As a result of problems of finance and of length, the publication and release of this issue of the NEW MITRE has been delayed until now. The editor sincerely apologizes for this excessive and extraordinary lateness. It is hoped that the material herein will provide a small compensation to those who have been either upset or bewildered by the situation. And to the people who contributed material and, in darkness, have been forced to wait to see their work in print: thank you for contributing, and a special apology.

Richard Price
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THE OLD MEN

Whirling eddies of November leaves whisper about their feet. They shuffle through them alone go towards empty flats with their beer. Sometimes they meet, chat in lobbies then take the elevator, the old men.

lynn pageau

AFTER THE SNOW STORM

Whipped by a riotous wind, shoals and eddies edge a wild, frozen sea: delicate curves of light and dark revealed by bright sun. A bird hops the crest of a frozen wave.

A hard, white expanse exhibits a line of dark trees sharp against a brisk sky: snow-blown fields after a wind-blown storm.

dedicated to Claudette

lynn pageau
WINTER

It was a hard winter. 
Ice froze in troughs and under eaves. 
Mysteries moved 
in the still of the trees 
and the straw barns, 
and the owls kept the cold 
in their icicle-omened feathers.

There, the man kneeled on stone 
and called the flame of love 
but the fire broke hard 
by the iron wood, 
and all the clear birds of the wood 
listened at his stone, cold gate.

His skull was full 
of the flurry of wings, of birds 
splitting the air like flames.

On the floor among ice, 
he called out to the birds 
and the beasts 
in the slow fire of the woods. 
Branches snapped in their sleeves 
and cast white shadows 
on the woolly cabin roof.

Inside, 
his dream was born in pain.

A prayer: 
to the flying birds 
and curling fire smoke, 
to the breath in the wind 
and the shadow under snow, 
to the warm blood huddling 
under the window skin.

Then, in a heave of light, 
the snow brought forth miracles of snow. 
Ghosts walked the white paths 
and snow drifts flamed 
in the night.

Then the prayer was answered 
in her presence 
and the beasts 
moaned in their shivering stalls. 
Over iron hay and stone 
she stepped 
to where she melted into words 
by his side. 
In the slow, cold fire 
she melted.

The night settled its weight 
on stone and ice, 
and his breath was as pale 
as the ghost of snow. 
Cold 
shivered under the eaves.

And a single set of footprints 
marked out a crazy path 
over a season’s horizon.

The birds and the beasts 
froze solid 
in the ashes of the wood.

douglas buchanan

CAMPING

Carefully 
we move through the trees, 
taking care where we step. 
Around our heads 
branches play cruel, grasping 
games, revealed 
even through the skin of leaves. 
In these parts, 
the trees become
coldly aware
at dusk.

I could tell you more
but the fire gives out.
I hear the sound
of approaching birds.
They have beaked thoughts.

I will withdraw
to my nylon stockade
and hope that the coming
storm
deals only in rain.

douglas buchanan

THE END

Buzz of flies
   in this room
make it late afternoon.
The sun begins to warm
a uniformly cold day
but the shadows are already long.

In the woods
   is silence.
Lone geese pass overhead
avoiding the building.
You can almost hear
the leaves turning red
yellow and brown.

If one was to write
would that be the only important thing?
The shadows are already long.

douglas buchanan

RETURN

The sun rising
out of broken, white
eggshells,
climbing over the dusty ledge
into the window;
leaving the table covered
with crumbs
like a violent relief:
sunscape.

The clock ticking
at time,
cats rustling softly
over the dirty floor.

The room
as you left it.

The sun rising,
the preparation of food
(through engorgement
to excretion)
processes to complete.

The knock on the door.

Spilled coffee
dripping
onto the dirty floor,
the cats crouching in fear
in the dusty corners.

I advance to the door,
revenge
in my hands;
but your face
is obscured
by the sun.

douglas buchanan
I FRAGMENTI

I was so happy when you said that you write poetry.  
It made you seem a little more like me,  
And that is something that I at last can deal with.

• • •

The shadows creeping stealthily across the wall  
Tell me that you should have been here long ago.

• • •

I awoke from my daydreaming to find the day gone,  
The sun cut loose, drifting, floating away,  
Sliding down its color-river,  
Sinking slowly behind a great wall of dark trees.  
My coffee grown cold, scraps of song scrawled here and there,  
Lay forgotten as I sat and wondered—  
Will I ever see you again?

• • •

The houses crouch contentedly on the hillside;  
Yellow squares mark habitation.  
I like to peek inside the uncurtained windows  
As I saunter past.

RAINY SPRING WALK

the wet road reflected  
tender-leafed trees,  
fluffy bloated clouds  
and a  
red-breasted robin  
with a worm  
 dangling.

i stepped on them.

RAINILIST

I am a passing cloud  
to You the Sun  
I will take the blame  
for rain  
You will take the credit  
for flowers  
and every  
sun tan  
in Miami.

Saturday Eventide  
and I'm missing the cast party  
and the dancing  
kisses  
beer, wine, etc.

joints of marihuana  
Drugs  
and kicking greasers  
outa ma way  
and with this blond baby  
sharing my armpit  
a cigarette dangles from her lips  
she's tough  
she's with the boss.

IAN STEPHENS
Really don't feel like a million dollars today
tonight
New Year's Eve
alone

watching Guy Lombardo
usher in another
and another
and another
all over again.

Oh yes
it wasn't too long far back in time

when in the dark we traded cold kisses
in the snow
below zero
drunk
knowing
we're through

ian stephens
QUESTION

If I approached you
and told you how often
my nightlamp has been
asking about you

Or how intensely
it pleads to become acquainted
with your tiny inquisitive breasts
and taut pompous buttocks

Or how urgently
it awaits the opportunity
to absorb your conversation
as well as your silence

Would you imagine
that a complex scheme was being enacted
with you as an unfortunate element
in its shrewd machinery

Or would you admit
that you are sitting single
in a black and hollow room
shaking

NIGHT POEM

A symphony of nightbugs
chanting anthems to a
Silence
that satisfied lovers
protect
like a tear
FIRST ENCOUNTER: FACE TO FACE

You flatter me terribly.
You open your stable,
Bring out a horse —
Black, three heads,
Big as a dragon —
Say: Ride! Ride this
Twice around the field
And my orchard is yours.
We don't even know names;
I have still just arrived;
And I think there is some mistake.
You see, dear lady, I'm working,
Working my way up North,
Building fences, building walls
Of invisible stone and brick.

richard price

A POEM FOR LONELY HOUSEWIVES

the day you prayed against
has come to the door
a little man capped
with a memory for you, lady
the wind sucks at your eyes
pulls at your ragged hair
your shoes fill with water
rise now I tell you
go on down to the station
catch a ride to the coast
where the ocean slobberes
and roars for your soul
like Leviathan drunk
on a Friday night
get along to the coast
to the beaches, to the waves
where your body will turn
rise and spread
a flower on a wave crest
again and again
till you're a carpet
and cover the water
can be walked on

richard price

THIS DEATH

This ugly whispered death, when
agile Narcissus, like an animal in heat,
rolls over, curls up
and rapes himself.
The head of the flower,
flushed in his thirsting mouth,
sucked off, then swallowed.
The sickness of his beauty, the creamy petals
turning in his stomach, like worms
knotted, convulsed,
biting themselves,
tail to mouth,
in a final quiet agony
of passion.

No cry, no sudden gasp of release,
in the night no heavenly flame
(green, red, or blue):
no disturbance, no complaints —
this death
but a smeared dirty picture,
a thin cold shadow
passing slow across
dark curdling waters,
(in memory) a mirror
in a dry and empty room.

richard price

STYLE

Is it sincerity
that makes me write,
I still love you?

Grew tall toward
the sun, with the light
reached for
a noticeable life.
Along came the long raw cough,
the wind, the careless music of the rain,
snap the stem.

Fallen in the garden,
in the long grass I prowl —
a bit angry, a bit confused —
yellow eyes that follow
the dim light about shadows,
the moaning dancers in the clearing;
they can't stand still.
They grow, circling myself:
wider, wilder
days, months, murked in revolution.
Spittle turns to wine/slow time.

But now for truth, really
I'm into the vase.
I pose, dying —
too much water and green glass;
petals on the windowsill,
words on your lip;
you stand beside
the big piano, singing
(there is a tapping of feet),
and if there is no sincerity,
there is style,
and your two famous tits,
perfect and white,
in movement now under cloth.

richard price
THE PALE POET DESPAIRS

I read too many books
Dream of statues
Unveiled in the damp air
I journey out for breakfast
In the grey light of morning
Drizzle falls, the wet pavements
Reflect the angles
Of taxis, raised boots, women
And there is no further description
Only the blur
The movements, which are
The problems of translation
Of capturing that which is
Alive, not static, not brittle
The problems of holding the living
The changing, with words
I admit to defeat
I give up
And later, in darkness, dryness
(After choosing a phrase)
Beat flesh against stone

richard price

TO A YOUNG BOY

To a young boy
a church is full of death;
even the Thanksgiving apples look stolen.
Games and days are waiting —
the shape of the hand
touching finger to finger
another hand.
But in the later beginning
there shall be seeds of the end.
Adam able to use
water as a mirror
speaks calmly from the lonely shore:

IT’S JULY

sometimes you act just like a child

The pressures of the passing summer:
The twisting heat, the garden burned,
Dead plants, cracked earth,
But the last flower
I saved, I ate it, and now
You say you don’t love me.

I redden my eyes, cry, Devil!
Only last month you promised
Forever; we danced as clouds
Gather round the sun, like the rain,
My fingers moved through the forests
Of your body, urging up roses.

The shudder and the struggle
Of the lumbering skies, the dry lightning,
The heat, the heavy thunder
Groping, rolling among the darkened hills.
A boy, out late and alone,
Arms around a tree, sags,
Vomits up beer and petals.

richard price
LI PO AT HOME

hushed on the shaded bank
from beneath the branches
of one tree
he could see the still reflections
of many trees

there is no wind on the river of tears
and at night, slipping through
his slender gathering fingers,
the moon among clouds and stones:
a delicate pearly fish
unobtainable
floating free in the cool endless waters

there is no wind on the river of tears
there is no sound but weeping

EVENING WATCH

for Margaret Atwood

The dark shadows, the trees
Blur, and tangle around
their eager resourceless fingers.
I see them moving up the valleys,
Rivers, moving through these northern hills.
Loads of bargains held over shoulders,
Terminal stains on their hands and teeth —
Picking berries, honouring the past.
Susanna, I think they will harm us;
I think they want to trade memories:
Our forests their fields.
In a week they'll be found,
Our seeds — O Susanna remember
Once they were free.

Let us wait back in the cabin,
Write poems of fire,
Hide all the trees.
Susanna recall
Once we were free,
But now like flags,
Drum beats, frothing waters,
The saliva of wolves
On the door...

US POETS

for S. L.

... o never can we forget,
as we stare upon the drifting snow
during the talk of poetry and cheap wine,
and try to think about immortal paintings
of roses, birds, and nudes descending

the deal gone down
that beautiful soft fire, the unfolding
embrace of love, come to a wintry end:
the silence of the glossy snapshots
curling in the drawer, the puzzling faces
fastened to reclining bodies
or centered in the sunny garden,
their features angular and sharp
but their expressions now indefinite

and on the way home
past the river, full of ice, mumbling,
when the sign says DONT WALK
we crawl
I, the poet, warrior
in prison drag
I, the poet, warrior
worn photo grey and seedy
now hunched cold
alone in the morning
prepare the day in notes
messages for thin boys
legs of gazelles, hands of flame
they are my thin boys
will do my will
sometimes
dressed in tight pants
black shirts, smiles
curling on their lips
do my will sometimes
other times found standing
in the city, pawing at the heart
its life hung out on corners:
dry saliva at their feet
the wind knotted in their hair
their words quick and rough
blurred through cigarette smoke
their eyes fingers sliding up
past perfect knees in nylon —
go by!
they are my thin boys
knives in the night
for money for words
they are my action
they are my violence
they are my thin boys
I, the poet, warrior
in prison drag

richard price
ONCE AGAIN ON A FRIDAY NIGHT

What we need are some women.
Mmmm, you're right, I said.
So on with the tight coats,
The swaggering boots, the smiles,
And out the door, down the stairs,
Onto the boogie-woogie street
To walk slow with a swing,
Cool as rocknroll Joes
For an hour or more,
And not a thing,
But a cold-fingered dollar
Spent quickly on a magazine.

LUNCHLASSNIGHT

Hot tongue sandwich
Two slices of ryed lip
Lotsa saliva
To go

Beware of bargains and high walls
— Jericho fell for a song.

THE SPURIOUS COONERIST

ronald reeve

The Reverend William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930) of New College, Oxford, is remembered today by the peculiarity that made his every utterance an eagerly awaited occasion. "Kingquering congs their titles take," said he, announcing a hymn in the college chapel (the only "spoonerism" accepted as authentic by The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations). Two other remarks often attributed to him are, however, almost as well-known: "As the weather is clamp and dammy the meeting will be hauled in the hell below;" and again, referring to the need to refinish the chapel pews: "Let us refurbish these beery wenches."

Pronouncements such as these are symptomatic of a fairly common disruption of the motor mechanics of speech in certain types of people. Not all of its victims are Anglican clergymen, though I well remember another with whom I once worked who frequently reduced his congregation to helpless laughter with such utterances as, "They shall mount up with ings as weagles (said with great feeling after a pregnant pause); and again, "It is easier for a camel to go through the knee of an idol than for a rich man to enter the Gingdom of Cod."

A characteristic of this affliction is the lack of awareness on the spoonerist's part that he has, in fact, transposed his consonants, or even, in the more advanced cases, misplaced whole syllables. Like the inveterate despoiler of correct spelling, who cannot see that what he has written is not only wrong, but looks wrong, the spoonerist does not hear his furious crazes. He is convinced that the mounds he sakes correspond to the thinks he things — that the audness is in the minds of his odditors. Hence he is typically surprised at their gitters and tiggles, and demands a rimple season for it. "Are you trying to fee bunny?" he asks. "I have woken spell; perhaps you have bird hadly?"

Such is the unlotty hap of the spurious coonerist, who will idly observe that, as it is roaring with pain, he will mutton up his back, care a wap, and chance wetting get — then wonder why we lore with rafter.

One can only hope that when he really needs assistance he will have the sense to ask for a helping hand rather than a pat on the back!
In his room there is a bed, and Thaddeus spends much of his time sleeping on it. The bookcase was painted brown on the occasion of his fourteenth birthday. It looks nice, because it matches the desk. On the mirror there remain obvious traces of CREST, PEPSODENT and GILLETTE FOAMY. In the morning Thaddeus has been known to go at his face with more or less reckless abandon. His 1964 baseball trophy is tired and dusty.

Thaddeus has his graduation picture on one wall. Nearby, his old football sweater (#64) spreads its arms simply because Thaddeus has nailed it that way. The mosquitoes sneak into his room late at night. They hide in old #64 until Thaddeus falls asleep. There they make their plans and decide on which of his ears they will attack. Thaddeus finds summer nights a pain in the ass.

On another wall there has been pasted a tiny piece of paper which yet remains a little crinkled. She gave it to him one day in the cafeteria. She had been crying that morning and Thaddeus had wanted to put his arms around her. The paper read: I LOVE YOU, THADDEUS . . . TRULY, JUDE.

Jesus hangs above the bed. St. Joseph is resting on a shelf. They love children, it rained this afternoon, and Thaddeus' mother still goes to Mass on Good Friday.

Last night Thaddeus went to a party, which, for him, is rare. Parkin was there and by ten o'clock he was up to his old tricks. He was wearing a lady's nightgown and a pot on his head. Parkin was a good friend and so Thaddeus mentioned to him that he was making a fool of himself. Parkin answered that the thing was you had to screw the system. They're laughing at me, he said, but I'm laughing at them. Parkin could dance well too.

For that matter, most everyone at the party could dance well except Thaddeus, who liked parties so that he could leave early. When he wasn't leaving early, he would wander about with a little too much wine in his glass to be socially acceptable and do imitations of Hollywood stars and sports celebrities. He wasn't very good at it and so usually people guessed the wrong stars and celebrities. Thaddeus would always pretend that they had guessed correctly and then head for the bar to put too much wine in his glass.
Most of the guests at the party were drinking alcohol. Although Parkin was twenty-one years old, he loved it when people drank too much and got sick. A veteran party-goer, he would linger by the washroom for the better part of the evening. At this party, though, some of the younger guests were sitting on the floor and smoking marijuana. Thaddeus walked over and asked them why they were sitting on the floor with so many chairs about. They told Thaddeus they were smoking marijuana. Thaddeus told Parkin and Parkin laughed at them. It was a good time.

John was at the party too. Everyone had been asking where John was until he finally arrived without his date. Everyone then began asking where John's date was, but John wouldn't tell. He felt badly and preferred to sulk. Thaddeus hated people who sulked.

Fred and Alice spent the party on the couch. They were in love and spent every party on the couch. Thaddeus hated Fred and Alice too, because they looked like such a good couple. They would be married in another year and Fred would have a good job and be making good money. Alice would spend her days cleaning the house and organizing discussion groups among the wives in the neighbourhood. Their holidays would be spent in Florida, or at a ski lodge when the kids got old enough.

Around eleven o'clock the hostess finally asked Thaddeus how he was doing. Thaddeus made a John Wayne grimace and said he wasn't doing too badly. Thaddeus was in love with the hostess, but the hostess seemed to be in love with her boyfriend who was going to be a doctor. The doctor was with John, but he couldn't get him to stop sulking. Parkin was there as well, but Parkin was laughing.

The hostess was very pretty and her outward appearance had not changed much from that day in the cafeteria. Thaddeus was not a good skier and did not know how to drive a car and always put too much wine in his glass. Thaddeus was a little afraid that the hostess would notice these things, although there was a time when it didn't matter. Then she was Jude, but now she was the hostess and she was leaving to put on another record.

Thaddeus looked at the dancers. He was not good at dancing because the entire concept was insane. Why anyone would want to dance, except if they enjoyed sweating, was beyond comprehension. It defied logic. It was almost un-American. Thaddeus tried to tell the party-goers this, but they preferred his imitations. He even used little words, yet it never worked.

Around eleven-thirty, Olive said, "Four summers ago our country-place was smack in the wilderness. Smack in the wilderness. And now do you know what it's like?". Everyone was silent, except Parkin, who thought it was funny because it was common knowledge that Olive was a loser and would cry at anything after a few drinks. But Thaddeus hated Olive because she always called him Thaddy, and so he answered out loud, "A Howard Johnson's Drive-In". Olive started crying and Parkin started laughing and John stopped sulking and Fred and Alice looked up from the couch and the doctor gulped under his turtleneck. For a moment the hostess who used to be Jude looked at Thaddeus the way she used to, but it was only for a moment and then she began serving drinks again.

Thaddeus spent the rest of the evening with a girl named Claire who wrote high school poetry about leaves buried in a blanket of snow. They fell asleep in the bathtub when Claire had finally stopped talking about the beauty of nature.

Thaddeus' thoughts drifted back to his room. He used to hide his vegetables all around the house. Some of them he hid in a drawer behind his LIQUID TIP marking pen. Now a TIME magazine, pictures of Fidel Castro, and an unfinished novel live there.

He had always dreamed of being someone famous so that children could study him in their readers every day. He was going to be Eldridge Cleaver, The Lennon Sisters, Winston Churchill and Ernest Hemingway. Maybe Leonard Cohen too. He was going to be all of these people and then quite a bit more.

The radio is playing and Thaddeus is left alone with Bing Crosby. He hates making his bed so he lets his mother do it. She listens to the talk-shows and likes phoning in.

Thaddeus hates talk-shows.

HE SMILED

peace in viet nam (with honor)
i read it to frank
who smiled
as men sometimes do

i have never described frank
well here goes
he is a not so tall man with dark curly hair
who is not a negro
although he would like to be
a member of some minority group
i don't know why
never did
never will
some of his habits annoy me
done on purpose (i'm
sure) to drive me insane

this morning
while we were brushing our teeth
we looked at our reflection in the mirror
and i said peace in viet nam (with honor)
frank sensed with honor
was in parenthesis although i had said
nothing to indicate this (he is so
bright) told me the times
they are a changin'
but not really
he (as though in on
some cosmic joke) said
i was only twenty years old

david o'rourke

BLUE SKY

drinking and play
ing the tv on in
the bar i met a
philosopher with
chess books so
we played a few
games to waste
the while away

to waste
the while away
we wasted the
while away

the sky being
blue the bar
offered a way
to stay within
we thought we
were within
thinking we
had found a way

thinking we
had found a way
we wasted the
while away

david o'rourke

CONFRONTATION
(a fill in the blanks poem)

the radical ists held out
though outnumbered
the fascist ists bombed from a blue sky
and tanks crawled the streets
the radical ists fought on
the fascist ist propaganda
the fascist replied with censorship

it was over after many lifetimes
the ists had scored a total victory
under an empty blue sky
the ist workers returned to their factories
and talked excitedly
of the revolution

32

daavid o'rourke

33
WHEN

when the irresistible force
meets
the immovable object
a loud “bang” will be heard
politicians
will negotiate
& advocate
a return
to cease-fire lines
china will boycott the conference
Canada
will play the role
of peace-maker
bringing
the good
& the bad
together
Canadian nationalists will have orgasms
it will be in all the papers
"AGREEMENT REACHED"
forces to be made
less irresistible
objects
less immovable"
in the Yukon
there will be a man
and a lake
like a mirror
he will be fishing
wondering
or making love to his woman

MY FATHER

like my father
i could never understand
people who laugh and sing
abstract innocence in time of war
reality
is the morning newspaper
he used to say
the americans are loud
and
what's on wide world of sports
today
after supper each night
he would fall asleep
a one-way telescreen blaring
in the parlor

BUTCH CASSIDY

with muscles like chicago
and a laugh like the rockies
ahead (alogcabin)
where dreams are
hitching on a highway
of now to yes or even
hoppin freights (clackety—clackety-clack) to where
ever sunshine children
and good trout fishin is
he pauses (lighting a cigarette) in the darkness

David O'Rourke
MALCOLM X

the room was oppressive
smoke
tales of lsd

i talked about you
lecturing
to a virgin audience

they listened politely
almost attentively
taking drags with ease

your life
your politics
your death

blackness
power
and zootsuit

the discussion
progressed
to near dope busts

sunshine
moonshine
shoeshine

i said
malcolm x used to shine shoes
it was off the topic

there's frost on the window
off the topic

it snowed today
off the topic

are you alive
off the topic

PHONCALL

david o'rourke

The telephone is ringing so I have to leave my room and go into the kitchen where our telephone is located. My dog follows me into the kitchen. My dog follows me everywhere. What a pain in the ass that Frank can be sometimes.

"Hello," I say.

The voice that answers me is that of an old man who is, apparently, in heat. He is breathing in spasms and tells me how much he loves me. I say I'm sorry, but that he must have the wrong number. He says he knows it's me, Tony, and that he's going to come over and eat me cause he's been watching the way my body moves for a long time and he likes what he sees.

I say, "Please don't do that, mister, please don't do that!" Then I remember my name is David, not Tony, and I tell this to the man. The man lets fly a long list of obscenities and says he's going to let me go this one time. I reply, "Wait a minute," and then give him the telephone number of a guy whom I hate because he is noble, true-blue, and can get you that first down when you need it. Moreover, this kid looks like Audie Murphy. I give the man this fellow's phone number and tell him it's Tony's. The man blows a kiss and hangs up.

My dog is now barking because he wasn't in on the phonecall. I explain the situation to him and we both get a laugh. He is happy now. I pick up a jar of NESCAFE INSTANT COFFEE and throw it. My dog chases it. I throw sticks, milk bottle, cups — you name it, I throw it — and my dog, Frank, will chase it. Such are Frank's brains.
NOTIME

were there no clocks
sun moon stars
calendar seasons
day and night
there would be notime
or time enough

and then i'd
spin a tale
until you were
dizzy on your
knees crying

why not spend our notime
twogether sailing
across a mythic sea
to islands
hitherto unknown

time ends fantasies
life
dreams (vision
ary and other
wise) and yet

you tell me your time
is reserved
a parking place
and i wonder if
at notime you would be
happier (that is
to say) realizing
sunrise is only an obscene
reminder of old
age

david o’rourke

SAILBOAT

You have your sailboat now
and the feeling you once knew
or thought you understood
and called various names
one being dependence
is behind you
like a distant shoreline

But a word about the wind
on occasion it will caress your sails
and lead you to a wasteland
an island without animals or vegetation
or it may seduce you to a mirage
and tempt you with native fruit
that does not exist
but has satisfied many
There will be times when you will grow
to hate the wind
as it rips a sail
or leaves you in a whirlpool
facing a tropic storm without protection
And you will cry
and curse the gods
and the day you put out to sea
but these things are good
They will tell you where you have been
and remind you of where you want to go

For you will discover
that you are the wind
breathing life into your craft
setting your own direction
when it is most needed
You are the energy
that can snap a tall pine
to the ground
or lull a child to sleep
with music soothing to the soul
The freedom that you now know
is a force no wise man can deny
and a love that no sailor is able to resist
Those who cling the land
cannot foresee the wonders
you are about to behold

Hesitant footsteps
A fork in the road
Flanked by twin moonbeams imprisoned
In ribbons of steel. Letting
The quixotic windmill of mind
Whirl itself out. The forest beckons
Murmuring soft secrets
Moonlight muffled pines
Behind the shadows scurry
Echo of squirrel or whisper
Unknown and un-nameable. Furtively
Meandering back to moonbeams
Fleeing on twin rails
To a rising sun.

I heard Bob Dylan tell
Me on underground radio
The Pepsi and Honda ads
To send my cheque
Or chargex number
And get a special
Album of protest
Songs that moved
Our generation,
A true collector's item
The perfect find
Or gift to store away
For town house bedecked
With Braques and Klees
And souvenirs of Marrakech
Katmandu, St. Moritz
And places in between.
Music to search by,
Sipping Brandy Alexandre
And that still unwritten novel.
SI ES QUES

If only
in his lonely
DESPERATION
a pen
could have served
as lips
letters
as words
pages
as love

LOST
would have been
a matter of
miles
between two
(Now many damned
if onlies)

now only one.

herbert bailey
both photographs: robert macpherson
This is madness: snow on the roof
knee-deep
and on the garden chairs

year after year

this repetition

with the closed
summer houses like a frieze
and silence

water broken by the wind
in solemn hills

One hankers after blood

until the news
throws shadows of that desert flower
across the screen

an anger
muttering with guns

Here we are
retainers in an old
garden (fish

stare from their element
at snow)

who hardly care
as they grow white themselves

or notice the repose
in winter's repetition, living
quietly with death

a few small animals, a few
small birds
sudden above trees
they come

I panic, counting now

the gulls
from grubbing fields

dark heads dried
blood-colour turning
in the last sun

up there

they are beaked fish, prey
predators
moving toward

open water

wave after wave, some
two hundred, then
empty sky

an eye, emptied
among bare branches
garden

full of dead leaves

doug jones

I REMEMBERED YOU WHILE AWAY

In Ogilvy's
lavender-gray matrons
poise petitely
like stoutly obsolete manikins
their bosoms
settling heftily
on acrylic counter-tops
abreast specimen bottles
of Chanel No. 5

All don stratified rouge
over doughy jowls that dangle
in harmony
with tarnished neck-tethers
(annexed
to sterling spectacles)

They analyze
(with anal eyes)
your insecure approach
and click their mildewy tongues
at your selective taste

I chose this scent for you
but God knows
I abhor purchasing perfume

nelson gonyer

AFTER BATH

Rising
from the steam

dripping
the oil-sweetened
drops of refreshment

she is clean

doug jones
With a dark towel
she pats away
the beaded residue
of her bath
and smooths baby powder
into thighs
pink
from the subtle burn
of hot water

But it is a transient burn
and as she reaches me
her skin has redeemed
its ivory tone

Now
so beautiful
so fragrant
so pure
she must not be touched

Ma Julie est Francaise

Someday
I will lift the millstone
of color and design
from her petite shoulders


UNION JACK

Is it purely color and design
that are indicative
or the way it trembles
in some foreign breeze
like a tropical bird
flying headlong
into a coolly symbolic draft
while I witness the gaudiness of it all
on a portable panasonic
and sip on a glass of iced tea

Perhaps it's the manner
in which it hovers
on a French Canadian wall
of my girlfriend's apartment


and staves off
at least one FLEUR DE LIS stare per day
while on the chesterfield below
we scald and drown
any visiting criticism
with hot tea

Following your relentless argument
the words that — in themselves
nonsensical — fall like snow
on warm pavement melting
flake by flake on touch
i occasionally pause to wipe
the verbal sludge off your lips
and store it for later use
and you say communication
is a disorderly thing that
defies logic — what matter
the word? what the letter?
but i say that a base
is needed and footscrapers
at the door of conversation
the duality mustn't
run parallel never reaching
the terms must correspond
universal or not at all
UNTITLED

Ice, your frosty white coolness
Floats nicely on the humours,
Melting down into water,
The water you cool is nice.

JOHN HANSON

AUTUMN WIND

I. naked to the wind,
hollowing
out the debris,
watching my leaves
fill up someone else's ditch.

lying here,
liking my rawnness,
I want to walk home
with twigs in my hair.

II. the rough bark
scratched my cheek.
I laughed,
and rubbed it with my hands;
rolling at its roots,
crushing its leaves,
feeling the ridges
and hugging the firmness

letting the wind
claw my heart.

EVA BALDWIN
CAUGHT

she vowed
she'd write
the great Canadian novel.
she spends
her mornings
(Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays)
in the lecture hall,
her afternoons
sitting
in a door-opened room
(hoping no one
will take the invitation
seriously).
her nights,
pen in hand,
fumbling with naked images.

eva baldwin

EXPECTANT

butterflies drawn
not yet from the cocoon
red
    wide
    wings that soar
a flight that leans
on intemperate birth
salient wounds shall show

leah bradshaw
White swans
flickering their wings
in the pearl sky,
crying the winter's approach.

catherine isely

fairy tale roses, sweet lullabies
a dream you once cherished
with the sun on your smile.

a tangerine lady
sits by your side, laughing the wind away.

wait for me.

catherine isely

Comme un moulin dans ma tête,
Comme une chanson dans le vent,
Comme une fleur toute en fête
à la venue du printemps.
je te regarde, je te vois
Comme un oiseau dans le ciel
volant les quatre vents.

catherine isely
I AM MASTER...

i am master of my demons
forging, forging

travelling
with heroes, dragons
dreaming storm and cloud
over chasms of shining water
ships with pale sails
imagining shade and shadow
among trees, ruined cloisters
feeling heavy red carpets and curtains
of silence
within moonlit chapels

words are hammer and anvil
to try ideas from cold pools
fed by mist and bells of experience

i am master of my demons
magician, thief
sneaking into spirit and soul
to snatch them by surprise
hold captive
whip, violate

there is no key
for the locked labyrinth

i am master of my demons
forging, forging
tireless, driven by perception
always closer
lands of fire and desolation
lands of ashes, lands of impotence
on flat, empty shores
waiting for the slow sea
to stop moving

BLUES FROM THE COUNTRY
for D.S.A.

I

darkness unfolds outside
brighter flames inside
reflect like dancers on the wall
only four-thirty
it comes early, the sun's daily death
in the dark months
forests camouflage themselves with a windy sigh

here quietness destroys useless conversation
only wood, crackling, praises the sky
a sacrifice to benevolent solitude

and the land empties
abandoned nests
houses and fields deserted

II

darkness crashes in from the street
trying uselessly to muffle the screams of rush hour
last flickers of light
filter through smoke and grimy glass
then the tired lamp-lighter
outside wet streaked windows
marks the beginning of a different life
remarking the hour he would frown

like Sisyphus the city does not rest
must push the boulders of pride, power, delusion

i see more and more
reach gladly to help

... sodom and gomorrah snicker in the side-lines

alan s. atkinson
III

Streets that follow like a tedious argument
T. S. Eliot

the sidewalk i pace is dirty
windblown with wrappers and yesterday's headlines
bus sign stands like a wilted flower
choked with dust
sagging, after the rapacious hands of young boys
attempted to uproot it

dawn crawls weakly over the horizon
greeted by the sneers and curses of city workers

the bus i wait for
produces itself condescendingly
(later it will be more impatient)
driver almost smiling

we move too slowly
through the lifeless acropolis

IV

I recognised a silence like that which
pervades a church after a service
James Joyce

dawn barrels in over the horizon
light, laughing, rolls down hills and fields
houses and trees appear naked
holding their long shadows on the ground

later when the sun has bent its way
into the sky
i walk with a cigarette
donw dusty roads
from a hill the scattered forests
shadows of great birds
are still in the heat

alone, i am master
throwing curses that turn my enemies to salt
then soon there is nothing to defend

bards have spoken
like a child, astonished at his first spanking
i will not speak or weep, only wonder

breezes blow the dust of the road
about my feet
distant clouds cry out for home

THE STREET'S YOUNG MAN

smiling
into the dark he goes
knocking garbage cans
down corridors
pipes and wires
hurrying
worn shoes scraping
shadow twisting
on buildings and pavement
smiling
into the window he looks
hands rubbing glass
then on, hurrying
past the drunks
empty sacks
in front of Harry's Bar and Grill
grabbing cold lamp-posts
for support
fixed in the cone of light
smiling
into the gutter he steps
then on, hurrying

alan s. atkinson
COUNTRY CATHEDRAL

rock and dirt floors
not marble or tile
a hay loft
not an organ gallery

this roof vaulting overhead
has certain magnificence
a window high up
(quite square, without stained glass)
admits a beam of light
to filter through dust,
stillness

no sound but wind
curling about cracked boards
creaking of weathered beams
disturbs empty silence

the rectors are porcupines
who eat portions of the walls
being unable to take collection
no saints relics
a horned skull in one corner
martyred for a farmer's belly

in later times
no pompous plaques will state
“Norman” or “Gothic”
white snow
will drift among the ruins
wind will swing doors
on sighing hinges,
sing through broken walls
a spectre
moaning through a home long dead
A VISION OF LEAVING

door almost closed
light enters
one sharp path
dividing darkness in the room

when it closes
walls of blindness
fall, drown
Egyptians of dreams
washed up on red shores

slaves of pyramids
cry from windows
cry lead us away
from sand to water
shadow to light

old men
in narrow streets below
sigh wisely

get up boys
time to raise some dust
kick stone, spear, sword
trample on the ground
time to gather food
bread and wine
behind broken chariots

the door is locked
windows are too dirty to see
torches have been put out
long ago
by priests in soft robes, painted tombs
where dreams lie dead

alan s. atkinson
As soon as I got out of being solemn in my younger age, I looked upon my native neck-of-the-woods as a nest of singing birds. I still do. Poets are everywhere in the Eastern Townships. Unlike the phoenix bird, of which there is only one rising out of its own ashes into the freshness of youth once every five hundred years, a veritable flock of warblers (and some crows) nest in these acres south of the St. Lawrence River. Their utterances are heard continuously through the generations, especially in the summertime when their tail-feathers are not clipped and chilled by the snow and ice of this southern Quebec winter.

As a neophyte, how I longed to be thought one of this valour of warbling authors indigenous to the summer waters and winter snowdrifts of the Eastern Townships. I had already started a five-part novel and an epic poem before I had been launched out of the Sherbrooke High School. But it was to Bishop's University in Lennoxville that I lifted my aspiring eyes. And to Bishop's I went. I pitched headmost into what I thought must be the Athens of the north. Here was Frank Oliver Call the poet, and W. O. Raymond, the editor of a book of Swinburne's poems, and who, later, was to send my first effusions to Robert Bridges, the then Poet Laureate, in England, and who was to drop dead almost immediately after reading them. To Bishop's came old Canon Scott the poet in his Episcopal gaiters; and here came the eminent visitor from afar. In my freshman year came Alfred Noyes the poet, eminent then and forgotten now. I was of two minds that we treated him fairly. Dr. A. H. McGreer, then Principal of Bishop's University, had to keep apologizing to the poet — not that Noyes was to be forgotten but at that moment he was too well remembered: in the hollow pilasters around Convocation Hall alarm-clocks were studiously placed to go off at two-minute intervals. Go off they did. Noyes no sooner got another start on the stanzas of "Come Down to Kew in Lilac Time" than his attention was unmelodiously yanked back to the Eastern Townships. I was truly amongst a nest of singing birds.

The creative core of the Eastern Townships is Bishop's University, but the whole environment is alive with grosbeaks and downy woodpeckers. We here are in the know; those outside little realize what tremendous Townships ferment goes on, especially
around the hospitable shores of Lake Massawippi. Artistic activity is thought to be the monopoly of Montreal or Toronto or Vancouver. Not a bit of it. We have a formidable rivalry of festivals, novelists, and a mess of poets. If you want to increase the value of your library, come to the Townships and have your North Hatley book inscribed by its author. I offered to be accommodating just that way the other day to my class of students in Canadian Literature. The going price of the book of mine I brought, so I read in a Toronto catalogue, is $29.50. I offered to the class to sign it at the reduced price of a flat $29.00 since the jacket was worn. The class is still thinking twice about it.

I have counted no less than eleven writers domiciled at once in North Hatley — that is, eleven in summer. Most clear out before the pipes freeze. I myself stay. This year I have only had to wrap hot cloths around the pipes to my upstairs bathroom.

It is not difficult to discover the basic reason why the Townships hold and attract writers and make them fall in love with what they offer. The reason is simple: beauty. This stretch of lakes and rivers and hills and valleys is incomparably beautiful. I wish we could keep quiet about it and so preserve the Townships as they are. We can’t, of course. Beauty, like murder, will out. And I suppose what I am saying is that the Townships should be kept consonant with a boy’s memory of them. I can remember putting on skis and exploring the woods immediately back of Ontario Street in Sherbrooke; later on, you could get a nice fistful of mayflowers and Indian ghost-pipes there. At the moment the area is covered with basements and asphalt. As a good citizen should, I climbed Mount Orford, that highest beauty east of the Rocky Mountains, not by shifting gears, but by instinct. And that vanished wooden covered bridge over the Massawippi River just outside Bishop’s University that I was exalted by and wrote a poem about. Over the entrance to the bridge was a sign: WALK OR PAY TWO DOLLARS. That puzzled me. Then I was struck by what rhythm can do; four iambic feet in sequence the length of the bridge might have sunk it. Yet I am still puzzled: to whom did you pay your two dollars, especially if it was thirty below? You pay your money now, of course, to the Quebec Government. I wish it was still two dollars... I remember putting a short log across my chest, and under the instruction of my piano teacher, Miss Laura Rugg, learning to do a commendable breast stroke in Lake Massawippi.

And with it all, so abidingly beautiful are the Eastern Townships that they still make claims against the rest of the world. We haven’t got Chartres Cathedral here, the marble temples of Greece, or the music of Bali. We have our own kind of beauty. The beauty is natural, the beauty of the place still has solitude, and quite frequently the sunsets and stars send you crazy. I am told that the dawn also does. No wonder the intelligent like the place.

The first real live author I remember was the sister of Ned Adams. Ned was an eccentric around Sherbrooke in the early Twenties; never was he seen without muffler, rubbers and umbrella. His sister was Kathleen Adams of New York City; she had written a girl’s book. Ned used to come into my father’s photography studio on Wellington Street with unpredictable frequency. On the basis of this, my mother one day blackmailed Miss Adams into our front parlour on Wolfe Street, where Montcalm runs into Wolfe. Here, in living presence, was a writer who had got into print! She was made to read the first chapter of an unfinished novel of mine written at the age of fourteen. Its title was Westward Ho! with Columbus. Was it good? Of course it was good. So was the lavish tea my mother pressed on her. I look back on that book as the best I never wrote. How Kathleen Adams looks back on it, I don’t know.

Her brother Ned brought me in touch with another author. He was the friend of the son of Minnie Hallowell Bowen of Lower Queen Street. Mrs. Bowen used to read me her poems — to my great embarrassment. Poems about the “Red Flower of Life” and “Adoration” make me restless. But the afternoons were not all poetry. There was prose too. The house Mrs. Bowen lived in wasn’t a bow-and-arrow shot from legend. At the lonely pine on its rock in the river St. Francis, at the foot of Queen Street, great happenings took place; happenings that had to do with unrequited love or war dances. I am not sure which. But I was willing enough to hear about that as long as it was in prose; and the battle of the Big and Little Forks, the original names of Sherbrooke and Lennoxville; and the struggle of Major Rodgers, the Ranger, with the fierce Abenakis. To go back to unrequited love, not a quarter of a mile from my boyhood home on Wolfe Street is the gorge through which the Magog River roars. Its cliff is the Lovers’ Leap of the story. Below the Leap is the canyon’s whirlpool. It is obvious how one can get carried away. Legend, fact, and beauty are everywhere for the writer in the Eastern Townships. Drama, and the scene to put it in. I don’t know why I wrote about Columbus.

And politics are round about everyone. The right kind of politics — at least they were then. My father used to tell me about the loved figure of a local book called The Grand Old Man of Dudswell. The grand old man was the Reverend Mr. Chapman. He rode
around in a two-seater Concord buggy drawn by a white horse named Dolly. In that fashion he went visiting parishioners. Often, coming from Marbleton to Lime Ridge where my father was living — not too far down the valley of the St. Francis from the covered bridge I spoke of — the Reverend Mr. Chapman of Anglican fame had with him on the two-seater the Methodist minister and the Roman Catholic, Father Plamandeau, both also big in the seat. I still think that is the way to get there.

My father also told me about Dr. Drummond — William Henry Drummond of you-can't-get-drowned-on-Lac-St. Pierre-so-long-you-stay-on-shore fame. As a telegraphist helping support his mother and four children, he worked at Bord-a-Plouffe, a little village on the Rivière des Prairies. Having got a little ahead financially, Drummond came to Bishop's University, where he graduated in medicine in 1884. He established a practice at Stornoway, a village near Lake Megantic; then at Knowlton. At all these places he learned about the small farmers of Quebec, the habitants, and their qualities of simplicity, kindliness, hospitality and humour. He put this into verse.

Drummond's reputation as a poet has declined. Protests are lodged that he sentimentalized and patronized the habitant; that he showed in his verse only the pleasanter side of the habitant's life; that he used a broken English never uttered by a Frenchman in heaven or Ottawa. Others say he wrote what he heard. Louis Frechette, the distinguished French-Canadian poet at the turn of the century, introduced Drummond's first book with warm sympathy. We are told that the habitants themselves admired the poems.

Whatever the limitations we may put to his poems, we must admit they are pretty well equalized by their tone of warmth and affection, never a condescension — a friendship between the two cultures that in my experience has never been fatally distorted or disproven. I gathered in some valuable affection when as a boy I listened to the Sherbrooke man famous for his recitations of "Johnny Corteau" and "Leetle Bateese." He used to recite Dr. Drummond's poems in the Chautauqua tent put up every summer on the Parade Grounds down Queen Street. Now, I am told by a Bishop's graduate who gets his name in print that I have a "garrison mentality." I am besieged. Affection is out-of-date; is synonymous with condescension.

The first Bishop's graduate and Eastern Townships poet of renown is Dr. Drummond. The second, and one I knew, is a poet now unhappily forgotten. He too wrote of the French Canadian of the Eastern Townships. He was born in West Brome in 1878 and
his name is Frank Oliver Call. Fortunately for me and for many others at Bishop's, he was on the faculty in the Twenties and Thirties. When I became an undergraduate Dr. Call was Professor of English Literature. He gave us lectures on modern poetry. The outstanding worth of Bishop's is its individual warmth. Here was I, knowing nothing, and there I was, in the space of a year, sitting in Dr. Call's living room having tea with the poet and talking over my own verse. You won't find the equivalent of that happening at any of our multi-universities of ten thousand registration, a freshman talking as a personality to a friend on the faculty. Now, they pay $20,000 to a writer-in-residence who doesn't want to be one.

In my turn, during my first year at Bishop's, I learned from Dr. Call not only that Tennyson wrote poetry, but that Vachel Lindsay did, while beating a drum. The tea and biscuits were good too. They were eaten in the rooms at the end of the corridor of the New Arts Building; rooms, I suppose, rightly gone now. But I don't know why the authorities had to destroy Dr. Call's garden of flowers that stretched colour from the Principal's old office to what is now the threshold of the Library. I suppose flowers interfere with the grass.

In my final year I ended up with an entire chapter of mine in Dr. Call's book called "The Spell of Acadia," published by L. C. Page of Boston in 1930. I had been to the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Dr. Call hadn't. So he put my piece of prose in his book and inscribed a copy thanking me for "my assistance in the preparation of this book." Imagine what that did to an aspiring writer! That is what can happen here at Bishop's.

F. O. Call's is a poetry simply uttered — the simplicity made possible by a fine command of a formal technique. It is not what we call "modern", but that needn't be held against it. His Blue Homespun is an affectionate account of the Quebec scene and of the Quebecois. The tradition runs straight through from Dr. Drummond, Dr. Call, to A. M. Klein, to John Glassco — from Stornoway through Lennoxville to Foster. Pleasure is still to be got from Call's book:

LA TERRE
When Jo was young he used to hate the land;
And though he struggled hard and tried to wrest
A living from it, still he schemed and planned
To seek the distant town where men were dressed
In better stuff than homespun. Years have passed,
And now St. Jean seems very far away,

For chains he would not shatter hold him fast
In golden bondage to the loam and clay.

His fields are something more than clay and loam
To yield a living, bring him gain or loss,
Now he is old; and from his whitewashed home
He looks towards the churchyard with its cross,
Then at his fruitful acres lying there
Between, and murmurs low, "La bonne, bonne terre!"

Dr. Call did not only show me his paintings and garden and how I could improve my poems; he also introduced me to Louise Morey Bowman. Mrs. Bowman was born in Sherbrooke in 1882; began writing there; ultimately came to be praised by the then-famous Amy Lowell of American and Imagist fame. Ezra Pound came to mock Amy's poetic images as Amygisms. Louise Morey Bowman's work has passed out of favour. Well, we'll leave it at that; we mustn't set up the Eastern Townships and make a list of people merely published to fit in them. There is sadness, isn't there, going back to a reputation now faded. For every thing, all the goodness of the flower faded, as Isaiah said a few years ago.

But not quite, I think. Art has a way of surprising Time. After all, Isaiah and his cliché about Time are still remembered! So are other writers whose power of words has overcome the arrogance of Time and outrun the clocks. We are not yet through with the Townships.

I think of a graduate of this University, born in Quebec City in 1861 but whose formative years — those years which are never got over — were lived at Bishop's. A few will remember this man as Canon Scott — Frederick George Scott. As an undergraduate I twice won a poetry prize which Canon Scott had set up. This apparently condemned me to listen to all his latest poems as well as his old ones whenever he visited Bishop's. He had a discouragingly long memory. I used to get cornered in the gymnasium. Canon Scott would take off his clerical half-coat and, on a wooden chair leaned back against the wall, in his bib and gaiters, recite his verses at me. The poems were virtuous; against the flesh. The flesh is ephemeral, I know; but, at that time, I wasn't interested in the information. I stuck the poems out, though; no conspicuous squirming. Now, of course, I realize that old Canon Scott was choosing the wrong poems of his; those in the pulpit. He should have nailed my attention with something within my experience and not in heaven — a road out at Lime Ridge, say, and "the creak of a lumberman's sleigh."
Up there is the throne of the Triune God
And the worshipping multitudes,
And here is the long winter road
And the silent woods.

But I want to come to F. G. Scott’s son, F. R. Scott. Here we are on terrestrial ground. Frank Scott too is a graduate of Bishop’s University and as much a poet produced by the Townships’ landscape and its spiritual climate as anyone who has lived continuously in them. Frank Scott is, of course, our foremost constitutional lawyer, a founder of the C.C.F. party, member of the Bicultural Commission and all the rest of it. I like to think of him as the defender of Lady Chatterley. But at the heart of him is something other than the lawyer. To know him is to see him exploring the countryside around the several Hatleys; to examine the success of his wood-chopping and bird-feeding and to follow the barometer-reading inside and out on the verandah to his summer place at North Hatley. Best of all, know him at his camp on a steep hillside up Lake Massawippi. The camp is always on the point of descending into the lake. That’s the place where he wants his ashes scattered. He can’t leave Massawippi. His poem, “Lakeshore”, is not specifically of this exact spot. But it is as fixed in this region as any piece of writing good enough to have the vision to transcend its parish. The poem could as well start in Lake Massawippi as it actually ends at the resting place of Noah and his ark. Read it. It is here to stay.

And there is A. J. M. Smith, born in Montreal, an undergraduate with Frank Scott at McGill, a close friend of Frank’s and mine, and at present living in Michigan; and one who can’t get the love of the Eastern Townships out of his blood and doesn’t want to; who, significantly, has just bought a house in Georgeville near where he lives half-a-year on that next lake, Lake Memphramagog. You only have to sit out on his verandah and look up at the enclosing trees or tear up and down Memphramagog in his motor boat to know that he shapes experience with what the landscape and the inscape of this district give to him. He has got a jack-pine in his front yard too and writes of the unfathomable mystery of this land. Read his “Birches at Drummond Point:"

Leaning over the lake
slim white birches
curved by the south-west wind
offer a silent rebuke
or seem to
When the sun glints
on their leaves
dark green or light green
they seem to be flashing
a message

When a breeze
makes them rustle
I listen:

What do they say?
or seem to?

From Drummond Point move further westward. There, this side of Brome Lake, at Foster, lives John Glassco, poet and memoirist and friend of all lake-dwelling poets. Who in Canada has written better of Paris? All right. Paris is not in the Eastern Townships. Let me put it another and more pertinent way: Who has written more graceful and engaging prose than John Glassco has in his Memoirs of Montparnasse? The answer to that one is: no one. And if you won’t find anything of the Eastern Townships in Memoirs of Montparnasse, go to the poems; what you will find there is some of the most accurate definitions of the Townships that have been set down. His poems are the whole art of memory — of his point of sky at Shefford and Brome: the entailed farm, the gentleman’s farm, the rural mail, the abandoned buildings — all the spiritual climate of the region.

And nearby is that other understander of Quebec-Canada, Hugh MacLennan, who lives as much time as he can growing his roses at North Hatley and walking for his international mail at the town’s little square of a post-office. I realize Hugh MacLennan goes off to Grenoble or where-was-it? to write a novel; or writes in his inhabited Montreal. But who knows, including Hugh himself, what tranquillity and possibility of soul the Eastern Townships provide so that he can do it? Every summer he is back in the region of the river he writes about, the St. Francis,

“river of the Eastern Townships with their deep volcanic lakes and rolling hills like the Scottish lowlands,”
as he puts it.

And down the hill from him is that other man and scholar who knows Quebec like the palm of his hand: Ronald Sutherland, interpreter of the literature of one tongue of Canada to the other, a native of Montreal, the scene of his novel, Lark des Neiges, but a
liver and lover of the shores of the Massawippi.

And down the street from Ronald Sutherland lives D. G. Jones. What a huddle of happenings and raft of writers these Counties cuddle! Jones was born up there in some place called Ontario. But here he is, down here between the St. Lawrence and the Vermont border writing as clear and delicate lyrics out of the sensation of the district's lakes and hills as can be had anywhere in Canada. Jones stays all winter, washing his car next to my front door so that the salt won't eat through his fenders. Is our cold as Mrs. Moodie and Atwood would have it?

It was thirty degrees below zero that morning, and it would have been much colder if the thermometer had been longer.

Or is snow the precursor to a green Annunciation, as Doug Jones has it?

Snow has come back to make of weeds
A window-shopper's garden, frail
Eastern Flowers for unbelievers.

But the sun is not the same, nor the hills.
And the silence when I stop the car
Is not the same, is a silence made

For a few birds, their thin
Aerial music. This is the coin
Flung against the brazen tower.

It is the confidence within (not
Of what endures) of what will be.
Distant. It transforms

This window to a world. Again.
The air is not just air, it is an arctic
Confidence of flowers.

"A confidence of flowers." I believe there is something in these Eastern Townships that maintains, sustains, the affirmative spirit. We are not much urbanized; I don't think we want to be; we can get to Montreal and satisfy any urban desire easily enough. We are not computerized; we are not found important enough for it yet. We have our statistics; but they really aren't lived by, at least not too mathematically. We have our vulgar fractions as any place has. But this is what is important, we have the still rustic solitude without too much rock and roll and piped-in Musak; above all, we
have a sense of abiding — for a time, at least — we have old cemeteries and recurrent sunsets, both without death in them.

Mention of cemeteries brings to mind, not Thomas Gray and his poem, but Neil Tracy and his poem “Elegy in a Country Graveyard.” Neil and I once rode the streetcar from Sherbrooke to Lennoxville, when we were undergraduates here at Bishop’s. The trolley made sparks in the winter air at the end of the line up there at the cenotaph on the corner leading down to the University, with the conductor trying to hit the overhead live wire with the trolley as he prepared to run the car back the three miles to Frontenac Street in Sherbrooke. Neil lived on Portland Avenue and I lived on Wolfe Street, near Montcalm, as I said. Sometimes the streetcar jumped the rails taking a curve on the way to Lennoxville. But it was never political. In those days, Neil and I were after Dr. McGreer and the prophet Amos. Both, the Principal and the prophet, were then necessary to obtain an Arts degree. But that’s another elegy... The elegy in praise of Eastern Township forefathers runs this way in Tracy’s book, Voice Lines:

Abraham and Abigail
Span the wool and swung the flail;
Read the Word and wound the horn,
And got their brats on husks of corn:
Of eleven of his leaven,
Seven passed from womb to heaven;
Followed by their mother’s tears.
Their good father through the years
Ever cheers and perseveres;
Sternly tries to copulate
This new land to populate;
Let us then though ills beset us
Praise the sires that did beget us.

These then. And others not mentioned, unknown beyond their campus yet, whose sires dwell elsewhere and whose progeny come here and who will write. And the established literary birds of passage who do a story of the Townships or a poem as Patrick Anderson or Irving Layton will.

Everyone of sensitivity lays claim to the Eastern Townships once he knows them; the Townships and their beauty ever lay claim to the sensitive. Every writer, it is true, has his particular region and so he should have. Certainly all great writing springs right out of the writer’s own, intimate, experienced, loved backyard. Each transcends his backyard. But there it is, the artist truly to create must do it from his particular parish; his own two-by-four refuge in the world.

For myself, it is the Eastern Townships I grew up in. I always came back to them. I have a poem about that; about the isolated railway station serving the countryside around the village of Compton. It is called “Quebec Winterscene”:

And the snow trodden round the yard,
Soiled with boots and fetched cordwood,
Straw ravelled near the barn—
The long snow of the fourfold land.
At dusk, acres clamped cold,
Threshold and clearing everywhere white
To the distant scribble of alders, across
The frozen field snakefence
Like charred music; sky only harvest
Helps over, buckled, with taste of tin
Dipper icy a man drinks gasping,
Sweat of warm barn-work a hazard
Once out, door-to, headed for house.

At eight, night now pitch, the train,
Halted for mailsacks at the swung
Lantern — the far horizontals
A moment, a history happening
The hills — alongside, pants, monstrous,
Pistons poised. Then pulls past.

At the cutting heard warning
whose only
Answer is the local heart.

ANNIVERSARY

And at ten minutes to four
The sun broke through — only
For about a moment but long enough
To set once more aflame the maple.
Gold struck crimson and I knew
Life shaped and shaken; the sun,
Leaves falling (a chill wind
With rain all day), across the land
And lake and hedge cedar-green
Gold struck and I thought: So,
Eternity tumbles, birch, maple,
Once valid gold since spring
Was pledged — yet, burned through the mist,
There is the sun, there is the sun.
Affirmation for the moment,
A fallen leaf (Akhnaten exiled
Gods until there was only worshipped
Sun; let sun burst and
We too worship). Only a moment —
But for that time world was bronze,
Leaves fell without their season,
Gold struck the edges of
The cornice, marvel was as it was.

THE MOSQUITO

The fumble does it.
One whack
And that is that. Muck
Around divine
Forearm hairs
For a suitable place
To drill for blood,
Proboscis knocks
A hair and that's enough:
Down comes Thunder,
Life's knocked flat.
Trying
For sustenance or love,
Plant four feet firmly,
Slide it in,
Suck and get the
Hell out.
Don't sing before you do it.

ralph gustafson

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