization can owe nothing to the past. 

Ross's attitudes toward time contribute directly to the poem's completeness, which brackets metaphysical questionings regarding observation in the here and now with "facts."

Logically, "If Ice" is a simple implication and the statement -- if ice melts, then spring is coming -- serves as the framework over which natural description is stretched and into which a meditative quandary is inserted. In terms of content, the poem is concerned with a poetic vision that does not open a portal through which transcendent truth and order may be glimpsed; on the contrary, the transcendent, like the stars, is brought down to earth. Physics and metaphysics are relegated to the same level of verbal play. Yet at the same time Ross requires some assurance that God does not play dice with the universe and inserts the secondary implication -- "if life return/ after death, or depart not at death" -- into his poem as a sort of Kierkegaardian either/or, illogically, by right of coercive force alone. Ross's trust in the rhetorical power of language to extract a higher meaning from reality is a departure from the reliance on convention in the popular
verse of his time, yet it is no less divorced from life.

Ross's scientific training had armed him with a method for expressing his vision in a poetry made up of small, aesthetically pleasing artifacts that engage dialectically with the natural contrariness that Pickthall strove to eliminate through the fantastic. Bachelard has suggested that a truly modern science must function within a dialectic of rational and surrational organizations, which sets in motion "a sort of logical kaleidoscope which suddenly upsets relationships, yet still preserves forms." Modern scientific truth results from the superposition and juxtaposition of divergent theories, a process in which contradiction is irrelevant since the relative truth of opposing explanations is accepted like an inclusive disjunction, an either/or whose middle term is the human imagination. In this phenomenological view, the "shifting character" and "synthetic value" of the scientific imagination negates the possibility of unifying systems of knowledge, which gives rise to a philosophy of negation in which language becomes the arena of a "semantic revolution."

"An awareness of multiple meanings," as opposed to thinking of words as pointing to things, "bids one acquire this consciousness of variable structures," a "schizophrenic" process of translation necessary to the "shifting character" of the imagination. In Ross's poem, the language of the natural cycle is translated into the language of a surrational perception of metaphysical truths, and vice versa. Neither the scientific
method nor the technical virtuosity shown in Ross's "translation," however, guarantee a resolution to the conflicting and fragmentary meaningfulness of modern life. To pass from an imaginative language such as Imagism or the decadent style to a rational language such as science or philosophical speculation "is not liberation at all; one simply strengthens the behaviorism involved."

Hence, "If Ic" interprets the data of Ross's observations as an analogical proof that the possibility of life after death exists. The manner of expression generates the simile that closes the poem, the stars as a kind of evidence of the beyond translated back into natural imagery. Ross's argument by analogy fuses reasoning with a series of imagistic snapshots—ice, melting, stream, buds, leafing, bloom and blossom—fall—which creates a simulacrum of temporal flow. Human mental processes and the processes of renewal in nature are fashioned into an intuitive coherence derived from a superimposition of intuition on the immediate present. The temporal continuity of the poem's framework is interrupted by the uncertainty at its core, but the value of beauty in the poem is thereby enriched by the sense of purpose, method, and determination to make language reveal the unknown. Locality and technical inventiveness are merely tools that lay conveniently to hand in the fashioning of an aesthetically pleasing though internally uncertain proof.

In 1950, Ross wrote to his friend A. J. M. Smith that
"spiritualism etc., are naturally prominent in all my work" because of "fundamental beliefs and experience." Ross had decided early in his career —

to stick by what is evidently my real trend though I realize it leads me away from rather than towards publication, popular opinion being at its present stage, which I look on as somewhat benighted. My experience and studies have been unusual and their product must naturally be looked at askance by the majority.

Ross went on to explain that he had been studying Freud and other psychologists' works on the subject of dreams, and that these studies had been useful to him in his poetic attempts to "reflect or echo real experience, not so literally, but by a sort of verbal transposition which goes somewhat beyond parallelism in feeling." Ross's experience of nature, the city and the spiritual combines with his feeling toward language in such a way that beauty in his art emerges as a process of translation not unlike that described by Bachelder.

Ross's poetry brings a new sense of purpose to the values for which poems were written in time of Pickthall and MacDonald, yet in a sense it returns to a concern for assurances of a transcendent order and purpose in the universe that may be found in the previous generation of poets. Among Ross's contemporaries, the poetry of beauty became less and less important as a vehicle for transcendent truths. In Clarke and Pickthall, poetic beauty arises within a reading-world of literary resonances that perhaps substituted for the literary
and social value of transcendent beliefs as a form of resistance to the modern world. Clarke and Pickthall differ in the nature of their resistance in that Clarke draws upon the storehouse of traditional literary forms, while Pickthall builds a barricade from the materials of fantasy. In Ross's work, the poetic value of beauty may be seen to assume yet another variation on this resistance, where Ross departs from the decadence not only on the side of an empirical objectivity, as one might expect since he was a geophysicist, but also in his attitudes toward the past. In Pickthall past and present are absorbed into her sensitivity to literature and the conventions she chose to use. In Ross literary traditions are subjected to a dialectic with the present and a feeling for language as somehow beyond time and change.

Ross was never fully accepted into the company of the "moderns" — Livesay, Smith, Gustafson and so forth — because unlike them he was not interested in propagating the future any more than he was interested in perpetuating the past. Promises of social justice or "chiselled lyricism" and the clarity of a modern lapidary prosody are not to be found in Ross's work. Ross's detachment as a poet from the forces at work on the values of poetry in Canada was complete. His poetry is unique in its sense of purpose and direction, and it was perhaps this confidence that separated him from the poets who presented themselves in the New Provinces anthology of 1936 as writers whose "search for new content" had been less
successful than their "search for new techniques," which reflected the aimlessness of their social environment. Due to Ross's own indifference toward publication and the subsequent neglect of his work, his sense of purpose seems to have been aborted after he published *Sonnets* in 1932. It appears that Ross decided -- as a young man -- that his will to recover a prophetic truth from the here and now simply did not fit in with the progress of poetry in Canada.

After *Sonnets*, a work that he himself considered a failed book, Ross's disdain for publication increased. He wrote to Smith that *Sonnets* was an exercise: "a reactionary one, after my new departure in Laconics, 1925." Ross was a compulsive revisor, and though *Laconics* appeared in 1930, he dates it from an earlier draft. He told Smith that *Laconics* was based on a study of ancient prosody and his reading of contemporary American poets. The first book ratified Ross's claim as a poetic craftsman and established an aesthetic bridgehead on the modern world and the conditions under which poetry could be written in order to be reconciled with the modern world. Exhilarated by the knowledge that he had succeeded -- a knowledge that came to him from an inner self-realization rather than from a popular success -- he turned his new-found strength, in *Sonnets*, to the conditions under which poetry had been written in the past. His purpose was not to emulate poetic excellence in the manner of MacDonald, Clarke or Pickthall but to reduce tradition to the strictures
of a method. The single-mindedness and originality of the poetic expressed in these books deserves more attention than has been forthcoming among the critics of poetry in Canada.

Sonnets was meant to be more overtly philosophical than Laconics:

The general idea was to employ the "clean" language of free verse without the lack of rhythm or pattern which offended me in all the latter except some of Pound etc. As regards Sonnets I had the notion that longer lines were needed to express ideas adequately and the sonnet form seemed suited to this purpose. I was ditched by my inability to carry over into them--the prestige of the models being so great--the aforesaid "cleanliness."

Ross's failure with this quixotic enterprise led eventually to an intense preoccupation with verse as object on the one hand, and private, humorous verse on the other. Ross had been interested in "the surrealist manifesto" in the late twenties, and his later work along these lines represents a practice of compulsive revision of poems begun as a young man. Between 1944 and 1962, he wrote long letters to Smith concerning the typography of his anthologized poems, apologizing at one point that "This is an unfortunate business -- but I take poetry rather seriously." Ross confined his often brilliant verse-parodies to his letters and with the exception of Margaret Avison generally disliked the younger poets beginning to publish in the 'fifties. Ross disapproved of what was happening in Canadian poetry in general and disliked Pratt's "pretty expert word-juggling and rhyming in particular. He
believed that "displaying inferior stuff for any reason at all, however worthy," was detrimental to the future of poetry in Canada. He felt more enthusiastic about the quality of poems by Pickthall, Knister and Patrick Anderson than Pratt, and Tom MacInnes "quite hypnotized" him.

Unlike his contemporaries, Ross understood poetic value solely in terms of the time in which he wrote. In his later years, he expressed this situation in the poem "First Snow," where he asks the reader to consider the snowfall as "a time" covering the dust and clutter of autumn, and "hiding old traces; making all new, for a time." Ross's ideas on poetry were drawn from French and American sources, and he believed Canadian poetry could achieve excellence only along the track followed by European and North American innovators in poetic content and technique such as Max Jacob, André Salmon, Guillaume Apollinaire, Marianne Moore, e. e. cummings, A. J. M. Smith, Raymond Knister, Patrick Anderson and himself (Ross later changed his mind about the value of cummings and Anderson). Ross's Imagism was so enclosed by his rejection of any values for poetry that were not strictly relevant to his own method of perceiving reality that his Imagism became entirely his own. There is little difference, after all, between Pater's gemlike flame, so important to the English decadents, and T. E. Hulme's image-analogies that enable one to "dwell and linger upon a point excited." In Hulme, Pater's rejection of time-bound reality remains intact, but Hulme
differs in his material determination of values. Where Pater sees beauty beneath the surface of things, Hulme is concerned about its emergence onto that surface. For Hulme the moon becomes a friendly rural face in the urban sky, presaging nothing but a touch of cold and a nodding acknowledgement of the ruddy farmer's greater endurance. For Ross the moon is seen reflected characteristically in lake water, "making there/ a double world,/ the moon above,/ the moon below." Ross accepted Hulme's Imagist idea of time, but insists that an image may be employed in critical programme for reinstating transcendence as an originary force in one's perceptions of reality.

There are four stages to the programme that contributes to the overall structure of Laconics and Sonnets, which together amount to a critique of poetry as Ross saw it. The treatise begins with the outward, intellectual construct of myth, which is internalized as a "Dream-Way." Fastening onto the substance of myth, Ross works his way into a fantastic poetic world that carries within it an analytic attitude toward dream. For Ross, experience becomes complete once it is informed by a rare combination of theosophical spiritualism and a scientific frame of mind. The goal of the dialectic is to achieve a material experience or proof of the transcendent. The dream-way leads to an experience of beauty and a poetic translation of real experience that "goes somewhat beyond parallelism in feeling." At this point Ross turns his poetic
guns on the reality of the modern city in Laconics, and on the natural world in Sonnets. In his first book, poems on the Canadian landscape are placed at the start of the cycle. These are the northern poems that were based on Ross's recollections of two summers' employment as a surveyor north of Lake Superior in 1912 and 1913, written one night in 1926 after a discussion on Canadian nationalism among friends. The programme is ultimately directed toward an idea of reality in which a poetry of beauty is achieved and then dispersed into language and form as a power over reality. In Sonnets, Ross attempted to break the cycle and pursue in the final pages a degree of artistic self-development in which his work would attain to the power of poetic prophecy.

Ross knew that he had missed his mark in Sonnets. Another poet discovering that the status of a poet-prophet was beyond him might have chosen to fashion a prophetic persona to speak for him from the world of his poetry. Ross did not, nor did he attempt a second time to reach that supreme function of a poet in his community to alter for the better the perceptions of his audience. Ross realized his limitations as a "Watcher" through the experience of writing Sonnets and chose to go underground. Much later, in 1956, Souster's Contact Press printed a slim typescript of Ross's work, but Souster's purpose was not so much to re-introduce Ross to the public as to get any American influence working again in the bloodstream of Canadian poetry. The politics of Souster and the
anthologists obscured the true nature of Ross's work by over-emphasizing his Imagism and his Lake Superior poems.

In the third section of Laconics entitled "Myth," Ross works with the stock mythical subjects of the decadent era, but differently from the way MacInnes, MacDonald or Pickthall might have done. He writes of Aurora, Dyrads, Nereids, Pan and Lethe not for the sake of an escapist reverie but as a test for the strength of his verse-form, and the attitudes it entails. Marianne Moore described the form as a discipline in the art of exactitude. Aside from stressing Ross's studious search for explicitness, brevity and simplicity, Moore's review reminds us that for those poets who acceded to Huile's "point excited," the pleasing is still an essential presupposition of poetic value and beauty. "Science's method of attaining originality by way of veracity is pleasing," and Ross's book "gives pleasure, besides suggesting a method."

In "Dryad," Ross indicates that he is concerned with uncovering the reality behind mythical figures that had become clichéd by the turn of the century. The Dryad's oak dies "in the spring," and "no more the Dryad felt and heard for with the tree her life was gone." Ross's combination of precise observation of natural imagery and mythical setting can produce images of startling brilliance, as in "Nereids."

On summer days they dance across the sparkling water. When it is calm, the green halls
are visible through the deep transparence of the sea.

These figures are clean and explicit, suggestiveness is reduced to a minimum, the images are easily visualized and the banal subject-matter is invigorated. When the subjects are aetiological explanations of familiar natural phenomena, the images open into a world one recognizes as the one in which we live. When the subjects are the exploits of men and women in a legendary setting, as in "Ariadne," "Argo," "Laestrygones," "Andromeda" or "Hercules," the sense of present experience having been fused with the ancient figures is more often lacking. The overall movement of the section, however, is from stationary image toward narrative.

Ross's "Death of Orpheus," with which "Myth" concludes, is a narrative lyric of twenty-three "stanzas" of eight double-stressed lines apiece. This narrative and dramatic poem is closer to the singing of an imagined reality that we find in Pickthall than any other of Ross's poems. It lacks the ability to create a meaningful experience by enabling the reader to visualize imagery intensely, yet it is not designed as a catalyst for the reader's reveries. The brevity of the lines, the emphasis on the stresses, leads naturally to a sense of drama. This quality would be exploited by Livesay a few years later in "Day and Night."

In Ross's poem, the verse-form creates an abrupt, telegraphic presentation of a subject that was one of the
favorite themes of the decadent imagination in the decades surrounding the turn of the century:

What caught the attention of artists in this period was, less the theme of the descent into the underworld and the resurrection of Eurydice—which was scarcely compatible with the decadents' fundamental antifeminism—than that of the poet-magician with his power to control the elements, rocks, wild animals, and human beings with the spell of his song, who yet fell victim to the ignorance and fury of the soulless mob, represented by the Thracian women.78

Ross's treatment of the motif excises the obscurity and vagueness that Valéry, for instance, believed essential to the ambiguity and suggestiveness of a poetic beauty that could not be paraphrased. In Ross's poem, Orpheus returns to "kindly Thrace" where Apollo had first given him the lyre, "that he might sing." His song is so masterly "that trees, rocks, wild beasts, rivers, all were moved in spirit to hear him."

Loyal to the memory of Eurydice, he spurns the Bacchanals, which angers them. Ross uses repetition of key words—beat, drum, clash, cymbal and orgy—to express the drama of the bacchanalia. The women tear Orpheus into pieces and throw the head and the lyre into Helorus, which carries them to Lesbos where "ages later" they bear the "rich fruit" of Lesbian poetry. Repetition of apostrophe is used finally to recapture the lamentations of the muses and their condemnation of Dionysus, leader of the Bacchanalia, "the ivy-crowned, the enemy of poetry, of the clear song." Here, the Dionysian and Apollonian function dialectically.
Sonnets begins with a set of three poems "On the Cessation of the Oracles," only the first of which retains that reverberation of experience that infuses Ross's best work:

"The well is dry and ceased the babbling water From springing into sunlight at the source. Gone is the trail of that mysterious force. No priestess telling what the god has taught her."

Recalling Eliot's response to the Grail legend (yet another decadent cliche), Jesse Weston and Frazer, these sonnets lament the impotence of the "sacrificial altar." The mantle of prophecy and the "nurse" of faith are denied and the "The land deserted." The second and third fall into prosaic exposition of the theme: "The present extends its arms towards the past/Which holds forth arms reciprocal in vain." The modern world has desolated antiquity and driven the sacred irrevocably from the "smokeless plain." In consequence, one is forced to think that there is "some lack of basic equity" in life as we know it in the present.

Ross pursues the theme of prophecy in "Prometheus--1," and in "Prometheus--2" we learn that there are two spiritual forces in play, one in league with prophecy and nature, one allied to "the strong hand of deity," Zeus, "that tyrant of an hour." In this first section of the book, Ross develops the notion that divine speech has been lost to the world, yet prophetic speech in the form of song and music remains, though in bondage, as represented of Prometheus, Andromeda, a statue of Venus and the sonnet-form itself. The section ends with an
affirmation of "Golden Apollo" whom "all the watchers marvel at." In "Sappho," the blame for the loss of divine speech is placed squarely on the part of man's complacency. Ross records his personal response to the natural supernatural that preserves the prophetic function in "The Pipes of Pan." 72

In Laconics, Ross moved from "Myth" to the section called "By Woods and Water" in which the dominant note is sounded by the first poem. In "Woods, I Remember" Ross explains that in nature there is something "eternal, almost, as the sun." The landscapes, lakescapes and starscapes of this section are safe and pleasant enclaves within the dominion of time. In "All still would die," Ross subtly develops the notion that perception of beauty is capable of maintaining a momentary release from change and death, "the landscape making/ a pause unbroken" within perception so that seer and seen are indivisible. "Time would cease," he believes, should an image of the landscape become so perfect that perception froze. Yet to achieve this condition is for Ross too much reality to bear. The pause in time that his poem marks is broken in the last verse by clouds "that do not cease" and "point to time/ and time's rotation." 73

In Sonnets, Ross passes from mythical subjects to the proposition in "Dream-Way" that an understanding of dreams may be a way "that surely leads beneath/. To solving of these lasting mysteries." In "On the Supernatural," Ross plants a signpost for those who would follow him in his argument:
We must affirm the supernatural
However doubtfully we have looked upon
Its bare existence in time that’s gone,
For it is ever near and ever real;
As we shall find.

In "The Call," Ross seems to speak of psychological analysis
as a variety of the prophetic voice for which he is searching,
This voice asserts "There’s no finality in a funeral" and
promises that answers culled from dreams are "Not sinister,
but comforting;" It is only necessary for one to perform the
search and answer the call of a watcher either in ritual,
faith or analysis.

In Sonnets, Ross leaves the dream-way to contemplate
the aesthetic in the section entitled "On Beauty, Etc." In
Laconics, the logic of Ross’s method indicates that in "By
Wood and Water," the fourth section, he had returned to his
starting-point in nature. "North," the first section of
Laconics, begins with "Plunging into" the cold northern lake
water; the fourth part ends with a waterfall contemplated from
the safe distance of its aetiological spirit. The difference
between the beginning and ending sections is that a spiritual
reality beyond the images is suggested in the close. In "Pine
Gum," from the fourth part, the "ghostly glimmering" of the
white gum is an image of hope — a light that "ever appears
through the darkness." This is the second to last poem in "By
Woods and Water." The second to first poem in "North" is "The
Dawn: the Birds." Here, when Ross plunges into the "the
beautiful water/ invitingly lying," the water is frigid, "but what does it matter?" It matters. This highly structured book is designed to produce an answer to this question. Stated bluntly, Ross's lesson is that there are natural spirits in reality that will warm to you if you call them, and his chief metaphor for this call is the wind, in Laconics.

As the power of the wind symbolizes Ross's aesthetic attitudes and weaves throughout the book as a motif, images of descending water in falls and streams seem to carry the poems forward toward an affirmation of transcendence. The section ends with "Rolling Streams" in which the northern water has become "winged water,/ sprite-like, aerial," responsive to the wind in Homeric tones. Near the close of the fourth section, in "The Ripples Ran," Ross and another have enjoyed a mild breeze, the moving water, flowers and "we're happy."

In Sonnets, the phase of his method in which Ross confronts reality with his trust in language is more fully developed than in Laconics. In "On Mythical Beauty," with which the section starts, he insists that the ancient beauty contained in myth must reveal itself again in the present, its "form regained/ Becoming ever clearer." History has nearly destroyed this beauty, but it will shine into the present and nurse new ways and newer energies from the "illimitable soil,/ Fecund, of the human spirit." In "Islands of Song," Ross speaks of a place where speech has never been but "melodious from minds/ Attuned to beauty that was never lost." Beauty is
continually crossed by stupidity, yet those who would delve into forgetfulness, he suggests, may be able to find such archipelagoes of song. This location is referred to in "To the English Language--2" as a "zone of difficulty in the mind," an "inner cell of recollection plain." When one writes carefully, Ross believes that language shakes off the bondage of man's wayward indolence to reveal its origin in spiritual beauty that is sweet, strong and euphonious. In "On Flowers," this inner cell of recollection is capable of releasing what Ross calls the "sting of inner secret powers."

At this point a marked note of self-mockery intrudes. The wind re-appears in contexts of shrillness and vanity. The wind's power, the power of poetry and art in general to galvanize an age's intellectual presuppositions is mocked in terms of "an empty monument." Water-imagery is confined to still water and to plunge into it is to be "chilled and dead in water beautiful," or to be fooled by the illusory image of another world: "in the water's heart," between the "upper and the low" where the surface shines "Without a flaw." The section ends with three sonnets that deal with human love. Between childhood attachments, love of women and what Jung called the anima, the fantasy-beloved clearly wins out over more mundane loves in the poem "Recognition."

In the brief, fourth section of Sonnets, "Somewhat Wordsworthian," Ross turns to the natural world for evidence of a prophetic speech more enduring than the divine speech of
the gods or man's monuments. The section begins with
"Renewal," a poem that refers back to the nature poems in
Laconics. Ross recalls the freshness and delight of those "new
impressions" he had "previously told/ In verse" of the Ontario
forest "whose scent is more than gold." Having returned to the
wilderness, he wonders that his senses can be revived "as if
never chilled/ By city brick." The value of these revivified
impressions is not their former novelty nor any material
success his verse might have won but rather the fact that they
have endured. "Summer Day" continues the theme of attaining
a sense of timelessness through tranquil remembrance and
specifies its significance to the book Ross is writing:

The clouds have moved a little through the cold
Space above earth and one may gaze around
Until the past is merged into this time.
Fresh memories sown on such earlier ground
Growing together make a newer rhyme.
Make ever old the new and new the old.

Subsequent poems focus intensely on individual trees, a robin
and a landscape. "The Tree" clarifies Ross's attitude toward
nature as a form of religious contemplation comparable to
tree-worshippers in Africa whose entranced attention to a tree
as a sign or spell of sacred and secret energy is a way of
knowledge. The section actually amounts to a negation of the
Wordsworthian theme, in favour of a more precise analysis of
Ross's inner responses to the forest, impressions inseparably
linked to his childhood. Such impressions would be akin to
Pater's intellectually sensual subjectivity, yet Ross focuses his will to perceive beauty and truth by means of an objective, psychological analysis.

In Laconics, the miraculous emerges as belonging to the province of nature, the source of mythological representations that may be made to respond to man's desire for the beautiful through the medium of poetry. Ross employs the precision and patience of an empirical method in his quest for the wonder and magic of poetic beauty, but he does not dispose of metaphysics entirely. The poem "Reality," published only in Shapes & Sounds but dated 1928, is probably the closest he came to an entirely substantialist or positivist theory of meaning in the observable world:

The objects in the countryside
Are solid, heavy and opaque.
The road runs resolutely on.
These exist. Let no mistake.

Confuse the mind but there are here:
Objects real and very clear;
And yet this tree is designed free
From empire of geometry.

In "The City Enforces," in the section of Laconics entitled "City," Ross spoke of the beauty of geometry as "energy, made manifest." The city binds men and things to the "spell" of its geometric orderliness and like poems it participates in the human visionary dialectic. Hence Ross cannot reject the city nor objects nor geometry as poetic subjects, yet under their
spell he wonders whether such orders are designed for men, or men for the order in which they may participate.

Ross's city poems in *Laconics* are not merely descriptive panoramas of streetlights, skyscrapers, traffic and close-up observations of factory machinery. These poems attempt to meet the modern world on its own terms, to draw the city into an alliance with poetry. The power of art to force reality to surrender evidence of that which transcends it, symbolized by wind elsewhere in the book, is expressed here in imagery of the city's noise in "The saws were shrieking" and "Machinery." In "Skyscrapers," fire darts from geometric eyes of glass, an image meant to convey the power of the will to order. The descending water motif -- a sign pointing toward a more spiritual reality -- is perhaps taken up by the plunging, "crazy tangles" of city traffic in "Factory at night."

In "Laboratory," scientific researchers are said to seek above all else exactness of proportion in "the mystery of measured matter." In "Various," a group of poems on enchanted gardens and distant lands at the end of *Laconics*, "Art" describes art as a "consistency among incommensurables" paradoxically "equal to itself." The "Various" section suggests that this consistency is magical and miraculous. Exactness and proportion of expression, however, as in alchemy and science, are the gradients by which the recalcitrant meaningfulness of modern reality can be measured, tested and proven. Ross believed that "success in verse is due largely
to getting the right form for the right content, fitting them
together to produce something with a new dimension." This
"trick" is more complicated and seldom successful in free
verse, and a modern verse-form, "to be any good, requires the
same sort of fusion." A poem becomes good if and only if it
is equal to itself, and the wholeness resulting from the
"process" of this fusion of form and content amounts to Ross's
definition of poetic value. Such internal consistency is the
measure of the transcendent above and beyond the orders and
disorder of man's understanding of life. Ross's verse-forms
are the same in Laconics whether the vehicle is a mythical
figure, a landscape or the city because his subject is the
same: the truth that must lie beyond saying no in the face of
any given datum of evidence. Essentially, Ross strives to
achieve a fusion of testability and transcendence in the
Laconics verse-form.

In Sonnets, Ross is concerned with the erosion poetic
beauty has suffered from the effects of time and human
history. The sonnet is his vehicle for fitting the shards and
broken pillars of the past around an ideal poetic content that
is recoverable from time. "Barbizon, France" shows the
exacting craftsmanship of Ross's method of achieving a consis-
tency equal to itself that would open a rupture in time
through which prophetic speech can be drawn into the present.
In this sonnet, the octet describes a Visigothic ruin,
"massive stones, uncouth and inchoate," which must await their
eventual destruction by time. The sestet neatly turns the reader's attention toward a second "shattered ruins," the slender white columns of an earlier Roman fort. Ross's rhymes are crisp and intellectually pleasing, fitting to the sense and minimally suggestive. The simple juxtaposition of two historical moments constitutes a momentary pause in history's intransigent onward flow. "Alexandria" presents the city as a futile monument to the power of man to maintain a transitory freehold in time's dominion. The poems "Egypt" and "Gold" continue this theme, maintaining that ancient Egyptian priests were cognizant of "the greater mystery," and that beauty will always be prey to the corruption of human greed. At this juncture, the sonneteers aspire toward prophetic speech.

Ross had taken pains to prepare himself for an effort of prophetic speech throughout the volume. The fourth section on the meaning of beauty in nature and memory ends with an image of the sea and the bereft loneliness of an empty ship. The motif of descending water in Laconics has arrived in Sonnets at the estuary of its significance. The final section entitled "Sometimes Quite Imitative," the longest section in the book, begins with "The End of Play," in which the playfulness of waves on the sea ebbs at night into the "mother of dreams" who draws darkness into herself. Ross readies the reader for an assessment of his qualifications as a poet-prophet in direct contact with the sacred, which contact makes him a man apart. Cut adrift by loneliness on an internal ocean
of impressions, Ross's next cautious step, in "The Treasure," is to meet death, shaman-wise in a sea-cave where a buried "secret store of jewels" lies. Then follows "The Nimble Fish" in which the landing of a strong, "full-grown pike" symbolizes, without an excess of emotion, the shattering of the surface of things and the watcher's rite of passage from everyday reality into an eternal realm. One last criterion must be satisfied, however. Will the formal properties of the sonnet-series be fitted exactly enough to be new and yet filled with "a content true," so that "High Beauty" may stand forth "with no intervening screen?" The sonnet "On Art" declares that poets seek a mystery that lies between execution and "the impulse new -- the starting, -- and the exact method too." A naive dependence on novelty is a vain and wasted dream. Only a form that "retains the old" (methodologically, dialectically) within the new can be efficient enough to bear the secret into the present.

The power of prophetic speech is suggested in the next poems "The River Speaks" and "The Indian Speaks." The river says that its course must not be altered lest a great calamity befall the state, "And woe to him unknowing who forgets/ The lasting rights of earlier sovereignties." The Indian also speaks of his primordial rights. The sonnets that follow emphasize Ross's separation from the world of man, for it is in the absence of human relationships that the sacred must speak in his writing. In "Hypocrisy--The Vision," the
earlier note of self-mockery returns. A voice cries out "in accents stern and loud" to devastate the vanity of "Some holy man" who had hoped to erect a monument to be remembered by. In the three sonnets that conclude the book, the watcher speaks to us in indirect quotation. First, the whispered voice of Hope creeps into the watcher's "waiting mind," then the watcher proclaims the arrival in man's darkness of the spirit of beauty; finally, he breaks into a song of praise.

Life passes into "simpler and more elementary forces," as Pater said in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance, forces which extend beyond human experience into the province of scientific observation. Like "a patient etherized upon a table," in Eliot's phrase, human life and experience is overwhelmed by a flood of external objects that only "a trick of magic" and an appreciation of beauty can dissipate. Passion in Pater is both a response to the inward world of the spirit and an agent acting upon objective reality in such a way as to open it to "unstable, flickering, inconsistent" impressions that "burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them." This passion is transmuted into the cold precision of a method in Ross. His imagism never amounted to the intensification of life's forces that Pound's image-vortexes were meant to be. Ross's images are never direct treatments of things, but rather the crucibles and balances of a poetic laboratory in which the sense of loss and the fragmentariness of modern
life is separated from an elixir of prophetic or visionary truth. The method is primarily religious, as John Sutherland suggested just before his death in the mid-'fifties. "The work of this poet is based on the conventional belief -- until recently considered quite outmoded -- that poetic inspiration is of supernatural origin... In the materialistic world of the twentieth century, we must affirm the supernatural if we are to save ourselves from the wasteland of rational explanation thin and void."

Pickthall, for all her devout posturing, had begun to approach what Wallace Stevens called supreme fictions without which life is unbearable and inconceivable, and no other Canadian poet was to venture out on these seas. In the early part of the century, poets had to choose to either attempt to mend their apprehension of an essential incoherence in life or to somehow learn to live with a sense of fragmentariness at the centre of things. Early twentieth-century poetry in Canada responded to this dilemma in two ways. The period is characterized by a remarkable heightening of public appreciation of the poet as a popular songster, which led to successes such as Pickthall and Audrey Brown. On the other side of the dilemma there arose an intense, ultimately reactionary rejection of the popular in favour of the serious. Clarke, Ross and A. J. M. Smith were poets who considered their audience to be a highly cultivated and cosmopolitan few whose primary allegiance was to what Ross called la poésie connaissance.
These poets introduced Canadian literature to an élite clubbishness and the notion that poetic values should arise necessarily from the authority of a particular milieu.

What is of particular interest in the poetry of Eustace Ross is the sense of purpose that he brought to the detachment of poetry in Canada. Ross's Imagism and the simplicity and clarity of his descriptions of nature effected only superficial change in the poetic value of beauty as it existed in his time. Beauty was manifested as a form of resistance to the problem of incoherence in modern life. In this context Ross developed a method with which he sought to re-evaluate poetic beauty through symbolic repair. His hope was to achieve a palpable poetic vision of the metaphysical truths that the decadence had reduced to cliché. His desire to achieve vision and the gift of prophecy as expressed in Laconics and Sonnets, signals a general shift within the values for which poetry was written in Canada in the early part of the century. Other poets appeared on the scene to carry forward the sense of purpose that we have met in Ross, and it is to these poets that I now turn.
Notes to Chapter Three


6 In his chapter, "The Unconscious and Sexuality," in *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981). Jean Pierrot writes: "If the decadents discovered sexuality, however, it was only for the most part to reject it, or at least to reject its normal forms. For here we encounter a further aspect of their antinaturalism... which is a rejection of normal love and sexuality as belonging in the realm of nature."


12 Logan, *Philosophical Review*, 18 (1901), 36-44.


18 "From a Lost Anthology," *Wood Carver's Wife*, pp. 15-17. Pierrot, *Decadent Imagination*, p. 286. Baudelaire had said of the prose poem in *Spleen of Paris*: "Which of us...has not dreamed of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhyme and without rhythm, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of the psyche, the prickings of consciousness" -- quoted

19

Gaston Bachelard's idea of the "trans-subjectivity" of the poetic imagination, which Bachelard develops from both the psychoanalytic and phenomenological points of view, is relevant here: Bachelard, "Introduction," The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964). Georges Poulet analyses this idea in "Gaston Bachelard et la conscience de soi," Revue internationale de Philosophie, 66 (1963), 492-504. The point to be stressed in that from D. C. Scott to the beginnings of reader-response criticism the poetic consciousness is not regarded as other-worldly nor transcendent. These critics, including Scott, understand the imagination in terms of substance. Poulet expresses the sense of overhearing a text in "Phenomenology of Reading" in Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Gregory Polletta (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), thus: "Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I" (p. 107).

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Pierrot, Decadent Imagination, pp. 147, 193.

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Pierce, Book of Remembrance, p. 155-56.

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Pierce, Book of Remembrance, p. 54.


Pierce, Book of Remembrance, p. 54.

"The Little Fauns to Proserpine," Drift of Pinions, pp. 5-7. During the time of her prominence, MacMechan praised Pickthall in Headwaters as "incapable of uttering a false note and "Little Fauns" as a "dulcet Swinburnian melody" (p. 222). Lionel Stevenson, in Appraisals of Canadian Literature (Toronto: MacMillan, 1926; 1977), saw this poem as an exquisite example of mystical and epicurean elements (with the mystical dominating) characteristic of Canadian poets (p. 54). However early as 1922 there were doubts; John Daniel Logan's monograph, "Marjorie Pickthall: Her Poetic Genius and Art. An Appreciation and an Analysis of Aesthetic Paradox" (Halifax: T. C. Allen, 1922), though laudatory on the whole, still insists, echoing Pater's treatment of the "Mona Lisa" in Style (1888), that "her verse lacks style. I do not mean...the grand style. Technically her verse is...free, flowing, musical...in a word, feminine. But...it lacks originality and substance of style—the subtle quality which gives us the sense of having met with beauty that is memorable; unforgettably fine and pervasive as a spiritual essence" (p. 19). Using a method derived from Santayana, but adhering to Pater's non-materialistic Platonism, Lorne Pierce, in A Book of Remembrance, arrived at the opposite opinion, regarding "Little Fauns" as one of Pickthall's most appealing poems (p. 70), and "transcendental without becoming lost in the stars" (p. 167). Collin, in White Savannahs, still had much good to say about her work and had read more of her than the anthologized pieces (pp. 71-79). I disagree with Collin on one point. I doubt that Christ plays more than a cosmetic role in her verse.
"Imperfection," *Little Songs*, p. 79.

Ironically, it was Pierce, in 1943, who finally destroyed her critical reputation in his memorial address, "Marjorie Pickthall" (Toronto: Ryerson), where he called attention to her "obscurity," her limitations as a poet and representative author in Canadian literary history: "With Marjorie Pickthall the old poetic tradition in Canada may be said to have come to its foreordained end" (p. 5). In the same year, E. K. Brown in *On Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943; rept. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1977), remembered her as "the object of a cult" and states with erroneous sarcasm that her reputation depended on "unacademic" critics (p. 64); to Brown, Pickthall represented the end of a suspect tradition of "Naturism" (p. 67). Pierce reprinted the most damaging parts of the memorial address as the "Introduction" to his edition of her *Selected Poems*, in 1957. Desmond Pacey completed the process of transforming the earlier overly exuberant praise into overly exuberant disapprobation in *Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), pp. 91-94, and more personally cutting in *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), pp. 145-50. Pacey's remarks on Pickthall's fear of life appear in the latter essay (p. 149). Northrop Frye's interesting and favourable remarks on Pickthall appear in his 1957 review of the *Selected Poems*, rept. in *The Bush Garden*, pp. 86-87. In the *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), she is ignored by Munro Beattie ("Poetry 1928-1935," pp. 723-41), and dismissed by Roy Daniels ("Minor Poets 1880-1920") as an author symbolic of "the loss of momentum, weakening of grasp, reduction of resonance...too many removes from the original sources of strength," which Daniels sees generally in turn-of-the-century Canadian verse (p. 425).

Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian thing," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 118. Here, it might be pertinent to cite Marie Bonaparte, *Female Sexuality* (New York: Intl. Univ. Press, 1953), to the effect that the female fear of sexual penetration, beginning in the womb, "finds expression in the terrifying sadistic form of the perforation complex," which is based on an "anatomical reality, renewed in every virgin" (p. 185), and that apart from moral or social repression, this fear persists because sexual instincts "interfere with the preservation of the biological ego...it threatens the male substance with disintegration and decreses penetration for the female" (p. 187).
"Inheritance," *Wood Carver's Wife*, p. 32


Pierce, *Book of Remembrance*, pp. 52-62 (mother's death), 162-63 (melancholy), 94 (gassing), 104 (misfit), 122 (conflict in prose).


Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination* p. 201. Pierrot regards Narcissus as one of the three chief mythical figures most favoured by the decadents he studies, the other two being Orpheus and the legend of Oedipus and the sphinx.


Bruce Whiteman, "Introduction," *The Correspondence* [unpaginated]. Another selection of Ross's letters has been edited by Michael E. Darling, "On Poetry and Poets: The Letters of W. W. E. Ross to A. J. M. Smith," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 16 (Fall-Win., 1979-80), 78-125. Peter Stevens's article, "On W. W. E. Ross," *Canadian Literature*, No. 39 (Win. 1969), 43-61, deals with the influence of American poets such as Marianne Moore and W. C. Williams on Ross's work, discusses the sources and precedents of Ross's surrealism and summarizes Moore's reviews of *Laconics* and *Sonnets*. Stevens's article is useful mainly for bibliographical information, although he makes the point that Ross's later surrealism and prose poetry manifest a preoccupation with strange states of mind, an effort to perceive reality through the spirit. In Stevens's view, there is more to Ross's work than merely an early instance of Canadian Imagism. Marianne Moore's reviews attempted to elucidate Ross's Imagist techniques: "Experimental Simplicity," *Poetry* [Chicago], 38, No. 3 (Aug., 1931), 288-81; and "Modern Thoughts in Disguise," 42, No. 2 (May 1933), 114. John Sutherland's "An Unpublished Introduction to the Poetry of W. W. E. Ross," is the most perceptive critical appraisal of Ross's poetic purpose. It has been collected by Miriam Waddington's edition of his writings: John Sutherland: *Essays, Controversies and Poems* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 162-64. Philip Gerber's "The Surface and the Terror: The Poetry of Eustace Ross," *Far Point*, 5 (Win. 1978), 46-54, is a valuable negative appraisal of Ross's work, dissenting from the favorable views of Moore,
Sutherland and Stevens. Gerber like Stevens traces Ross's sources and precedents and repeats Moore's assessment of Ross's technical originality and strength. Gerber sees no depth to Ross's work and believes that Ross's career as a scientist destroyed him as a poet. The contention that Ross's later experiments with surrealism were essentially "abortive" is not easily dismissed.

51 Whiteman, *The Correspondence*, letter 47.

52 Whiteman, *The Correspondence*, letters 23 and 58.

53 "If Ice," *Shapes & Sounds*, p. 47.


57 Darling, "The Letters," 94-5. Whiteman, *The Correspondence*, letter 22. Ross was attracted to the techniques of Marianne Moore and e. e. cummings. The metaphysical verse of Moore's treatment of the past-in-the-present (her reduction of quotable matter to transitory statement of feeling) and cummings's playfulness naturally attracted Ross. W. C. Williams's insistence on the material fact (plums and wheelbarrows) displeased him. Williams, in Ross's view, left out one half of the dialectic in translating ideas into things, by neglecting the translation of things into ideas. Ross's statement that the verse-form of Laconics derived from a study of Greek prosody probably applies more to the mythological poetry collected in Laconics than to the "northern" poems for which Ross is remembered today. The Classical influence is clear in Ross's only narrative poem, "Death of Orpheus" (Laconics, pp. 62-69). Ross told Gustafson that his study of Classical prosody stemmed from a need "to arrive at a fresh form suitable for pieces of some length" (Whiteman, *The Correspondence*, letter 13).
Ross’s poetic is obliquely described in Whiteman, The Correspondence, letters 9, 10, 13, 15, 40, 42, 44 and 46. Here Ross intimates that his poetic presupposes brevity in terms of lines (a maximum of 100), craftmanship "squared" by precise emotion, an aesthetic freshness and cleanliness, clairvoyance, an "outer consciousness' etc.," "pleating," an absense of "that 'Canadian' would-be feeling," unambiguous clarity (contra Empson), and an "ability of technical skill to fix the elusive poetic."


The date Ross gives is 1928-1929: Whiteman, The Correspondence, letter 17. Ross’s interest in what he called the "fantaisistes, André Salmon for example," stems from the "verbal elasticity" and the "search through the subconscious" that he saw in surrealism (Whiteman, The Correspondence, letter 7). That Ross’s later pieces are in fact revisions of a young man’s poems is suggested in letters 20, 28, 42, 44, 58, 60 and 62. Ross’s inspiration became "intermittent" early, changed to a matter of "finishing up," and cumulated in the "squibs" and epigrams of his letters.


"First Snow," Shapes & Sounds, p. 142.

Whiteman, The Correspondence, letters 7 (Jacob et al), 22, 30 (Moore), 22, 62 (cummings), 46 (Smith), 1, 2, 4, 26, (Knister), 7 and 26 (Anderson), 22 and 28 (changed his mind).

As quoted from The Criterion, (July 1925) by W. E. Coling, White Savanahs, p. 158. Coling’s sense is: "Hulme’s analogies all have a constant purpose: to produce surprise, to create power, 'to enable us to dwell and linger upon a point excited'."


67 Souster, "About the Author," *Experiment* 1923-29 p. 23. Ross maintained that Souster was only interested in his nature poems or that aspect of his work Smith called "Native." See Peter Stevens, "On W. W. E. Ross," 43. Ross told Gustafson that he wished Souster had mentioned him together with Knister, Livesay, Charles Bruce and Arthur Bourinot in his remarks "About the Author" (*Whiteman, The Correspondence*, letter 42).


73 "Woods, I Remember," "All still would die," *Laconics*, pp. 73 and 81.


The two sonnets with the wind motif are "Islands of Song" (p. 30) and "Blindness" (p. 34). The two poems of water-imagery are "The Lake" (p. 35) and "By the River" (p. 36).

"Recognition," Laconics, p. 38.

"Renewal," "Summer Day," "The Tree," Sonnets, p. 43, 44 and 46. Pater, "Conclusion," experience is the focus. "where the greatest number of vital forces untie in their purest energy" and not "the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end" (p. 222). Darling, "Letters," 95; Ross regarded the psychological study of dreams as part of his method for communicating "real experience" in poetry.


Pater, "Conclusion," p. 221.


Native Prophecy:

Call, Bourinot, Knister, Stephen and Others

The cocktail of poetic values in the early part of the century was stiffened by the introduction of a sense of purpose that surfaced in such works as Ross’s Laconics (1930) and Sonnets (1932). Popular writers banded together to lobby in the government to put copyright in the hands of the author. Serious writers introduced a new critical spirit into Canadian letters. Arthur Stringer and F. O. Call, though popular, put forward their modernist "blasts" in Open Water (1914) and Acanthus and Wild Grape (1920). Raymond Knister’s criticism picked up where William Arthur Deacon’s reviewing left off to bring a more rigorous sense of inquiry to an appreciation of Canadian writing. Women writers such as Louise Morey Bowman (1882-1944) and Dorothy Livesay (1909-), inspired by the Imagism of Amy Lowell in the United States, were resolved in their desire to write poems that opened onto their own lives as opposed to the lives of faeries and saints.

Bowman’s "Sea Lavender," from her first book of Imagistic and genteel poems Moonlight and Common Day (1922), is one of three poems that illustrate the prospect before poetry in Canada in the latter part of the period. The poem concerns Bowman’s remembrance of her "Puritan Grandmother" who in her
"smoothly-banded mind" was always so sure "no things but the right things shall endure." The poem is cast in heroic couplets but varied deftly in line-length and rhyme. "But let me whisper it to you," Bowman says, referring elliptically to a "flame" by which her grandmother "sought beauty" in a sea-shell collection the grandmother mounted as "frail tangled things! / Handled by her, fit to trim fairies' wings." The gentle irony of the poem's opening is undercut by Bowman's insistence that these sea-beach treasures retain the elements of "revelation, sweet indeed," in which "Beauty's shadow" triumphs over "All her rigid rules." Livesay's "Green Rain," also a reminiscence on her grandmother, goes a step further in disengaging an idea of revelatory truth from the context of a Victorian heritage. The poem appeared in Livesay's second book, Signpost (1932) and demonstrates her precocious facility with Imagism and vers libre. Images tumble over one another surreally as she remembers veils of rain feathered like her grandmother's shawl, the rain green from spring growth "Waving in the valley:" Careful sound-play evokes a quiet-speaking voice as the poem continues through the similes of an image-chain, linked conceptually to the key words "veil," "green," and "rain" in the first line. The poem ends by underlining this reliance on discontinuous resemblance subsumed by the simile: "I remember the day:/ As I remember my grandmother./ I remember the rain as the feathery fringe of her shawl."

Bowman would preserve the value of beauty, but Livesay
means to preserve the memory of a day in which her grandmother's house was "Alive with herself and her voice, rising and falling." The context of beauty in Bowman's poem is Victorian bric-a-brac; Livesay's context is adolescent love. Bowman's ironic characterization of her grandmother is her way of distancing herself from the authority that the grandmother represents. Livesay's detachment from the past involves a different sort of irony. The poem says nothing about the woman her grandmother was; since Livesay was thinking on that day "only of my love/ And my love's house." Hence the falling rain, rising wind, swinging back and forth between similes represents a girl's unconscious sexuality, and this is the revelation the poem aspires to express.

The difference between sexual fantasy and a reluctance to abrogate the land of faerie has less to do with youth and middle age (Livesay was twenty-three when Signpost appeared; Bowman was forty when her first book came out), than with the reasoning behind the poets' choice of values. For Bowman, Imagism was a means of selective retention by which the old gem-like flame could be kept burning. For Livesay, Imagism and surrealism became a way to mimic the immediacy of life and to emphasize her femininity by incorporating the grandmother's voice in her poem. This desire to envision the reality in which people live, channeled into the form of a reminiscence, occurs also in the title poem of Kenneth Leslie's (1892- ) second book of verse, the award-winning Lowlands Low (1935). A
certain self-consciousness about the past reflected in Bowman’s use of the heroic couplet and Livesay’s over-use of the simile recurs in Leslie’s use of repetition. There is “No way to hint the quality” of his father’s voice, “No way to hint the quality of his eyes” nor “to remember the thickening in my throat,” Leslie says, when his father sang “His song, The Lowlands Low, not mouthed from a book/But taken alive and terrible from the sea.” The poem is not Imagistic, but it is preoccupied with the image, its visual formality set off by the framing-device of repeating the phrase “the screen of years” in the poem’s beginning and closing verse-paragraphs. We are told that there is no other way to remember “days that shall not begin again” except by “letting the image enter well-used doors.”

Leslie’s poem also attempts to retain something of the past when he pictures himself as a “song-captured idolator,” listening to his father’s song and smelling “the clean aroma” of Harris Tweed, English leather and Old Chum tobacco with an “unsated delight/In all things various.” Leslie departs from Bowman and Livesay, however, by insisting that such picturing cannot represent the essence of the man and “all the heaped-up helping life had served him.” Leslie unfolds the Chinese screen of his memory in the poem’s close, returning his attention to the present. In this way, memory pushes “this strange semblance of myself/Into this strange semblance of my city.” However, though only a tenuous resemblance remains between
past and present, Leslie can say that the essential life-force of his father's voice is remembered incarnate "here in my throat." The value that "Lowlands Low" means to express has the informal, virile and intimate qualities of an aesthetic in which beauty is secondary in importance to a sense of the spoken word "taken alive" from a specific time and place.

In this chapter I discuss poetry in which beauty is displaced as a value by the new sense of purpose and critical spirit that began to affect poetry in Canada in the first decades of the century. In the work of such poets as Frank Call, Arthur Bourinot, Raymond Knister, A. M. Stephen, Kenneth Leslie and others, poetry in Canada returned to an earlier romantic idea of prophetic vision as an aesthetic value for which poems ought to be written. This continuity runs beneath the current of experiment in form and technique that is reflected in the early Imagist poems and free verse of the period. It is not by accident that Leslie's poem resembles Sir Charles G. D. Roberts's "Tantramar Revisited" in its framed structure and contemplative sense of loss. Indeed, toward the end of the period Leslie banded together with Roberts and other Maritime poets to form a league of poets called the Song Fishermen, dedicated to the articulation of a vision of life in their locality.

Prophecy and beauty are not discontinuous as values in Canadian poetry. Both stem from the same root. The detachment in Canadian writing from the fragmentariness and seeming
futility of modern life splits in two, as it were, forming the complementary modes of poetic vision on one side, and a will to impose order on reality on the other. The poetic value of vision itself splits in two: a desire to create an object of beauty and a desire to create a representation of life as it is lived in a particular locality. A. J. M. Smith named the poles of this division "Native" and "Cosmopolitan." Poetic vision is, in short, a quality of experience that must precede a poet's decision: either to create an object of beauty or to speak as "the voice of his people." For a poet who is not content to behold vision, choosing instead to proclaim its truth, this decision presupposes an attitude toward the status quo in which it is assumed that "the people" have wandered from the correct path and that their perception of reality has become impaired. Thus, a sense of purpose and criticism could well have been a significant factor in reactivating a poetry of truth in the early part of the century, yet neither this event nor the verse itself has been given much attention.

Frank Oliver Call (1878-1956) is remembered today as the author of Acanthus and Wild Grape (1920). Like Stringer before him in 1914, Call argued in his "Foreword" for experimentation, defending the values of the "vers librists" once again like Stringer in militaristic metaphors. Call, however, wanted to see a change in the way poets perceived their world, while modernism for Stringer promised a technical means of
expressing strong, private emotion within a decadent or late-Symbolist context. For Call, modernism was a means of reconciling emotion to thought: "it seems to me that it matters little in what form a poem is cast so long as the form suits the subject, and does not hinder the freedom of the poet's thought and emotion." Call departs from the formal artifice of MacDonald or Pickthall and Ross's modernist formalism in that he aims in this book to achieve "strength" out of a "union of thought, emotion and beauty" while at the same time believing that formal correctness in expression is irrelevant to the unity of a poem. This concern determines the structure of Acanthus, which balances a section of conventional lyrics against a section of poems in free verse.

Call's purpose in this arrangement was probably not, as Munro Beattie has said, to "demonstrate the superiority of free verse," but rather to demonstrate that the ability of poetry to communicate "visions" has no essential relationship to form, or that what is essentially poetic belongs to another order than form. Call's "strength" derives from what he has to say, not how he says it. Hence, in the two title poems, "Acanthus" and "Wild Grape," content is not affected by form. The first is a sonnet calling attention to itself as a sonnet; the second flows in and out of a basic iambic in varying line-lengths. Both announce that beauty is eternal. The poems are demonstrations of the notions mentioned in the "Foreword" but do not really indicate the overall tenor of the book.
The "Acanthus" section reprints almost half of Call's earlier collection, *In a Belgian Garden*. It begins with a set of fourteen sonnets. "Wild Grape" begins with a set of five poems on subjects such as eternal beauty and divine immanence, then continues with poems on Japanese, Swiss and Venetian scenes. "Acanthus" closes with "The Answer," a slight lyric in which Call asks himself why he chooses to listen to the song "Of pine-boughs singing all day long." Call is drawn to the "silver sound" of a spring and fantastic images of "pearl ships upon a sapphire sea" forming in cloud-shapes. He states, however, that the reality beyond these decadent conventions resembles a language unknown to him. Call imagines that "Ten thousand poets" have left the secrets of his vision untold. In "Prayer," the closing poem of "Wild Grape," a "wind-bell" sounds in the "gateway of an ancient temple" and a pool reflects sunrise and sunset within the temple grounds. The bell draws "the people" to prayer with "music echoing in their ears," and the pool remains with them when they leave, "rose and gold, and crimson in their eyes." These are people who never have heard the "music of the wind," and who never lift their eyes from "gray dusty streets" to appreciate such colour. The book ends with Call's invocation to the "Maker" of music and beauty to allow him the privilege of emulating the bell and the pool. Ultimately, the parallelism of Call's arrangement is secondary to his purpose.

"Swiss Sketches," "Visions," "Japanese Prints" and
other poems in the back of the book express a will to attain vision of place and history that personally and palpably re-affirms the truisms of previous poems such as "To a Modern Poet" and "The Foundry." This will to perceive is, however, still represented by precious stones and metals. The best and most personal of these are "Cups of Jade" and "The Loon's Cry" in which love's affirmation is treated without an excess of expository statement. The theme that vision may be inexpressible once attained appears in "Cups of Jade":

Now is my tongue heavy with thoughts I cannot utter,
For I know that to-morrow
My path will not lead over the steep hill,
Nor yours down into the valley,
For we have drunk together from cups of sea-green jade.

Here, Call succeeds in refurbishing the decadent clichés of the paradis artificiel that apparently comprises the only language with which he can represent the vision-quest.

Call was poetically active for a period of ten years or so between the start of the First World War and 1924, when he published Blue Homespun. Call was a native Québécois, educated at Bishop's College in Lennoxville, Québec, McGill University, Marburg and Paris. His first book, In a Belgian Garden, published in London in 1917, records Call's walking tours on the continent as a student. He returned to Canada and took a position as a professor at Bishop's College, which he retained until his retirement. Part of Blue Homespun derives from the historical and anthropological research that went into his
prose work *The Spell of French Canada* (published in 1928, but revised and expanded in *The Spell of Acadia*, 1930). In 1944, at the age of sixty-six, he published a Ryerson Poetry Chapbook, *Sonnets for Youth*, in which Professor Call's love for an unnamed "youth" unscarred by war rekindles the "high quest" for affirmation he had once pursued "with the doggedness of middle age."

*In a Belgian Garden* is very much a war-book, at times echoing the manner of John McCrae. This book was the first Canadian item to be included in the English "Little Books of Georgian Verse" series. Call's London publishers hoped to sell the book by stressing Call's love for the "motherland" and by calling him a "disciple of the cult of the open road", camping and canoeing." In one of the landscape poems, "The Chambly Rapids," Call speaks of white-water canoeing as an experience of demonic, "hell-born light," a "fitful fire, pale and blue/That burned my spirit through." This sense of horror emerging from a close look at the landscape of one's locality, however, passes quickly. Landscape is generally described in terms of precious metals and stones, though "The Vision" contrasts this precious imagery with a plain declaration of love, which makes the jewelled vision dim in comparison.

The most interesting poems in the book are those that record Call's feelings concerning the destruction wreaked on Europe's cities during the war. In two of these, "The Madonna" and "The Lace-Maker of Bruges," Call like Arthur Stringer in
his "The Woman in the Rain," communicates his sympathy for the suffering he sees through the figure of an old woman cast adrift in "the midst of the surging crowd," defeated by modernity and war. "An Idol in a Shop Window" interestingly focuses on the detachment of a Buddha who, with "eyes half closed in a mystic's dream/ Of his poppy-land of long ago," remembers "the kneeling throng he used to know" and watches the crowds passing in the street, only to wrap himself "in his mystic shroud" until the sun once more goes down. This theme recurs in Call's figure of "The Mystic" to whom life is a "dim, weird pageant passing by" even though "the pageant is real, himself the dream." The theme appears again in "The Indifferent Ones," "The Obelisk" and "The Golden Bowl." Like Eustace Ross and Raymond Knister, Call's mystical observer stands outside of life looking in. Call's experience of shattered Europe inaugurated a ten year search for a visionary detachment from the meaningless destruction he had witnessed, and in this search he wasted no more time with poetic experiment than he put into Acanthus.

The experience of war creates conditions that are ideal for the emergence of a prophetic strain in literature. The horror of war can become a force that drives an audience toward a desire for its perception of reality to be proved limited in its capacity to know the truth. A literary vision when it functions as prophecy always puts a choice before the audience either to walk with the prophet or to reject him. If
the audience accepts the vision as a variety of prognostication and omen, its perception of reality may surmount the repetitiveness of history (in an act of faith), and accede to an apocalyptic moment in which time is felt to be coming to a standstill. Prophecy converts time into space in the sense that it herds events of the past into an immense Now on which God passes judgement. In this spatialized present, literary figures used to communicate the vision acquire the same reality as the dead who will rise. In the last days, Milton and Blake’s Milton stand side by side. The experience of war seems to have preceded the moment at which Blake, Nietzsche and Pablo Neruda consolidated the values of their work, before going on to write in the prophetic vein. In each case, they turned to an allegorical, discontinuous poetic in which past error and present wisdom occupy the same literary space founded upon a visionary, timeless consciousness of cultural values.

Much early twentieth-century Canadian verse records a similar moment of visionary consolidation in the development of poetry in Canada, paralleled by post-war euphoria and renewed nationalism. One could say that the war put the Canadian locality "on the map" for indigenous writers in a prophetically spatialized way. Local literary space was expanded after the war with the rise of a poetry responsive to visionary truth. The work of Eustace Ross and Frank Call were only two such oeuvres to palpitate with this moment.
Call is remembered for his dabbling in free verse but he is more interesting in what he attempted with the sonnet and the sonnet series, "A Sonnet Series of French Canada," the first of the three sustained sonnet series in *Blue Homespun*, impressed Lorne Pierce with the simplicity and sincerity of his pictures of habitant life. Lionel Stevenson also commented favourably on the simplicity of these word-pictures, "reminiscence of Millet's paintings." For Call, one form was as good as another and the sonnet series as a group of interlinked discontinuous poems suited him is its capacity for a wholeness greater than its parts.

In these civil and sophisticated poems, Call presents an allegorical representation of the eternal verities as he has come to know them. The plain piety and way of life of the francophone farming communities around Lennoxville provided Call with a vision of present wisdom enduring despite the incoherence of modern life. In "The Oven," the mother of a family is "the priestess of an ancient shrine/ Keeping alight the sacrificial spark/ That made old altars through the ages shine." Though the reality to which Call directs our attention is symbolic, he is not concerned with literary resonances. When the "habitants" sing or tell stories, as in "Chansons" and "The Raconteur," they enjoy it fully, then go to bed in silence. In *The Belgian Garden* Call had seen an image of unnamable horror in the Chambly rapids. Here, in "Chambly," the rapids are tamed and have become a monotone "dull rune/ Of
ancient days." Across the water "sleeps the silent town," as night "Enshrouds the whole" in mystery. In this allegorized reality, it is the landscape and the customs that have meaningful speech, as we see in "The Old Habitant":

He sits in silence on his porch at night
And looks into the gloom. The low winds mutter
Across dark level fields, and poplars utter
Low sighing sounds.

The habitant’s perception of reality is one and the same thing as his thought, and the truth by which he lives is founded upon this equation:

He only thinks: The sun has dried the swamps,
The frost has touched the corn, and oats are ripe,
And in the orchard fruit begins to fall.

The habitant listens to the cycles of growth and decay to which he belongs and would not amend. Nor will the poet, either with fantastic imagery or with experiment, for Call’s verse would now become the voice of this articulation between man and place.

In the second series, "From a Walled Garden," Call presents five sonnets in which he expresses his own attempt to live by the truths he has found. The allegory becomes threefold: in the context of the habitants’ farming, the city-man’s gardening and God’s horticultural exploits in the Garden of Eden. In "Tulip Time" Call abandons the decadent imagery with which he had tried to express vision in the earlier works. In "Carpe Diem" he abandons the past for "one day of ecstasy." At
this point, Call encounters death's ultimate challenge to his certainty. In "Gray Afternoon" he enjoins us to turn our eyes to "the pathway of the departing day" in order to "learn/ The worth of noontide and the price we pay." A "strange white, silence" has blossomed in his garden.

The final series of nine sonnets, "Simples," concerns the relationship between death and what Call calls "my magic craft." The art of poetry becomes the fourth level of the allegory. The series represents Call's personal journey along the "endless pathway" where there are "secrets only Death can know," as we read in "Knowledge." In "An Old House," we find "The crumbling garden wall is overgrown/ With pallid bindweed flowers." Dead fingers clutch at the latch in an unearthly twilight. The following three sonnets constitute not only a resolution to Blue Homespun, but also the consummation of Call's search for the truth and a language with which to express his vision of the truth. In "Curtains," Call tells us:

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I hung gay casement-cloth with birds and flowers
Across my window-panes to hide the street,
Where, on gray stones, through long toil-laden hours,
The weary human footsteps throb and beat.
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This tapestry was able to bring back a memory of spring, but he could not stop his ears from the sounds of passers-by. Hence he decides to strip the windows "That I might see the human crowd outside." In "Burned Forests" like Ross in "If Ice," Call concludes that "Life still follows on the trail of
Death." The final sonnet, "A Chinese Poet," leaves the reader a choice. We either accept the vision -- by an act of faith that supersedes matters of literary taste -- or reject it:

Li Fu, a Chinese Poet, long ago,
Weary of strife, forsook the world and made
Himself a garden edged with cool green shade,
From pines and blossoming plum-trees in a row.
And by a hedge with crimson blooms aglow
He placed a tablet carved in sea-green jade,
Whereon each day the poet's scroll was laid;
That all who came his dreams might read and know.

But if none paused and entered in to read
His written words, the poet paid no heed,
But wrote the dreams and visions of his soul.
That was a thousand years ago. Today,
In a walled garden half a world away,
And in another tongue, I read his scroll.

Arthur Stanley Bourinot (1893-1969) is another poet of the period who "paid no heed" to the formal demands that modernism was making on literary taste. He was born in Ottawa, the son of the revisionist historian and Imperialist politician Sir John George Bourinot, whose Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness (1883) is the first in a line of cultural and literary statements that perhaps culminate with Northrop Frye's "Conclusion" to the Literary History of Canada. After graduation from University College, Toronto, in 1915, Lieutenant Bourinot served until 1919 in the 77th Overseas Battalion, two years as a prisoner of war. On his return, he completed his law degree at Osgoode Hall, and was called to the bar in 1920. Bourinot painted, wrote and practiced law in Ottawa until his retirement in 1959. As an undergraduate his
"close scrutiny of Nature, selection of the beautiful, largeness of idea, depth of emotion, and delicacy of phrase" impressed Andrew Macphail, who helped Bourinot publish a sheaf of twenty-four verses, *Laurentian Lyrics and Other Poems*, with Copp Clark in 1915. Bourinot's "To the Memory of Rupert Brooke," a competent sonnet on the dead poet, attracted considerable attention while he was overseas.

Bourinot's early work expresses an idealism unscathed by war. Like Brooke, Bourinot was fond of the sonnet form. His second book, *Poems* (1921), contains a record of his internment in Holzminden and Freiburg, remarkable for its detachment from the privations of prison-camp life, a space of silence and lonely reverie used "To lessen grief by calm assuaging thought." In subsequent books, Bourinot returned to the origins of his feelings for poetry in an aesthetic response to the Laurentian country-side and wrote a number of collections of verses for children. In 1931 he published a sonnet series, *Sonnets in Memory of My Mother*, in which the poet paid homage to Lady Bourinot's love of the arts and nature. This group of eighteen sonnets is one of a number of works belonging to the period in which a death in the family figures prominently in the consolidation of a poet's art. Other such works are Pickthall's *The Drift of Pinions* (1913), Robert Norwood's *Mother and Son* (1925), Pratt's *The Iron Door: An Ode* (1927) and the partial transcript of Frederick Philip Grove's "Poems" (c. 1927) recently published in *Canadian Poetry*. Bourinot's
light and painterly touch with conventional forms facilitated
the continuance of a youthful, genteel idealism but with the
Sonnets a new strength appears in his work.

As a prisoner of war, Bourinot cultivated a sort of
benign passivity in which the decadent cliché of an elemental
revery became a means of survival. Poems has its share of
verses in which it would seem that Bourinot writes for the
sake of art. "Pâle Prôserpine" appears in the sonnet "Spring,
1916." In "Keats" and "To John Masefield" Bourinot appeals to
beauty as a disciple. This beauty is a "guerdon hard to gain;"
a reward and a "message" that in "Revelation" issues from
"boundless spaces" and swaying fields: "at the nod/ Of an old
magician." As in Call's Lennoxville sonnets, Bourinot is here
a recipient of beauty rather than a semi-divine artificer. In
"Night at Holzminden" the prospect of such visions is blocked
by the barracks' shadows "on the vacant square." Sounds inside
his room are meaningless, raucus "stentorian breathings."
Outside, "silence sleeps profound," and ironically "Adream, we
prisoners, pass the peaceful night." When he reminisces, in "The
Old Indian," Bourinot's memory fills with the momentous speech
of a story-teller he had known as a boy. A decade later, in
Sonnets, his muse had again been silenced. This time, however,
the passive longing that served as a form of resistance during
the war is not enough. He does battle with his bereavement
with the only weapons at his disposal, intelligence and sophi-
stication. "And whirling doubts, holding a lawyer's brief/ For
death, went to defeat." He returns to the hills that his mother had loved; "ageless, serene from strife... as though a door/ Had opened on the corridors of life." In these sonnets the poetic value of beauty is put to rest beneath "the bosom of the night" where a "phantom city, lost in a dream" welcomes the beloved removed by death.

The Depression and the onset of the Second World War had the effect of hardening and straightening the values of Bourinot's mature work. His war poetry of the 'forties expresses the realities of war explicitly and plainly. His versatility now unburdened by preoccupations with artifice, the poetry opens into more natural patterns of speech, which carry a sense of conviction in the worth of what he has to say. Plangency and the magic of beauty are now to be found in the "place names of our country." Lyrics such as "Place Names" in his later work aspire to parole the language of the Ottawa region, and longer narrative poems record its people and the truths by which they live.

Bourinot's modernism did not require a revolution in literary taste in order to find its own level. The austerity of the poetry in Under the Sun, What Far Kingdom and four later collections, including the Collected Poems (1947) did not result from experimentation but rather from a process of self-realization in which his sense of identity worked to incorporate locality. George Woodcock has expressed the sense of locality I am using here as a logical and inevitable goal of
Knowing oneself historically in terms of family and community, direct and inherited, individual and social, the creating of a continuing pattern of interrelation between man and the landscape which is necessary before true regional feeling can come into existence -- the sense of the region as a living polis as well as a mere area of land.22

Bourinot chose to render in his verse a courteous articulation of the lived truths of the landscapes and communities of the Gatineau Hills area because these truths could be felt intimately. The poem "A Death" suggests that personal experience of grief led him to deprecate the dream-world of Canadian domesticated decadence so that his view of death emptied of transcendence but remained affirmative. Death for the aged can be a "healing touch" that gently closes and seals the eyes in "dreamless/ sleep." This poem and others in Under the Sun including "Outcasts," "Machinery," "Not Long Ago" and "Mr. Wander" reveal the fragmentariness of modern life while at the same time communicating a feeling that poetry has at least for the moment brought it under control. At its richest, in a narrative verse such as "Nicolas Gatineau," for example, Bourinot's variety of omen and augury deftly balances the conventional against originality in the cordial insistence that the reader ought to pay more attention to what can be learned from the close at hand. There is nothing new under the sun, he tells us, and hence we are mistaken to be preoccupied with novelty.

Bourinot's lyricism naturally graduated into an
poetic that was capable of being at once prolific and
sustained in quality. In both the narrative and lyric modes,
Bourinot's poems are essentially answers to the question "What
is it?" -- the answers come from living in reality, not
visiting it. His civilized modernity is never far from the
riddle, the proverb and the parable. One appreciates, however,
in poems like "Mind," "Dreams" or "Under the Pines" that his
buoyant conservatism is also never far from the gramophone,
boisterous laughter and stentorian breathings of the Holzman-
den barracks. Ideals become incarcerating in "Mind":

Mankind is never free,
Mind spells captivity.
Hungry by light fettering thought,
In a net of turmoil caught;
Never to savour peace,
Never to know release;
Mankind is never free,
Mind means captivity.

In "Dreams," "Visions of unuttered thought" break their prime-
val fetters, "Pounding into the present/ With fugitive feet
in the brain of man." In a poem chosen by A. J. M. Smith to
illustrate the modern cosmopolitan tradition in The Book of
Canadian Poetry, "Under the Pines," Bourinot insists that the
mantle worn by his poetry is the self-same silence that fell
over man in the Garden of Eden:

All is still
Under the Pines,
All is still,
Still as the heart of Eve
When fear first came.
And the flush
Of shame
Mantled her cheek
And the sword of flame
Flashed
In the garden of the Lord.
All is still
Under the Pines,
All is still.

The compliant orthodoxy of Bourinot's poetic voice is enclosed by a profound silence that functions as a form of local resistance in the face of the evidence of a chaotic and errant present. The space from which this voice speaks is occupied by a prisoner's mentality to be sure, in which to tell the truth is at the same time to admit one's culpability before God and to commit an act of treason before one's fellows. Such an uneasy tension between prophetic speech deferred to silence — name, rank and serial number versus verse, truth versus dissembling or the voice of place versus an impending threat of judgement upon what is said — lies beneath the calm, even complacent surface of Bourinot's poetry, adding a certain strangeness, richness and depth to his best efforts.

In his later years, Bourinot made significant contributions to Canadian literature in the area of archival scholarship. The new critical spirit that bubbled to the surface of Canadian letters in the early part of the century is reflected in his editions of the letters — recovering the voices — of the generation of the eighteen-sixties. In the critical
writings of John Raymond Knister (1899-1932), another form of recovery found expression. As for his young acquaintance Dorothy Livesay, it was important for Knister to clear the way for poetic voices unconstrained by the past. Knister's slim volume of poetry, the greater part of which was written in the winter of 1921, has only been published in its entirety and in its original arrangement in 1983; a selection was published by Livesay in 1949. His impact on Canadian writing, outside of a small circle of his friends, was limited to his articulate and uncompromising articles and reviews, which are -- at least -- equal to the poems in their importance to an understanding of poetic values as they existed in the period. Knister's criticism served to clarify the issues at stake among writers like Arthur Stringer, Wilson MacDonald and others with whom he sympathized from the vantage ground of a more coherent vision.

One need not have been a prisoner of war for one's life to have been informed by feelings of entrapment in early twentieth-century Canada. "There is no doubt," as one of Raymond Knister's best critics has said, that a great deal of his writing is autobiographical, "expressing Knister's feelings of entrapment within the farming community" and a sense of deadened artistic sensitivity. "And yet paradoxically much of Knister's success as a poet and short story writer derives from his meticulous recording of farm life." Peter Stevens remarks that it is almost a cliche to compare a story such as "Mist Green Oats" to "American stories of the mid-west
with their themes of entrapment, the sensitive spirit chained in narrow-minded small-town life or fastened to the mindless activity of subsistence farming." If I read Stevens correctly, he suggests that this theme fans out into two complementary themes, a fading but "sudden revelation or vague realization of knowledge beyond innocence," and the subsequent alienation of the young adult from his environment. Stevens's comparison of Knister's poem "The Plowman" and the story "The One Thing" concludes that the poem may not be a parable "about the search for perfection and man's inadequacy in the face of that search," as is often thought, but rather an ironic statement that such a search is "too obsessive and that such single-mindedness may have a warping effect; in that lies man's inadequacy."

Knister's critical and autobiographical writings do suggest that he regarded the situation of Canadian literature in the 'twenties as an entrapment. With a few exceptions, he believed that Canadian writing was inadequate to the task the times demanded of it. Like MacDonald but with more reason, he placed the blame for this condition squarely on the reading public. In America, he wrote, readers encourage a wider, more democratic range of subject matter and the development of "a poetical tradition for the short-story." The Canadian reading public, however, forces writers into a "fascination of what's easy," beginning with a desire to see great Canadian authors in any sort of writing that was local—and echoed Wordsworth or
Thackeray. "This is likely to become more oppressive as time goes on; for now increasingly we have the popular American magazines everywhere to vitiate any possibility of taste." The same democratic standardization that makes America fertile ground for new work blights overly sophisticated British and Canadian markets that cannot pay as well or offer as large a public. This materialism imposes a false set of aesthetic values "on this continent" and destroys any possibility of individualism or originality outside America. Knister lists victims of this oppression as Merrill Denison, Stringer and Pratt. These writers Knister felt had lost sight of their search for perfection -- which Yeats had criticized in his poem "The Fascination of What's Difficult" -- because of the poor reception of their early works.

Wilson MacDonald was the one major exception to what Knister saw as a climate of compromise. To Knister, MacDonald embodied everything that poetry in Canada should be, "an austere and wild earthly magic." In his essay on MacDonald "A Poet in Arms for Poetry," Knister praises the poet's humanitarian feeling, passion for fair play and intense hatred of intolerance, prohibitions and censorship of all kinds. He speaks with pride of MacDonald's decision to quit the advertising trade (after seven years) and with great affection for him as a friend. Knister marvels at MacDonald's "haunting melodic rhythm, a magnetic sadness" that "rises to a vigour of prophetic denunciation," the voice of an "ardent patriot" and
far-seeing citizen of the world that Knister said in another place was destined for immortality.

Not MacDonald, probably, but Knister's idea of MacDonald was what diminished Knister's critical acumen and exacting reasonableness in this case, but then he was not alone in this view. MacDonald was convinced of his greatness. John Daniel Logan and Donald French saw MacDonald "as a Seer" possessing sheer creative genius "working in the field of spiritual vision." In soberer moments, Knister expressed the idea of a poet as "The Lost Gentleman," an imminent, creative cosmopolitan. For Knister, the gentleman is an extinct species whose image has become ridiculous in both popular and serious literature, "And here we are approaching deep water -- the effect of art upon nature, which in the future is bound to cause complications." Ultimately, Knister argues, it is nature and Darwin who are to blame for the loss of the gentleman, dissipated by Victorian artificiality at the time man's knowledge of "the continuity of life, the solidarity of man with creeping things," changed the values by which men live.

Later there was a resurgence of man's ego, a reassertion of the soul. But it was a long time before it was possible to achieve once more such Olympian and yet authentic and up-to-date detachment as that of Edwin Arlington Robinson.

Robinson is Knister's true visionary, surging ahead of the herd and opening the way to a "finally, completely co-ordinating point of view." Democratic standardization is a
temporary condition, "restricted and academic in value," because "the world is under-going a stage of transition in which values are being reassessed." The possibility of "an ideal character" may be glimpsed, however, and "The gentleman may stage a come-back."

The poetic value of vision in Knister's essays is actually a matter of deliverance, an imminent power distrustful of democracy and spiritually allied with the "continuity of life." Speaking of "purely literary values," he says that the subject of writing need not be identifiable, the "Gun-playing West and North or chimes-surrounded cathedral towns," but it "should embody a life of its own." Canadians do not realize that poetry must have "a connection with life." If we give a certain latitude to "the word 'good'," he says, a good writer "must have known life," which entails the shedding of "induced fetishes" and an acceptance of "life itself at its face value." Knister praised Housman's The Shropshire Lad because it brought "the stuff of eternal human clay" to the decadence of the Yellow Book school. "Here, in fine, was life, and the public which loved poetry was not long in discovering it."

Wilfred Campbell, in contrast, fails as a poet because he lacks the "fine integrity" by which good poets embrace life, and let "its 'uplift' derive from its own essence." In Campbell, prophecy and vision degenerate into prose, yet the value of his mystic feeling, brotherhood and millenial outlook will "remain stable until the remote time at which his country
has changed fundamentally from its past self.

Concerning "the deeper and more individual characteristics of our national existence," Knister believed that "All things dwell continuously in a flux," especially expressions of an indigenous mode of life.

The Here and Now obsess us, and necessarily so. We have reckoned with the currents of influence in the past, and prophesied it may be, concerning forthcoming developments. But no sooner have we given these hostages to the future, than the present...exhibits traits until now wholly concealed from us, time being the acid process necessary for bringing out such concealed hieroglyphics.

Knister knows that it is idle to quarrel with the forms of literature and to confine so sentient a thing as life "within a theory." Yet he envisions "a truer consciousness of ourselves" arriving with "an epoch of realism," not "an unmixed good," but bringing deeper knowledge, conviction and "authenticity of feeling together" to reveal "our inner-life."

Knister's use of the words "value" and "life" reveal the tension he felt between vision and his sense of oppression within the superstructure of Canadian cultural values and economic conditions. With Bourinot, perhaps, he felt that a return of the gentlemanly "detachment," "clear vision and sure rendering" that Knister admired in D. C. Scott should commit modern poetry to a condition in which the truth must 32&disconcert the status quo. Like Ross, Knister believed that he had discovered a method for achieving prophecy, an ideal, liberating character and a finally, completely co-ordinating
point of view to be proclaimed by the poet as an observer.

The method was a simple one. Knister had recovered his health after leaving the University of Toronto in his first year due to pneumonia and pleurisy, "by dint of working fourteen to sixteen hours in the field until autumn." At this time Knister consolidated his ideas about writing: "There was something about the life that I had lived, and all the other farm people round me, something that had to be expressed, though I didn't know just how." He felt, however, that one "must be objective." That winter of 1921 he wrote the bulk of his verse "with an eye on the object," some of which appeared later in avant-garde literary magazines in the United States. "They weren't morally subversive, nor eccentric mannered, these attempts," but Canadian editors rejected them because they were "so Canadian and came so directly from the soil." Objectivity meant not invoking things "by name and reasoning about them" as D. C. Scott had done and as Call and A. M. Stephen continued to do, but rather representing things as they exist in reality, "seen as it were through a medium--the style, the personality, the method or what you will." One chooses not any bit of life, but individualities within "the universal stuff of human nature," which to be real must be lived. "In the creation of a personal art," life must be "sufficient to proclaim itself through the medium and the materials." Moreover, Knister's method of reducing "types of humankind always awaiting creation" to identifiable essentials
is basically allegorical.

As a young man just beginning to feel his powers, Knister felt the influence of literary trends such as Realism and Imagism. He also wrote prose poems, fragments and sketches of poems like "After Exile," "Reply to August" and "The Motor: A Fragment." Knister wrote traditional lyrics, the poetic series "A Row of Stalls" (similar to Masters's Spoon River Anthology) and narrative poems, but the voice that speaks from his experiments with means and materials is that of a modern Piers Plowman, and in this lies his originality.

In Knister's longish narrative poem "Corn Husking," his most comprehensive poetic effort among the poems collected in Windfalls for Cider, ordinary speech becomes the medium for details of everyday life on the farm. The first of the poem's seven sections emphasizes the actual speech of his locality by introducing the reader to the main character through a brief passage quoting the way in which he speaks to his plow-horse --- a kind of apostrophe, verbalizing his thoughts of the moment. The one line not in direct quotation, "The horse finishes her grain at a gulp, and I add," alerts the reader to the first-person narrative in which events are made more immediate by means of the present tense, but the tag "and I add" undercuts the immediacy by suggesting authorial premeditation. The verse is composed of four-stress lines with enough variation of feet to read naturally; the slight
caesuras at line-ends do not draw attention to themselves. The second section introduces us to two young men, Jake and Jess, and the manner of their work:

Lifting the tongue, shouting the two forward
To fasten the neck-yoke, shouting the "Back!"
To hook the traces up, "First link them, boy,
You're forgetting!" Four of us for Father
Has come forth from the pig-pen, "All aboard!"
He shouts, and the three of us clamber up
While he stays behind to shut the lane gate.
Then he's on; I loosen up the lines
And slap the horses on, and everybody reels
Turning the corner. The wind brushes our ears,
We shout, sing, dance a ballet to the sober cloud gradings,
And the cornstalks bow with laughter.

The phrasing of "Father has come forth" and men's "ballet" suggest another level of meaning beyond the plain sense, which is touched again in the image of clouds arranged in a scale or series. The inner life of the corn is personified as laughter. This life is balanced against the "sucking" of the men. The sense that the ears of corn are listening to human speech or song. The first two sections are tied together in the closing line of the second, in which the ancient Roman sense of verse, as a turning in the furrows of a field, may be present at some level of evocation. The speaker jumps down from the wagon:

"And when I'm down, my row is left behind," completed, finally, like a line of verse.

In the third section, the nature of the speaker's work begins to struggle "toward a rhythm." In the opening, four-stress lines alternate with five-stress lines, then steady to a loose blank verse, which drops or adds a foot now and then.
but remains the measure of the rest of the poem. The phrase
"For a time" is repeated at line beginnings to underscore the
struggle toward a rhythm as the speaker hurries to get the
corn away, and the noise of the ears on the barn floor fills
his mind, crowding out all thought. Then he hears his father
talking, "and in a minute, of course, I am able to catch up."
The remainder of the section is devoted to the father’s
conversation, in which new characters, hands Roy and Bill, and
much local colour are brought forward. The conversation is
orderly, however, having its own wholeness and division into
parts. It begins with a joke, moves toward the subject of
women and concludes with the "theme" of marriage in the sense
of an alliance between farming families, in which marriage
means either increase or decrease of lands by dowry.

The forward thrust of the narrative is not allowed to
diminish in the fourth part. The poem attempts to give the
sense of diverse activities all happening within a small space
of time. The reader is reminded at intervals that this farming
family must not fall behind in the husking:

On we go, down the half-mile rows,
Less talking now, because the end is near.
The air is cool, the wind is sharp, not strong
But buoyant. Wisps of long torn leaves of corn
Are floating high like tiny barges, tarnished gold,
Until, after a minute’s cruise at most,
They slide prow-first into the deep, and spill
Their load invisible. And all about
The tones of sepia, old gold, dirt-brown,
Ink-blue in forests farther off; a sky
All dusty, and not cleansed yet with the snow.
The ground is blackened deep with recent wet.
There is time to appreciate beauty, invoke a detailed word-picture of the field, but no time to name the feelings of vastness and wonder that the speaker experiences or to reason about them. The narrative returns to the work and the humour of the men, and the section ends by illustrating what honour means among farmers: "fear of being helped by the others."

Bill and the unnamed speaker hurry to catch up to the father, who "makes a jump" further ahead in the row and waits there for them. Part of Knister's meaning lies in the veiled correspondences between his materials and his method (the manner of the work and the form of the verse; the jumping from section to section as the men leap about). However, one may note a young writer's self-consciousness about this art. The difficult image of the sea-voyage of corn-husks dipping in a sea of green vegetation reminds us that, as with many of the poems in Windfalls for Cider, we are dealing with apprentice-work.

The fifth section jumps back to the barn, where Roy and the speaker unload their wagon-load of picked corn. During the unloading, the speaker is filled by lyrical emotion:

Oh man, perhaps those shovels do not sing
As each ear-cluster shoots from the metal,
For we are getting chilled from the long ride,
And as the metal sings the kernel's dance,
Their golden drops sparkling as they leap up,
Knocked from the hard ear-parents as they strike.

The colloquialism "Oh man" (in the sense of "oh boy"), disquises a standard literary apostrophe within the plausible
weariness of the speaker. In this lyrical outcry, Knister emphasizes the continuity between nature and man, suggesting that each dances to the other’s Dionysian music. While they work, the men “forget the flight of time,” and in the tradition of Hesiod’s Works and Days and Virgil’s Georgics, Book II, Knister works toward a representation of agriculture that participates in the high world of poetry. This section anticipates the dénouement of the closing lines. When the father brings apples for the men to munch before they head out for another load of corn, the speaker touches upon an uneasiness of the Christian tradition toward thanksgiving for pleasures not directly related to man’s redemption in the crucifixion.

In the sixth part the tired men “A little while are slow and lax/ Of motion,” but soon “every move is rhythmic.” There is an echo of approaching winter in an image of cornhusks white as snow. “Just then a red ear falls upon the load.” The speaker’s father interprets the meaning of this omen to young Bill when he explains that “the old French custom” was, such that, if a boy or girl threw out a red ear he or she “may take their choice, to kiss/ Whichever one is at the bee, they like.” Bill responds with a “chin- jerking laugh.” To the speaker, however,

A vision comes of those young humans years ago,
Boys in home-tailoring, caps
Of black, and girls with petticoats, and shawls
About their heads, as we move on.
The detached anthropological image contrasts with Bill's response, and the father's use of the story to tease Bill on his amorous exploits, which we learned in the third section involved rich Tim O'Shea's daughter and her dowry. This section ends with Roy and Bill punning on the refrain of a song, "The Rose of Summer," and the last rows of corn. The thread of the narrative is not allowed to slacken, the rhythm of the work and of the day strictly adhered to as a unifying device. Thus, in the seventh and last section the dusk comes on over the rows of bowing corn. "Slowly it gathers in about us where we work." Naturalistic details of how the light actually looks at this time of day and season contrast with the undercurrent of Knister's concern for reflecting an Aristotelian idea of poetic unity. Tired, the men wonder at the southerly travel of the sun, but no one thinks of an answer to the puzzle. Weariness makes one wonder at ordinary things. The sun sets in "defiant splendour, as though he cares/ Nothing for all the disregarding men" who work the land.

Recalling the speaker's words to his horse, "Hold still now! Hold still," in the poem's first line, the reader learns that the approach of stillness at night or noon-time usually makes Bill anxious and impatient. Now, in stillness, the young men watch a "sinuous V" of wild geese overhead, and hear:

A mellowed squeak, like a pitiful baby-cry  
One and another of the great birds gives  
As they cleave space, and, almost, time, across the night.
Here, the duck-hunting of the third part is recalled by Bill who wishes that he had his gun. Knister draws a parallel between the birds above flying south and the men below working toward supper-time, in both instances encouraging each other on. He uses repetition of the word "opposite" within the dialogue to underline the notion that the human and the natural struggle of life are two sides of the same coin.

An intellectual resolution to the poem is made appropriate in Knister's concluding picture of the exhausted men, since the mind naturally tends toward speculation when the body is at peace after labour:

We lie upon the solid corn and pluck Idly at wisps of husks, and see we have Forgotten to take off the pegs. Then each Recites how his hands are scarred and raw; And Father tries to stop the team, but they Will only rest a breath, then jerk ahead. "They know when's suppertime," young Bill remarks.

Reminiscent of Call's habitants, perhaps, what space exists for thought in these farmers' lives opens behind the chevron of the wild geese. The body moves toward supper-time but in the body's wake lies the history and the procreative urge of the locality, symbolized by the red ear in the sixth section. The echoing of the third part here, in the close, ties this social aspect of the poem to the social and economic motifs of that conversation: the division of labour and produce, and the local allotment of property. Knister's repetition of numbers in the second and third parts is recalled in the contemplation
of measurements, miles and yards, in the closing lines. Thus, like the geese, the poem cleaves space and anthropological time, but there is another measure to be tied off in the Aristotelian sense, "Rhythmically the bent stalks click and brush against the axle as the wagon moves." Knister's carefully crafted narrative seeks to derive the justification of his poetic from an objective observation of men in a landscape, accepted at face value without praise or blame. The poem's technical unity must therefore reflect a wholeness in its setting. The verse struggles toward a rhythm that must logically correspond to the rhythms he perceives, and hence it closes with the harvested stalks beating time to the thoughts and emotions of the poem and the heritage of its subject.

"Corn Husking" is a parable celebrating the solidarity between man and "creeping things." This is why the father comes forth from the "pig-pen" and why these lines are alliteratively emphasized. Rude, raw life is a "ballet" danced to a Dionysian score played by the elements, which is why the cornstalks bow with laughter in the second section, and bow as the curtain of dusk falls in the final part; it is also why the speaker remains nameless as the medium of this score, since the speaker may be no more than the instrument of revelation or a vehicle for the continuity between the contrarities of life.

Finally, there is the motif of eating which recurs in the second, fifth and last sections, and the drink of water in
the first. This motif is related to Knister’s repetition of “gold,” as the color of harvest and the wealth of the land. In the fifth section, where the speaker almost bursts into song, he forgets time’s flight thinking of golden popping-corn and munching apples. For a moment the polarity between man and nature is reversed as the “kernels dance” and the metal instruments of man’s work sing the accompaniment. The third section expands the concept of sustenance to include the economy of the region while the poem as a whole, by gathering the life of the locality and storing it in the form of a parable, aspires to create an artistic unity from the vicissitudes of man’s need for providence. Hence, in this way, the life of the locality literally becomes a host in an act of communion between the artist and the field, full of folk that he celebrates. Beneath the mask of his nameless speaker, however, “the style, the personality, the method or what you will” becomes prophetic in its capacity to interpret Knister’s sacramental vision to the hard of heart.

Knister’s poetry grows out of three primary concerns: the nature and meaning of the human figure in a landscape, the nature and meaning of work, and the reality of the elemental world. In poems on landscapes and domestic scenes such as “Reverie: The Orchard on the slope” and “The White Cat,” Knister seeks archetypal characteristics within the naturalistic and anthropological details of his observation, not detail for detail’s sake. Hence “Corn Husking” begins with a repeti-
tion of the number four, since this number has the power to evoke fundamental concepts such as the shape of a field or the cardinal points. His concern for the relationship between human character and locality appears in poems such as "February's Forgotten Mitts" and "A Row of Stalls." "The Roller" and "Poisons" concentrate on evoking examples of human endeavor that are meaningful within the context of his vision, while "The Plowman," "Lake Harvest" and "In the Rain, Sowing Oats" explore the continuity that harsh work brings to the relationship between "disregarding man" and the natural world.

Within Knister's poetic medium, however, the mutual antagonism of life and death may be considered as the essential truth of his vision. "After Exile," which appears to be a sketch for a poem, contains many of the elements articulated in "Corn Husking," but here "The boy stumbles over pumpkins/And finds the earth/Itself feigning death." Death, speaking to men through naturalistic details, "Bids you satisfy yourself/With food, drink and slumber." The parable ends moraistically with an example of how life should be properly suffered:

That he loves, or has forgotten
Is a weariness
Of half-sought memory.
Until another harvest come.
Gone,
He may remember that this is life
And think to be wise
Seeing it pass.

In poems such as "October Stars," "Change," "Night Walk,"
"Cedars," "Spring-Flooded Ditches" and "Because They Are Young," Knister writes of the human soul as knowledge that lies beyond locality and human history. The soul looks upon life as a strange and unpleasing "insufferable joy" trapped within the "visioned seed" of procreation. For Knister, to remember is ultimately to return along the path of this visioned seed -- the soul's journey through evolution and its track in a locality's racial unconscious -- to a primordial disinterestedness in life. In "Boy Remembers in the Field," the remembering leads to a vision of "Pitiful life, useless, innocently creeping/ On a useless planet." Here, as in "Arab King," the voice of some nameless sorcerer cries out to the heedless: "Did anyone know? Did anyone understand?"

The psychology of Knister's poetic vision derives its force from a fundamental ambivalence toward life and death. "The Quick and the Dead" expresses this ambivalence in the form of a traditional love-lyric that contrasts love and pleasure on the one hand, and the cold hatred of the dead for the living on the other. At the physical center of the poem, procreation has the power to transform gravestones into "less than stone" until the lovers kiss. The kiss raises the dead from their sleep. They bequeath their ominous knowledge to the speaker who, having partaken of it, suddenly sees the beloved as a hated creature. The vision alienates the poet from humanity, yet it bestows upon him the power to know and proclaim truths that man must live by. In "Martyrdom," trans-
fixed autumn leaves suffer "immeasurable pain/ Immeasurable ecstasy." It is because art like any human endeavor must circumscribe this immeasurable contradiction at the root of life that Knister says ironically in "Moments When I'm Feeling Poems," that "the ladies and the lords/ Of life are they who, knowing, feel/ No call to blight that sense with words." For Knister, the power of art derives from a vision in which creation collaborates with death. Art must blight as well as bless and in this lies the supreme detachment of Knister's idealism. Knister projects this inner knowledge, a "lived or felt knowledge from which his objectivity necessarily evolves, into the objects of his contemplation, the characters, activities, domesticated animals and landscapes of his poems.

Aside from a method, Knister also had a theoretical justification for expressing the inner life of things by means of an objective art. He criticized the Montreal scene of A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott and Leo Kennedy for its dearth of convictions -- "The great idea is not to have ideas, they might say." He insisted that a local or personal art must go beyond "personal experience" as the literature of the Scandinavian countries had done, to command "the respect of the world: disinterested, profound, intensely local and yet -- the antithesis cannot be avoided -- universal." In his study of Lampman, Knister expressed his personal view that a "lack of tension between the poet and his environment" may have been the reason that Lampman never developed "those possibilities"
which became plain in him toward the end of his life. Lampman had "his eye on the object, Canadian landscape, more rarely Canadian character and situations," and in this "was evolving a poetry "vigorous enough to deal with experienced reality as a whole," Lampman’s feeling for the exterior world expanded "to include the major human emotions, and there even appeared a sense of character." "This very attitude," Knister wrote, as opposed to a "puritanic doubt of life," "developed into a higher conviction, which is only now beginning to reach the minds of the generality of men." Knister then quotes Lampman with approval on this "new spiritual force," a "modern thing" which culture disseminates "into the mental character and spiritual habit of all mankind."

The tension Knister felt between social recalcitrance toward change and "transilient experiment in the arts" without which no advance is possible, however, may have contributed to both the strength and weakness of his verse. As Stevens has said, the key to the poem is the "self within annotated by external circumstance, with a tension, explicit or implied, holding the poem in equilibrium." He says of the poem "Moments When I’m Feeling Alone" that the "conflicts between the poet’s vision and the inadequacy of language to express that vision" amounts to a distortion of his vision by art. Knister’s youth at the time of writing, however, and the unfinished nature of his manuscript, must be taken into account in an assessment of the strength and weakness of his poetry.
Knister died accidentally by drowning in 1932. The theme of entrapment that can be found in his prose and in some of his poems has lent some credence to the romanticization of his death by Milton Wilson and Dorothy Livesay, though Knister's daughter, Imogen Givens, and Marcus Waddington have tried to dispel the myth of Knister as a desperate, unfulfilled artist driven to self-immolation by the situation of writers in his time. Incidentally, Livesay's myth-making edition of Knister's poems in 1949 is another illustration of the detachment with which Canadian writers confront the fragmentariness of modern life in societies such as ours. Commenting in 1980 on Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher's demythification of the life of Emily Carr, The Untold Story, Livesay insists that myth and legend are better than fact, and suggests that literary biography can dispense with reason and objective truth once intuition is called upon. "What does it matter to literature or art," she says, "whether or not in real life the artist was unpredictable, irascible?" In literature, the past is a fiction is it not? Knister may have had more in common with Alexander Maitland Stephen (1882-1942), another poet of his time, than he was prepared to admit. Stephen, however, was a more hortatory poet, more critical of large issues than of the telling detail as was Knister's way. Stephen's tendency to state his perceptions overtly and to reason about them in his
poems naturally displeased Knister. In a letter, Knister had grudgingly admitted that he could not see Stephen's *The Rosary of Pan* as a whole because flawed craftsmanship "spoils any piece of writing for me, and it is only after the mind assents to the technical mastery that the emotion is allowed to reach me." Knister went on to say that this "intellectual assent" and "real emotion" is necessary for genuine literature, though any ideas will do as long as some structure has been effective in showing "that life is slow and yet brief, beauty far-off and yet tormenting." Since Knister demanded formal correctness from "free versers and likewise the jinglers" he could not avoid a negativity toward Stephen that came from looking at his work "more as a writer than as a human being."

Stephen grew up on a small Ontario farm and thanks to his father's tutoring and large library. -- Stephen's father had been a school-teacher before he took up farming. -- he passed his high school entrance examinations at the age of ten. At high school, Stephen and a group of students read Darwin and Huxley and discussed the prospect of a world founded upon reason. Stephen finished high school at fourteen, and not able to afford university, attempted to study law under an uncle in Kamloops, British Columbia. On the news of his father's death, Stephen abandoned his studies and spent several years in Seattle, then a goldrush boomtown. He worked in restaurants, lumber-yards, dock-yards, on the stage and as a volunteer in a free clinic for derelicts run by a mis-
sionary. He taught school briefly in British Columbia and at this time became involved with the labour movement in the west. By the time Stephen enlisted in an Imperial regiment at the news of the First World War, he had been a miner, a logger and a cowboy in Canada, a farm-hand and an office clerk in the United States. He married the daughter of the farmer he worked for in Oregon. He was wounded in France, in his first action, and lost the use of his right arm.

Stephen returned to teaching in Vancouver and, writing with his left hand, became a prolific poet, playwright, novelist, public speaker and recitalist. Stephen, like Tom MacInnes and F. O. Call, turned to poetry in middle age and like them practiced poetry actively for about a decade, in his case from 1923 to 1935. He launched himself into politics when the Depression came. In his reckless and energetic way he joined the C. C. F. party, delivered righteousness, indignant polemics on the radio and in the meeting hall, campaigned successfully for financial aid to China and Spain and ran for office on an independent ticket in a Provincial election. Though these years produced Stephen's best book of verse, Brown Earth and Bunch Grass in 1931, he was over-worked and never fully recovered from the pneumonia that contributed to his defeat in the Vancouver Island riding.

Stephen survived the war and his own nomadic youth to be broken by an excess of humanitarian resolve to hasten society's progress toward a better and more egalitarian world.
He abandoned the free verse and declamatory power of Brown
Earth and Bunch Grass and in his long narrative poem of 1935,
Verendrye, became self-consciously conventional and explicitly
romantic in form and content. He lost interest in politics,
and his idealism lost its millenialism. He rallied his
creative energies, however, with the onset of World War II,
writing the poems collected in the posthumous volume Songs For
a New Nation, which contains a number of prophetic rhapsodies.
Stephen had submitted his third novel to a Ryerson Press
writing contest, winning honourable mention, when he suffered
a second, fatal attack of pneumonia at the age of fifty-three.

Much of Stephen's first book resembles the verse of
MacInnes, MacDonald and Pickthall. The Rosary of Fan contains
poems influenced by Stephen's favourite philosopher,
Nietzsche. "Superman" and "Man the Creator" combine the will
to power with notions of spiritual love. These notions cor-
respond to MacInnes's Tauism and MacDonald's theosophy as an
intellectual underpinning of transcendence. In "The Wanderer,"
the Word as Flesh usurped by Man utters a Dionysian vision of
man's evolutionary quest toward divine self-perfection: "twice
ten million human years to seek/ That, which is I, From mine
own self, divorced." Other poems such "The Spirit of Beauty"
and "Arcady" attempt the musicality of MacDonald's verse,
while poems like "The Sanctuary" and "The Troubadour" success-
fully reproduce Pickthall's dream-paradise and historical
pastiche. These poems need to be be read aloud and feelingly
for them to come to life. In this Stephen resembles other consummate reciters of the time like McDonald and Katherine Hale (Mrs. John Garvin). Stephen's natural rhythm is the declamatory rise and fall of the King James version of the Bible and the street-corner orator, and this quality reflects a conflict of poetic interests in which the values of prophetic utterance abrade against the poetry of beauty. In "To Bliss Carman," Stephen focuses not on the notion of idyllic freedom on the open road -- he knew too much about the road to take that seriously -- but rather on Carman's "voice, resonant with joy." "Voices" figuratively records the moment in which the Word entered into his life, creeping "from out the shadows of the great ravines." Hearing these voices, Stephen receives a vision of "prisoned life," an eerie murmuring within "the city's heart," and knows that "Life is One," a spiritual force that travels upward to become a radiant god. Born from a chrysalis of sod.

Throughout The Rosary of Pan, Stephen's individuality struggles against poetic forms that he naively accepts as definitively poetic. In "The Broken Rood," "Drunk and Disorderly" and in lines and phrases scattered among the verses, his own poetic voice breaks free as a narrative strain in which his religious convictions confront the harshness that he knew as a wanderer in his youth, and with which he empathized as a socialist in middle age. In "The Broken Rood," the paradisal fantasy of his mentors' poetry becomes a stark and
brutal Gethsemane, in which the agony of a young nun leads to an affirmation of life and love that is at the same time a denial of her Christ——"Of Christ? Nay——of this gaunt god impaled on a dead tree." "Drunk and Disorderly," is a parable illustrating the principle that ungratified love is every man's crucifixion. The book contains the elements of a simple allegorical system based on the Trinity, and summarized in "Wind, Rain and Sun" and "The Trinity." In this system, the Word emanates from darkness and silence in 'mad desire' for union with "Life Divine." The rose symbolizes the beloved; and "The Rose of Heaven" symbolizes the perfection of evolutionary life. Like the hippies of the nineteen-sixties, Stephen is convinced that God is Love and that the purpose of poetry is to reveal this truth. Once the Word has entered time, it participates in the "labyrinth" of the many ways of love. Body, soul and the spirit are fellow-travellers along this thread, and Stephen's lyrics attempt to articulate the significance of these figures in the context of his beliefs.

Stephen was more sure of his craft in his second volume, The Land of Singing Waters, published in London and Toronto in 1927. The earlier book, despite the weaknesses that Knister saw in it, represents the moment in Stephen's life in which his values coalesced into an allegorical poetic system. The little poem "Poetry," in Singing Waters, encapsulates the values of poetry in Canada in the first decades of the century:
Word-symbol of the quest divine,
Of Life, the rhythmic overflow --
Here Beauty, mirrored in a line,
Transcends the little truths we know.

Here one may note the nineteenth-century romanticism of the
Symbolists, to whom words are merely "An echo of the mystic
Name," une sorcellerie évocatoire in Baudelaire's phrase,
which influenced Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Wallace Stevens. Yet
here also we should note the sense of purpose that Knister saw
in Robinson, which perhaps underlies the natural or literal
use of words that one finds in Frost, cummings and W. C.
Williams. Stephen's "rhythmic overflow" suggests more than a
quality of heightened emotion, as it does in Stringer's work.
Like Pickthall's The Wood Carver's Wife, Stringer's Open
Water, Call's Acanthus, the early Imagists and others, and
like Knister in his lyrical moments, Stephen's poetry is part
of a general uneasiness straining against the limitations of
the symbolic to reveal transcendent truths in the context of
everyday life.

Thus, in Singing Waters Stephen makes his peace with
the poets to whom he had apprenticed himself in the sonnets
dedicated to Charles O. D. Roberts, Carman and Pickthall, the
rondeels and MacInnes-like ballades that close the first half
of his book. In the first part poems such as "Resurgam" and
"Winter Winds," equal Pickthall and MacDonald in craftsmanship
and music. The themes of The Rosary are carried forward in
such poems as "Gethsemane," "I Would Be Your Voice, O Hills"
and "The Romant of the Rose." "Apotheosis," a remarkable poem on Nietzsche's madness, reprises the theme of "Drunk and Disorderly." The second half of the book is devoted to a collection of narrative poems in which Stephen's vision is made to speak through representations of the legendary past and the local history of the Pacific coast. In "Tiger-Lily," "The Death of Julian" and "Apotheosis," Stephen's individual poetic voice can still be heard today, chafing against unresilient formal constraints. It would seem that Stephen simply did not have time for the experimentation and care with language that his poetic system desperately needed, since he had launched himself onto the sea of poetry suddenly in middle age. Yet despite his habit of abbreviating his content with the capitalized proper noun, the intelligence, erudition and humanity of his verse does manage to make itself felt.

In a final, violent drive to find his voice in poetry, Stephen broke his fetters -- not by experiment or foreign example, but by luck -- in Brown Earth and Bunch Grass. This volume is divided into two parts, a longer first section containing poems on history and place in free verse and a shorter second part on the power of love to effect spiritual regeneration. The first part begins with a "Prelude" in which Stephen asks how art can reveal "the eternal Now" while the "imminent Past,/ looms like a spectre/ on the brink of dreams?" Stephen clothes himself in the prophetic mantle and answers: "I have drawn apart./ I have paid the price./ Freedom
is mine." In true Old Testament fashion, Stephen declares that he sings "of a nation yet unborn." His word will dwell with the children who "inhabit the house which I have built.

The voice of these poems derives from the Word, which is Stephen's symbol for a spiritual life-force seeking embodiment in the present. Stephen's function as a poet-prophet is to communicate his vision to his audience's perception of reality that they be cleansed and converted into proper receptacles of the Word. In the close of the second part of the book, the love-poems culminate in "The Fourth Dimension" and "Marriage," poems insisting that the distance and mystery "between two worlds" is dissolved in the "high dimension of love," and that "the impurity of a virginal mind cannot conceive of beauty:

Before a poem is born,
a marriage is consummated,
By a man and a woman
are all things created.

In the same place, the poem "Fidelis" explains that this creative force cannot serve as a redemptive agent unless its vehicle, love, is unsullied by infidelity.

The Word travels across the distance between the two worlds of spiritual vision and the reality that is its sign by means of love in the most general sense, but it uses the poet's voice as its vehicle. Several poems in the beginning of the book articulate the mystical reality of voice as opposed to discursive language. "Stampede" is a rollicking cowboy poem that points up the value of natural, localized speech rhythms.
In "Impressions" we are instructed that "Voices are the keys" to the other world, symbolized here by "dreams" and "the indices of the soul." Between voices there is only an abyss, but the voices of the past may be heard, in "Rivers of Gold," flowing from the heart of the prairie. In "A Prairie Wind," the poet listens to the wind and represents its meaning in terms of dreams, precious metals and stones. He then personifies the wind, attributing to it the native hospitality and plain speech of the region. Stephen's vision, however, obliges him to declaim the higher meaning, that this voice emerges from eternity on "the tide of the soul/ seeking the honey heart of truth." In "Travel with the Wind," Stephen encourages his audience to "come out with me!" in a visionary flight across Canada on the wings of "the breath/ that wondrous, in its monotone,/ of what is hidden, unrevealed/ within the silence." The rhythms of the poem create the sensation of soaring and dipping above "the prairie Mother, gypsy Earth," who sings to her children "songs as old as Eden."

In "The Earth is Ours," Stephen proclaims dramatically:

"I bring you a message; masterful and strange. I am the Voice of the Beauty you have rejected, of the Love you have crucified, of the Humanity you have dethroned."

"Out of the North" expands this sense of purpose to include Canada's relations with the world. Here, Canada becomes a
hammer and a forge for "the Will to Redemption" because the 
Word has been kindled in "the white stillness." In "Poems" we 
learn that poems are "weapons of sound" made to pierce the 
separateness" between souls.

In Stephen's quite readable free verse, longish poems 
such as "Steel Cliffs," "Vancouver" and "On the Air," 
delineate the fragmented meaningfulness of modern city life. 
In each case the humanity and evolutionary mysticism of his 
vision serve to represent a unity of life in the Here and Now. 
The separation of souls is partially the result of past misin-
terpretation of the written word and the established belief-
systems of western culture. In "That Which A Man Bequeaths," 
Stephen reminds us that man's gods are but "shadows cast/ by 
his own ego in space and time." The winds "talk together," and 
because man has forgotten how to listen for the truth,

He hides himself from the greater Self, 
concealing the charnel-house of his heart. 
Embracing the myth he has created, 
he weeps when he touches reality.

"Peach Davis" and most of the remaining poems in the first 
section are devoted to representing this reality in terms of 
the everyday lives of ordinary rural and urban characters. 
Peach Davis is a retired wilderness mountie working as a 
janitor in Calgary, "city of beef barons and oil magnates." 
The poem upbraids Canadians for overlooking the heroism of 
simple men in their search for cultural symbols. "The Children 
Are Dreaming" criticizes the materialism and elitism of the
tribesman of Judas, "in the swivel-chairs of authority." The poem also attempts to speak to us directly:

You, Madam.
and you, Sir,
may, if you care to listen,
hear the word of the Dawn.
It contains a message to Judas.
The Voice is one you have heard before.
Masterful and strange, it resounds through the Age of Iron.

The message for us, the prophet's children, is that we shall be "Clean as the morning wind, fearless of opinion, unashamed of sex" and proud of the word, the Voice and its poet, that speaks through our locality and our lives.

The posthumous volume Songs for a New Nation, published in the United States in 1963 (Stephen was already forgotten in Canada by then), vacillates between slight though technically sound lyrics and poems that seem to be moving toward a long, sonorous line similar to that employed by Blake in the prophetic books. A number are entitled simply "Fragment." The final verse of the first part of Brown Earth and Bunch Grass, "So Long," said farewell to the Victorian "oil of conventionality," and Stephen decided that "I am glad that I live in the year 1938, A.D." Stephen's illness, however, impeded his gradual development away from the poetic value of beauty, so that in his last poems he hovers between poems that aspire to be objects of beauty on the one hand, and representations of the truth on the other. These two values had been entangled
from the beginning in Stephen's verse, and *Songs of a New Nation* is interesting in the way the two kinds of poems grate toward rhymes and free verse respectively. Stephen approves in these pages of the prophet in Robinson Jeffers and ridicules T. S. Eliot's chilly impersonality. At his best, Stephen's work retains a sense of genuine mysticism and the qualities of an informal, virile and personal art that has gone virtually without mention by the critics of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada.

Stephen's definition of a poem as a "symbol of spiritual experience," and the Bergsonian belief, attributed to him by his brother, that a poet must enter into the life of a thing before that thing may be truly known, indicate an attitude toward poetry shared by others more concerned with the formal properties of literary excellence than he perhaps was. For Ross and Knister, Imagist and Realist techniques were in no way meant to diminish the transcendent in their perception of reality. The desire to ensnare the spiritual was merely different in form among the Canadian decadents. In Ross's and Knister's impersonal vision, the prophetic value spoke for itself in a cleansed and corrected representation of reality. Pickthall's poetry of the beautiful was the product of an attitude toward art neither personal like MacIver's or MacDonald's, nor concerned with poetry. Knister disinterestedly and Stephen personally, look upon nature as humanity's
stage and strove to express that drama's inner life. The new critical spirit of the time works in close proximity to a nationalist concern that is the outward form of their vision.

In the 'twenties and 'thirties, Stephen put forward a Marxist poetry in the cause of social justice. In the Maritimes of the 'thirties, Kenneth Leslie joined with Charles O. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, Robert Norwood and Charles Bruce to form the Song Fishermen, an ill-remembered group of poets determined to establish a Maritime poetry that would be socialist and Christian as well as responsive to the land in a manner unencumbered by fantasy. At McGill University in Montréal, student writers A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott responded to the new critical spirit in Canadian letters by producing tracts and poems of enduring merit. Publishing in the student magazines that they edited, these new poets found a place in Canadian writing for the literary and critical standards of Poetry (Chicago) and Scrutiny at Cambridge. In the 'fifties, Irving Layton brought a new intensity to this spirit while at the same time returning poetry in Canada to the values of the prophetic and the personal.

Despite the shifting re-alignments of poetic values in the period, verse now saccharine, now bitter, now a well-balanced blend of liquors fermented within a cultural detachment from the fundamental incoherence of modern life. As a value that justifies the reception of a poem into society as a poem, beauty passed through a period of domesticated decadence
in which the foundations were laid for the sort of formalism that emerged in poetry like Smith's, whose *A Sort of Ecstasy* surprised Northrop Frye when he reviewed it in 1954 with the number of poems collected there that were "romantic landscape poems in the Carman tradition." The Imagism of Bowman and Livesay marks a mid-point between the decadence and formalism, perhaps, in that the virtues of Amy Lowell's idiom "are not those of sharp observation and precise diction", but a "gentle reverie and a relaxed circling movement" that resembles the consciousness of Pickthall's verse, for example, in that Imagism "tends to descriptive or landscape poetry, on which the moods of the poet are projected." The poetry that A. G. Bailey wrote during the period in *Songs of the Saquenay* (1927) and *Tau* (1930) adheres to the decadent exoticism of Pickthall and MacInnes. Through his friendship with Earle Birney and Robert Finch, Bailey's work was straightened to conform to a stricter formalism, an intellectual concreteness and precision that like Imagism, in Frye's estimation, is only one more formula designed to save one "the trouble of making independent judgements on poetry."

The formalist conception of beauty became equivocal with respect to poetic content, and Eustace Ross's work was a critique of poetry in Canada at this stage. Predictably, the decadent penchant for mythical subject matter surfaced again among "modern" poets like Smith or Jay MacPherson, who elected to work with the abstract literary patterns of "the stories of
gods whose actions are not limited by reality." This "formal tendency is primitive, oracular" and used by "modern" poets — I am still quoting from Frye's reviews in The University of Toronto Quarterly — "just as modern painters use abstract or stylized patterns." Hence the richest poetry of Birney, Livesay and Pratt is that in which aspects of culture are reduced to "myth, metaphor, and apocalyptic imagery." The formal tendency, primitive and essentially conservative, can rapidly degenerate into a set of conventional mechanisms. "But repeating ready-made formulas is one thing; working within a convention is quite another," as Frye remarked on the unpretentious conservatism of Charles Bruce's The Mulgrave Road (1951). This quality also characterizes Bruce's two chapbooks of the period, Wild Apples (1927) and Tomorrow's Tide (1932).

The social function of such "naive or primitive verse" is essentially to resuscitate traditional truisms, and its virtues are those that allow one to distinguish between the "simple and the commonplace emotion," between a sparkling renewal of conventions and unenterprising monotony or between a poem and a "conditioned reflex of nostalgia."

Beside the abstract literary patterning of Pickthall, Ross and others, a prospect opened on ordinary lives and places that was a necessary step toward the mythopoesis that takes place in the work of such poets as Pratt by fiat of an ordering imagination. For poetry in Canada to become prophetic as opposed to oracular, mythopoeic as opposed to mythical,
there had to be a return to the values of earlier representational poetry. The patriotism of the period is only the surface reflection of a deeper return to the visionary sources of the poetic imagination. A small number of poets became concerned with the discovery of new truths relevant to one's experience and perception of reality in Canada. Call Bourinot, Knister, Leslie and Stephen strove to represent reality as they saw it in their respective localities. The unity of their poems derived from their personal lives and from the desire to understand themselves at the level of feeling. In their poetry one finds a marked increase of love poetry, and it is perhaps worth noting that Roberts's later poetry was primarily concerned with love. They were regional as opposed to cosmopolitan and informal in their approach to that which justifies a poem's right to be considered a poem. They were subjective and descriptive poets who had no taste for the "difficult, lonely music" of metaphysical or mythical intellectualism. In this poetry the inner life of place is allowed to speak for itself in its own voice. In longer poetic narratives such as those by Robert Norwood, E. J. Pratt and others, to which I now turn, poetry in Canada began to search for values in patterns of myth organized beneath the surface of language arising from the locality.
Notes to Chapter Four


2 Vision lies at the point of divergence between the values of poetic divination and poetic soothsaying. The initial connection between the values of beauty and vision is, of course, in Coleridge’s “armed vision,” in which perception of the beautiful is guided by the poetic imagination. The difference lies in what happens after the beatific or archetypal experience has taken place. In poems valued for their beauty, vision is assumed to have revealed an archetypal pattern that has no essential relationship with reality. Such poetry records visionary experience. In poems valued for their vision alone, there is no essential relationship between the experience and a higher reality. What is essential is rather the truth of the vision and its applicability to present reality. The most natural figure of the poetry of beauty is perhaps the apostrophe, which the reader overhears. In the poetry of vision, there is always a stated or unstated “Hear ye” appended to the address. Beauty presupposes artifice separated from the flow of time; vision, by itself presupposes prophecy inseparable from the conditions under which prophecies are spoken. The Hebrew word for “prophet,” nābî, means “to bubble forth,” or “to utter.” In the time of Samuel other words, ro’eh and hozeh, came into use to mean a “seer.” The “prophet” proclaims the word of God; the “seer” beholds it in silence. The prophet predicts, warns, conveys religious instruction, interprets current events, promotes enterprises beneficial to the people, blesses and reveals hidden truths such as the imminence of judgement and the evil of the days.

3 “Foreword,” Acanthus and Wild Grape (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1928), pp. 9-13. The other texts I have used are: In a Belgian Garden and Other Poems (London: Erskine MacDonald, 1917); Blue Homespun (Toronto: Ryerson, 1925); and Sonnets for Youth (Toronto: Ryerson, 1944).
Munro Beattie's paragraph on Call in his "Poetry (1929-1935)," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1945), pp. 725-26, stresses the abortive nature of Call's modern sentiments, concluding that Call was conventional after all.


"Introduction," Belgian Garden, pp. 11-12.


Paul de'Man has dealt with the relationships between time, prophecy and the audience in his "Rhetoric and Temporality," Interpretation: Theory and Practice (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969), p. 287. The concept of a "moment of consolidation," is the subject of Lawrence Lipking's The Life of the Poet; Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981). To Lipking, this moment is a rite of passage or initiation into the atemporal world of literature in which a writer's values fall into place so that he comes to know himself and what he can accomplish. Such a moment was experienced by Blake in writing The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. After writing the Marriage, as Lipking says, Blake's spiritual, atemporal form set out "to walk through the whole world of time and space, interpreting its secret history and meaning" (p. 47). The experience of war preceded such moments in the lives of Blake, Nietzsche and
Neruda. Blake pieced together his Swedenborgian vision in the early years of the French Revolution. Nietzsche served briefly as a medical officer in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and produced The Birth of Tragedy two years later. Neruda was deeply troubled by the excesses of the Spanish Civil War and his Alturas and Canto general were initiated by his feelings toward the approach of World War II. Enrico Mario Santi, in Pablo Neruda: The Poetics of Prophecy (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), mentions that Neruda's Alturas de Macchu Picchu (1946) recorded Neruda's triumphant attainment of a coherent access to prophecy (p. 104). One could say that the experience of war can precipitate such a consolidation not only in writers, but also in literatures. This is my position at any rate, and I maintain that the experience of the Great War created conditions in Canada favourable to the (re-)emergence of a prophetic strain.


19 Pickthall's influential first collection was compiled under the influence of her mother's death in 1910. Norwood's work was written after the death of his son in a hunting accident. Pratt's ode commemorated his mother's death, and Grove's poems appeared in the death of his first child in 1927 and completed by 1930. Terrence Craig, "Frederick Philip Grove's 'Poems'," Canadian Poetry, 10 (Spring, 1982), 58-90. Sir John Bourinot died in 1932 at the age of sixty-five. Arthur was raised by his mother.


27. Arnason, "Democracy and the Short Story," Raymond Knister pp. 146-48 (democratic public). Stevens, "Canadian Letter," First Day, pp. 378-79 (fascination); "The Canadian Short Story," p. 388 (Americanization); and "Introduction to Canadian Short Stories," p. 394 (false values). Arnason, "Canadian Literati," Raymond Knister, pp. 163-64. Knister says here that the "unresilient atmosphere" in which The Unheroic North was received drove Denison from the act of creation. He blames the reading public for Stringer's commercialism after Open Water. He regards Pratt's works as profes-
sorial and witty, but lacking the "freshness of material and vision" of *Newfoundland Verse*.


40 Dorothy Livesay, "Carr and Livesay," Canadian Literature, 84 (Spring 1990), 144-47.


42 Stephen's first book of poems, The Rosary of Pan, was published in Toronto in 1923 by Macmillan. The second, large volume of verse, The Land of Singing Waters, was published in London by J. M. Dent & Sons in 1927. It was distributed in Canada under a British imprint. Stephen edited The Golden Treasury of Canadian Verse for Dent in 1928; this volume was published by Dent's Toronto agent, and was aimed at the Canadian market. Stephen had family connections with Dent; his brother, Gordon became Dent's Vancouver manager in the forties and fifties. Brown Earth and Bunch Grass (Vancouver: Wrigley Printers, 1931) has the dual distinction: being Stephen's best book and the least read, having been published by a vanity press. Dent also published Stephen's long poem, Verendrye: A Poem of the New World (Toronto, 1935). The poems in the chapbook Lords of the Air; Poems of the Present War, published by the author in Vancouver in 1940, are also collected in Songs for a New Nation (New York: Vantage Press, 1963).


"So Long," Brown Earth, p. 95, "Descent with the Dead (To Robinson Jeffers)," "To T. S. Eliot," "The Sad Fate of Gerontion" Songs, pp. 21-22, 29 and 126.


Northrop Frye, "from 'Letters in Canada' (University of Toronto Quarterly)," The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 37 (Smith), 84-84 (Imagism), 18 (formula).

Frye, Bush Garden, pp. 44-45 (myth), 6 (Bruce), 3 (naive or primitive).
Alternative Orders:
The Canadian Ode, Patterned Books, Robert Norwood,
E. J. Pratt, and Others

Stand where Posterity shall stand;
Stand where the Ancients stood before,
And, dipping in lone founts thy hand,
Drink of the never-varying lore,
Wise once, and wise thence evermore.

-- Herman Melville

One of the qualities of vision as a value of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada is its ability to assimilate the various genres of poetry to the lyrical mode. The period may rightly be considered as a lyrical revival in that it privileged the idea of a poem as an embodiment of the poet's consciousness as an "I" palpitating by; what Coleridge called the primary imagination or what Blake called the first principle of knowledge, imagination as spiritual sensation. In this inherited context, the poets of "The Decadent Interim" and "The Second Renaissance," in the words of Logan and French, chose either to present an artifact of their vision or to proclaim it in prophetic poetry. In the first case, beauty was fashioned out of the materials of the decadent imagination; in the second case, prophecy was conceived as a voice speaking in the locality and repeated in the experience of the poet. In either case, private, rhetorical, dramatic or
narrative expressions of poetic vision were appropriated into lyric on the printed page.

In the 'twenties, T. S. Eliot rejected the subjectivist tradition of poetic vision in England as a type of egoism characteristic of Arnold's time, a period of false and precarious stability. Victorian attitudes toward mind in culture supported an ideal of authority and humanism in which "the progressive centrality of the self as a register of meanings, literary and otherwise," came to depend "on consciousness as the repository of value." At the same time Eliot and Knister were developing their ideas of impersonality and objectivity as values of poetry, Lionel Stevenson wrote that "I am convinced that it will be fatal to poetry if the element of thought ever comes to be considered an essential attribute of lyric poetry." From here it is a short distance to the well-known slogans of modernism: MacLeish's "A poem should not mean, but be," William's "No ideas but in things," Pound's "Go in fear of abstractions" and so on. To one critic these phrases suggest "an intellectual and poetic devotion to the utterly particular moment, the unique instant caught by the senses as in one flash of the retina." In the face of this utterly particular moment, poets in Canada had two alternatives, either to write what Stevenson called the "lyrical lyric" from a "pure" and elitist poetic consciousness, sacramental but not intellectual, or to write from a more modern and social consciousness that could approximate primitive myth-making.
Wordsworth's *Prelude* is one example of the inherited tradition in which the narrative mode is transformed into lyric, tracing "the emergence of a prophet from a penseroso by means of a selectively dramatized experience with nature." The materials used to express this experience are drawn "only from the resources of mind and nature, of mind in nature," and hence must reflect the voice of the *I AM* crying in the wilderness. For Frank Call, this voice resounded within the context of a walled garden perceived in the Lennoxville community as an Eden immured from change and doubt by the simple piety and way of life of the habitants. For Bourinot, the voice originating in his locality carried within it a certain nervousness toward the garden-vision as an imprisoning Gethsemane. In Knister's and Stephen's experience, the theme of consciousness imprisoned within nature became more intensely dramatic and led to an intellectual tension between personal vision and the environment from which the mind escaped to seek refuge in systematic efforts of theorizing and philosophy. This tension served to invigorate a sense of purpose in their poetry and bring to fruition a critical spirit that had entered Canadian intellectual history half a century earlier in the essays of William Dawson LeSueur, for example. A. B. McKillop has shown that the acumen of these essays take the form of what Northrop Frye has called a "modern myth of concern." In this type of order-making, cultural values are conservatively configured around an older "myth of freedom"
whose province today is the safe-guarding of social values: "such as the tolerance of opinion which dissents from it."

Romantic freedom, however, privileged uniquely lyrical expressions of consciousness in nature beyond which a poet such as Keats could see only oblivion and death, his vision become a sod to the nightingale's high requiem.

This tension in the critical spirit of the time initiated the theoretical justifications of Knister's method of interpreting the inner life of things, and Stephen's mystical understanding of the will to power in terms of the Word and human love. These were attempts to arrive at myths of concern in which consciousness could be relegated to a point outside human life. Call, Bourinot, Knister and Stephen felt it necessary to render a narrative impulse to dramatize an "anxiety of coherence," to use Frye's words, in discontinuous, allegorical but essentially lyrical forms of prophecy. The effect of the ordering imagination on this language was such that the local could be heard to speak either in its own right or in a language that originated with God prior to man's knowledge of God.

In this country, the tension between a humanist sense of the freedom and power of man in his environment and feelings of humility and even culpability before non-human order and system may be traced back to the pluralist thinking of philosophers such as John Watson (1847-1939) and George Biedewitt (1873-1912). In their works, consciousness as an
awareness of the order in things leads to knowledge through an acceptance of the availability of many alternative possibilities of order, evolution and Genesis being only two of them. Failure to appreciate the existing orders of communities and environments could lead, they felt, to a philosophical and social cul-de-sac, a sort of cultural "Dust Bowl."

In this chapter I describe an uneasy alliance between the values of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada that was shaken by the growing strength of a critical spirit in which poets chose to pursue poetic excellence in terms of order. In previous chapters I have touched upon the narrative or ordering imagination in my discussions of MacDonald's "The Song of the Undertow" and Knister's "Corn Husking," but my purpose here is to determine the nature of order as the third primary value in my triptych of the period. A struggle for dominance existed among the values of the beautiful, the prophetic and the regulative. In this struggle, which has received so little critical attention, "alternative orders" of coherence wrestle with the singular powers of an essentially lyrical vision of poetic beauty and truth.

No model of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada, however, can categorize every species of the poetic animal. Knister's "Corn Husking," for example, is both lyrical and narrative, visionary and concerned with making sense of life as it is lived in the locality. In W. W. E. Ross's poetry a relationship between the values of beauty and prophecy strain
to the point of becoming an internal contradiction. There are many strange beasts in the verse of the period -- odes, verse-plays, unusual chapbooks, sports of the single-book poets and narrative, spiritual adventures like Macdonald's "Undertow" and Norwood's *Issa*. The values of these works often appear to be in conflict with one another. This conflict between a created and creative order, between artifact and myth-making, lies at the heart of the inspirational and psychological narrative verse of Norwood and Pratt; but it is also significant in the more lyrical voices as well.

**The Canadian Ode and Sports of Poetry.**

Before turning to the poetry of Robert Norwood and E. J. Pratt in the later part of this chapter, certain genres of poetry, resistant by their nature to beauty and prophecy as the dominant values of the time, should be discussed briefly. As a form of ceremonious public utterance, the ode was not convenient for the expression of intimate delight. As a form rigorously controlled in choice of diction and poetic figures, it was not amenable to the spontaneous voice of visionary exaltation. Wordsworth's *Intimations Ode* had, indeed, exploded the eighteenth-century conventions of the sublime that adhered to the form in his day and, in the company of the other great romantic odes, redesigned the form to accommodate unique and subjective experience. The Canadian odes of the period, however, return to an earlier conception of the ode as the
proper vehicle for the revealed truths of religion and the public veneration of monuments and kings. The reason for this is not hard to find. The ode was initially confined to the celebration of Empire and King. Gradually, the ode came to celebrate public themes relevant to an indigenous community.

It is doubtful that there ever was or could be an ode quite like Tom MacInnes's "For the Crowning of the King," written in 1902, a year after the coronation of Edward VII and his visit to Canada. Through the conventional language of the ode, MacInnes fashions an order in which time and space, the evolution of "The Briton" and his empire, are centred on the king whose rule circumscribes that order, and whose legitimacy connects earth and heaven through the racial "dream and prophecy" of a Jacob's ladder rising from the throne. Nineteen twenty-seven saw the appearance of two odes published as small books, Wilson MacDonald's An Ode on the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, and E. J. Pratt's The Iron Door: An Ode. At about the same time John Daniel Logan (1869-1929), the high priest of "Imaginative vision of reality and artistic treatment of theme -- imagery, form, color, music" -- in the first two decades of the century, published two odes and a verse epistle. These poems were written in Logan's later years, at a time when he was campaigning for the government job of Associate Dominion Archivist under Prime Minister Mackenzie King and for election into the Royal Society of Canada. At this time in his life, Logan had also advanced from his...
earlier metaphysical and literary philosophy to a more fully orthodox religious position. The third public poem was written on the occasion of the inauguration of a new president at the Jesuit's prestigious Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Logan became Head of the English Department in 1927, two years before his death in 1929. Pratt's ode was written on the occasion of his mother's death. MacDonald's ode is felicitously wrought, simple, plangent, serious, meditative. Like Logan's Mater Coronata, it contains a lyrical-prophetic interlude. Judged by its own merits, the poem is successful as an ode, yet curious in its detachment from that which it celebrates. Ironically, there is more of a sense of belonging in MacInnes's ode to empire than in this poem.

The close of the period saw the appearance of several odes. N. A. Benson's "Ode On the Death of George V" praises a king who "makest all true men king." In his "Ode for Dominion Day" (1929), like MacInnes and MacDonald, Benson stresses his inheritance of heroic Teutonic tribal migrations in the first millennium. However, their notion that contemporary poetic vision is a descendant of this racial inheritance is absent in Benson. In "An Ode for Toronto's Centenary (1834-1934)," Benson seeks dignity and orderliness in the local community, "revealed to history's gaze." In Clarke's "Ode on the Burial of King George the Fifth," the heroic ideal is excised along with the Wordsworthian, prophetic strain, and the ode is more formally sublime in the eighteenth-century manner, For,
Clarke, the king symbolizes in life and death the peaceful centre of an orderly realm. The king was a "comrade fair," and because of his decent humanity all men can understand the meaning of his death —

we shall seem
incredibly healed, no more the prey of sorrow.
No more self-traitorous
All men for all men in the coming mornow.

By virtue of the humanity, elegance and dignity of his verse, Clarke's commemoration odes for McMaster and Queen's Universities (1940 and 1941) evoke a sense that the natural and intellectual history of the Ontario region belongs in a history of man's "eternal thoughts."

Watson Kirkconnell's "To Horace" (1935) and his moving "Ode On the Death of Marshal Joseph Pilouski" (1946) continues this naturalization of the ode in Canadian poetry — as a vehicle for the expression of a world view in which the locality belongs. Watson's odes stand up well in comparison with the Horation odes of Allen Tate and W. H. Auden, "To the Confederate Dead" and "In Memory of W. B. Yeats." The Canadian odes represent a point of closure in which the poetic values of the early part of the century undercut each other. The genre achieved a distinguished hiatus in Kirkconnell's ode on a hero and martyr of Poland's struggle for sovereignty against Russia and Germany. Here, in the context of Kirkconnell's anti-communist feelings, the chief theme of the ode in Canadian verse is expressed:
chief theme of the ode in Canadian verse is expressed:

  Hew tributes out of marble to the best
  Of all whose blood for Poland has been shed,
  Even this uncrowned king, who sought instead
  Of sceptred pomp, a citizen's behest.

The status quo of the middle class is celebrated in this
figure of a democratically "uncrowned king" at the centre of
a orderly realm. Kirkconnel's work in translation of Canadian
poetry in other languages besides English and French
represents another aspect of this theme in the context of
multiculturalism in Canada.

Several early twentieth-century poets produced unusual
sports of poetry in Canada, which often took the form of a
single, highly structured book of verse, or an experiment in
the genres of the verse drama and the long narrative poem
(patterned books and chapbooks of interconnected poems could
be regarded as amounting to a genre in themselves; lyrical
undercurrents in longer narrative works often seem to distance
them from the epic form). Some of the more notable instances
are Calv's Acanthus and Wild Grape of 1920, the critic Arthur
Phelps's A Bobcaygeon Chapbook (1922), the painter Lawren
Harris's Contrasts (1922), the book of exotica, Fir-Flower
Tablets brought out by Florence Ayscough, missionary to China,
in collaboration with Amy Lowell in 1922 as well as Marcus
Adenev's unpublished Mansong, Pratt's The Witch's Brew (1925),
Ross's Ieconics (1938) and Sonnets (1932), critic W. E.
Collin's *Monserrat and Other Poems* (1930), Leo Kennedy's *The Shrouding* (1933), Pickthall's *The Wood Carver's Wife* (1922), Stringer's *Open Water* (1914) and his adventures with the verse drama on Classical subjects (1903). One could add to this list Benson's *Twenty and After* (1927) and its substantial sequel *The Wanderer: A Narrative Poem* (1930), in which the myth of the Fall is retold in terms of a prophetic voice of Toronto and environs. Stephen's *Verendrye* (1935) and Bourinot's 1955 collection of *Ten Narrative Poems* may also be added to the list. A. J. M. Smith's formalist and cosmopolitan conception of poetry, Dorothy Livesay's conception of the documentary poem and other developments of mid-century poetry in Canada perhaps evolved out of the conflation of values that is reflected in works such as these.

Nineteen twenty-two saw the appearance of a considerable number of Imagist works in Phelps's *Bobbacageen Chapbook*, Harris's *Contrasts*, Ayscough's *Fir-Flower Tablets* and L. M. Bowman's *Moonlight and Common Day*. In the same year, Logan and Pickthall published chapbooks of religious lyrics. Pickthall's good friend Isabel Ecclestone MacKay wrote an introduction for *The Wood Carver's Wife* and published *Fires of Driftwood*, her best book of verse. Phelps's poem "The Wall" is a memorably objective, Imagistic treatment of conventional themes and subjects. His Spenserian stanzas in the *Chapbook* ask beauty, "a burden but not speech," to relinquish "The crystal's divination half unglassed." One moment the dropped draperies and
dropped mask." "Bits from 'Bobcaygeon'" shows that Phelps captured briefly a poetic voice that was entirely his own:

Words are only the gesture
Toward the thing we are after,
The escaped or escaping
Beauty and spirit;
Like the hand toward a sunset.

Harris's contribution is the most distinctive of these works. Harris divided Contrasts into five groups -- "Descriptive," "Emotional," "People," "Definitions" and "Spiritual" -- that together cover the range of poetic subjects in his time. Most of the verses are prose-poems or prose sketches cut into lines, and the tone of the volume is generally irreverent and teasing toward the poetic values of beauty and prophecy. In "Overlooking the Sea," for example, the prospect of solemnity and majestic repose in the beauty of the sea "doesn't amount to much when you're not on it. It just lies out there, / A surface for ships to sail over." "Great Song" dispenses with the notion of a spiritual voice speaking from the inner life of things in three lines: "Down through the ages/ Goes the great song/ Quickening the dead." Harris does believe in a "great voice" blowing "in from the sea," filled with "radiant resurrections," a centre of light and hope "Sweet Jesus-breathed" in "The heart of man." His verses on emotions and people express his faith in humanity and friendship, and he defines "Blasphemy" as nay-saying to "aspiration, dreams and visions." Not playfulness, however, but the
detached tidiness with which he dealt with the values and conventions of poetry as he understood them is the chief virtue of Harris's only book of verse.

In 1930 Laconics was published by Ross, and Ryerson published William Edwin Collin's chapbook, Monserrat and Other Poems. Collin's poems reflect his interest in the Symbolists and Baudelaire, surrealism and in drawing one's subject matter from the store-house of world mythology and folklore. Within this context Collin burlesques the poetic conventions of his time and place. Ross published his second methodical and highly structured book, Sonnets, in 1932. In the following year Macmillan brought out Leo Kennedy's The Shrouding, the first appearance in book-form of the poetry of the Montreal Movement. In the poems of A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, A. M. Klein, Kennedy and the Torontonian Robert Finch the values of poetry in Canada were made to feel at home in the world of T. S. Eliot and Sir James G. Frazer. As part of a Canadian Forum series on conventional and modern verse in Canada, Collin's article on Kennedy enthusiastically supported the rejection of local precedent in "the blasts of these iconoclasts of whom Kennedy, I think, is the most destructive." In 1938, the date at which this study terminates, Collin published his article on Kennedy as the final chapter of The White Savannahs, a study of Canadian verse that has been called the first such study to employ a modern perspective (actually, John Murray Gibbon's "Rhymes With and Without Reason," publis-
shed in The Canadian Bookman in 1919, Stevenson's Appraisals of 1926 and Knister's criticism of the 'twenties antedate Collin). Also in 1936, the Montreal poets anthologized themselves along with Pratt in New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors, bringing to maturity a decade of development among this group of nay-saying poets. These two works inaugurated a "new" way of looking at values in which, as Smith complained quoting Archibald MacLeish in the famous "Rejected Preface," a poem should not mean, but be.

Kennedy's poems in The Shrouding, are designed to make sense of those elements in modern culture that threaten one's ability to accede to faith. Kennedy's single, youthful book of verse strikes at the sources of uncertainty and dread with an intuition of the ordering imagination that at the same time works to improve and straighten the poetic value of beauty. As Collin shows in The White Savannahs, Kennedy's precedents in his conception of beauty are the French Symbolists. What Kennedy does with these precedents differs from what Pickthall had done in the manner of his presentation of himself in the prophetic figure of a visionary. He resembles Pickthall, however, in that both poets strove to create beauty out of a preoccupation with death and in the context of an intense literary sensitivity. The difference is that where Kennedy chose to dramatize "waste places suddenly burst into flower like the Gardens of Adonis," in order to bring new life to poetry in Canada, Pickthall chose virtually to dwell in the
lands of legend. Collin demonstrates that the resurrection motif found in Kennedy, Scott and Smith reflects a new, vital and immediate sense of belonging in which the personal concerns of the poets merge with the larger patterns of western Christianity, whereas in the "borrowed power" of Pickthall's poetic world there is no sense of belonging that the reader can share. The primary value of the book is not so much the experiment, foreign example and intellectuality for which his milieu is remembered today, but rather the way in which Kennedy organized these traits and marshaled them against the forces of incoherence in modern life. Though Kennedy's genius was short-lived, he produced an enduring work that spoke directly to its audience's experience of dread and uncertainty, as opposed to poetry in which one overhears an evocation or repetition of literary values.

There may be another reason that Kennedy's poetic was dissipated in advertising copy after he left Canada for New York in the late 'thirties. The conflict in his poems between the values of creating a poetic order that makes sense of lived reality and creating poetic exercises in intellectual or metaphysical craftsmanship was not shared to the same extent among his colleagues in the Montréal Movement. It is significant that Macmillan accepted Kennedy's manuscript at Pratt's urging, since Pratt did share in this concern for the identification of meaningful patterns in social life. In the middle 'thirties, Kennedy dismissed his own efforts in The
Shrouding as empty surrealist exercises and concerned himself with radical, Marxist criticism of Canadian society and literature. This is not to say, however, that milieu did not appreciate the value of the ordering imagination as a reflection of the critical spirit of the time. Writers in general—with the exception of Watson Kirkconnell—responded to the Depression and the Spanish Civil War from a socialist perspective. Yet the genre of satire was more amenable to poets such as Scott and Smith. For Pratt, Livesay and lesser poets such as A. M. Stephen the prospect of the narrative poem seemed to offer possibilities for order-making, and a resolution to the tension in their attitudes toward poetic value.

A Conflict in Values.

In the poetry of Robert Winkworth Norwood (1874-1932), the conflict in values I have been discussing achieves harmony not only because of his skill as a technician in verse but also because of a flexibility in his approach to writing that may seem supremely self-indulgent to the non-religious. This aspect of Norwood's personality is also reflected in his milieu. Norman Shrieve, in his Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, describes the "posturing extravagance" of the Canadian literati among whose number Norwood was accepted before his move to the United States. The correspondence of men like John Garvin, Albert Durrant Watson and Norwood shows that they found it easy to find great poets among their number.
and that they felt responsible for an elevation of Canadian verse in which Mařiř would rival Shakespeare and Norwood, in his own opinion at least, might rival Browning.

This whole literary movement of the early twentieth century had, indeed, a curiously anachronistic affinity with that of the post-Confederation period; for, as then, the poets of the later time seemed obliged, as A. J. M. Smith has noted, to gather "their singing robes about them to hymn the mysteries of life and the grandeurs of Empire," to regard their craft as one of a very high "high seriousness." But, as Desmond Pacey remarks, with their nineteenth-century emphasis upon nature and love, they seemed unaware that a new age had come into being, and that even it was changing rapidly. The poet and man of letters of the time, in fact, stood apart from the restless world around him; he was fastidious in his dress, even to the celluloid collar, ribboned pince-nez, and stick-pin in his cravat; new members of the group were "new singing voices" who would surely "be heard afar"; if they were female, they were "brilliant daughters" of Toronto or Montreal; if male, they were "sons of Apollo."

What emerges from this passage is the quality of the detachment among these men. Shrive goes on to point out the esotericism of the seances and Spiritualism of A. D. Watson, author of the only book-length study on Norwood. Such esotericism constitutes a wide vein running through the theosophy of Ross and W. A. Deacon, Knister's prophetic vision of the lost gentleman in modern literature, the Ideal Love of John Daniel Logan for whom God was love but only on a higher plane of consciousness, A. M. Stephen for whom the will to love was of God, and Norwood for whom love was God. Thus, poetry in Canada strove to reinforce the detachment, loathe as the poets were to giving in to an attitude toward art and life in which only a fragmentary meaningfulness could be achieved or expressed.
The passage in Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada* referred to above states that there were four alternatives for writers in the first two decades of the century. "In the face of such a chaotic period," Pacey said that a writer could ignore it and "go on writing lyrics of nature and love," retreat from it by writing "regional idylls" like William Henry Drummond's *The Habitant*, accept it at face value as a popular writer, or "challenge it, satirize it, and attempt to reduce its chaos to form." Pacey felt that Leacock alone tried to expose the pretentiousness of the period, but in an ironic detachment Leacock was joined by Pratt. Many qualities of this point of view aside from irony, however, can be found in the poetry of the early part of the century, qualities that have been regarded for too long as non-poetic because of a lack of irony. One such is the moment of imaginative coalescence in Norwood's devotional poetry, a kind of poetic smelting in which religious verse becomes relevant to readers who would have certainty if not ceremony.

Norwood was a priest involved in ambitious machinations within the Anglican Church. Like Wilson MacDonald and Pratt, he commanded an imposing presence speaking in public. The combination of his attractiveness, seriousness and concern for his parishioners guaranteed him a considerable audience among the religious. His contacts with Kenneth Leslie and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, however, and Lionel Stevenson's appraisal of his works as having attained a new myth-making capacity in his
narrative poem of the maritimes, Bill Boram, were not enough to convince readers of poetry in Canada that his verse was significant in terms of that which provided an alternative of order to chaotic reality. Like MacDonald, too much of his reputation depended on his personal aura. He is remembered today as a member of the Song Fishermen and not entirely forgotten as an author of two religious verse dramas, but it is his fame as a pulpit orator that has been most enduring. Shortly after his death, a large following of his parishioners from New York and Philadelphia attended the unveiling of a memorial bust of Dr. Norwood in a ceremony that commemorated both the centennial of the prestigious St. Bartholomew’s church and the ministry of its sixth Rector.

He was born in New Ross, Nova Scotia, the son of the Reverend Joseph Norwood and was educated at Coaticook Academy and Bishop’s College in Québec, King’s College, Nova Scotia, and Columbia University, New York. He failed to distinguish himself at university, particularly in mathematics, and avoided society because, as Albert Durrant Watson explains, he "was not financially able to dress appropriately for social functions, and, besides, he desired to read so as to perfect himself in belles-lettres." He was encouraged in poetry by his professor of English, C. G. D. Roberts, and given the freedom of Sir Charles’s home and library. With his room-mate, Charles Vernon, in 1898, he privately published Driftwood, a chapbook of student verses. He was ordained in the same year in
Halifax and was highly regarded by the Cape Breton parishioners of his first charge. He married Ethel McKeen while in Cape Breton and went on to larger parishes in Quebec, London, Ontario, and Philadelphia in 1917, at which time he became an American citizen. From 1925 to his sudden death in 1932, Norwood enjoyed affluence and prestige at St. Bartholomew's in one of the most exclusive districts of New York City.

Norwood's first book of verse aside from Driftwood, was His Lady of the Sonnets, whose title poem is a sonnet sequence vaguely reminiscent of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese. The volume was published in Boston in 1915, but it and Norwood's first verse play, The Witch of Endor (1916), were written during his ministry at Cronyn Memorial Church, London, Ontario. The biography and the publishing history tell us that Norwood's allegiance was to his Church and that he looked upon his growing following in New York State as his poetry's audience. McClelland and Stewart handled local distribution as the Toronto agent of Sherman and French of Boston and George Doran of New York. His stature as an author was greatly enhanced by his ability to attract the attention of American publishers. His second religious closet-drama, The Man of Kieroth (1919), along with an undistinguished collection The Piper and the Reed (1917) and a sustained tribute to Browning in The Modernists (1918) were all written as verse-texts for his ministry in Philadelphia. Contemporary critics looked into these works and recognized the Mystical
Love that has been taught by John Daniel Logan among others and, noting that Norwood and Pickthall both chose to work with Biblical subjects, really had little else to say except to mention his commitment and success in the field of pulpit oratory or to point out that the poet's great-grandfather married a full cousin of none other than Oliver Wendell Holmes. Not surprisingly, aside from the chummy appreciations of his friends A. D. Watson and Elsie Pomeroy, Logan is Norwood's most extensive critic.

Watson saw in Norwood's verse a "masterful art and clear prophetic vision" where others noted an overly rhetorical flair, but many agreed that the main value of Norwood's verse was its sense of purpose. His treatments of Biblical subjects and the theme of inspiring love worked to interpret modern life for Canadians in such a way as to instill a confidence in religious narrative that had been shaken by Higher Criticism. As a poet, Norwood felt he should espouse the value of formal craftsmanship. He also correctly believed that his rhetorical voice could well stand in for the prophetic mode. His verse from the beginning sheared away from the dominant values of poetry in Canada, however, toward the values of a dedicated priest. In his verse as in his ministry, Norwood strove, as he says in "Fellow Craftsman" from His Lady of the Sonnets; to bring "full confidence to the lives of his parishioners in a co-ordinated Christian context that they "know / Thou and thy God can perfect everything!"
The Lady of the thirty sonnets in the title sequence is a multiple figure among whose aspects are Woman, Eve, "A dear Dream-Goddess," Diana, an immortal soul, innocence, a "hidden, lovely Eremite," a "goddess, robed in white," "Water turned to Wine," a "Dear Comrade," Helen of Troy, a "white light" and ultimately Christ as love incarnate. Similarly, the persona of the sequence is Man, Adam, a dreamer in a paradisal garden hung with precious metals and stones, Endymion, one who "knows: How you surpass the lily and the rose," the three wise men, a Roman slave, one of Charlemagne's servitors, Renaissance Italian nobles and Plantagenet and Guelph, robbed in purple. The primary value of these multiple figures is that they are an arrangement in which physical love is made over into a rule for ethical conduct. The major symbol of the sequence is the kiss, which is capable of miracle, "Transforming void and chaos" into the Kingdom of God on earth, here expressed as a paradis artificiel. The lovers "have lived before," through cycles of reincarnation, and in each life the mystical kiss comes closer to perfection and atonement within the divine unity of God. Neither death nor sin, flesh nor malice can withstand the onslaught of this patterning, designed to "Let Joy and constant Certainty appear." Thus, arrangement and decadent beauty combine in a restless and shifting world-view centred around an affirmation of emotion and physical love.

His Lady of the Sonnets continues with a sequence of
ten dizains, "Antony to Cleopatra, After Actium," in which the theme of love between man and woman as a mutual sacrifice akin to Christ's sacrifice on the cross is further developed. Then follows "Paul to Timothy," a dramatic monologue which later appears in The Modernists. Here, Norwood delineates Paul's conversion to faith in "One God, One Law, one Hope, one Faith, and One Desire." "Dives in Torment," the next poem, is a dramatic piece set in seventy-four quatrains reminiscent of Wilfred Campbell's "Lazarus" and Francis Thompson. The work is based on the tenet that this One Desire is the vehicle of salvation not only for the rich man but for all men. Moreover, through an act of compassion all men, like Lazarus in this poem, may attain to the divinity of the Saviour. Here, Norwood approaches the theme of democratic humanitarianism that we have seen in the Canadian odes. The book closes with a miscellany of songs and sonnets that reprise the themes of reincarnation, the perfection of the human spirit through history and the all-inclusive power of love.

It would appear that Norwood had set about to produce an annual book of verse-texts in his forties for the message of his ministry. His two closet verse dramas expand on the theme of love as modern man's answer to a lack of confidence in traditional methods of achieving certainty in salvation. The Witch of Endor continues his interpretation of the great stories of the Bible. The Man of Kerioth demonstrates that it was Judas's love for Christ and his impatience to know the
Kingdom of God on earth that led to his betrayal. Thus, the
drama absolves Judas and human love is again elevated above
all uncertainty. The Piper and the Reed is a collection of
miscellaneous pieces in which man's "task of slow emergence
from the clod," as stated in "The Slow Emerger," is to perfect
himself through love in the present and to learn through the
examples of history that "man must not chain a woman's soul,"
that "dear and tender fiction," in the allegorical sense of
binding society and poetry to too strict an adherence to
convention. The emotional intensity and dramatic force of
his other volumes is absent from Piper, allowing a vein of
sentimental and stilted optimism to appear.

Of his eight books of verse, The Modernists is the most
accessible today. These nineteen dramatic monologues whose
personae range from "The Cave Man" to "Darwin" and the "Voice
of the Twentieth Century" trace the evolution of human perfec-
tion through history in such a way as to make sense of life as
his readers knew it in 1921. In this grand design modern man
is a King. The Second Coming is to be understood in terms of
an immanent age of humanism in which Man becomes the sign and
the instrument of the Word, the Will and Law of God. As in the
odes of MacInnes, MacDonald and Clarke the most significant
aspect of this new King is not only that he is a common man
but that he stands at the controls of an orderly and righteous
community. Watson Kirkconnell's The Eternal Quest (1934) and
the "Centennial Tales" collected in 1965 follow the same
pattern that Norwood worked out in The Modernists to bring order to a jumble of abstract and contradictory images and motifs.

The Modernists may be one of the most readable works of religious or inspirational poetry to come out of the first decades of the century in Canada, but it was in Bill Boram (1921) that Norwood struck an entirely original note, producing a fiction of confidence and certainty that surpasses his earlier paraphrases of texts in Classical and Biblical literature. As Stevenson says, the subject-matter "is so simple, dominated by a single entity -- the ocean -- and devoted to a single calling, that the poem, without seeming overburdened with detail, presents a synoptic view of the locality." The appearance of Kirkconnell's The Flying Bull and Other Tales in 1940, a collection of Canadian Canterbury Tales inspired by a remark made to Kirkconnell by the English poet John Drinkwater -- "Why don't you make poetry out of your own backyard?" -- attests to a possible continuity of this sort of fiction-making in Canadian verse.

In Bill Boram the prospect of meaning and coherence is set in the Nova Scotia fishing villages that Norwood knew as a child and as a young priest in Cape Breton. Charles G. D. Roberts felt that its characters came intensely alive on the page and that it was a vividly objective dramatic narrative, despite the language Norwood chose to use, which was too vulgar for his taste. To John Daniel Logan, the poem as a
whole lacked "imaginative truth and dramatic power" because Logan believed that the conversion of Bill Boram's love of sensuous beauty into a love of spiritual beauty was "impossible." The poem combines subjectivity and objectivity in the manner of the documentary poem of succeeding decades, yet it does not belong to the genesis of this type of verse. Norwood impales his fiction of concern upon the crucifix of a sincere and rigorously worked out treatise on the One Desire. Though the text allows the locality to speak of the ways in which its people make sense of their lives, Norwood guides his readers through this aspect of the verse in a long, lyrical and narrative sermon that concludes predictably:

My story ends. The polar night is breaking.  
What do you think, my friend, of bad Bill Boram?  
To me this Northern sky with song is shaking—  
The song of Christ: "O come, let us adore him!"

Bad Bill Boram's blasphemy, atheism and drunkenness are not allowed to admit the essential incoherence of life in his place and time.

— Norwood's strategy for achieving this is to consign all evil and sin in life to relative insignificance with the one exception of malice, personified in the figure of "The She Weasel." Since malice is the only sin and since the scrap of tenderness in Bill must by its nature extinguish malice:

...With wealth
Of tenderness, amazing us, the thick
Hard hands of Borum paid in full the score
Writ down against him by the pen of God.

Bill's conversion is relegated to a symbolic triumph of good over evil. His salvation is a part of the design of providence in which all men, rich and poor, sophisticated and rough are evolving toward perfection, "Till Was and Will-Be had become I Am!" Bill's character is similar to Paul's in "Paul to Timothy," a "prisoner of Jesus Christ," condemned to sacrifice his body for the faith, except that Bill is uncouth and uneducated. Bill's saving grace, his love of flowers, is comparable to the Greek boy who sings a song of Sappho's to Paul in his cell. Yet both the boy and the love of flowers must be sacrificed to the cleaner love. Bill "disagrees wit' pa'sons" whose souls are frozen by orthodoxy and trusts only in his stoutness of heart:

"...an' these spars
A-tap'rin' up'ard tells to me a sight
More'n most o' men c'n tell. To hell wit' creeds!
Yet, begod, them dam tubers gets my goat.
I'm strong for fightin', an' I likes the deeds
O' devilt's; they is no man afloat
C'n lick Bill Boram, an' I'm surey bad;
But somethin' like a tuber's inside me,
That tunnels up'ard, somethin' that is glad
In darkness wors'n hell. What c'n it be?"

"Yer soul!"

"Oh, hell! they ain't no soul."

Yet Bill is redeemed despite himself because every man "is God's Son," and "his final need is always God."

Norwood relies heavily on a new approach to language in
this work in order to make the poem seem more immediately
relevant to the ordinary man, an approach divested of decadent
images of brilliance and the verbal tonalities of the
prophetic voice. Yet the narrator, Tom Blaylock, interrupts
the narrative periodically to supply a running philosophical
commentary. Tom explains that "they must live forever" who are
taught by an experience such as Bill's that even the smallest
forms of love are "at one with what goes up to God," an
omnipresent and imminent "mystical desire" whose name is
Christ: "God's ecstasy of pure creation, / He is the artist in
the soul of things." Tom, a parson's son, also provides the
specific lesson of Bill's example, that the truth of Christ is
to be found in passionate love of Him. It is Bill, however,
who has the last word in these lines, addressed to Bobby Fox,
"the sage of the cove," whose wisdom had "knocked to
smithereens / Them fables that made the Bible a poor book":

Bob, I found this at last: Things has their soul
Which hides from us, accordin' to the law
O' beauty, as a woman hides each breast,
But gives 'em freely to the lips she loves.

Norwood apparently lost interest in his poetic project
after, 1921. He had found his way out of a need to evaluate
poetry through "verbal color and music and his power of
spiritual vision and exaltation," in Logan's words, but he
failed to see that the ordering imagination could be a value
of poetry in and for itself. Bill Boram ends in comedy, with
the community's laughter at Bill's conversion far more convin-
cing as fiction than Tom Blaylock's solemn moralizing tagg
onto the close. Perhaps Norwood realized he had begun to drift
away from religious poetry toward the sort of myth-making that
The opportunity of realizing and accepting laughter as one
alternative to contraries and meaninglessness, however, was
denied to him by the death of his only son, Ted. The volume
*Mother and Son* (1925), records Norwood's personal search for
consolation and sublimation in verse. In most ways the book
resembles *The Piper and the Reed* in being a collection of
miscellaneous inspirational verse, but in two long poems, the
companion-pieces "The Mother of Cain" and "The Mother of
Christ," a new contrariety has opened in his poetic. Here,
woman is no longer an arrangement of disparate elements held
in a coherence by the force of an intellectual passion, but
rather she is the meeting-point of modernity and tradition,
doubt and certainty. In these poems, the language of Cain
reflects common usage, and the stately language of the ode is
employed for "The Mother of Christ." In his last poetic
work, *Issa*, published in New York and Toronto in 1931, a
spiritual autobiography of some eighteen-hundred lines,
Norwood's anxiety of coherence is overpowered by the lyrical
inheritance of his devotion to Christ.

In *Issa*, Norwood uses his own life as an exemplum to
teach the power of love to bring order and meaning to a life
such as his. The poem is filled with hundreds of images of
disparate things, fragments of the man’s life ordered by the force of his Christian devotion.

For nothing 'neath my roof
Lacked soul or self --
The inkwell in the hoof
High on the self,
A broken peacock fan tacked to the wall,
Trunk, hatbox, shot-flask, powder-horn, and all.

Memories of the localities in which he has lived and worked, of friends, relatives and loved ones jostle against one another for their places among ordinary things and a plethora of mythological and literary allusions in this "dance of words." As in "His Lady of the Sonnets," the object of love is a multiple figure. The multitude of its fragments is circumscribed and contained within the ordering power of Norwood's religious and intellectual passion. The poem serves to demonstrate "How love makes of all life a sacrament" and how love is also a rite of passage by which all must pass through the secret of Lord Issa, either to attain "their Godhood" or to be lost in "outer darkness." Heaven and hell "have but one door."

For Norwood, the secret of Issa or Jesus is a divine mystery, yet part of that secret is contained within the chaos over which this name is sealed. The resemblance of this obscure appellative of Jesus to Isis is in itself suggestive of a duality of conception. This initial duality of concupiscence and sublimated passion together with the concomitant promises of hell and heaven unfolds into three further contraries:
tion between multitudinousness and the One Law of the One Desire and the duality of poetry and redemptive silence. Honour and renown shall be due only to Christ when on his "glorious day" all songs will be quieted "and harps laid down." No book, church or creed "has value, where Faith, like a broken reed" is ruined by dogma. Yet Norwood's poem has a fissure running across the breadth of its metaphysics, and faith is already broken within itself. Poetry "was heaven's last, highest, holiest gift to earth," but poets no less than saviours are made "Upon the thorns Of life," and "However horrible the lonely night;" they must obey "The goddess, she will tell you what to say."

Norwood's syncretism in Lisa perhaps indicates one of the terminal points of the narrative tradition in early twentieth-century poetry in Canada. A similar point was reached by the ordering imaginations of such poets as A. M. Stephen, Arthur Bourinot and W. W. E. Ross, for whom poetic value led to an internal contradiction and inevitably to a sense of transcendent truth accessible only in silence beyond the capacity of poetry to communicate. In poetry of beauty such as MacDonald's or Pickthall's, the valuing of decadent stereotypes and artificiality in general reduces language to opaqueness; the timelessness of the figures stands forth disengaged from the vehicle of their expression so that the reader may only overhear the meaning. In the explicitly prophetic mode, as in Stephen's poems, the "voice" of the
prophetic mode, as in Stephen's poems, the "voice" of the locality is still overshadowed by the figure of the prophet and the timelessness of his vision. Knister, by dissolving the prophetic figure in an impersonality that foregrounded his language and images, had begun to open a pathway out of the trap that became a central motif in the verse of F. O. Call and Arthur Bourinot. Such was the situation of poetry in Canada when Pratt arrived on the scene.

**Pratt and The Surface of Language.**

Edwin John Pratt (1883-1964) managed to avoid this trap in his discovery of a means of continuing and perhaps completing earlier systematic efforts at order-making in Canadian verse that had left off, for example, with Heavyside's *Saul* (1857) and Mair's *Tecumseh* (1896). Indeed, the narrative impulse in Canada in the early part of the century was characterized by a desire to return to unfinished business of the past, and to tie its fragments into an order of the present. Pratt's contraries of human compassion and the ferocity of brute being has been well documented by his critics, and I need not dwell on their intricacies here. With respect to Pratt's place among his contemporaries, it is probably worth noting that Norwood's *Bill Boram* reflects Pratt's interest in the human community as a heroic subject but that Pratt's contraries differ in that his are articulated in an ironic as opposed to a lyrical vision. Pratt's irony, however, was not
imported from experimental verse written abroad but rather developed within a sensibility in which local history was inseparable from a concern for order-making in the present.

The prophetic voice of Issa like that of its most immediate precedent, Melville’s *Clarel*, written after a trip to the Levant in 1856-57, finds it impossible in Emerson’s phrase “to be where and what it sees since it can only see its own limits.” The similarity of these two works may help to indicate the specific point in past sensibilities to which the ordering imagination in early twentieth-century poetry in Canada returned, a variety of nineteenth-century subjectivity in which the poet perform must make a world out of his own mind. The American Civil War made the problem of perceiving the world as merely meaningful in its fragments inescapable. In Canada a legacy of the successful suppression of rebellion -- and the successful defense of national sovereignty against its symbolic encroachment in the War of 1812 -- had fallen into place. In Heavysege’s *Saul*, the king’s rebellion against God figures as a satanic force threatening the fabric of society despite its romantic justification as a rebellion of the spirit against an authoritarian God. Norwood had picked up this thread in the tradition in *The Witch of Endor* (1916). Mair’s *Tecumseh*, for which Norwood wrote a flamboyant introduction in John Garvin’s 1927 edition of Mair’s works, views coherence from the distance of a dramatist’s presentation of the conflicting arguments of his protagonists. In his work
Mair declines to conjecture on how the integrated Utopia of a
"noble, natural man living in pristine simplicity" could be
concretely achieved, allowing Brock's authoritarianism and
Lefroy's Republicanism to cancel each other out.

All of these works and others mentioned in this chapter
generate an almost Byzantine love of size and literary
allusion that surrounds and contains the symbolic sacrifice of
an integrating vision of coherence in the world. The funda-
mental Christianity of this sacrifice prevents it from
becoming a tragic acknowledgement of an absence of order and
purpose in a universe where the only perceptible laws are those
of sheer natural process and temporal succession. These works
preclude any possibility of existential hollowness, such as
Melville expressed by pilgrimage in Clarel or by the amorally
ambiguous sea of brute being which swallows the spirit in the
close of Billy Budd, Melville's last attempt to express his
metaphysical yearnings in prose, unpublished until 1924. In
the place of this troubled and troubling acceptance of failure,
to perceive a uniquely ordered world, the Canadian poems
postulate as law one or another of several alternative orders
such as the social-concern and Rousseausque nobility of
Heavysege and Mair. Norwood returns to the beginnings of the
essential disruptedness of modern life in order to heal it by
virtue of Isis-Issa's all-embracing rule of love and redemp-
tive grace. Pratt more successfully returns to this point with
a singular concentration on language as a regulative power.
What makes Pratt's imagination unique in his time is that he returns to the courage of Tecumseh and what A. J. M. Smith called the "geographical animism" of Isabella Valancy Crawford's "Malcom's Katie" with a determination to confront the incoherence of modern life on its own shifting ground. In Pratt's verse, what MacDonald called red, raw life is engaged at the level of language, so that his images of order in life derive from language itself, a growth arising from beneath the surface of language, controlled by the effects of the ordering imagination on that surface. Pratt's myth-making is limited to this level in the sense that his "The Cachalot," for instance, never helped the whales in the way Mair's "The Last Bison" helped to establish a federal sanctuary for the bison, or offered his reader the sort of hope and trust that Norwood's poetry could provide for his ministry or that Stephen's could offer the worker through an act of faith amounting to an exhaustion of the intellect.

Pratt's narrative poems are like myths in that they are quite paraphrasable, yet this valuing of story-telling for its own sake does not exclude the social reality that participates in the chaos beneath the surface of language. Pratt learned to sail through the Charybdis of what Knister called "the fascination of what's easy," choosing topical subject-matter and telling stories with which the common man could readily identify. At the same time his work was accepted as poetry by elite connoisseurs of beauty and form such as Smith and the
spontaneously adventurous John Sutherland. Pratt's poetry has been received into society as a legitimate form of myth-making to a degree unprecedented in Canadian verse, perhaps because the value of order in his work achieves a forcefulness of expression unencumbered by the internal conflict in values that one finds in less successful narratives of the period. Readers then as now accept his fictions as a way of making sense of their lives and their perceptions of the world around them -- at least for the time of reading, and that is all the time it takes for an audience's perception of reality to be permanently changed.

Pratt's *The Iron Door: An Ode* (1927) focuses on the idea of a centre necessary for an ordered view of life and death, and the possibility of an order of things in which life may continue after death. Pratt's symbol for this centre is an iron door wrought "cruciform" by a giant hand and embossed with the crest of death "in ironic jest." Pratt substitutes for the figure of the king whose death paradoxically reinvigorates the cultural values invested in his eminence, the figure of a good and decent woman -- never named, but inspired by his own mother -- in whose death, after a period of blindness and deteriorating health, Pratt invests the values of his humanity and his art. It is by an effort of understanding the meaning of her death that Pratt struggles to achieve an affirmation of order and purpose beyond the cycles of birth and death. Pratt
states that reality could not cancel "half the meaning of that hour" in which he suffered a vision of immortal souls traveling into the white light of heaven, but he insists that the meaning has value only as a fiction that must be sacrificed to "strange unreason" before the door can be unlocked.

Beyond the threshold of the door,
I could not see; I only knew
That those who had been standing, waiting there,
Were passing through;
And while it was not given me to know
Whither their journey led, I had caught the sense
Of life with high auroras and the flow
Of wide majestic spaces;
Of light abundant; and of keen impassioned faces,
Transfigured underneath its vivid glow.

This vision passes away, and Pratt is "left alone, aware/ Of blindness falling with terrestrial day," a blindness "heavy and old as clay" that can only register the light of this truth "shattered into hurrying streams" and like some "weird prophetic code" of "multitudinous voices that would tell/ Of the move of life invincible." The latter part of the ode devolves into prophetic lyricism, but Pratt is careful to curtail his exultation — "which outrode/ The vaunt of raw untutored strength" — by directing the reader's attention to his verse as a text that must be "read" before "The faded symbols of the page" can be deciphered.

The stately language of the ode allows the "I" of the poem to move in and out of lyrical passages with impunity, yet Pratt breaks away from the traditions of the genre by casting it in the form of a dream-visions. This strategy allows Pratt
to deal with a symbolic monument and with private symbolism while remaining within the structure of public utterance. The iron door itself is situated in chaos, surrounded by Time's "immeasurable stride" and winds blowing from "uncharted" quarters. Beneath this chaos and its centre, the dreamer beholds the forms of mortals coming and going, and hears their "fragments of speech" rise "upon the pauses of the wind."

Still further beneath these fragments lies a music, "In broken chord and troubled undertone," which "only the earth has known" during the crisis of planetary creation. The wind, like the breath of the dreamer who speaks to us, has the power to organize the fragments of human speech and the broken chorus of nature into a language that will carry the dreamer's private grief into larger patterns of meaning:

The cries were winged into language,
And forms which were featureless grew
Into the shapes of persons I knew
Who had tasted of life and had died.

Pratt's concern is not how fragmentariness is generated out of chaos, but rather how these fragments may be organized in such a way as to make sense of a decent woman's death.

As in Bowman's and Livesay's poems on their grandmothers, and Leslie's poem on his father, Pratt pursues the prophetic quest by reaching into the voices of his family and their locality, which is apparently inconsequential and naïve "against the drift of space." The dreamer remembers his father
and a master mariner, "his face grained/ With rebel questionings/ Urged with unsurrendered dignity." He realizes that his father cannot provide him with an adequate symbol of authority and that the seaman's challenge of an "unknown admiral of an unknown ocean" is answerable only in "The authentic word" of a story telling how his sons had died bravely at sea. "What signals and what codes prevail?" cries the seaman, "Do you bury your dead/ In the national folds?" The challenge itself, inserted into the narrative in italics, reflects the dreamer's quest for a native or local language by which courage and honour receive "their fair name and title."

The dreamer now turns to the authority of compassion and brute strength, by which he hopes to come to an understanding of the apparent meaninglessness of the death of "One whom I knew so well." This woman never doubted the certainty of an after-life, yet as she lies on her death-bed, albeit drawing "strength from out of the deep," a "young man" attacks the door and demands proof that her serene belief is justified. In his melancholic despair and need to believe that she is not gone forever, the young man imagines himself as Christ harrowing hell:

No one has seen this young man go,
Or watched his plunge,
To save another whom he did not know.
Men only guessed the grimness of the struggle,
The body-tug, the valour of the deed,
For both were wrapped in the same green winding-sheet,
And blood-red was the colour of the weed
That lay around their feet.
Life for a life! The grim equivalent.
Was vouched for by a sacred precedent;
But why the one who should have been redeemed
Should also pay the price
In the mutual sacrifice,
Was what he wished to know,
And urged upon the iron, blow by blow.

The "body-tug" is as necessary to retrieve life from chaos as
the breath or wind is necessary to separate a primal cry into
36 particles of speech. MacInnes, MacDonald, Stringer, Stephen
and Norwood in their own ways also relied on the body and its
feelings as the basis of their values. The pleasing, as it
appears in Pickthall and others, was used to transcribe the
transcendent on a material conception of the unconscious.
Strength, however, and the "valour of the deed" are not enough
to prove adequate for faith in Pratt's ode.

In his search for a language that will make sense of
the death of a loved one who has become a "stranger" in
death, the dreamer plunges beneath the surface of language in
a "mutual sacrifice," one of the body and the other of his
previous desire for beauty, "form and colour, symphony and
phrase." No longer shall the dreamer seek delight in "gods I
made perfect by man's hand," And Nature's glories on the sea
and land," for he has discovered in his melancholia that "the
Creator's power,"

Finding itself without a plan, was spent,
Leaving no relic at this vacant hour,
But a grave-stone and iron monument.

At this point the dreamer acknowledges that there can be no
transcendent meaning beyond the plain sense of language. The
"world/Outside the soul" betrays the soul's quest for truth.
Beacon signals become no more than "casual fires," and systems
of order-making are certainly "dead but for their power to
spin." The dreamer determines that "the whole cosmic lie was
predisposed" and faces it with indifference.

Indifference is the key to the meaning of the door, for
now a "sharp insistent cry" distinguishes itself against the
background noise of chaos, opens a rift in "storm-cloud's
eddying" and then transmits its signal to the dying woman's
cheek, signifying "The same dark burden under which the race/
Reaches old age." The death-cry, amplified through a chain of
images, places the woman at the centre of man's fate. Like a
lightning rod, she collects "all the shame" hidden in the
history of the race and is marked by the stigma of Eve. "At
this darkest moment," the dreamer continues, the wind rages
over drifting sands, having "fled the nescient hollow of God's
hand," and the broken music of the earth is confined in its
meaning merely to "the grey rotation of the surf." Sailors'
signals are unanswered; all colour and design in "full
eclipse." Here, the turning point of the poem is reached, and
Pratt takes refuge in a burst of prophetic lyricism. He
prefaces the final song of affirmation, however, with the
deflating assertion:

That a fool's belief in the incredible,
Joined to the sounding magic of a name,
Makes up the stuff of miracle.
From such a source, it may well be,
Came this supreme authority.

"I do not know," the dreamer tells us, "But in the dream the
door began to move." It moves only because the dreamer has
become indifferent to its "higher" meaning and chooses the
authority of a fiction he himself has invented not to explain
but to control the mark of death and find sense in the woman's
cry.

Ultimately The Iron Door: An Ode celebrates the
primitive and magical power of the story-teller to name the
world, to ascend from the depths of silence and unreason and
rediscover the wonder of names and naming deployed for its own
sake across the surface of language. To know the name of a
spirit means primitively to own that name and to be able to
exercise sympathetic control over the spirit; moreover, names
are kept secret lest the power of knowing them be used against
the knower. In not naming the "spotless name" that probes the
depths of his melancholy and measures it against a scale of
metaphysical questionings, Pratt places that name, the possi-
bility of a name, at the centre of the narrative. The power to
name the world outside the soul is one aspect of possibility
that Pratt brings to the surface of his narrative struggle
against the other. The miracle of story, however, which can
bring a sense of order to life, making the incredible into the
stuff of faith, is what finally proves the "case for life
before the throne of death" and names, in the sense of control—
ling the meaning of the crest upon the door.

The Iron Door may well be the key to the values that are uppermost in Pratt's poetic. It certainly marks the most significant event in his poetic career. One of his biographers has pointed out that on the publication of Titans in 1926 and the death of his mother in December 1926, commemorated by the ode in 1927, Pratt severed most ties with his past, "with Newfoundland and his ministerial commitments," having survived "his great feud with the Krakens and dinosaurs of his past" to enjoy "the prospect of a future which held rewards that now were his for the taking." Pratt's biography is perhaps better known than that of any other poet in Canada, but it might be worth noting that at this time Pratt was in his middle forties and had been practicing poetry for little more than five years. The death of his mother corresponded with a moment of consolidation in Pratt's attitudes toward his art. Until the publication of these two volumes of poetry, Pratt was seen by the public as a seriocomic and even caricaturish literary personality whom they knew from frequent newspaper items on his golfing exploits, his parties and his forgetfulness. Pratt did not discourage this attention, "welcoming anything, as he used to say, that promoted sales." The reviews of Titans, which was dedicated "To the Boys of the Stag Parties," and The Iron Door, as of his previous works, were as a rule gossipy and anecdotal. After the publication of the ode, the "serious"
readers of poetry in Canada began to find other, "deeper" values in his work beside gusto, the lighter side of irony.

The popular audience of poetry in Canada responded enthusiastically to Pratt's earlier works because they appreciated that the poetic value of order-making operated in these poems at the level of the public voice. He was speaking to them directly, they must have felt, in a way that did not demand from them a special kind of literary competence. It is often said that Pratt did not consider himself as a bridge between his nineteenth-century precursors and celebrated experimentalists of the time such as T. S. Eliot. Collin's *The White Savannahs* and Pratt's inclusion in the *New Provinces* anthology, both of 1936, were among the first works to suggest Pratt as a transitional figure in this light. However, though Pratt's modern diction, lack of sentimentality and craftsmanship won him approval among the younger poets emerging toward the end of the period, his values were not theirs. The lyrical consciousness that had mutated through its phases of Romanticism, Symbolism and Decadence in the more formal aspects of poetic expression, became "new" in the sense of an "I" of visionary poetry -- like Eliot's Tiresias or Kennedy's voice in *The Shrouding* -- that could be only a private though impersonal voice. Poetry in Canada had found within itself a capacity to turn away from this alienated consciousness in public verse before Confederation and, intermittently, in the poet-prophet's search for the "voice" of their locality since
then. In Pratt's return to a poetry of order he stepped out of the main stream of modern verse. This had two main consequences: it allowed Pratt's verse to speak directly to a real need felt by the local public, and it removed Pratt from a place beside other significant voices in England and the United States.

To most Canadians the rapid and startling changes in the modern way of life and the moral and ethical challenges of the Great War, the Boom and the Depression were to be blamed on the Americans and the leaders of Europe. As Canadians resented Americanization by means of the automobile, the radio, the magazine and so forth, so Canadian readers and reviewers looked upon experimentation in verse as "Yankee." Canadians were in general opposed, as Northrop Frye said in a review of Toward the Last Spike (1952), to any attitudes that approached a revolutionary contempt for history and an impatience with the law. Under these conditions Pratt was to enjoy uncommon popularity and literary renown in his own country because, like Norwood, he had found a way to make a rule of life livable. The law in Norwood's myths of concern was constructed of love and sublimation; the same might be said of Pickthall concerning the poetry of Beauty. Pratt's way was to make laughter the rule and after the publication of the ode, the co-ordinated actions of human groups engaged in heroic struggle against an indifferent and recalcitrant world, such as soldiers, the crews of ships, Brebeuf's community or
the men who laid down the first transcontinental railway in
Canada. In either case, laughter or the actions of men, it is
the legitimizing authority of Pratt’s approach to story-
telling that was received into society as the primary value of
his works.

The poems Pratt called “Extravaganzas” in his 1944
Fable of the Goats,” “The Depression Ends,” and “The Truant,”
all met the need for a sense of return to better and more
stable times. These poems met this need by creating myths of
concern out the materials of high spirits and comedy. They all
organized a view of life that by its nature allowed readers to
laugh at themselves, and in this form of catharsis to enjoy
the sense that a better and steadier world had returned, at
least to the space of the time of reading, an hour or so of
coherence the memory and the value of which reality may not
wholly cancel.

In “The Witches’ Brew” Pratt accomplished through
laughter what Norwood had attempted to do through love, the
organization of contemporary feelings for the literary and
mythological figures of the western cultural inheritance into
an order to which they belonged. Norwood’s multiple figure
is, in a sense, a table of all items relevant to the present
and local situation. A similar strategy had been employed in
the poetry of vision in the form of Whitman-like catalogues as
appear in the verse of MacDonald or Stephen. Pratt’s innova-
tion was to render this encyclopaedic impulse into the rule of his particular brand of story-telling.

According to the witches' plan,
All life whose blood did not ring true
Must be excluded from the brew.

The poem simply names the ingredients of the brew — "Pickles, dynamite and jam," "Budweiser, Guinness, Schlitz," "Tongues of the Ganges crocodile," the inventory of the spree, the three witches, an obscurely erudite amphibious composite-god called "the Cretan," and all "his industrious progeny," Satan, St. Peter, the good and evil angels, "Tom the cat from Zanzibar," the immortals, and all the denizens of hell, itemized in five numbered lists ranging from "Statesmen and apothecaries" to Puritans who never learned to dance, Ph.D.'s and Sadducees (and this is only a partial list). The result, of course, is an orderly arrangement that permits us to sit back and laugh at the utter chaos raging beneath the surface of the narrative.

E. J. Pratt's future reputation and influence as one of the foremost poets in Canada was not certain with the publication of *Titans: Two Poems* in 1926. His myths of laughter as alternative orders provided a certain detachment from the fragmentary meaningfulness of modern life, yet critics and publishers such as Lorne Pierce were doubtful if not hostile to the values expressed in Pratt's earlier extravaganzas. Newfoundland Verse had led Pierce to look "upon Pratt not only as a potential champion in Ryerson's camp, who might bring
credit, even renown, to both the firm and himself," but also as a protegé Pierce might guide and shape into an embodiment of the great Canadian poet:

one in whom 'the best of the old tradition refurbished' was combined with the 'high seriousness' and 'desperate earnestness' which he felt Canadian poetry lacked. But The Witches Brew and Pratt's eagerness to have it published -- and under his own name -- struck Pierce as singularly aberrant. ... and Pierce as a consequence, for the time being at least, refused to have no part ... of either Pratt or his verse.42

Thus it was that Pratt approached Hugh Eayrs at Macmillan. Macmillan apparently saw Pratt's order of laughter as a saleable commodity and arranged to handle the Canadian end of a contract between Pratt and Selwyn and Blount of London. A similar contract was drawn up the following year for Titans. After Pratt's next book, The Iron Door, however, Macmillan published Pratt exclusively in Canada.

In The Iron Door Pratt spoke of the sounding magic of naming as the stuff of miracle, and in the Brew sought to prove the poetic power of naming and ordering ingredients and inventories --

And myriad substances whose form
Dissolved into quite other freight, in
Beneath the magic of a storm.

Similarly in "The Great Feud" his order-making constituted a "strange activity ... radiating everywhere" so that brutes, on land and water,

Had come to feel, in a dumb'way,
That their protraction, too,
Might, with the birth of any day,
Dissolve before a miracle.

Again, in "The Great Feud," Pratt uses lists of names — and his consummate skill as a humorist and verse-craftsman — to organize a detached control over "ignorant, inarticulate, Cold-blood barbarians" that dwell in the sea's depths. The confidence Norwood hoped to teach in his ministry, a confidence that certainty of salvation could be obtained in the here and now, Pratt instilled by enabling the common reader to feel that he shared in Pratt's administrative power to bring order into his fictional worlds.

It was sufficient to Pratt's fictional world that the question "What is man?" may be adequately answered thus:

"What is his pedigree?"

'The base is guaranteed, your Majesty —
Calcium, carbon, phosphorus, vapour
And other fundamentals spun
From the umbilicus of the sun,
And yet he says he will not caper
Around your throne, nor toe the rules
For the ballet of the fiery molecules."

"The Truant," from which these lines are taken, has a dual centre, man in his capacity to make sense of things by his own lights, and the sovereign authority that dispenses penalty and humiliation for man's "pride of mind" and blows the dust of all man's accomplishments back into the "spinal festival of fire" in which the universe began. The essential Christianity of Pratt's vision, his trust in the tree of salvation
despite his distrust of the story of the Fall, appears in the
last line of "The Truant," "No! by the Rood, we will not join
your ballet." The same tree appears also in the close of the
"The Great Feud," where the lone survivor of Pliocene Armaged-
don -- "The female anthropoidal ape!" -- dazedly surveys the
molten red "Of plain and ridge on which were spread; The
incredulities of death":

There, at the hollow of a tree,
She found her lair, and brokenly
She entered in, cuddling her brood
To withered paps; and in the hush
Of the laggard hours as the flush
Of dawn burn't out the coppery tones
That smear'd the unfamiliar West,
The heralds of the day were moans,
And croons, and drummings of the breast.

These sounds are not only the origins of language but also the
origins of a power that belongs to man in the larger context
and to poetry in Canada in the lesser.

Pratt's public voice occupied an uneasy position among
the rights of poetic values in Canada in the early part of the
century. I have discussed the tension between the popular and
the serious in earlier chapters, but here one could say that
we find the inevitable resolution to one of the major problems
facing poets in Canada during the period. The need to publish
abroad before the Toronto publishers could risk independent
ventures of publishing in the local market, the further need
to gain a popular success abroad since the "serious" avant-
garde markets in England and the United States were filled
with their own indigenous experimenters, and the insistent nationalist impulse arising from the youth of the country all led to serious and popular values that were inextricably entwined. By rediscovering the organizing power of language, Pratt succeeded in bringing an equilibrium to this situation.

In his later works Pratt continued this enterprise, treating the actions of men facing crises such as war or shipwreck as a kind of language in the sense that language became for him a model by which to bring order into his perception of reality and history. The later language of action is perhaps more prescriptive than the language of intellectual play that characterizes his earlier works. In his last and greatest narrative poem, Towards the Last Spike, Pratt returned to the pre-Confederation era for his subject, thus completing an oeuvre whose unity lies in a will to re-organize the past in an order of the present perceived as —

The same, but for new particles of speech —
Those algebraic substitutes for nouns
That sky cartographers would hang like signboards
Along the trespass of our thoughts to stop
The stutters of our tongues with their equations.45

"As now, so then," the poem begins, life "in calm/ Preserving them, in riot rupturing" the broken fragments of man's ability to make a world out of the speech of his locality. One of the most interesting features of the Spike poem is the analogy Pratt unfolds on the surface of his narrative between Sir John A. Macdonald's Word of Command and the taming of nature, the
creation of community -- "a nation's rise, / Hail of identity, a world expanding," -- and "A common mother-tongue." Near the end of the tale British Columbia threatens to secede from the Dominion, which would "ruin -- language" in the sense that the Dominion and the language of the actions of men by which the nation is created are one. I now turn to a discussion of "The Cachalot," published in Titans in 1926, a poem that clearly expresses the place of Pratt's values in early twentieth-century poetry. In this poem we will see how the regulative value subordinates beauty and the prophetic.

A letter to A. J. M. Smith, W. W. E. Ross told Smith that he was right to select Ross's poem "The Diver" for The Book of Canadian Poetry in 1943, because that poem "indicated, in 1928, my own future course to date." In "The Diver" Ross expresses his wish to explore the world of dreams -- the green and strange light of a still pool "seen from within" -- and return into the safe and ordinary light of the surface. Ross noted that in Canadian poetry there are "quite a number of poems about diving, whereas they are lacking in U. S. and English [sic] writers. Of course, Pratt's whales may be at the bottom of this phenomenon!" One critic of Ross's poetry has argued that Ross seldom penetrates the surface of the sensory veil in his approach to language. Unlike Pratt's seascapes, Ross's image-oriented lakescapes are unpopulated but by the eye of the observer and are basically two-dimensional like a
Picasso painting, especially in his later attempts in the surrealistic vein. Above the central plane of the imagery there is darkness and infinity ironically scintillant with unknowable stars that images may reflect but never interpret.

Beneath the surface of the sensory plane there are "secrets" analogous to dreams, whose suggestiveness is not whose meaning can be arranged upon the image-surface. Pratt's solution to this problem is to arrange actions and names in an order that seems sufficient without transcendent, historical or psychological levels of reference. In other words, rather than arranging a metaphorical surface that pretends, so to speak, to reflect deeper meanings, Pratt's language is organized only on one level like a sheet of ice lifted from a frozen pond.

The first part of "The Cachalot" begins significantly with a royal genealogy that presents the reader with the sperm whale as a monarch of the sea. Pratt's extensive use of actual place-names in the beginning and throughout the poem instructs the reader to accept that his protagonist might belong to the real world. The fictional family chronicle of the Cachalot's forebears is presented as having actually occurred off the shores of Labrador, China, the Bahamas, Mozambique and so on. The interplay between fiction and reality is further underlined by the device of tying the exploits of the cachalot's ancestors to sea-faring explorers such as Leif Erikson, Marco Polo, Columbus and others. Pratt's readers in the twenties would have been struck not only by
the "Taurian" masculinity of his rhymes and meter but also by
the way his poem tacks between reality and fiction.

"The Cachalot" would have been something new for those
readers who had been accustomed to delight in the company of
noble figures that inhabited the fictional worlds of their
favorite poets: poetic heroes such as those invoked by
Pickthall in her poem "Dedication," a poem that employs the
same meter and rhyme-scheme as Pratt's. In "Dedication",
which sets out Pickthall's poetic credo, Biblical, exotic and
"beautiful, fierce lords" are called upon to encompass --

The glory and the gleam
Of a whole age
Snared in a golden page.

Pratt's work decreases the aesthetic distance between the
world in which his audience lived and the world created by his
words and places the latter in the foreground.

The sovereign grandeur of his subject established,
Pratt then combines place names with anatomical diction in
order to express the nature of the cachalot. His choice of
diction is not merely an alternative to that of a poet like
Pickthall, whose favorite words included "moth," "little,"
"dawn," "silver," "sweet," and "sleep." The anatomy of the
whale is presented as a metaphor of the power and force of its
"dynastic name," a "marvel" cast from the hand of time whose
organic being is greater or at least equal to the power and
force of death. The whale becomes "wonderful within" as the
narrative describes his maw as a "sepulcher," his interior large enough for ships to navigate among the lungs, lymph-glands, liver and pancreas. The whale contains an immense treasure of ambergris, "reservoirs of oil/ And spermactis" that "fighters of the Saxon race" have desired and died for in fatal combat with the whale, "Littering the waters with the chips/ Of whale-boats and vainglorious ships." In the same way that the place names develop a tension between the fabulous and the historical, Pratt's use of anatomical names acts upon the theme of death to develop a tension between the power of the whale's life-force and the death that it occasions for those who challenge it. Knowing the names of the anatomy of this life-force is his way of gaining control of it for the purpose of his narrative. Both genealogy and the categorical nomenclature of anatomy contrast sharply with the natural flux and welter of the sea. These two ordering strategies are employed to transform the hero of Pratt's beast-fable into a symbol of the power of coherence if not in nature then in the hand of mythic or narrative time. This power is transformed from marvel into a way of understanding ourselves and the world in which we live by means of a re-organization of the language with which we express our understanding of the world.

Paradoxically, next to the heart and the storming "cataracts of red blood" of the cachalot, the treasury of its ambergris is described as a "fearful labyrinthine coil. The
coils of the giant squid, which Pratt elects to identify as the mythical kraken, are also fearful and labyrinthine. This correspondence between the labyrinths of the fabulous and the labyrinthine complexity of the empirically observable -- the anatomy of the internal organs -- serves to generate the overall structure of the poem. The meaning of the whale emerges from its marvelous genealogy and becomes, as it were, a body dissected upon a table. It is then re-engaged with the marvelous in the form of the squid. Winning this struggle, the whale becomes a body to be broken down into the sundry commodities of the whaling industry. In the end, however, the marvelous returns in the guise of the whale's fabulous rage, which destroys the whalers by striking a tremendous blow. "Ten feet above and ten below/ The water-line," plunging both antagonists into the fiction of their tragic heroism. On the surface of the language, therefore, meaning is created by playing two types of language against each other. We do not expect to find deeper meanings because the fabulous metaphors transfer their resonance to scientific metaphors and vice versa. The game is enough, but this is not to say that other levels of meaning can not be sought.

Devoted to the kraken and its epic confrontation with the cachalot, the poem's middle section contrasts with the first part in that anatomical and place names are far less pronounced. In their place are mythological epithets. The kraken is a Gorgon, while the cachalot is a bull; their
struggle is described as that between a Titan and an Olympian God; once the cachalot has devoured its foe, the kraken lies "Like Vulcan's anvil in his belly." Part two has a single place-name; parts one and three have many.

The whale and the squid are thus presented as contrary forces in nature. The dialectic in nature's "war of opposites" achieves synthesis when the whale incorporates the cephalopod into his life-force by digesting it. This incorporation of the labyrinth by the digestive system of the cachalot -- a system accessible to us through anatomical science -- indicates to us that the whale's victory can be understood as anarchy being brought under control. When the whale is killed in part three the synthesis is broken up, and life and death are again released into the chaos of the monarch's dying fury:

That orgy of convulsive breath,
Abhorred thing before the death
In which the maniac threads of life
Are gathered from some wild abyss,
Stranded for a final strife
Then broken in a paroxysm.

The kraken resides in "dull reptilian silence," and the cachalot is presented by means of a precise catalogue of names. The kraken attacks by rearing its "unmeasured" tentacles upward from the slime to grapple with the whale, whose exact tonnage and measurements have been given. The kraken is motionless "as a boulder set/ In pitch, and dead within his lair." The cachalot travels the world's oceans.
The kraken first senses the cachalot’s approach in terms of poetic language, “No febrile stirring”:

But a deep consonant that rides
Below the measured beat of the tides
With that vast, undulating rhythm
A sounding sperm whale carries with him.

When the battle is over and the squid’s abyss is inside the whale’s belly, “a rose shaft” of dawn etches a ripple, “eloquent! Of a freshening wind and a fair day.” The cachalot may now, by “unchallenged right” and “demonstrated merit” assume the lordship of all mammals in the sea. It is not hard to imagine that Pratt was aware of the importance he was about to assume in Canadian poetry when he wrote these lines:

And nobly did the splendid brute
Leap to his laurels, execute
His lineal functions as he sped
Towards the Equator northwards, dead
Against the current and the breeze.

In terms of the values this work demonstrates, it would seem that for Pratt, once the treasures of fiction and the fabulous have been incorporated in a language of order an opening is made in nature through which an essentially poetic revelation emerges. The sea becomes metrical, and this rhythm echoes within the whale as eloquence pours forth over the horizon; the whale assumes the laureateship of nature. The revelation is one of reason, however, for the whale is characterless, a mere table of names, and the coherence it commands is ironically “dead,” in the precise sense of “dead on.”
The eloquent rose shaft of dawn must separate the world in which we actually live from that other world that Aristotle regarded as the origin of poetry in the Poetics, the actions of good men of noble family that are serious, complete and of a certain magnitude. In Pratt's poetry, one appreciates that actions such as these are recovered from nature and that the order and magnitude of these actions is reflected in the language of his plots, characters and diction. Pratt's deployment of mythical and scientific language against each other is meant not only to unfold the order and system of his fictions like a map, but also to possess and control this map and through narrative poetry to bring its coherence into the real world of his audience. The antagonism of two modes of comprehending meaning and meaninglessness in life serves to generate the narrative tension of Pratt's long poems. This tension, released through comic or tragic means, leaves behind it a calming and powerful sense in the mind of the reader that the tumbling and rearrangement of chance and change has once fallen into a universal and comprehensible pattern. The reader may then accept that since there is one pattern in which he can believe -- the tragic death of the cachalot, for example -- other fragments of meaning and purpose must exist to be measured and organized in the process of telling and reading stories. Thus, the poetic value of order in Pratt's works promises the reader that a purpose does exist in creation, and that life therefore is not without meaning.
The third part of "The Cachalot," some one-and-one-half times the length of the first two parts, develops another aspect of the dialectic between order and the labyrinth now at the centre of its domain. Pratt has said that he regarded old-style whaling as a variety of romance in his youth, but this is not the reason he made his whale a king. Pratt regarded his poem as a mock-heroic epic in which "scientific facts are the essential basis." In part three, the cachalot's royal genealogy is matched by another sort of hierarchy: the militaristic ranking of a merchant ship's crew. At the apex of these two orders there are the founder of the cachalot's line, who followed Leif to Labrador, and the captain, "so far-famed." At the nether end, closest to the present and furthest from the fabulous, are the whale-king and the regular sailor, Hall. Hall has a special relationship with Captain Taylor, for it is Hall who, in the fifth boat, risks capsizing in order to pass the spliced lines from the other boats to Taylor on the Albatross. These lines are attached to the one harpoon that is securely fixed in the whale's side (the first strike is thrown by Gamaliel, the second mate). Hall represents more than a link between the action on the sea and the captain on-board ship, for the two hierarchies meet in this link between king and common man. The dialectic between coherence and meaninglessness thus evolves into matters of sovereign power over and against the strength and courage of an ordinary man. As we have seen in the Canadian odes, this is a central concern of
the public voice in early twentieth-century Canadian verse.

Captain Taylor is as widely travelled as the cachalot; place names abound in the third part. Where anatomical names had revealed the essential life-force of the whale (as a power of order, and with the precision of a scalpel), the technical names relating to ships and whaling are meant to underline what is essential to the cachalot's human adversary. Technology confronts the whale's life-force, and the sailors' articulation of their technology, their means of making a living, is a match for the monarch.

In the first two parts of the poem Pratt's poetic language integrates the fabulous into the historical and scientific. Pratt knew that his kraken was not a mythological beast but rather the Architeuthis dux, which can grow to sixty-five feet long. Yet he presents it as the kraken and his meaning is clear. The order that the origins of poetry make accessible to the world in which we live must confront and control subjectivity of expression. The confrontation cannot be avoided because the subjectivity of the marvelous does not adhere to life but slips away into the realm of dreams and what in "primitive" religions is called sacred time. Life consists in action and an actual integration of the contrariness in nature. Part two closes with the image of the dawn, symbolizing language's synthesis of order and life, which at the same time, by virtue of "demonstrated merit," commands the
forces of chaos and death. This resolution, however, only serves to display another contrariety over the surface of language, that between heroic narrative and the speech of the common man:

The day was fine; 'twas two o'clock, And in the north, three miles away, Asleep since noon, and like a rock, The towering bulk of the cachalot lay.

"Two hundred barrels to a quart," Gamaliel whispered to Old Wart.

"A bull, by gad, the biggest one I've ever seen," said Wart, "I'll bet ee, He'll measure up a hundred ton, And a thousand gallons of spermaceti."

"Clew up your qab!"
"Let go that mast!"
"There'll be row enough when you get him fast."

Unlike the "reptilian silence" of the Kraken, men make "bloody noise." The incorporation of men's speech into the narrative corresponds to that of the Kraken's coils into the anatomically described interior of the whale. What new synthesis is possible between a language of order and life and the everyday speech of rough men?

After sounding from the first strike, the cachalot returns to the surface of the sea "In a white cloud of mist" as a terror, "Silent and sinister and grey." The whalers attack and their harpoons drink "blood with energy more fierce/ Than theirs." The attack pierces the cachalot in its very being:
...nor could he shake them off
With that same large and sovereign scoff,
That high redundancy of ease
With which he smote his enemies.

Men are "impious;" the whale is "pristine." However, it is the kraken within the monarch that provides him with the "cunning" to attempt to mesh the whalers in "a rapid moving spiral coil," which would entangle the lines and capsize the boats. In the ensuing struggle Hall positions a barb "Three feet into the lower bowel." The Titan's pride is broken "by a thing called a second mate," and in his death throes draws the men into death "like a royal retinue" following "the Monarch to his grave." In the conclusion of the poem, men's speech and courage join the cachalot in death as the fabulous kraken joined it in life. A new synthesis has been wrought: the order, magnitude, seriousness and completeness of the poem itself, which is "dead on." In the fictional world thus created, men and their speech are subservient to the sovereign, and the sovereign is language itself. The narrative has found a level at which myth, science, and the common man have each their proper place.

In "The Cachalot," Pratt, like Ross, stands outside nature, wielding a power of dominion over reality. Pickthall had once said that when she wrote she felt "a queer sort of thing sometimes... a sort of flood of power... Sometimes it used to seem that the very clay was molten in that fire.
and then, — 'I saw that it was good.' " As Frye said in his review of Pickthall's Selected Poems, in 1957, "when she writes of Père L'alemont she is subtle and elusive, not because her religion was fuzzy, but because she was writing lyric; when Pratt writes of Brébeuf he is dry and hard not because his religion is dogmatic, but because he is writing narrative." Frye suggested that Pickthall and Pratt may have more in common than is usually supposed once differences of genre are taken into account. I am suggesting that their difference and their place in Canadian literature may be addressed by reference to the values they aspired to express and in terms of which their works were received and later discarded by Canadian society as poems.

Nonetheless, when Ross writes of life in death and nature's on-going flow, he creates a metaphorical unity of feeling and fact because he is writing in the lyric mode. When Pratt writes of the evolutionary force and grandeur of life and the tragedies suffered by magnificent species he creates genealogies because he is writing in traditions of mythopoeisis. The poetic value of order would seem to be most at home in narrative while poetic beauty would seem to seek expression more often in the lyric. These generic distinctions, however, become blurred in a poem such as Pickthall's "Mons Angelorum" or Knister's "Corn Husking," where both narrative and lyrical elements combine to fashion an emotional situation that the reader can share. Moreover, poems in which the values of
beauty and order are uppermost create a reality that can be
grooved over the face of nature, and poems in which the
prophetic value predominates are essentially acts of atonement
with nature as it is perceived.

Truth or revelation is the site of poetic power for a
poet like Knister or Stephen, but for other poets of the
period values of poetic beauty and order form the seats of
their powers as artists. As a value to which a poem aspires --
that which justifies its existence -- poetic order goes beyond
the power of beauty to create an artifact that is good in
itself. Poetic order transforms the world in which we live
into a good, and allows us a measure of detachment in which to
enjoy that goodness. The order of a poem like "The Cachalot",
with its tabulation of words and things unfolds a narrative
surface on which fragments of meaningfulness are arranged and
presented to the reader as a kind of yard-stick with which to
gauge his own experience and perception of life. This value
contributes to the unity of the poem and produces a
Weltanschauung of the world to which the poem belongs. Such a
view of the world, an achievement in which the locality can
experience feelings of belonging and well-being, may well have
been the inevitable culmination of early twentieth-century
poetry in Canada.
Notes to Chapter Five


2 Anne Williams, Prophetic Strain: The Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 70-71. A. B. McIlroy, A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1979), p. 135-37 and 135-69. "Northrop Frye, The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism (Loomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), p. 36. Frye also says: "The myth of concern exists to hold society together, so far as words can help to do this. For it, truth and reality are not directly connected with reasoning or evidence, but are socially established. What is true, for concern, is what society does and believes in response to authority, and a belief, so far as a belief is verbalized, is a statement of willingness to participate in a myth of concern.... it has its roots in religion, but religion has also at that stage the function of religio, the binding together of the community in common acts and assumptions" (p. 36). For Frye, the values of a literary work may be determined within a dialectic of concern and freedom. He demonstrates this thesis in an analysis of the defenses of poetry by Sidney and Shelley (pp. 56-78).


5  Nathaniel A. Benson, Ode On the Death of George V (Toronto: Ryerson, 1936); George Herbert Clarke, Selected Poems of George Herbert Clarke (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), pp. 27-41.

6  Watson Kirkconnell, Centennial Tales and Selected Poems (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), 147-50 and 170-73.


9  W. E. Collin, Monserrat and Other Poems (Toronto: Ryerson, 1930).


13 See: Dorothy Livesay, "Canadian Poetry and the Spanish Civil War," CV/II, 2, No. 2 (May 1976), 12-16; Sandra Djwa,


15 Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), p. 84.


17 To most readers of his time, Norwood was a pulpit orator first, a verse dramatist second, and thirdly a poet. Norwood's published poetry comprises eight books: His Lady of the Sonnets (Boston: Sherman and French, 1915); The Witch of Endor: A Tragedy (1916); The Piper and the Reed (1917); The Modernists (1918); The Man of Kiriath (1919), Bill Boram (1921), and Mother and Son (1925) were all published by Doran in New York; Issa was published by Scribners in 1931. There is a copy of the student chapbook Driftwood (1898) in the Logan Collection of Canadian Verse at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Among these works, Logan discusses the sonnet sequence and the verse dramas, considering Bill Boram as a dramatic poem, in John Daniel Logan and Donald G. French, Highways of Canadian Literature: A Synoptic Introduction to the Literary History of Canada (English) from 1798-1924 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), pp. 211-12, 288-90 and 296, 315-319 and 321.

18 Watson, Robert Norwood, p. 24. Norwood was considered by Logan in Highways as a member of "the Second Renaissance," and comparable with Pickthall except that she wrote of "private experience," whereas Norwood's was a public voice of interpretation on the subjects of "Ideal Love" and the "divine
function of Woman," pp. 288-90. V. B. Rhodenizer, in his Handbook of Canadian Literature (Ottawa: Graphic, 1930), was more succinct on this point: "Whether he is writing in prose or in verse, his ultimate purpose is to interpret the universe in terms of Divine Love" (p. 237). Lorne Pierce's Outline of Canadian Literature French and English (Toronto: Ryerson, 1927) provides biographical details not found elsewhere, and considers Norwood chiefly as a dramatist of great compassion, but also as a satisfying interpreter "of the Biblical times and characters" (pp. 117-18).


27. Issa, pp. 21-25 and 59.


29. Clarei: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, ed. Walter E. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, 1960). Issa appears on the surface of things to be a self-indulgent song of himself and all the immiscible elements of his day to day life as a cultured and compassionate priest in eastern North America. Yet Norwood evinces none of Whitman’s confidence in himself to contain multitudes. On the contrary, it may well be more appropriate to consider Melville’s Clarei as the immediate precursor of Norwood’s work. Clarei was Melville’s long narrative and allegorical poem -- running to six hundred pages -- on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1856 and 1857. It was written, however, during that period in American history at which the Civil War threw into harsh relief all of the doubts that Americans had begun to feel towards the ambiguity of good and evil, and the certainty of a transcendent order and purpose in the universe. Like Issa, Melville’s work is filled with a multitude of disparate images, but Melville’s images are unreal where Norwood’s are made to participate in another, higher reality. Melville’s Jerusalem is a symbol of emptiness, in which man is divorced from any sense of coherence in nature. As one critic has said of the work, Melville attempted to approach “the trust of Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam’ in some ‘larger’ subjectivity, with the significant difference that Melville counts not so much on hope as on courage.” Issa’s readers, like Melville’s pilgrims, must in the end confront religion as a “jumble of abstract and contradictory propositions from which the spirit has departed.” Bernard Duffy, Poetry in America: Expression and Its Values in the Times of Bryant, Whitman, and Pound (Durham, N.C: Duke Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 88-89.

30. The point is made by Sandra Djwa in her ”Introduction” to Charles Hevysege, Saul and Selected Poems, including excerpts of Jephthah’s Daughter and Jezebel: A Poem in Three Cantos, ed. Sandra Djwa (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. xix.
31

32

33
A. J. M. Smith, "Introduction," The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. xxx. Smith's point is that nothing "that can really be called Canadian" aside from the odd descriptive passage was written in Canadian poetry between the times of Crawford and Pratt.

34
Smith, "Some Poems of E. J. Pratt," Towards a View: John Sutherland, The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Introduction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956). Smith, of course, scoffed at Sutherland's creative interpretations of Pratt's works. Smith concentrates on the simplicity of Pratt's formal craftsmanship; Sutherland's concern was to demonstrate the manner in which Pratt's fictions participated in the larger mythological and
ideological structures of western culture. Smith, as a poet of beauty, saw that value in his reading. Sutherland, as a poet of prophecy or truth, sees the worth of Pratt's achievement in terms of an effort "to sing life as it actually is," descending from "the Christian dogma of incarnation." For Sutherland, as for Call, Bourinot, Stephen and others, the pathway of the Word into the works of a poet "lies through Gethsemane" (pp. 188-9).


36. Gilles Deleuze, in his study "The Schizophrenic and Language: Surface and Depth in Lewis Carrol and Antonin Artaud," Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), makes the point that "To make language possible" has a very particular meaning. It signifies to distinguish language, to prevent sounds from becoming confused with the sonorous qualities of things, with their so-called oral-anal determinations. What makes language possible is that which separates sounds from bodies, organizes them into propositions, and thus makes them available to assume an expressive function. Without this surface that distinguishes itself from the depths of bodies, without this line that separates things from propositions, sounds would become inseparable from bodies, becoming simple physical qualities contiguous with them, and propositions would be impossible. This is why the organization of language is not separable from the poetic discovery of surface. The greatness of language consists in speaking only at the surface of things, and thereby in capturing the pure event and the combinations of events that take place on the surface" (pp. 284-85).


38. W. E. Collin, The White Savannahs (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1936; rept. 1975). Collin predictably defines the difference between Pratt's "young art" and his "important works," The Roosevelt and the Antinoe and The Titanic, by reference to Eliot's "objective correlative" (pp. 127-37), and concludes his study of Pratt's works by comparing his imagination to Donne's and his achievement to Rimbaud's (pp. 140-44). Klinck's "A Biography" in Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and His Poetry (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), attempted to correct the impression that Pratt was a
transitional figure linking the "invertebrate rhapsodising" attacked by Douglas Bush in his article "Making Literature Hum" (Canadian Forum, Dec. 1926), and the "subtlety of the metaphysical group," Collin and the New Provinces poets who "were "new" in a sense not applicable to Pratt" (pp. 30-33). Klinck, however, makes his peace with the the "new" poetry in his concluding remarks, in which he describes Pratt’s poetic as an "Imagism of action" which "provide the ‘objective correlatives’ which Mr. T. S. Eliot demands for the expression of emotion in the form of art" (p. 56). Klinck quotes Pratt saying that poetry should rise above romantic individualism, so that poems prepare a "semblance of reality which people so insist on in an industrial age," however, and concludes that the chief value of Pratt’s verse is "the evocation of common experience" (p. 57). Sandra Djwa’s E. J. Pratt: The Evolutionary Vision, in which Pratt’s language is seen to be modern, but his thought to be nineteenth-century idealist, has made the picture of Pratt the transitional modern an established feature of Canadian literary history.

39

D. M. R. Bentley assembles considerable evidence to support his claim that the the period was characterized by a general feeling of "indifference, even hostility, towards American" free verse in the politically sensitive period prior to the Second World War: "A New Dimension: Notes on the Ecology of Canadian Poetry," Canadian Poetry, 7 (Fall-Win. 1980), 16.


42 Pitt, The Truant Years, pp. 287-88.


Lorne Pierce, Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance (Toronto: Ryerson, 1925), p. 76.

Frye, Bush Garden, pp. 86-87.
Conclusion:

On the Economics of Poetic Value

One of the first problems treated in this study of the values of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada was the intensity of the pleasure that met the reading tours of Wilson Macdonald and Bliss Carman, the works of Louise Morey Bowman, Marjorie Pickthall, the greater part of Arthur Stringer's verse, Arthur Bourinot's earlier work, the poems of Audrey Alexandra Brown and much else now forgotten. To read these poets today is to be struck by their thinness; the poetry seems to be marked by the absence of a depth of feeling to which we could respond, and our reading therefore tends to be cursory. Yet the large audiences these poets enjoyed in their time simply did not diminish during the Depression and the Second World War. The emotional response, no less than astonishing, that the popular poetry elicited was still keenly felt by many readers well into the 'fifties. It was almost as though the detachment in this form were an immense pleasure-machine that kept running despite the fact that the Montreal poets held poetry in Canada under the cold shower of T. S. Eliot during the Depression and World War II.

Lotta Dempsey, a free-lance reporter for the periodical market of the 'forties and 'fifties, once recalled listening to the poet Katherine Hale, the wife of John W. Garvin, who
had been a considerable influence in publishing circles in the
beginning of the century:

She stood by the piano and read poetry in that strange
voice of hers, mellow yet edged, like a bell tempered by rain
and sea wind. As she read, magic melted the corners of the
room and they ran together and dissolved in a kind of dream
where only those words with the deep undertone of piano
chords, and the other-world mood they conjured up, existed.
Many of the poems were her own poems of our Canadian woods,
streams, lakes, rocks, houses and people. Everything she
touched, from the mellowness of Quebec to the harsh clarity
of the prairies, took on a fourth dimension — a spiritual
and inner quality that has always been a part of this
country, but has had to be found out and brought into focus.

She ended, and reality crashed down upon the large
audience gathered in that tiny hotel dining-room. Katherine
Hale had finished her recital.

What is remarkable here is that the author is merely covering
the recital “as a workaday reporter on a routine assignment.”
The hyperbole is unintentional. I have tried to account for
the pleasure with which such poetry was received as well as the
scorn with which it was met in academic circles, such as Frank
Underhill’s remark that the Canadian art world was replete
with “drug addicts.”

I have addressed this question in terms of an economic
equilibrium — in both the psychological and social sense of
economy — that was gradually eroded by changes in literary
values in Canada and abroad. Leon Surette has argued against
what he sees as an obsession in Canadian criticism that
amounts to an out-moded variety of nineteenth-century national-
ism, the search for a native or collective genius usually
through a “topography” of stock literary themes. The preced-
ing chapters should suggest that the essential divisiveness — Riel, French-English, Old World and immigrant culture and so on — that Surette finds in such "topocentric criticism" in Canada was largely internalized in the poetry of the first decades of the century, so that it is difficult now to speak of the values of this poetry as falling in line with themes such as Frye's "garrison mentality," Atwood's "survival instinct" or Dennis Lee's phenomenological "earth-world" confrontation. One could say, I suppose, that A. J. M. Smith's generation re-externaled this divisiveness in the form of a qualitative distinction between popular and serious in terms of poetic values and the expectations of the audience. However, aside from such thematic concerns, the preceding pages have shown that successful Canadian writers of the period felt at home in international markets supported in part by the stature of such literary figures as William Dean Howells or John Masefield. As the fifteenth laureate, Masefield's praise of D. C. Scott's "The Piper of Arni," for example, some forty years after coming upon it in the American magazine Truth, testifies to a certain homogeneity among literary values in Canada, England, and the United States. Well into the fifties, the majority of readers in these countries knew precisely what values they expected from the books they read.

The readers of this cosmopolitan milieu favoured poems that communicated a sense of pleasurable felicity, continuity with the past and assurance of coherence in the present. This
poetry expressed consciousness in the form of a resistance to
the new sensibility emerging from society's response to radio
and recordings, jazz, the automobile and the street-car,
importing transatlantic communications and transportation,
electricity in the home, central heating, large-scale migra-
tion into the cities and the manic-depressive mood of society
between the wars. The readers who made Pickthall interna-
tionally renowned viewed her poems as liberating the spirit
from the transient reality of an incoherent present through
the permanent power of beauty to lift the emotions to an
"other-world mood," above and beyond the here and now. The
intense pleasure with which poetry was received into society
could be a more specifically Canadian response, however, when
one takes into account the size of the market for so small a
company of local talents and the voluptuous dissipation that
marks the experience of reading as it existed in the early
part of the century.

If markets, ideas and emotions can be said to consti-
tute an economic background for writing, then readers' pre-
ferences will be bound to the dynamic interplay between that
which determines what gets published and read, and the intel-
lectual and emotional tenor of the time. In an "axiography" of
the period, a study of the values dominant in a given period,
the divisiveness of which Surette speaks, surely a variation
on Cartesian duality, would appear to have been diminished in
value. This aspect of the dynamics involved in the reading
habits and aesthetic choices of the time blurred the distinctions between reason, intellectuality and serious writing on the one hand and desire, pleasure and popular writing on the other. I have found it difficult, for instance, to explain the differences in popularity between poets in whose work the same values were expressed. Thus, to re-evaluate the values of early twentieth-century Canadian verse, I have been forced to concede that these values functioned on a number of different levels at the same time. One of the reasons that this poet has been neglected might be that readers today can no longer recognize and respond to an equilibrium in the economy of writing powerful enough to sublimate the pleasure of reading to the sort of beatitude expressed by Lotta Dempsey in the popular market or by critics like Lorne Pierce in the serious.

Poets like George Herbert Clarke and W. H. E. Ross had to wait until the mid-fifties until their audience could be said to be anything more than a small circle of friends. Their verse was never popular as was Pickthall's or Pratt's, yet the value of order and system that underlies the ideal of beauty, craftsmanship and traditional form in Clarke's poetry became uppermost in Pratt's poetic. I have shown that the curtailment of an in-dwelling or Emersonian transcendence by the option of mechanistic theory in Clarke's "Halt and Farley," and a similar curtailment appears in the formalism of Pickthall's verse. A belief in transcendence as held by MacDonald recurred surprisingly in Ross's nature poems, where Imagism combined...
with religious philosophy to elevate form of expression over the recalcitrant observable content. Pickthall's content was subjective enough to be accepted as "spiritual," whereas Ross and Clarke strove for a certain objectivity of expression.

Pickthall's readers looked upon her as a poet who would preserve all that was most beautiful and inspirational in literature. The experience of reading or listening to poets such as Pickthall or Hale was understood in their day as a means of translating the mundane present into some divine and unchanging awareness. Indeed, Pickthall's most devoted reader believed that no doctrinal system of ideas nor "reasoning of any kind" could at all match the satisfying imaginative experience "through which we are identified with the beautiful which is not only felicitous but also loving and true."

In this experience lay Pickthall's "real interpretation of life." She exemplified the principle of beauty in all things, "which, in a world of decay and disillusionment, defies death and constitutes the one loving reality."

Perhaps the kind of poetic beauty to which Clarke and Ross aspired was too much a good in and for itself to receive the sort of public recognition that Pickthall enjoyed. Poetic beauty was the end toward which these two poets strove to find expression, but the audience of poetry in Canada was not prepared to accept a poem as an object among objects, however well-wrought, self-sufficient and self-contained it may be.

"Pickthall's domesticated variety of the decadent imagination
was also a good in and for itself, however, justifying the poetic act and producing the materials of poetic unity and wholeness. Yet this intrinsic valuing did not exclude her readers' desire for beauty as a means to an end -- emotionally uplifting and inspirational moments of truth, beauty and coherence in their lives -- because she fitted her poetic creations into a context of literary familiarity and an intimate mystique.

Then as now, readers of Canadian poetry felt that a sign of a local poet's excellence was the mention of his or her name alongside that of an admirable foreign poet in the same sentence. This habit must not be permitted to obscure the significance of the poetic values brought forward in the early part of the century. Pickthall was forgotten shortly after her death in 1922 not because poetic ravishment of the reading experience was no longer felt to be relevant, as Lotta Dempsey's 1948 reportage clearly shows, but rather because the literary context in which her poems took their place was no longer a familiar context to her audience. It became fashionable not to read her as literary taste zeroed in on the poetic revival that had begun some years earlier in Chicago and London. In a sense, no one ever read her, since it was customary to read local talent in tandem with foreign models.

Thus, literary popularity in the early part of the century was not so much a product of the values to which poems aspired as it was a product of the literary contexts provoked.
the skill of publishers in manipulating this experience. As I have shown, the conventions of the decadent imagination contributed an ambience of other poems and places to the quality of reading in the period, which was not considered imitative until those inspired by Eliot and Auden self-consciously attacked the older generation as imitative in their attempt to effect a revolution in literary taste. Once the question of imitativeness is put aside, the literary ambience of this kind of verse can be seen to contribute a powerful richness to the expression of its values of beauty, truth and order. In the economy of such writing the healthy emotional gratification of a literary and cosmopolitan ambience figured prominently alongside market conditions. Today, such pleasure in reading seems remote to us, as does the market in which it flourished and the intellectual presuppositions by which a poetry of the pleasing, a poetry of prophetic truth and a poetry of order could be possible.

Values in poetry could be treated in terms of an "exchange value," the reader paying with his attention for some service or good that he expects to receive from the text. An objective and serious reader may find a poem worth reading for the sake of its internal structure and its place in the larger structure of literature in the widest sense. When such readers wish to communicate what they hold to be true values to the public, they enter the mass market of book-buyers with a "quality product" of their own, a critical means by which any
reader learns to discriminate between true and false values. In this case, false values will be the values for which the readers of popular literature exchange their currency: entertainment, titillation, consolation, adventure and escape. These false values, of course, exist in good literature. Shakespeare entertains, Rabelais titillates, Herbert consoles, the Iliad and the Odyssey are adventure stories. The major problem with associating poetic values with taste and the reader's response to what he reads is that literature becomes subservient to a way of thinking that might best be described as conditioned by the ideology of the market-place. Hence, it is important to remember that literary values respond to historical conditions — especially when one means to reassess some four decades of poetic activity that has been summarily dismissed as trash. A distinction between irony as a true and serious value and poetic ravishment as a false and popular value, for example, would seem to have been drawn only as the period came to a close. As a criticism of the period such a distinction is inappropriate, since it can tell us only that the economy of early twentieth-century poetry in Canada was different than our own.

The period adapted the "Victorian compromise" and American genteeelism to the Canadian situation, a hybrid that combined nostalgia for a passing age of authority with progressive optimism for the future of the nation, an aversion toward materialism, and a concern for refinement and decorum
in that which constitutes the value of a work of art. Canadian nationalism helped in the creation of the Canadian Authors Association and often led the editors of Canadian magazines to select patriotic poems rather than poems of a more "abstract" character. In the publication of poetry, however, nationalist chauvinism was not as significant a factor as other values that contributors, editors and publishers placed upon the poetic word. In Willison's Monthly, on the publication of the collected Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott in 1927, Knister praised "a mood of detachment" in Scott's poetry in terms of "clear vision and sure rendering" that "might have been written anywhere in the English-speaking world, by a man cultured, urbane, of keen observation and delicate imagination." In the same year, also in Willison's Monthly, C. F. Lloyd had characterized the spirit of the times in terms of a repose, conservatism and stability "expected of a courier in the presence of his sovereign." In the Canadian imagination the sovereign was venerated because he symbolized an ordinary man at the centre of an orderly realm. In Pratt's "The Cachalot" of 1925, however, this sovereignty was passed onto language, and the centre became a labyrinth.

Canadian losses during the Great War were overshadowed by the euphoria many Canadians felt in their country's proving herself a force to be reckoned with among the Allies. Such euphoria was perhaps not available to Americans who remembered the 1860's or to Europeans who would never again be able to
look upon government and authority with equanimity. European malaise and American innovativeness in poetic technique were forced upon Canadian verse at a later date through the curiosity of a younger generation alienated from nationalistic commercialism and the ideological detachment that derived from the colonial origins of their society. The poets I have been discussing in this study looked upon the accelerated change of the twenties, Bolshevism and psychology not so much as a threat to be feared, but rather as conditions that could be handled in their own way. Pratt learned to harness the power of the labyrinth. When these controls were disregarded, the "new poets" found themselves adrift in the depths of language.

As early as 1917, the University of Toronto magazine, The Rebel, challenged Canadian intellectuals to seek "an honest criticism of things as they are." Raymond Knister's criticism of British, American and Canadian poets could in no way be considered as nostalgic or genteel; nor could William Arthur Deacon's essays, which Knister, in 1924, admiringly compared to Turgenev's essays. The nostalgia of the twenties was evolving a spirit of criticism on its own: The Canadian Forum, Canadian Mercury and New Frontier only accelerated the process. The emergence of political radicalism in Canada was not as sudden as was once thought. A clear differentiation occurred in the twenties between revolutionary and gradualist elements among the radicals. When this minority grew in the thirties to become "for the first time,
of major literary and cultural significance," the split between revolution by forceful and parliamentary means contributed, for example, to the difference between The Canadian Forum and its abusive rivals in revolutionary fervor, The Masses and New Frontier. The split also appears in the violence and restraint of Smith's and Scott's respective prefaces to New Provinces.

These highly-charged responses to Canadian life and literature bring us back to the pleasurable intensity with which I began these concluding remarks on the problem of values in early twentieth-century poetry in Canada. I have wanted to suggest that there were good reasons for the obvious sentimentality of the readers in that the pleasing was for them an almost mystical form of resistance to uncertainty and change that would be remarkable in any nation of the Western world. However, one must admit that within this attitude there existed a hard core of critical acumen.

I have also wanted to suggest that the poets' apparently complacent trust in "borrowed" forms and conventional subjects was perhaps a function of the pleasing, intended to heighten the reading experience with a sense of continuity and coherence in time and space. As the emotional ground for the production of the values of beauty, truth and order, the pleasing helped to stabilize poetry in Canada in the early part of the century, yet its force equally to the visionary and ordering traditions alike. Yet the basic
duality that runs through Western culture could not be
sublimated indefinitely. Sooner or later someone like A. J. M.
Smith had to come along and trample the lotus-blossoms of
Pickthall and Hale into the mud of reality, even though such
works as *The Wood Carver's Wife*, "Corn Husking" and "The Iron
Door" had already gotten themselves dirty on the floor of
Cyclops's cave.
Conclusion: Notes


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