QUARRY

A COLLECTION OF NEW POETRY

with

Introduction, Notes, and Appendices

SUBMITTED FOR THE DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (CREATIVE WRITING)

BY

PHILIP DAVIES ROBERTS
QUARRY

Poems

with Introduction, Notes, and Appendices

by

Philip Davies Roberts

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of De Montfort University on 4 October 1995
The author is a Canadian who was educated at Oxford and whose first poetry was published in the UK and in Australia, where he lived for 12 years. This work opens with a collection of 81 poems written in 1994-5, many of them brief, but some extending to two or more pages. These display a range of styles and forms, while recurring themes include dreams, North American Native rituals and ceremonies, French grammar, personal relationships, small-town life, spirituality vs. religion, and the act of writing itself, to mention a few. Many of these are united in the long central poem, "Quarry", which gives its name to the collection.

The rest of this document includes an introduction to the poet’s background and concerns: his youth in Canada, his period of "apprenticeship" to Robert Graves in Oxford and Mallorca, his work as a publisher, editor, and teacher in Sydney, and his present life in a small country town in Nova Scotia. It then moves on to an account of his work on the present collection, and continues with a detailed analysis of each of the poems, particular attention being paid to rhythm, metre, and other prosodical matters. (Roberts is the author of How Poetry Works, Penguin, 1985, an account of prosodical effects in English poetry, and some of the poems in this collection are laid out in the "downbeat column" style pioneered in this book.)
The work concludes with appendices containing 17 earlier poems referred to in the body of the text, 14 hitherto unpublished letters from Robert Graves to the author, a glossary of prosodic terms used in the text, a select bibliography, and a list of earlier books of poetry published by the author.
DECLARATION

I, Philip Davies Roberts of 144 St George Street, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, Canada, hereby declare that

a) the content of my thesis Quarry represents solely my own work,

b) the contents of this thesis have not been submitted for any other academic or professional award,

c) the thesis is submitted on the conditions contained in the De Montfort University Regulations, and

d) the work was carried out as part of the the course of study for which I was registered and not previously or subsequently.

Signed at Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia on 4 October 1995.

Philip Davies Roberts
CONTENTS

QUARRY: NEW POEMS
INTRODUCTION
NOTES
APPENDIX A: EARLIER POEMS
APPENDIX B: LETTERS FROM ROBERT GRAVES
APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY
APPENDIX D: SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY
APPENDIX E: POETRY COLLECTIONS BY PHIL ROBERTS
IN APPRECIATION

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Grateful acknowledgement is made to the National Library of Australia for permission to quote from the Robert Graves letters now in their archives.

■
QUARRY

BY

PHIL ROBERTS
AARDVARK: POEM TO POET

Demountable always, demonic on occasion, yet forever
Easy in its element, "artlessly" shining
Marching into the city centre
On to the market cobbles bleached
Near to white in the Sunday glare where
Traces of the past week's deals
Forgotten blow in the gutter:
Our common past
Rooted in rite (as it is)
Takes a kind of blindness to see

Until the best, most
Numinous of every age
Is somehow deftly dove-tailed
Velvet-like, warm even
Erogenously embodied in
Rhythm, pitch, tone, themselves becoming
Symbolic of something perhaps
Ineffable yet still forever
Talk from one to another:
You to me

Plus, if your reader insists it
Has to be somehow concerned with an aardvark, it
Demonstrably was, always will be, is
They finally meet, at a neutral spot
as the agency recommended, she in tweeds
with chunky understated accessories,
he in black leather and shades.
They have just taken in the sunset
walking along a deserted beach
becoming as one with the breakers; now
the candles are lit, champagne in a bucket,
behind them a blazing log fire. Look,
her teeth are perfect, his would be too
but for a minuscule chip on one, the result
of a long-ago scrap. Their shining eyes
are complementary hazel, their hair
lush, his black, shoulder length
glinting blue, hers honey blonde,
half-teased, half-coiffed. He has sleeves
rolled up, his forearms' knotted sheen
set off her crossed, languorous legs.
They lean to each other, and in close tones
begin their first real conversation
which (the waiter reports back to the kitchen)
boils down to how much freedom
each is willing to lose to the other.

So imagine a year or even six months
into it -- the champagne rotting her guts
and the house reeking with the stearic
stench of hundreds of intimate candles
lit & snuffed. They already agreed
to give up the beach that mid-winter day
when he froze his nose, and the fireplace
smoked a lot so they’ve switched to oil --
but where is he now? off to his no-hope
biker pals stinking of grease & rubber
and his hair is clogging the bathroom shower
(his personal habits are worse than a dog’s)
and she dreams of librarians with immaculate nails
and probably wouldn’t even bother to look
if she could see him now, drugged, drunk
tears in the arms of one of his buddies ....
It’s now she starts dreaming up a new ad --
something about classical opera and art,
deep feelings and financial security --
whatever it takes to create the dream
to escape the curse laid by a long-ago friend
back when the first one failed: "Face it --
you really aren’t the marrying kind."
In the wings wait a corgi, a Burmese cat,
a parrot that swears, hundreds of tropical fish.
ANOMIE, A CLASSIC CASE OF

Yes, those were the words. They didn't give any prognosis. When I got back home I looked it up. Symptoms: insomnia, friends become strangers, gut belief the sun won't rise.

Causes: too much caffeine, misuse/disuse of your native tongue, forgetting what happened this morning (i.e., the sun) is fairly sure to rerun at least tomorrow.

Treatments: a diet of bread & wine, immersion in Latin & Hebrew, a camp-out on top of a mountain above a land-locked sea surrounded by a desert

and if at the end of that time the sun fails to rise, you're the only person awake on earth, your dreams are visions of fire, you may be on the brink of a cure.

To say that this is extremely rare would be something of an understatement: there is no documented case of its ever having happened except possibly once twenty centuries ago on a hillside in the East but this is far from clear as afterwards the subject never returned for tests.
AWAY, THE ONE THAT GOT

Last night it came to me
after being on the tip
of my tongue for a decade

at least, and me always
putting it off, with the flash
that it would be enough

to set it down plain
even including how long
I’d been dreaming of it

till this morning, after
so long, ready to commit
the simple act, I find again

nothing but fog & emptiness
nothing at all. Urging
my thoughts to idle among

various possible topics
music, food, sex
loneliness, boredom, aches

strolling along a garden
path, nothing comes, nothing
I moon by the river....

I know it was something like breath
something soft, possibly sad
riveting, sweet, electrical

with a bite like a stun-gun....
Could it be this search
had something to do with it

all the time? Speak
now or forever hold
your peace, tease!

Strange how that luminous shape
under the cedar by the river
never, but never, stops moving
BEDFELLOWS

I seem to end up sharing my space
with people whose dreams are too grandiose
for mine like the Scout at camp one summer
who'd latch onto me, moaning
his brother's name over & over
or the short-term lover
who one windy night hissed in my ear "I'll
throw an incendiary at you!"
or you who by day affect not to care
but in mid-dream grow manic with want
bump me, jump me, hump
me -- yes, yes, yes -- I wake up
wait till you yourself come to
disarm me with two common words
outside is nothing but black & ether
between us nothing either
BELLES-MERES

In the francophone world
there is absolument no distinction between
step-mothers and mothers-in-law: belles-mères alone
accounts for them both,
which explains a lot of confusion
over how Cinderella could marry that Prince
when her mother-in-law-to-be had already
been so mean, likewise his two ugly sisters.
And all those ha-ha mother-in-law jokes in French
are much less funny when they translate
to replacements your father brings home
while you're still cutting your baby teeth.

And of course, these days
even the strictest monogamist
can easily have two belles-mères at once,
a mother-in-law
and a step-mother, two totally unrelated
people and only one word to refer to them both:
"beautiful mothers" --
both apparament equally belle,
creaming dreams with savoir-faire.

So how do you distinguish?--
"my beautiful mother pertaining to my father"?
"my beautiful mother pertaining to my wife"?

I've asked a few French males
if it ever becomes a problem, but all
I get is that never-fail Gallic shrug
while the real mothers,
sit in silence spinning straw
squat in the ashes, beyond the law.
Thinking of being
about to write
a song of "love that cannot be"
the paper white
everywhere but this corner
where the image begins spinning
so the more
that goes down
the more ruined & black it gets
the love becoming
nowhere, likewise
the song, the rest of the sheet
still shining
always possible holding
its own against hidden forces
CAT & DOG

The cat stays home
when the dog goes on expeditions with us.

She grazes the ground in the yard
while he scents the air from the canoe.

She’s on the prowl under the porch.
He pounces through woods in a shower.

She spends the night in the garage.
He curls up with us by the lake.

She dreams of a lap: he snores
next to the dying embers.

When the dog gets back to town with us
the cat takes off for the wilderness.
CAVEAT

You hold me close
look deep into my eyes
whisper

"You know you
can trust me, you
know you can"

Funny how
until that moment
it wouldn’t

have struck me
I couldn’t
Or shouldn’t
CD/CV

Just slip the disc in here, activate "Play" then switch on the screen and the candidate's credentials flash forth in stereo wall-to-wall sound together with action profile, her voice well-honed with restrained reverb, a tone assured, eager, yet not too dangerously keen.

Impatient? Jump to the next track: here the candidate is in the home workplace tackling the laundry, here you notice the suavity is somewhat more strident and it looks as though whites are being mixed with coloureds, some quite gray -- adjust hue & tint, then skip on your way.

In this one she's left the presentation having wowed the execs with voltaic words conjuring up mountains, clouds, & power winning the hearts of all -- and is now walking alone in the dark street outside a passer-by mutters filth at her no one else has ever heard of her.

Cut it: skip to the finale
Here totally naked and defenseless looking straight at the lens -- she is hungry she is cold, she lacks everything she asked & dreamed. Now she wants only your job You frown: too zealous, the pathetic-despair overtones should have been run through a filter.

It makes you wonder about people like her spending big bucks on working the media to appear cutting-edge, "avec-le" then not getting a decent drama-producer to make it professional Still, these things make great Frisbees from the fifth floor -- try this one and see
Your left hand runs crazy
rags and a dish
sits next to you on the piano bench
the famous writer affecting
desperate to be your lover
rattling teeth in the scullery
your old dances are still able
to bring half of Europe
to her knees, but in this cell
out of time, out of tune
with cool bruised new-aquamarine
Mallorcan moon

No matter how many
candles surround you
keep eyes locked
breathing fresh singing
falling from fingers
intending never to die

yet three weeks from now
to be buried alive
beside the Cathedral. You sigh,
"Alas! My poor hands!" Tears turn
the dark darker. Do you know
your music has already outlived you?
CHURCH/SEARCH

A wash of blue & purple rinses
bespectacled blank gazes
organ blazing quaint
as a steam-run trolley
the minister clearing his throat
crackles & fading
the brass plaques on the wall
could use some elbow
"She Hath Done What She Could"
endowed with a dusty patina
there are announcements
a sigh for the offering
a Victorian children's story
with stilted moral read from a wooden book
passages from the Scriptures
selected for the faithful
and four heavy hymns
people stand to heave to heaven
yet what we're here for we all know
can't be written or spoken
or even sung even on Sunday
its initials are an anagram of GOD
the search occupying
precisely one hour per week
CORDLESS

I take it with me
behind the garage

when it rings a line
lances the air

our words hang from it
secured by a pine tree

for all to see
(It’s essential to say
hi to all the neighbours’
ears glued to scanners)

If I go right under the tree
you can still hear my voice

but all I get is white noise
I go on talking, wondering

if they can hear both sides
if you’re still there

if you can read me
more than I read you
They moved in overnight. They must have come by air, a regular convention. No one even knew at first how to pronounce the name -- Coy-oat? Kigh-owe-tee? Then the local weeklies became full of owners with missing Fidos & Fifis and now cows have learned to bunch at the foot of North Mountain nights, against the first foe they’ve known. The eyes that deepest alien Tex-Mex jade, noses on the sniff for Canadian carne, glimpsed by the road, they seem so rangy, so spare, what motivates them, gazing down on the beaten-up weatherboard apple farmhouse, six generations old, all family gone except for the "baby", the unmarried son now turned eighty, alone on a diet of biscuits & tea, staring in the dark at flip-flopping purple images from a TV permanently tuned to the moon? and no fire, the calico cat asleep in his lap and him getting confused about where the rest of them went and some kind of scratching at the back door and now the first scent of musk-ridden breath. He knows nothing about any of this.
DAWN

Last night
in the middle of a dream
you reach out in your sleep
stoke me up up and aware
of what becomes something violent
the two of us finally connecting
then coasting back to where we'd been
your sweet butt rocked in my groin
my chest and belly your shining back
my arms round your shoulders
my spirit at your ears
attuned to every passing wave

What in your dreaming inspires you
to reach out like that? what in mine
keeps us hand in hand, but only till dawn?

■
DEATH OF A FRIEND

Last night I dreamt my friend was dead
it was hard to believe
I had seen him only yesterday

his wife was picking Brussels sprouts
while he smilingly chided me
for some minor lapse or other

he looked happy enough getting frail
parietal sutures pronounced steel hair
turned to adventitious fluff

I was stunned I couldn't believe it
It had happened ten minutes after I left
"It was just the way he'd have wanted--"

everyone said "--still in the prime of life"
A great hole yawns, I wake, reach out
The next time I see him he's someone else
DEDICATION

You know some of these poems
I should dedicate to you by rights

Some you suggested either directly
or slantwise as is common too

Some you more or less inspire
(may they convey something of your style)

Some are delight, some a puzzle
others only outrage, lust

It’s possible you might wonder why
your name doesn’t seem to appear

Actually, it does -- embossed
in invisible ink, thus

keeping forever expanding
the wilderness between us
Merrilee astride the Magic Mountain
in a totally black, plastic cave

happening to wave a joyful hand
got her thumb snapped off.

Three of Snow-white's dwarfs were waiting;
one gave her a shot of something assuaging

while the other two ushered her over
to a Koda-kapok tree concealing

an entrance to the underworld
where a surgeon with Goofy teeth

Mickey Mouse ears and Papa Doc glasses
smartly bowed and bound the hand

with a specialist click of heels. Minutes later
a check for five hundred Yankee dollars

in her good hand, she finds herself lying
on a levee by Kissimmee Lake

her mind erased, sky hanging low
& one echo, the echo remaining:

We do hope you enjoyed yourself.
No return visits permitted. Yours, WD
DIVORCEE

Much to her sons' amazement
their eighty-three-year-old mother
decides to attend her ex-husband's birthday
at a nearby Chicken Hut.

This was the man who
almost a half-century earlier
took off for Elsewhere arm-in-arm
with a local hat-check girl,

the son-of-a-bitch she said
she'd curse to her dying breath,
consign to eternal fire, refuse
even to share the same town with,

the bastard who'd stabbed her in the back,
pulled the plug on "wife" and "mother",
driving her out into the cold
to earn her keep as a teacher.

No-one can quite believe she's there
tonight, even sitting quite close
to the honoured birthday boy, smiling,
eyes shining, raising the toast

to his health & many more years
with the woman he chose over her for his mate --
raddled, furrowed, harrowed,
staring blankly at the cake.
DREAM

Heading for this major powwow
down a long woods road in the fall
through a mountainside forest

Will stops at a cabin
surrounded by fields of fallen leaves
the soft sun, the air still warm

and before you know it
it's dark and now he can hear
the feet of others heading there

crunching along the gravel
close enough to the cabin,
the sounds of the round-up starting

see the sparks fly far above
the trees, unfurling of heat
clouds of cedar lit from beneath

feels in his gut the boom of the drums
the nasal ai-yais of the men
women’s long high keening

and still some feet
go by on the gravel but
not as before, the feast

has reached a zenith with Will
still stuck on the cabin porch
unable to move, gazing up

at the sparks turning and flashing
in the hot wavery gray
no more than half a mile away

Then waking in the middle of the night
the dream itself now become a dream
still on the porch of the cabin

the pinewoods soft & silent
his eyes now projecting beams of light
weak at first, less than a match

but enough that if he gets down
on his hands & knees in the scrub
he can see the tiniest leaves
the leathery seeds of the tea-bush
the crimson cups of magnetic moss
and once he starts focusing tighter

the beams get brighter & brighter till now
he lights up the undersides of the pines
branches & trunks seem to jump

out from the black -- till suddenly
he hears more steps approaching
and falls to the still-warm ground

staring hard as he can down a radiant
rat hole to quench the light, soaked
in rays bathing underground tunnels

and the crunching feet come nearer
& nearer then stop  He wakes up
the porch is flooded with sun

it’s the middle of the day
slowly it dawns on him it’s over
with all the feet gone home

with him beginning to wonder
how far the light will take him    whether
the rest of the way    somenight    maybe
The two deck chairs
sat together a week or so
after our Easter "discussion"

facing the west, still a pair
canvas backs in line
arms parallel as soldiers

One still hasn't moved, though has come
to seem somewhat dwarfed by the drama
of a forsythia gone mad. The other --

every time I stop by now
it seems to have moved
once by the back door

once far back in the dark trees
once in the middle of the grass
facing now this way now that

maybe trying to catch some sun
optimize the reading light
enjoy the view of the river better

maybe trying to hide
Who knows if some kind of camera
speeding the whole thing up

might not reveal a formal dance
a bowing, wheeling, showing-off
a posturing, shameless pas-de-un

vain display encircling
the other chair that never moves.
that no one ever uses now?
EXERCISE, NEW YEAR'S EVE

Early Will leaves the Group Home for Misfits
buckets Provincial Highway Eight
in his 1986 Ford Bronco II
till he reaches Kedjimkujik National Park,
heads to the start of Big Dam Lake,
straps on the well-waxed Noordiwiker skis,
grips his Securoprong ski-poles, then "off,
off, forth on swing" (to quote the poet)
as a swallow swoops over a meadowbank
first into the woods behind the lake
where the trail gets narrower & narrower
then grappling down the bank
which is where the real story
of today's expedition begins.

The snow on the ice is thick and growls
sometimes hums or throbs
a distant approaching plane
and the plates of breaking crust cut into
the outer sides of his ski-boots (feet
get tender with this treatment)
and the wilderness expands to gray

he wafts in, while the skis as he gazes
down at them cleanly gliding along
in the barely distinguishable snow
bear him along on their own
and the future floats into the past
so he can't make out where he has been
still less where he may be going.

The whole thing ends when the light starts to fade.
He hitches a free ride back on the tramlines
he laid on the way out. He really can't see them
but the skis keep on going where they've already been
so now it's clear where they're going to end.
It would take a huge effort to step out of them,
blaze out a tangent, never return. And to what end?

On the trail back, along Frozen Ocean Lake
Will sees a Pileated Woodpecker attacking a White Birch.
Back in "D" Parking Lot is a stranger from Saskatchewan
sporting a Kodiak Parka & Goretex Mitts
who drove all the way in a beat-up Mustang.
The New Year lights are already bright
as he coasts downhill, home to Annapolis Royal.
The reason for the name remains obscure. -- O.E.D.

It's clear if C. T. Onions or Eric Partridge had ever been hailed with a cry to "Gimme five" this ineluctable riddle could have been cleared up at once. So, obviously, if it's a ballgame you play with your hands, [it's fives.

Likewise it may be a poker hand, as in the song: "Five... five... then STOP, that's enough." No, it's not hard to understand the reason the number to our ear sounds "off" -- or "high", "difficult", "ambitious", "poetic", or simply "hard" -- when every child's experience with nursery rhymes shows the four-beat line to be easy, fun, & natural. The trick with fives is to do it while keeping light -- keen as a pin, plain as a gun, always meaty, neat, sweet -- and incomplete.

*British handball game (1631)
FLU

Whatever it was you got, I got it too
today woke up with spinning head
really wanted to stay in bed
knew it when the rhythms of the morning
news in time started chiming a warning:
Chinese Trade Arrangements Made,
Militant Bosnian Terrorists Rioting,
Black Death Plague spreading through
my nerves like gas. And I also knew
what it must be like to be you
with everyone speaking in rhythm & rhyme
not at odd moments but all the time....

I forced myself to get up
took the dog to get groceries
trying to make some kind of sense of it keeping
to sentences like this that don’t rhyme or scan or anything.

Now I can look at it here in plain view
I already feel better. How about you?
The Old Man was going.
It was his last time to speak.
In faltering tones, clenching back tears
he paid tribute to his councillors.

Bestowing tokens upon them
with solemnity, he removed his chain
and laid it round the neck
of his eager young successor.

He shook the hands of the others,
took leave of them with careful words,
addressed each with heartfelt honorifics,
till it came to me -- "And, not forgetting

you, Silver Fox...." That was all --
he shook his head, gripped my arm --
then he was gone.

I had been his fiercest foe.
Both our faces showed the scars.
The room seemed so empty now.
There was nothing left to say.

And that's how I received the name
I would carry the rest of my life.
FRAG I

...and so
after a bad
night & burnt-out recall

you stroll
into the sunroom
just as morning breaks

and all
the fall afternoon
we loll along the river

so close
I get choked
smiling you take the full weight

of two
or three understatements
before the sun dies

we smoke
up on a rock knowing
this is as close as this

is ever
going, by whatever
heroic measures, to get
FRAG II

...how you used to do Corso's "Marriage"
at readings still in your twenties
with a choke in your throttle, wiping your eyes
having by then tasted one or two moments
of physical desire mixed in equal parts
with good-will, feeling this must have been "love"

wrote song after passionate song
praising the bliss of being the besider
the pain of apart, the desperate desire
to live, to love, to become
then like the stories
marry, have children, split up

at which point life falls flat
into one day growing out of another's
empty repetitive tasks

and you sit by the stove, winter alone
the dog by your feet, the cat in your lap
slowly become the invisible man
dreaming of "She", awaiting her lover
in a hot tub alone with a razor
& mirror nearby. Outside the wind roars

28
FREAK WAVE

for Tone

it's the one that hungrily rises
in blocks of freak ultramarine
with your particular name
only yours and yours only
emblazoned all over it
out of the blue, scoops
you off the rock where
we had been standing
side by side

sweeps you away
to another country
another way of looking at things
and I just go on being there still smiling
only now only slowly feeling, becoming aware of
the spreading cool at my side where once you'd stood
GAME

The dog saw the cat first
down the street in front of the deserted store.
His steps became precise, his ears pricked high.

Then there was
some insignificant furry thing
running towards -- yes, I said towards -- the cat's front paws.

It was plainly a mouse.
As we advanced
the dog was good and kept to heel

but the cat and the mouse
not knowing he'd be so mannerly
froze in their play, stared

as he passed, a precarious balance,
the gray-green eyes of the orange cat,
the black starry eyes of the tiny brown mouse

locked on him, unable to stir
till their common foe (us) had passed
and was safely beyond any possible threat.

Only then
(I glanced back to check)
did they get back to the game.
GETTING OFF

So it's then you read me
"the only poem you ever wrote"
(which I don't believe)
it's crazy jailhouse rock
you & a guy with trembling thighs
your cock like brass
deep in his ass
him moaning & crying
everything rhyming
tender obscenities
you hard & humping
shouting "Shut up, bitch!"
watching stopping to wash(?!)
then reversing inhaling
the deepest parts of each other
till the whole thing explodes
bodies lanced to the floor
mashed to the door -- wild!
as you read it
getting sincere
you play with yourself
till you get to the end
where you jack yourself
off (in the poem) to the skies/what a surprise
I'm getting turned on -- it's crazy
it's cheap it's crude but it's real
then you put away modest
tell me I'm the only one
you've ever read it to
I might react more
but you actually read it to me before
and seem to have forgotten
You ask if it might be suitable
to appear in a planned anthology
you read about I say I doubt
Now you say you've written others
perhaps more acceptable to the public
Buddy, give me a break!
How come you never read me those?
Is it that this is for you
a way of getting off easy?
When I leave it goes with me
GLITCH, PERSONAL-TOUCH

Dear Mr ROBERTS:

Mr ROBERTS, you will not believe your eyes. Your name has been selected from a MILLION others to go forward in our Annual Talent BANQUET.

Imagine your delight, Mr ROBERTS, Sir, as you join the throng to be TOASTED and honoured among Canadian leaders of TASTE.

During the banquet, CALF-LEATHER books goldleafed & stamped with your own PERSONAL name (Mr ROBERTS) will be presented.

Imagine the PRIDE of the ROBERTS family, Mrs ROBERTS and all the ROBERTS children to see you, hERR rOSTEN, so acclaimed.

As an OUTSTANDING example to your people. Vous devez être fier, Madame SOUCI. Esperamos Señor ZORRO recibir su respuesta, quedando Yours SINCERELY.
GRASS JELLY

In the July-baked musty
shelves of the Chin Xua grocery:
suddenly, Grass Jelly.

It’s so cheap I tell the girl
throw it in with the jasmine tea:
dream of undiscovered pearl.

Unopened it sits on your shelf for a week
then one afternoon I can’t resist:
ugh: brown smell of barnyard creek.

The next day I take off for home,
leave the puzzling contents behind:
hazy gray of autumn.

In October you write
the Chin Xua girl explains:
"Shower sugar like snow. Make sweet."

But why the grass? why jelly?
and why not Jelly Grass?
January white lies heavy.
HOSTEL, VANCOUVER, BACKPACKER

The first night there you're put in a dorm
with three other guys you're afraid will rape you

in another room in the dark I step
with my boot on the foot of a sullen Swede

who without apparent emotion says "FAWCH!"
So in the end we end up up in

a room of our own over
the Greyhound Bus roundhouse

where we smoke on the fire escape
watch the summer solstice sun

hang forever over the city's
proud Asia-ransomed jewels

bisected by the skytrain's
cream-filled horizontal wake

brew up pots of tea & ginger  cruise
East Hastings Street at night

count how many Maple Leaf flags
flying from yachts in False Creek

(You get 49, two better
than me but at least I was always
better at making comparisons)
During that often endless week

you slept a lot  I wrote
letters and read & gazed & sighed

Meanwhile, where was the tent?
curled up, resting inert

limply over the radiator
reuseable  recharging  expanding
HUNKERING

Hunkering down in the backyard, down behind the brushpile out of tuning into the rumorous community noise the general hum, suspicions

the muffled thud of a car door closing at the self-serve grocery parking lot a dog far off on my left (now he’s stopped)

a cube-truck whining into third a crowd of magpies, some crows the chitter of littler birds in the briars,

behind those elm-trees, probably you can see the flag of Nova Scotia on the left, on the right the Canadian flag each on its separate staff. You can’t see it unless you stand up, but the flag-poles actually flank the front of the local branch of the Liquor Commission store.

At one point, there was a long cry, either a cat in heat or a stuck baby, only once -- something like but not quite the sound you’d expect from either

but apart from that, out here in the sun it’s mainly birds & traffic, tires, brakes, engines, horns, the general hum, suspicions. It feels like noon.

■
ITE, AMOR EST

Let's imagine
I wasn't stuck on you
and you weren't stuck on something else

instead
those entrancing flames round which
we fly solo together were suddenly snuffed

and in the night
in the dark smell of their smoulder
we ourselves were linked

in such a way
that a bond was born between us
so strong that when morning came

we could take leave
of each other in peace, return
each to our separate peoples

with such myth
as to entrance the young wives
bring light back to the old men's eyes
ITINERARY

At first they planned to go direct: instead of keeping to their own territory which meant heading miles north up the Big River around the Kaskassi Hills skirting the lands of the Maliseet hit out due west, straight through Maine in a line till they come out in the middle of the Abenakis (our brothers) where whitemen switch to French

Later, after a week with those people and countless cases of spruce beer now armed with unbridled courage instead of continuing west through our Mohawk & Huron connections they drop south through the mountains deep into alien lands where men choose themselves who will rule A couple of times they are challenged he has to win this knuckle game before they are allowed to proceed to the wild-flower plains to deserts, mesas, buttes bloody as steaks where people don’t cotton to strangers

Then the mountains up hearts pounding, even snow this in the spring, then the road closes and they have to retrace head still further south along the Coloured River this time heading westwards through rows of parallel ranges to another week with distant kin

Then in a single day burst forth into gray and cool sand breakers
From there it was easy
to slip up the coast
back where we lay claim

On the return
they got a bus
straight through Canada, nothing of note

a couple of major mountain resorts
the low flat prairies
and the never-ending Laurentian scrub

a mere week
as fast as they were running
to cover what had taken months

the only surprise:
that two-headed bat
in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan
JANUARY RAIN: without glasses

An old woman in the graveyard in the distance --
I can make her out from the garage
here where I’m sitting, smoking --
shabby gray coat, pink & white headscarf
kneeling in the grass, in the morning mist & drizzle,
two very small white headstones in front of her,
a larger shining black one to the left, and, further away
and running behind them, linking them all in a line,
a horizontal metal rail lustrous with rain.

As I get nearer
the old woman herself is the back of a gray granite tombstone,
the kerchief is a clump of plastic chrysanthemums on top of it,
the two small white headstones are just that, but unrelated to her,
the black one to the left, further away, also unrelated,
and the lustrous rail behind them becomes the foreshortened breadth
of the rain-slicked street on the east side of the cemetery.

Yet certain possibilities remain
ye they were her children twins
puerperal fever still a young mother
life up to then had been fun for her
blizzards the roads impassable sledges stuck
husband blamed himself steel-walled himself gone
now forty years later at least
it still gnaws her guts and shall
till she is no longer to be seen

as she is here & now,
on her knees in the mud
under the warm January rain.
KICK, RELATIVE

It depends a lot
where you get it
the stuff from Biff
puts me to sleep
from Bax I feel
nothing at all
but from Bud
I end up up
any time whatever
happy hours later
Exactly three klicks from start of climb
to the foot of the high altar
and a steady slope up all the way.

Way stations here & there
two men nailing crossbeams by the road
after the long dark cleft

where now even at noon the sun doesn't touch
then the final stretch heading north
the steepest grade at the end

heading dead-on due true north
(rare in this diagonal province)
so your head soars like a rose before you

and at the end you step
onto a wide flat floor
a mammoth wing opening onto the west

nothing much to the east but a window
looking down on the River and Valley.
The centre aisle jogs slightly to port

now & then, avoiding the direct approach
to the front, true dead-on due north
crowned at the top by the tallest tree

surrounded by thorny briars
Labrador tea and roses. Basaltic columns
rear up from the floor below the tree.

Someone has painted the shape of a heart in white.
The floor of the nave is paved with tesserae --
green, brown, clear glass diamonds meshing.

Here is a monument, a heap of earth;
also a pit with rocks for abasement,
and the other things one expects in a church.

And over here is a wide staircase
around the West Wing up through the woods
to the top of the Altar, to the foot of the tallest tree

As well, on the East Side the celebrant
has a staircase, private & narrow --
it's pretty steep and you're close to the edge
and it's better not to look down
and you might as well stop worrying
the dog will slip over

If God wills the dog back
God will take the dog; as sure as
if people can think God people will

sitting at the top, with binoculars
looking down all over the Valley,
one with the Rock discharging its might.
...and I don't want this to be another of those easy lists where you snap out two zappy examples that trigger chuckles all round then nail them with a third exploding in a metaphor for something a helluva lot greater and better prepared than anyone earlier expected

No, my intention was merely to suggest a connection between the states of mind of absolute novices, virgins, first-timers about to eat olives and escargots or jump out of a sauna and into the snow or make out with someone whose sex doesn't show "Try it -- you'll like it!" urge the detestable peanut gallery with the smugness of those in the know faces reflecting the lip-licking sauces the ecstasy of flesh richly flushing the mapping of hidden forest expanses and then of course their remark turns out to be only half the truth the once risky becomes just part of life but you still could try goosing an aardvark while doing a headstand, mooning a cop, or seriously making love to your wife
LOOKING BACK

He was on his way out of the door, face set, nothing to say.
She gave him something for the journey
(she had given it a fair deal of thought) --
a notebook, some matches,
a flask of spring water, a few apples,
a tape of solo flute music with lots of silence,
a number to call if he needed protection.

She pictured him there at the end of the driveway
under the dying elm, the last one left;
after a while she knew he was gone.

Later she finds the pouch at the foot of the tree.
He has taken the apples and water
but everything else is there
plus a pouch of some regular, bitter herb
and the hunter’s knife he had always worn.

She fingers it gingerly.
The blade is nicked & scarred from of old
but it’s warm in the light of noon
and she knows it has just been sharpened.

All up & down the road nothing moves
except in the woods by the river
some crazy crow is calling.
And how was that lover
all those years ago
and what did he offer, then?

A body, O yes, no doubt
but awareness of precious little
beyond how bread's buttered

No doubt his teen-age looks
weren't bad, the dubious habits
hadn't yet festered his breath

and a fair number of years after that
were spent in long-term attachments
with strictly no playing around -- strange

then that on the cusp of "too old"
he should have heaped & risked
& lost not only the love he had

but also the one he hankered for
(being greedy) (two people you still
can see around town on occasion)

left one of them bitter & hurt
the other still playing at "friends"
with nothing left to be shared

So where did he go, this lover
when everything had turned so bloody?
Why, to China, of course

as a white-haired sage to be revered
to deconstruct walls
as a lama disappear

He is everywhere there
honoured by granite statues & plaques
No-one will speak of him here
MAGOG MOON

someone showed me A POEM
someone I'd never met
had written about my home town

"Moon Over Magog!"
What a shock! I'd never
considered the thought that scenic

but now I could see where he was standing
when he looked. I'd never
considered it from that viewpoint

but now it was clear enough
from the western
side of the lake

just before Green Point
on the East Bolton Road
eight miles from Austin

rising, hanging fast
silvering the roof & spire
of St Patrick's Catholic Church

making the trees along Merry's Point
shiver with pleasure
and huge possibilities

I'd never imagined
growing up in the closet
lonely anglophonic

As far as I could see he'd
have to have come from some other place
maybe be French -- but, OK

OK, I accept
it was good he did it
and I award him the palme d'or

(though not without some pique
at his familiarity
with this piece of my territory)

for revealing something always there:
with or without a moon
Magog vaut bien une chanson
Chantons, ensuite:

Au dessus de Magog
y-a-t' un' grande lune
au dessus de Magog
y-a-t' un' grande lune
Tout le monde y dansent là
chacqu'un avec chacqu'une

La lune, la lune, la lune --
chantons alors la lune

[bis, fading]
MAN CALLED UPON TO COMPLAIN, THE

S.M., D.G., T.Y.

Every town & hamlet has one. Dresses all in black. It's usually after someone dies "not well" maybe in a car smash or from some unspeakable disease they call him. (They choose them at birth.) He grumbles like hell, mutters curses, kicks rocks but gets there somehow in his beat-up truck hanging with roots & feathers, packs hardly a buck gets there first, shoulders his way to head of line, kneels down at foot of victim opens face wide to the skies: "WHY?" cries, cheeks shiny with tears & grease, "why now? why this woman? why this way? why the children? why such justice? why go on?" He goes on like that till everyone else has left, gone back to their homes, back to the shop, the market to singing, beating drums, to love, to be bored while he disappears with his dog. Kids fear him. He does have one close friend, though no-one else lets on. For centuries untouched by the rest of the world, this is the way they've handled grief. (The best ones are blind, or gay.)
MARKET

This time Will had the idea
of this small island store
the size of your average convenience

where one brand and one brand only
of each commodity would be sold
the superior one, it goes without saying

so: Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
Cooper's Oxford Marmalade, Patak's Ginger Pickle
Snow's Clam Chowder, Top Tips Tea

Fru-Grain Cereal, Becky's Pesto
Southwind Heaters, Grundy Grinders
Jotel Airtights, Rolex Watches

Tilley Endurables, L. L. Bean Jackets
Birkenstock Sandals, Victory Mousetraps
and Globus Hungarian Black Cherry Preserve....

Trouble is, at opening eve
someone forced the Masterbar Locks
sprung the Brinks titanium hinges

trashed the place, strewing
cases of generic instant coffee
jars of souped-up chemical creamer

and daubed on the walls
in a khaki paste comprising
57 varieties of swill:

"MR & MRS CONSUMER HAVE SPOKEN"
"DOWN WITH THE FOOD SNOBS"
"GIVE US WHAT WE WANT!"

When did they ship all that stuff over
from the mainland, where did they come from
these instant junk-food addicts?

especially as outside
now not a soul can be seen,
not even the faintest print
MAY, THE WATERS OF
Carlos Jobim, d. 1994

It’s a bridge, it’s a dyke
on the outskirts of Missouri

it’s the birthplace of Popeye
a riverboat hustler

it’s a ring, it’s a feather
an unnumbered highway

it’s a crest, it’s a swell
and a little red pickup

it’s a rush from the blue
and the sweet blonde driver

it’s lips drawn back, teeth chipped
generous mouth in shock

it’s the truck hurling straight at us
the horn, the horn

it’s the shades are up but
is there anyone home

it’s headlights blank, grille smiling
a badge glistening silver

it’s a faroff crowd of crows
circling miles & miles of corn...

When the music stops
we are facing the other way

skidmarks thick on the slick
and the little red pickup

not even a scratch
now just a jaunty cloud

on the other side of the levee
The waters are rising, will flood for a week
D’ja ever find out what happened to Bobby-Jim? Geez, such a promising kid -- could do Rubik’s cube when he was ten behind his back with his eyes closed -- smart little guy, bright, face wideopen always wanting to be the first. And all of a sudden he hit twelve or so -- classic case, the parents split up -- wouldn’t look straight at you, went silent, seen for a while with an older man got into some kinda trouble with a girl then totally disappeared, but once in a while wrote letters to his primary teacher saying he still wanted to marry her always re-mailed so they couldn’t be traced. Strange, cause today someone said they thought he was back in town. Funny I never seen him -- I don’t miss much. Yep [inhaled], like I say, I don’t miss much.
She was telling me over a beer
how a friend went ass over teacup
avoiding some diminutive mogul
on a slope above Zagreb

and the harness didn’t release
and she woke up in a Blutwagen
ride to a clinic of ruddy skiers
chanting a paean of perfect pain

rows of them! then another
pal on a trip to Bali
went to a ward where a buddy
had crashed one of the buggies

all tourists are exhorted to rent
during their tropic vacation
for maximum fun in the sun and found
a roomful of similar victims

in various states of agony
you never once saw hinted
no matter how hard you scanned
the agency brochures’ fine print

the fact that these were friends
of friends of friends being of note
the thrill of the urban legend
underlying the painful joke

Now she spends her holidays pacing
round an exotic gazebo
fenced off behind her garage
fast and furious. Look at her go!
The idea was a musical backing to poems -- not like Sitwell declaiming Façade in time with that tinkertoy Walton score. no, this was more like mood music -- he already had suitable recordings from somewhere so he just picked the poems to go around them.

ode: stately, majestic, pensive: Handel, Vaughan Williams
lyric: joyful, dancing, bucolic: Beethoven, Bartók
elegy: anguished, crying, dying: Chopin, Tchaikovsky

the connection between the words and the music so close, members of the audience later had difficulty in remembering any of it.

which was sad, because on their own the poems whistled their tunes the music told its stories

I'm glad I thought to say this, it came out of a chance remark you made last night halfway through a game of backgammon.
FROM ABENAKI MOUNTAINS
lowering from lands of the Maliseets
rafting the massive tides of Big Bay
comes the messenger of the Wannabees.

Their chief is sick, possibly dying.
Once a noted flute player, he now
sits in silence. No one invites him
to join the circle in the dance.

The messenger carries a feather
plucked from the chief’s left shoulder.
It is red with a blue tip
and a thin green lace tied round the spine.

He speaks of the chief’s former powers,
how at night his eyes could shine
enough to freeze a deer or discover
teeth at night under rocks & logs.

The chief has had a dream. In it
he is at some kind of initiation.
Everyone is running towards the river
perhaps for some ritual immersion
then down the river floats a log,
on it a shape of mud or clay
that cracks, slowly opens, becomes
the first woman of an unknown race.

She stands up on the log, fair, black-haired,
beats a tabor, and behind her
on other logs come warriors in canvas
faces smeared with European paint

Burnt Umber, Flake White, Magenta --
their faces are hard & unsmiling.
Everyone looks in the same direction.
The river flows strongly, smoothly.

On the bank a young man, naked,
seizes the wrist of the chief. A shaman
cross-dresser in make-up and gown,
voice cracking, pleads with him not to leave.

"It’s dangerous. You will die.
The others have already died, don’t you see?";
At this point the chief wakes up.
He keeps the flute near his bed.
He picks it up and plays it.
It is made from the shin of an uncle
who died of the plague at fifty-six.
The tune he plays has no ending.
NEW YEAR

It seems I remember clearly
where I was each midnight
beginning of each new decade

Last one, the nineties, in the organ-
loft of a Chicago church, a guest alone
in a easy chair with Bach & champagne

The eighties began stuck in a shack
with a one-month old baby
& mother surrounded by fire

At the start of the seventies
high on a rooftop in Sydney
with me mates gawkin at fireworks

And the sixties toasting the skipper
of a Norwegian freighter
in a gale on the Bay of Biscay

The fifties, subdued: only weeks
before my father had left my mother
and I was too young to get drunk

The one before that --
I was asleep (snow deep outside)
being only one and a bit

though I seem to remember some uncle
woke me, bore me into the party
to wet the babbie’s whistle for luck....

Counting them off like this
like beads, each to hold, consider
it’s a shock to turn the other way

and face the looming gate
the start of a whole new millennium
(that is, as we here reckon dates)

though it’ll probably end up being
just another day in the end, as simple
& plain as any. So far, at least.
This would be the day
if ever there was one to worship my ancestors

She would be 109
today the only grandmother

I ever knew
born by the bench of a shoemaker

next to a sheepfold on the Island of Anglesey

who grew up
to become "Auntie Maggie Canada"

to others
but always "Nain" (I thought it was "nine") to us. My [brother (two

years younger)
kept harping: "She's all you've got -- look after her."

So I became
her defender through two decades of daffiness

convulsed at her jokes
while the rest of the family grew comatose

till a swift stroke
carried her off on a visit to Florida

the lead-lined coffin
lurching the tracks back to Canada

My father got nothing:
my aunt had preempted the Last Will & Testament

but I got her jug
with the Welsh for "Be Still in the Lord" on it

II

She sure kept moving, dashing
up & down stairs so my parents feared she'd fall & break a leg
(and it wasn’t that at all
but the bogeyman’s stroke while she slept
that carried her off in the end)

She’d sing while she baked
notoriously crazy lemon pies
syrup beads on the meringue
sweat beads on her upper lip
firing favourite quips — "Who’s he
when he’s at home?" "She’s
the cat’s mother..." "I believe
you, thousands wouldn’t." And secretly
pressing a five-pound note
into my hand, "That’s between you
& me & the gatepost..." ("Diolch
yn fawr iawn, Nain.") dragging
on Piccadilly ciggies from aluminium
cases only halfway, shuffling, riffling
her snappy pack prior to Patience
on her dresser, a photo of Taid
smiling, bespectacled, who’d bereaved her
driving (en route from a rendez-vous)
into a train

a week before I was born
that, and words in a locket:
"You Are Ever In My Thoughts"

III

So today I hiked
with the dog to the quarry at the top of North Mountain
great crystalline
columns of clouds scudding overhead and
even this late
the chirping of the final cricket
the rush of wind
to become winter amazingly slack
the mid-fall sun
touching my neck, shoulders, back
I was on the hunt
for a significant chunk of rock

lots of hunks
but the smaller had had their angles rounded

too much the scars
had left a mountain cathedral

including white spray-painted initials JMJ

a "pulpit", "font", "lectern", and up at the top

a type of "altar"
it was hard to find the way up -- it involved

going back down
the slope a way then branching round to the west

After an hour
the sky had turned to lead, lowering

but I found my rock, it
fit snug in my pocket

snug down the hill:
she be with me still

■
The nub of the hook of the book
is solid as romance: falling
for your notion of who he could be
instead of what he actually is
so you take his somewhat menacing look
the creaking leather, the streetwise strut
transform it to something creatively wild
yet tender and always upbeat
while the minor problems of his past
the booze, the drugs, the compulsive sex
pop like soap in the warmth of your tender
affection, issuing iris-arcs
but when it turns out
the old black clouds come scattering back
and when you reach out for a touch
he derides you, moves out of range, then
proceeds to tell you in detail about who
he slept with last weekend -- and how
mostly it was gross or boring
but sometimes fun, even sometimes
someone he ends up caring for, writing
tossing & turning nights over, fighting
someone who could be your twin
someone that just like you
gets to know well the feel of the stars' icy shine at the craziest times
OTTAWAPHONIE

for Marnie Pomeroy

Round here you can't say you belong
without being at least bilangue

like those bevies of péquiste secs, slow-
sipping their Pernods in cafés al fresco

séparatistes arguing language rights
through Salvation-Army-hostel nights

fresh-faced farmboys from Smeaton, Sask.
chatting up chicks from Athabasque

stifling the impulse at whatever cost
to give up, cry "Oncle! J’ne comprends pas!"

Innus yakking in Innuemón
with the Prime Minister out on the lawn

Inuks rapping in Inuktut
with aides from the Louis Riel Institute

Abenak, Mi’Kmaw, Sioux, Maliseet
waxing in Gaelic sans missing a beat

Hurons, Mohawks, and Cree
locuting in Latin so soigné

some even major in Classical Greek--
ici the only langue not to speak

unless you'd be branded a linguistic pig
is English -- c'est complètement infra dig

all along le Canal Rideau
these polyglots parlant si comme il faut

jusqu'à la Rivière Outaouais
(Ottawa River to you, eh?)
PAGE, EXPLORATION OF THE

one dimension of ink
two of paper

then the dot transformed to a line
a jig, a snare, looping, skipping

periodically clinching
but always to the same conclusion

till the page begins to look
like a half-papered attic room

with the old look and the new
"vying for supremacy"

The Cantonese use huge
brushes of black with abandon

thousands of sheets
the size of a tablecloth

going through
paper like water

in the search of the message
that equals the effort

exactly
Thank Christ what I’m doing
requires almost nothing for materials
any old paper, any old pens (I always
mislay them but something turns up)
by contrast, your dream of music
with human voices and MIDI synth
building a consummate rhapsody
to be launched through cutting-edge
sound -- it would cost
at least two thousand
so think of the packet
I save creating it here
on paper for a reader with ears
for the whirl of its words, its voice

* 

A bit like trying to see
one of those three-dimensional figures
buried somewhere in the page
under a motley camouflage scrim
To do it, you have to switch off
gaze abstractly through the paper
and as the image begins to gather
you move it farther & farther off
then it becomes sharper & sharper
even without glasses -- colours fluoresce
with laser-sharp edges -- so you
reach to touch with a finger-tip
and the tip of your finger somehow
goes floating through the middle --
Unreal! My daughter
can see them instantly. Older
people, it takes longer.
Many give up. Others don’t try.

With a poem, when you listen
it’s the same thing

you have to switch off, let your ears
take you, go with the flow

let the picture gather, float
in & out of focus

and for sure in time -- could be a summer
a year or even longer

you’ll be able to walk into it
live it, know it, be it

so when you suddenly shut the book
you’ll return to earth another way
PARABLE OF BEING

(the 16 past participles that use être)

for Marcel Carrier

Went, arrived. Came in, went up
(perhaps to the Jordan) & was born
(could be in the guise of a Messiah).

Came, left. Went out, went down
(some say to She’ol or the Vale of Gehenna)
& died.

Then returned
then came back
then re-entered this life

where He fell
where He stayed
where He became.
like when you first glimpse the red
pickup coming straight at you
at first like an everyday social thing
I mean, who'd automatically assume
the worst but some kind of pervert
pessimist, but just to be prudent
you tap your horn (remember? so long
since you last had to use it) a kind
of message to the sweet little red
riding horror, for now it's on top of you
headlights bland and vacant
chrome immaculate, a drop of dew
on the front plate, the warm-
breath'd engine, the pungent tires
and the windshield a viewless blank
I mean, just because this time
this one was meant for you & you only
is that any reason it has to be a hearse
stenciled with weeping willows & skulls
with bumper sticker: WHO'DA THOUGHT THIS
WOULD TURN OUT TO BE YOUR NUMBER?
PINE

When he was younger but old enough
this kid wrote him poems in which she com-
pared him to the pine tree out on the point
proud, majestic, solitary, erect, &c. --
he was, poor soul, uneasy, supposing
this had to be a thin request
for something he couldn’t give
(he fancied himself still in love
with someone he’d never see again)

But strangely enough, though he pooh-poohed it
from that day on he began to take
a new look at pines. Yesterday, case in point
years later, he spent under a pine
that stuck straight out thick from a bank
then curved straight up, solid as hell
on a totally different point
naked, immersed, slowly shifting
from east to west, always maintaining the sun
and at the end as the light bounced off
the lake underneath it seeing its flicker
lick the boughs’ nether sides like nerves
flashing synapses with disabling news
till the whole tree seemed about to float loose
from its roots, ebb away, lose
itself somewhere deep in the blue

Maybe he was just unnaturally nervous --
it could be
all she meant
in the first place was a genuine pine
POWER

When I was just a kid
I came to believe the might of words
could win you any prize

and that the right tone
of conviction might even
forestall a writ of execution

like the time the bully teacher's
strap slashing down to my palm
was stopped with a single "No!"

(of course, backed with a great
deal of moral belief; I really
was blameless that time, and knew it)

or how a little larding & farcing
done with a touch of grace
could make eyes glisten, arms enfold

Of course, there had to be
something inspired, deeply held
to it, not just vagrant trance

and perhaps it was true
it occurs to me decades later
cause it did bring me you

& you & you again,
all those yous called into being
by the mere slick flick of a pen

is all it was, all the way up to you
when this "power" runs into a barn
of black granite, and me without arms

left crying for something physical
perhaps the shape of a flame
if not the actual heat

with every plea I risk
met with the same guarded glaze
the same considered distance

Is it written thus that this
should turn out to be
my final-curtain speech?
PRAYER OF HENRY VI, DEVOUT

Great God

eternal

from before forever
to beyond forever

Creator of my body
Redeemer of my soul

You bring me here to where I am:

You know what you would do with me

Do with me as you will

With mercy

That's it
PRIEST

can't wait to go back, it's like England before the Beatles
the other afternoon
walk in the back door
see my place as the house of a priest

with its minimal Zen-like objects
all of a single non-descript colour
like England before the Beatles

the dining table, wrested
from a mid-Depression Berliner
matching the unswept floor

the battered piano that must
have come from some Quebec convent
striking a sullen note

the bedroom doors' dusty
transoms from the Commercial Hotel
that once stood on this very spot

the kitchen severely functional
with the one decent-cutting knife's
eroding profile of Queen Victoria

the Damon & Pythias set
of collapsible Costa Rica rockers
withering in the shut-up porch

and me, uniformed in black
to church every Sunday for my sins
dreaming of green, rich, rotting earth
It was going to be a sort of day-to-day record of the cross-continental trip of the year

only instead of the hills and rivers the forests and mountains

and the names of towns and counties it was going to be only to do with people--

like the CD Motel manager searching for next week's TV Guides in the trash

the old hippie pal, now Buddhist & plump who lent us his school bus to sleep in

the hooker that made you jump when she asked for a light -- "Holy shit!"

the kindly Blessed Sacrament father and his frequent generous offerings

the medicine man who drilled you on the four doors of a sweat

It was going to have all these things but on the eve of departure

you took on a full-time job I stayed home. No one went anywhere
Now at the spring solstice I see it from the other side of the river, across Frenchman’s Bay.

At the top of North Mountain it seems no more than a bit of a scar in the trees.

You’d never notice it if you hadn’t been there at least once and had something happen.

I go once a week if I can, more often when I need it, or when the weather makes it urgent.

It’s the all-season all-weather rollback skyroof, enter at no cost or obligation.

I used to return for various reasons; the first and earliest being to possibly spot prey, something elusive, maybe a fox or coyote.

Yet after many times I never saw such a thing.

But I still kept coming back; next, it was for what I could pick up of colour, pieces of glass mosaic, parti-hued diamonds.

You could see them glinting on the floor as you walked across to the far end straight ahead.

But a lot of these, if not all, turned out to be square (carré) celebratory frags of bottle.

But I still kept re-entering, finally, for the rock itself, here where it sprang from the ground.

Or so I thought till one day, walking up the hill, I happened to look over my head to see them there.

Turning & turning, a dangerous cloud of basaltic bits, some as big as a fist, others no bigger than motes of dust.

An omnium gatherum getting heavier & heavier till I hit the floor of the summit.

And was glad to accept the help of the smiling old woman who appeared at my side the moment I came.

And the cloud of rock, after one last convulsive whirl gently, slowly exploded into its individual constituent components.

Each heading off in a different direction, a compass rose expanding each coming to rest amidst similar shards and bolts, indistinguishable, now locked in the allover rockiness.

Men think this to be a place to pick up rock, truck it away, slicing into the skin of the earth incising nearer & nearer the white-hot core.

I see it now more as where rock returns tenderly to the original world in praise of the stasis of nature.

No, it’s the rind of my heart that is cut my heart over & over bowing its knees my heart, its arms yawning wide, wide.
with, hot at its core, the miraculous undying light
of a small, sealed dark-lantern
with inside a flame, a ray
sometimes bright enough to see the way with
sometimes little more than a token glimmer
but always alight, always alight
of that there can be no doubt

As a result, you see me now, this is what brings me to know
what connects light and dark, light and heavy
light bright, light empty, light infinite expanding

The rock is dark, the rock is heavy, the rock is cold
The light is of stars, the light is of space, the light is forever

Besides the old woman, smiling, beside me
was a young man; he was with me for three years
The last time we were there (I did not know then it would be the last)
he piled up rock into the shape of a man, you can still see it standing
two squat legs, a great square torso
the head square too, square as a die
and the two truncated arms, trapezoids, reaching mutely up
People respect it, for whatever reason: after three months it’s still there
He also set a slab to serve as a bench
and on that bench, between us, that last time, as we talked, grew
by itself another, much smaller monument
of odd-shaped frags -- squares, diamonds, rectangles -- things just happening there on the ground around

Later, when I realized he had left, when I had to make anabasis alone, when he was not there at the top (and even the old woman was taken up with the dog or something else)
my heart itself suddenly turned into a rock the size of a fist
to be hurled at the man of stone he had made
I wanted to move on, and the only way was destruction, or so I thought
But then, once I got there, crossing the floor
first, it was hard to pick it out
then I saw it, chunk, square, arms still lifted up to the skies
head back, face lifted, neck bared, waiting --
Even the little heap on the bench I could have swept away with a single gesture of dismissal
seemed by its nakedness inviolable --
I could not do it, then, I could not do it

(even the dog, jumping over it, refuses to knock it over)

Three days ago, the last time, life seemed more simple

73
all I knew was the warmth of the sun coming home, the lantern-flame that would not be put out
and the woods all around, the rustling wonders of March

I turn back for one last look
before beginning catabasis, the simple descent
see the whole scene become one: the altar, the bench, the monuments, the flame, the weapons, the cast-off clouds of rock, one, all become one
RICKY, REACHING OUT FOR

Now a trapeze artist, in this shot
David Nelson is caught mid-air
reaching out for his brother

rockstar Ricky nine years back
fallen to earth in a copter crash
all of them stoned out of their gourds

Only last week aged 80
Harriet the mother succumbed
to a long struggle with something

And Ozzie the father
bandleader gone so long
no one quite remembers

the fresh-faced American family
bouncing out of the radio
nights after World War II

nylons & ball-point pens
chocolate bars & ice-cream
having just became true

I admired David
He was the older brother so
he had to be out there reaching

Ricky the pint-sized joker pip-squeak always ready with the quip
surprised us all by growing up

into a thunderous thrusting
hip-driven black guitar to
thousands of smouldering fans

It seems the parents kept their grace
Harriet singing with Ozzie’s band
doing the occasional guest-spot

where they first met
in a twinkling ball-room
before my time Now all of them

gone only David the first-born my guy
still reaching out still alive
hanging mid-air still 25
SCARF

That evening was the only time
the three of us met together
and she lent you a green scarf

when you & I left, and on the way
back around midnight the snow lashed & flew
my dick freezing, the size of a peanut

You also lent her a turquoise ring
which she haply accepted. I gave
you both my arms. She kept your ring

and the scarf, discarded, forgotten
turns up round the neck of my nephew
Some believe green is dangerous magic

such as Gawain riding off to do battle
with a headless trunk, enlaced
by a lady with emerald bones

■
It tickles us that birds & flowers
arrived here on earth
the same time as our human birth

blooms of impossible colour, scent
birds of convoluted song
& velvet feathers

so as our senses awoke
all these things were there
ready to receive us

so it seemed, those days, wherever
we looked or smelled, whenever
we listened or touched

a bird blossomed
a flower sang and that's
what happened that particular day

we turned to face each other
smiled, embraced, and straightway
tasted, understood the sea
SMELLS

Coming from somewhere north where smells keep to themselves

it's hard to believe the shock of leaving a plane in Spain

being instantly knocked out by omnivorous Iberian scents

the jasmine, diesel's purple burn, frangipani, rotting fish-heads

sweet basil, thyme, oregano garlic, acrid vino tinto

likewise the inescapable stench of something long-dead in a ditch

skirts heavy with saffron, vanilla, the nutty must, the pungency

of an orinario just outside the airport terminal drive

the taxi smells of ashes & saddles You know as long as you're here

your nose, not you will take command

getting you into spots you don't even want to think about.

Funny how those travel-ads never explain this. No shit.
SON MONDE, SA TERRE

pour mon ami Jean Mathieu

In Le's World, each Day becomes a major Event, like a Marble Bazaar with everything hued the Blue of the Sky

in contrast to La, who inherits the Earth a Week in a Piece, in her Library Rooms jammed with Shelves and Cabinets

which is too bad because
Le has in a Corner all of the Books not to mention Newspapers, Records, &c.

La has the famous Pen, of course, the Pen of her Aunt, there on the Table but Le's got every single Piece of Paper

Le has Trousers, La's got a Skirt but for some Reason, he wears a Blouse while she seems to be sporting a Shirt

La sautés Sausage & Chips in a Frypan Le bakes Ham & Eggs in a Stove He takes Tea, s'il vous plait. She sticks to Tisanes

In Le's World it's Autumn, the Maples are Red In La's Earth is nothing but Ice and Snow and -- guess what? -- all the Skis and Skates are his

From La's Window she gazes upon a Church in the Rain, Roses, a Sea-going Barque heading up the English Channel

where Le sees only a Sleeve. He steps out on the Balcony, wondering if this could be the Moment for some kind of Move

then remembers in Time she alone has all the Questions & Answers, also every Lock & Key.... But Le will always have Love
Earlier the noon siren went off at eleven: they forgot to set the clock back yesterday night. People on the street look up then shrug, the sound, on the dot of the hour like that, could signify no possible fire, especially on that day, just a laughable error. One hour later, it blows again. This time you know it has to be true, the blast has such conviction; the rising wail hits the hills the other side of the river, the echo trailing it upwards. Somewhere after its zenith the echo crosses its arc then lingers above it a moment before hitching a ride back to earth, tail floating down behind the kite. What is the chord they make together as they set in the west, I wonder -- a minor third? but the way it deflates through an infinite series of microtones makes it difficult to pin down, it collapses, is lost in the traffic, the mufti hum of a townful of burgers heading for lunch
TALULLAH

They used to say a day away
from her was like a month in the country

The gravel rasp, the tantrums
malicious goblets exploding

Or think of Carmen Miranda's demands,
hats festooned with fruit grenades

And remember Edie Gormay's breakfast duets
with Steve Lawrence? megadecibel riots

The point being a roller-coaster's fine
for occasional glitz but not for commuting

or that neon coat's great for Hallowe'en
but the old brown sweater's better

for everyday (the one you like
when I wear it camping) and I know

once in a moon is greater for us
with its attendant rush of rockets

To me the country (at the top)
would be more like a kind restful jail

where I veg on the bottom, stare up through
the pregnant sag in the mattress roof

for twenty-eight days at a time
and no hope of any parole
What seems even more amazing
than how far it’s come with us

is the way these fibreglass rods
and its gossamer walls & roof
demark the fabric of our life
whenever wherever we may be --

in a farmer’s sweaty fields
lank & lush, still close to home

on a campground on the prairies
(where we boiled tea in the shower)

on an endless gravel strand
above gray Pacific breakers

between roots under trees full of eagles
two hundred feet below the road

(you raged on the rocks for an hour
while I coaxed the sullen fire)

and how often in it together
ancient prides resurface

we set to as though
no-one else can hear us

(Lord, how wrong we’ve been by times)
then in the morning gently, neatly

roll the thing back up
lash to the backpack, then off, off

forth on swing through forest
to try to meet up with some ferry....

Seven by seven by seven, no more
seven cubic feet of space

delimited by such delicate
intersecting planes

some of these cubes remain vacant, one
with only the top of your head
in another only an elbow
but there's one that's packed tight

with everything that grows
between us, including the point

where we come together in dreams
of treachery, escape, shame

defilement, death, then defiantly,
just before we wake up, pleasure.

The aura bestowed on the outdoors
is so intense that even the dog
curls up in its porch for granted
awaiting the morning milk & mail

as soon as we pitch it. And I'm not
dismissing some of the rankest

moments also contained by
those phantasmical walls

which won't be discussed here
for fear of offending libraries

and how the taste, the smell of smoke
thick through it all still stays.
Atop the dusty upright
gathering time between
the metronome & the chess-set
shines the bone flute
fashioned from the still-warm shin
of a defunct warrior uncle.
None of us can play it
the holes are spaced so wide
you have to have a mighty span
pure lungs and the embouchure
of a hermit. Only Mr Henry
down the road, lickerish guy
once on his way home, took it down
spat & blew -- and through
the row of sparkling notes
turning & turning in the air
we heard the husky voice
releasing a phrygian mode
urging us through
unbearable perils ahead
Tamino & Pamina skirting
the dangers of the world
to the knowledge of absolute truth
revealed by the ghost of the flute
We stood hand in hand till it ended
answering our riddle with a question
the diamonds still spinning
in the air. We heard nothing.
It seemed the silence could sing.
That’s what people told us later.
TOCCATA ASSIDUA

Its key is B# major
with an occasional meander
to a relative minor (Bbb)

the world's most demanding piano
piece taking decades to master
and, incredibly, the most banal

like the eight-page section
with continuous double octave trill
together with "Mairsy Doates" in canon

or the part where you hold
both the two side pedals down
while joggling the middle one

with a leather-clad yardstick
clenched in your teeth, the whole time
humming "Give Peace a Chance"

Its last chord (still B# major)
repeats thirty-seven times (with
optional forty for random surprise)

thereby frustrating any well-meaning fan
hoping to burst into heartfelt applause
the moment the marathon ends

the composer being one of those
East Europeans that never learned
even how to throw a ball

Letchititchsky or Bolivosmärloko
known for their tea-party pastiches
played for the last Czar of Russia's brother

The audience (when you can find a performer
brave enough to take the chance
of putting it on the program)

tends to be made up of ministers, tax-men
three wives of friends you'd hoped wouldn't come
and an aging contralto, who all the way through

is dreaming of "Tales from Vienna Woods"
on a red stallion, a mad Arab
with blue bandanas, green tattoos

85
TRIPLES

Over and over
she kept asking us all
to find her a lover

till one day a tall
dark superstranger
asked her out to a ball

Wary of danger
yet not wishing to seem
like hogs at a manger

we bought her a book:
The Unprepared Date
But her hand fairly shook

and her heart's frantic rate
made it plain as a bell
she'd better not wait

but head straight to hell
without passing Go.
There's little to tell

and not much to know
except that the dimple
that blew his mind so

's now masked by a wimple
now she's a nun
and leads la vie simple

tells her beads one by one
over & over
Our Lady of Fun
VIEWING AN ANTHEM BY WILLIAM MATHIAS

compact Welshchap
carked it a few years back

composed it
"For HRH The Prince of Wales

and Lady Diana Spencer"
and yes it was first performed

at their wedding at St Paul’s Cathedral
29 July 1981

quite typical you see it asks
a lot of the women, high Gs

split sections, vast tessiturae
while the men, especially the basses

have to hold the line, the real star
being of course the whiz-bang organist

with a series of volleys & counterblasts
this being the fire that charges the thing

the whole production considerably boosted
by the famous cathedral’s endless reverb

especially at the end where the choir
divides seven ways to hold the "-men"

of "Amen" for six fortissimo bars
the organ maintaining the final chord

even longer till the pedals kick in
with a sixty-four-foot "Whoomph"

to the gut, still rebounding, resounding
round the Whispering Gallery

so when the sextons get back from the pub
to sweep up confetti & rice

Mathias is well past Reading
in a complimentary first-class compartment

halfway back to Abergavenny
glistening with competence
and the overheard
praise of a verger
before it finally dies.
It finally dies.

Do you think the Prince even noticed a note?
Can you believe Di connected
as those innocent boys sang "God be merciful...
Bless us and show us the light...."?

He was probably off in some
vestry adjusting a button
while she took final orders
from a jittery duchess

Anyway, now Mathias is decomposing
Charles & Di have split up
and it's next to impossible anymore
to find a market for wedding anthems

an art-form dying
like roof-thatching
where maybe a few make a bundle
but otherwise no one cares
VIRGINIA  (Take Two)

When I first woke up to her
there were still people alive who’d known her

to one a jolly aunt, to another racked
with monsters & birds talking Greek

Even her husband wrote me a letter
I imagine I still have it somewhere

I wanted to make To the Lighthouse
into a movie. He threw it out

Hard to believe it was possible
to achieve death with rocks in your pockets

in such an innocuous rivulet
But many more things come into it

wartime shortages, whiffling bombs
gramophones with failing springs

a gaggle of loony suitors
of every possible gender

most of all, the lack of hot water
smelly smalls, daffy hats

that made even the butcher’s boy
knuckles bloody, suet-smeared

sneer at her for her airs
the wild distracted stare
WAITING

Sitting here waiting
thinking you might show up

I find I have on my knee
(relaxed, uncomplaining)

the phone book open to Aylesford
looking up someone I remember
had the smoothest hottest skin

under that **Excerpts from Mi'Kmaw History**
and under that

the dictionary
open to "obloquy"

and under all that
me, no wonder, drunk
in wonder

of the power & might
of the Roman alphabet
YULE

I. Chimneys & Smoke

Easy be to think of many meretricious examples:

Tom in The Water Babies
birthed in a caul of soot

The white smoke after all the black
raising the Romans' "Habemus pap'!"

The wolf, salivating, too eager
becoming the pig's boiled dinner

St Nick, pristine, unsmutted
zipping through every chimney on earth

("gotta get there tonight
smoke or no smoke -- a lotta kids....")

As someone walks between us
we say: "smoke goes up the chimney"

link little fingers, pull. Then afterwards
go our separate ways anyway

This morning I'm standing alone
on the shore wondering why mine

seems to be smoking more
than any other along the front

in the cold December snap
the luxuriant plume heads straight south

out over the steaming seawater
where the saltstream is transformed

where the smoke hits the hoar flakes
both suddenly become invisible

the sun is rising behind the garage garden
the shortest morning of the year
II. Log

One day the storks disappear. At the door the next morning the people find a huge ancient log, a moss-bearded totem complete with a book of instruction listing rites and forms of obeisance.

The pages of the book burn easily. The log is chunked up to fit the hearth and the harps dusted off and retuned as the brimming bowls and lavish platters come staggering in from the kitchen.

It could be one day there may be something to pay for all this joy especially once the log is gone and they have to endure the cold & dark but for now the feast is all their care.

The children's eyes are huge with amusement. For all of them all this is new. Now they can see clearly how little their fathers & mothers have ever understood. None will escape this magic, these songs.
III. Midnight

On the table  
near the tree  
under the chimney:

two glasses of oloroso  
blue cheese & bread  
almonds & nutcrackers

It's hard to figure  
why two glasses are needed  
how there could be time to crack  
even a single nut  
though the deer would easily  
take care of the bread & cheese....

"So fair a fancy few would weave  
in these days": thirty-two cloven hoofs  
imprinting the sacred carpet with snow  
the steel sleigh-runners  
grating across the hearthstone  
the huge sacks bulging  
with only a moment to toss down  
two brimful glasses of wine  
stuff the nuts into a pocket  
then calm as smoke  
rise to the starry December sky  
be everywhere else in the world at once
IV. Return of the Sun

The gist of it was
the tonsured strangers told us
the feast of the solstice when the sun goes lowest
we'd always done because we liked it
cutting down trees, hauling in logs, roasting boars
was in fact the birthday
of something that came from the sky
and returned to the sky
the Sun of God
that's what they said.

This difficult.
Such the general response.

Some years later they went away
leaving their deacons in charge
to teach us their chants and drills
so every winter we could carol
Happy Birthday to the Sun.
We did it. Some of us even said we believed it.

But now the deacons have also gone
back to where they came from, it seems
and their wives don't really care
or no one takes them serious; they subsist
on water, mouldy loaves, and rancid fish

while we fill the churches with fir-trees & stars
roast pigs & geese in vicarage kitchens
buy each other the wildest gifts
so our own children, delirious with joy
can bring us back to what this always was:
this orgy, this harping of carols & hymns
of snowmen that walk & talk
of deer that fly with noses that glow
of sleighbells, of love in the snow

all this, we now see
we have always known
was, is, shall be
while we have breath
all this to return
the Sun to her throne
by springtime to burn
away Winter, Cold, Death.
...I think that you should go,
Go on ahead,
Take her in your arms
And be wed
Go, go, go, O Soul....

- Daniel Johnston, "Go"

**ZAZEN**

Do not write poetry for money
or for love
the zazen master exhorts

"I think to sing songs
and I see you enchanted" --
how long ago I wrote that

and how ill-advised it was
I see now imagining myself
"coming out of a decades-long dream"

of self-focused life as a monk
but how many times before
have I seen myself wake from the same dream

and all it turns out to be
is falling into another dream
like the one where I was hiding

under a cedar and its branches
started shaking and I woke
to discover an angel in bed

with me - Angeles, her name was
and I got up to wash myself
so convinced was I I was unclean

and lost her and woke from that to another
et cetera et cetera -- like I say
it's easy enough to steer clear of the money

but when every song I sing
is "love that cannot be"
hard not to dream

of waking up to a life
where the coffee is as real
as your wild hair & gapped teeth

and that what
makes it happen
could be such a song

95
Done! Assez vu....
Home at last! Assez connu....
Pitched past all pangs of quitting! Yet now, it seems
You hanker to leave, to be off with someone else
Though till now I thought our time had just begun.
Is it pride that makes you so willful? -- skittish, loose,
Swanning your charms through every cheapjack dive?
Remember the day it began, how we first
Eyed one another shyly, finally touched? Now your outlandish
Vanity threatens to do us both in, knocking flying stone
Icons & totems -- everything we worked so to create.
Never again may there be such a chance to think so "big"
Unless you come round, pick up your hand again. Yet,
The thing done, I can't stand to hang on either, I'm
Ranging, on the prowl for a charge, something hefty to hurl
Or to hear, to fear or to feed on. This wan May dawn,
Forsythia looms yellow through the kitchen window,
The chestnut's flambeaux blaze, warblers flit --
Nowhere a sign of anything even slightly out of tune
Or even askew. Nothing stirs. Then soft, in the cedars:
Movement -- don't say you don't see it! The shards of
Events still intrigue us; the fact we're even speaking
Demonstrates we're still awake & kicking.
QUARRY

INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND APPENDICES
INTRODUCTION

At the present time, nearing the end of the twentieth century, it may seem that few believe in the survival of the ancient powers of poetry. As with religion, the spiritual "light" of poetry, its numen, seems to have guttered out. At once the most modest of the creative arts (in terms of its production costs and inasmuch as its raw material is everyday speech, free to all) and the most demanding (in terms of the emotional and intellectual participation it asks of both its creator and its audience), poetry today may appear to be the Cinderella of the arts. In the blare and glare of music and spectacle, both strongly and insistently omnipresent thanks to television, radio, and recording, poetry has been eclipsed.

Or so it may seem. Yet there are still people -- poets and others -- whose lives are in tune with the spirit of poetry, who remain capable of being captured by a striking figure of speech, a hypnotic rhythm, or an intricate and artful pattern of vowel or consonant sounds; and these people know that poetry is far from dead. The inspirational power of the sound of poetry remains -- a power largely resulting from its economy of expression, and its concentration of meaning.

A poem is something one may carry around on a piece of paper in one's pocket, or -- better yet, and even closer to the true
nature of poetry -- in one's head and one's heart, to be relived, experienced, and once again enjoyed at whatever time one likes, and in whatever situation. The major obstacle for most people attempting to reach this happy state is a techno-historical development that, ironically, one might have supposed would win for poetry an ever-wider audience: the rise of the printed word and the consequent growth of general literacy.

As the earliest poetry was undoubtedly composed and recited by its creators to a local community, it was therefore conceived of as an aural art-form (as opposed to a graphic or a literary one), with the audience's experience of it being essentially governed by communal conventions and expectations. Millennia later, poetry began to be recorded in a written text. Then, nearer our own time, came printing. But only in relatively recent times has the basis of poetry in sound been generally ignored, discounted, or forgotten altogether. The poem today has become a literary "text" -- with the poems most favoured being those that are the most "difficult" -- allusive, and in need of extensive, even unending, explication -- as though the poem were at heart a kind of superlatively difficult and tricky word-puzzle.

The final irony, then, is that from its origins as a spontaneous art-form of the community (which it still is, for example, among the more isolated Inuit of Canada and Greenland), poetry has now come to be perceived more as something to be enjoyed only by academics and their acolytes, in solemnity, solitude, and silence.
My early school and university education had placed me firmly on this track. What changed everything for me at the age of twenty-two was meeting Robert Graves, first at Oxford and later in Mallorca. Although it may be argued that books such as *Goodbye to All That, I, Claudius,* and *The White Goddess* constitute Graves's main fame, I believe, rather, that it was Graves's integrity as a poet, together with the unique appeal of even his earliest works ("The Scapegoat", for example), that most distinguished him. Of course, his rather showy public life -- the self-exile from Britain, the much tut-tutted affair with Laura Riding, the epistolary spats with London's literary luminaries -- contributed to the legend. But I could see for myself when such "media figures" as Ava Gardner and Gina Lollobrigida came to visit Graves, that it was Graves the poet they wanted to see and hear, not Graves the best-selling novelist, raconteur, or bon-vivant.

For me, and for countless others fortunate enough to have known him, Graves epitomized the life, the being, the very soul of the poet. His regard for poetry over all the arts, his reverence in service of the Muse, his obdurate refusal to countenance compromise, his ruthless winnowing and discarding of work he felt fell short of his highest standards -- all of these distinguished him from the rest of his contemporaries.

It is fitting, though entirely fortuitous, that this project should have been completed in this year, the centenary of Graves's birth, and I herewith dedicate it to his honour.
Beginnings I grew up in the Loyalist-founded town of Magog in south-eastern Quebec. By the time of my birth (1938), the English-speaking proportion of the town's population had dwindled to a small but socially powerful minority. We had our own English school, where French as a second language was on the whole badly taught. All the white-collar jobs in the local cloth-printing mill, the town's main employer, were held by English-speakers. My paternal grandparents, both of Welsh origin, had emigrated from Manchester to Magog in 1915, where my grandfather became chief chemist at the mill. By 1935, he had risen to become general manager of the mill and a director of the Company. He died on his way home one night, when his car collided with a railway train at a level crossing. This was three days before I was born. (The poem "November Third" in the present collection, recalls this incident.)

I do not remember that poetry as such played much of a part in my childhood, though my maternal grandmother (of Irish-Métis stock) used to recite poems such as "Why, Phoebe, Are You Home So Soon?" and tell long, fanciful stories about a shipwrecked sailor called Godfrey. I certainly enjoyed traditional nursery rhymes, and firmly agree with Graves and others that there is nothing more sophisticatedly complex, rhythmically and metrically speaking, than what may be found in these rhymes. In my adolescence, I came to enjoy Gilbert and Sullivan's "patter" songs, with their brilliant and memorable answers to the demands of strict metre.
and rhyme. In elementary and high school we were required to recite a few poems "by heart" every year; though I did not particularly enjoy having to do this, it did reveal the liberation of being able to break free from the printed page and concentration on the oral realization of the poem. (This is very much like being able to a play piece of music by memory or by ear -- it enables one to give much greater attention to the sound, particularly the timing, of one's delivery.)

Although I had some interest in poetry in school (and once concocted a series of "IMITATIONS" of modern Canadian poetry as a demonstration to my high-school teacher of how facile I found the examples we had been studying), this interest did not really begin to develop until 1955, when I left high school and moved to Nova Scotia to attend a small liberal-arts institution (Acadia University, Wolfville) where I received my first degree, a B.A. in English, in 1959. During this four-year period, I became involved in university journalism, and found that several of the other contributors wrote poetry, some of it quite impressive to me, which would appear in the pages of the undergraduate weekly. One of my friends, Ross Graves (no relation to Robert), who wrote under the pen-name of Ben Hal, seemed to me particularly accomplished. Soon I too was writing little pieces and having the gratification of seeing them in print in relatively short order. (The fact that the editor viewed these poems primarily as "space-filler" eluded me for a while.)

I must say I had no great estimation of the quality of most of these pieces, and kept only one of them, "Lake Dawn", an
impressionistically "gray" sketch, ending with a contrastive "put-down" line: "The dream is mine, not yours." (It appears in Appendix A: Earlier Poems, together with all poems referred to in this Introduction and in the Notes that follow). Nearly forty years on, recalling this final line, what strikes me as typical about it is, first, its highly regular (in this case, duplet) rhythms, and, second, the highly dramatic contrast of its tone and content to what has preceded.

The other notable event of my time at Acadia was first coming across the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Somehow, I had never encountered Hopkins in high school, and it was not until my third year at Acadia, in a course on Victorian Literature, that I came to know him. In matters prosodical, I have admired and attempted to convey something of his free-wheeling approach in my own poetry, particularly as regards rhythm (though Anglo-Saxon rhythms make Hopkins's, by contrast, seem regular!). I do not have any particular interest in Hopkins's theories of prosody; my attention is on what happens, rhythmically and metrically, in a given line. As to sound patterns, I enjoyed Hopkins's imitations of exotic effects, such as the Welsh cynghanedd sain (in "fall, gall, and gash" ("Windhover", l. 14), for example). At this time, I also came to esteem Wilfred Owen's phonically innovative yet still highly natural idiom, as well as the declamatory drama of Dylan Thomas. (My Welsh grandmother often spoke of her admiration for Thomas, but I do not recall her ever having read any aloud to me.) From a narrative point of view, I admired Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, and enjoyed puzzling over the
varied riches of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (though over half a lifetime later I now think "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the greater achievement).

In 1959 after graduating from Acadia, I proceeded on a Rhodes Scholarship from Nova Scotia to Jesus College, Oxford. I chose Jesus College mainly because of its Welshness: my paternal grandparents, as noted, were Welsh-speaking, and my maternal grandfather was of Welsh origin also. This aspect of my ancestry seemed significant. At Jesus, I completed work on an Honours B.A. in English Language and Literature in 1962. It was during this time that the achievements of *Beowulf* and other great poetry in Old and Middle English were unveiled to me.

During my second year at Jesus, I became friends with another English Literature student, Tim Jordan. Apart from the personal pleasure I took in his company, I particularly enjoyed sharing his enthusiasm over new poetry. One evening, at the beginning of my final year (1961), he thrust a book containing Robert Lowell’s "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" into my hands. At that time (October 1961) I had never heard of Lowell; his work had only recently been published by Faber in the UK, and none of my teachers at Acadia or my tutors at Oxford had ever mentioned him. I was instantly impressed by the strength and vigour of Lowell’s language, especially in the first section of the poem, and then by the contrastive effect of the sections that followed of the poem, with its rich yet often simple vocabulary and images. Only a few days after that that I went on to read Lowell’s *Life Studies*.
First poems. This was the moment at which, one might say, my liberation from old assumptions of what poetry could be and do was complete. Now, with Lowell as a kind of spiritual guide, I began to write "myself", particularly aspects of my earlier life in faraway Canada. I found myself swept by mystical memories of the dark snow-lit days of winter, reliving experiences that had seemed quite "ordinary" at the time. The first of these poems to emerge, quite autobiographical, was "My Father" (in Appendix A), a sketch containing memories of skiing into the woods of Québec to a log cabin with the man who had built the cabin, together with my younger brother. In the poem, I saw my mother’s role as wife, lover, and helpmeet as having been removed through my father’s absence (he had remarried and moved to the U.S.), leaving her sterile, cold, and bored. As I wrote the poem, I also became aware that "Ken", the cabin-builder, had in a sense become my "real" father. In the two last lines ("I cut them with Ken in a straightforward way/ that winter, the time my old man ran away.") I recognized not only that breaking of parental ties which is a part of maturing, but also the resentment I harboured towards my absent father. The choice of "My Father" as title was ironic, as this subject was not mentioned until the end of the poem, and then only in the dismissive "my old man". The father’s significance is in his non-presence. There is also something of a initiatory mode hinted at in "I cut them with Ken" and the reference to a "stubborn thumb that coughed up blood".

105
In the next few days following the writing of "My Father" I wrote three or four more poems, in what turned out to be the first, and perhaps most intense, flood of inspiration of my life. The climax of these was the poem "The White Devil" (in Appendix A). The poem is once again set in a winter night in the woods of Quebec. This time there is no father-figure present: the brothers are alone, crossing a frozen lake on skis, fearful that they have lost their way. The poem appears to be a third-person narrative: "The older boy turned and said to his brother:/'Winter is the White Devil, come to get you.'..." But the last line shows it to have been in the first person all the time: "...And I, the White Devil, grinned in their eyes."

The most notable aspect of this poem to me was that not only did its opening come "from nowhere" (particularly the allusion to the White Devil, possibly a recollection of the title of the Webster play), but, even more, that its last line, the shift to first-person, the revelation that the "White Devil" had somehow been present, though in hiding, throughout the whole poem, had come to me, as I wrote it, as a shocking revelation. I hope it still conveys something of that shock.

Never in my life had I experienced such a charge of excitement as when that final line of "The White Devil" came to me. The second line, "'Winter is the White Devil come to get you'", was similarly a complete surprise: it simply leapt out after the opening line. A good deal of the rest of the poem is autobiographical, but those two lines came from "somewhere else".

These new poems seemed of an entirely different emotional
and spiritual order, compared with anything I had written earlier. They were perhaps a way of dealing with homesickness. To my English readers, they conveyed the exotic appeal of the Canadian winter: the various references to the colours, textures, even the sounds of deep snow and ice — even the sound of the word "Québec". But for me, they had, quite simply, managed to take me out of myself.

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Robert Graves The end of my second year at Oxford (June 1961) had coincided with the end of the three-year period during which W. H. Auden had held the title of Professor of Poetry. I had read some Auden during my English studies at Acadia, but it made no emotional impression on me whatsoever. Its technical facility was obvious, but other than that it left me cold. (I should say that I have since found several Auden poems that I like very much.) While at Oxford, I had not attended a single one of Auden's professorial lectures.

Autumn 1961, when I was writing these new poems, also coincided with the beginning of the three-year tenure of Robert Graves as Professor of Poetry. There was a good deal of interest in the new incumbent, particularly as he resided in Mallorca, was incorporated in Lichtenstein, and, for complicated tax reasons understood only by British Inland Revenue, could not stay in the U.K. more than a few months at a time. For this reason, it had been agreed that in each of the three years he would give his three lectures and be in residence during one term only. In some

107
ways, this arrangement worked better than the usual one, as it focussed more attention on the Professor and on his pronounce-ments during that one term.

The arrival of Graves certainly caught my attention. I had read a little of his work before, but now I pored through the whole of his Collected Poems (1959) with great interest. (Of course, this interest was probably not unrelated to my spate of creativity, but, as far as I can remember, at the time I was conscious only of the influence of Lowell.) Finally, I summoned up the courage to send copies of my new poems, including "My Father" and "The White Devil", to the Professor of Poetry for his reaction.

A day or so later I received a note in the quirky handwriting I would come to know well, asking me to come to his rooms at St John's College some morning. (See Appendix B: Letters from Robert Graves, letter I.) When I did so, some days later, Graves graciously went out of his way to welcome me and put me at ease. He had found the poems striking, he said, and would be glad to see more. He was particularly interested in what he felt my work revealed of my North-American Native ancestry (which is slight; a maternal great-great-grandmother, Alma Pigeon, was an Abenaki). He gave me the names of various editors to whom he said I should send my poems (Howard Moss at the New Yorker being chief among these). Most generously of all, from that time forward, for a period of three or four years, he read over, and commented on whatever poems I sent him. During that time, including a year when I lived in Spain and spent a couple of weeks
with him and his family home near the Mallorcan village of Deyá (in September 1963), I showed him virtually every poem I wrote.

Graves could be extremely dismissive, and was always quite candid about what he liked and did not like. Comments in his letters to me included in Appendix B include: "The metre gallops away with the sense mercilessly" (IV), "my only trouble is your laying on of crude colour" (VI), "one should never say in a poem that one is sick of so-&-so, but always make the reader sick by a statement of the ambiente" (VII), and "[The poems] have power but it seems to get dissipated in violent unbeing through some lack of direction in you.... I hope you reintegrate" (IX). Graves made a fairly rigid distinction between "private" and "public" poems, the former being ones that were addressed to one person only and did not really work outside that context, though they could be effective within it. (See his first letter to me for a statement of this.) Other Gravesian dicta: funds earned from poetry (e.g., by publication) should be used for pleasure only, not to pay the electricity bill. And, one should never refer to oneself as a poet; it is for others to use this word.

Personally, I came to have great respect for Graves. He was big and extremely physically active, then nearing the end of his sixties, able to bound down the steep mile-long track to the beach and then back up at a speed that left many of his younger companions panting far behind. He bullied Cyril Connolly, on a visit, into shinnying up a spiky tree to get an out-of-reach orange that Connolly's young daughter wanted ("You heard her, Connolly"), winking at me conspiratorially as Connelly, pale,
overweight, and clearly out of shape, somehow managed to clamber up and pluck it. On the other hand, I was on the wrong end of Graves's sharp tongue more than once: I particularly remember one afternoon in the kitchen at Canelluñ when Graves got quite angry with me (though I cannot remember now what the problem was), dressing me down like a stern father. I have no doubt that he thought it was for my own good.

Another aspect of Graves's career that caught my attention at this time had to do with his work as a printer and publisher in the '30s and '40s, especially with the American poet Laura Riding. As Seizin Press, they had produced books of new poetry using a flat-bed press with hand-set type. Graves in Oxford had presented me with three Seizin books: An Acquaintance with Description by Gertrude Stein, Laura and Francesca by Laura Riding, and To Whom Else? by himself (which he did not rate highly). The paper and bindings were striking, the latter two featuring cover art (under onionskin dustjacket) by Len Lye. All copies had been numbered (up to 500) I think) and signed by their authors.

This first part of my literary career continued with the acceptance of "The White Devil" for publication by The Observer in London, followed by later poems that appeared in such outlets as London Magazine, The Listener, Transatlantic Review, Paris Review, and Encounter. I had letters of commendation (even though some were also letters of rejection) from such well-known poets, critics, and editors as Stephen Spender, John Lehmann, Alan Ross, Anthony Thwaite, and Howard Moss. Throughout this period, the critical feedback of my friends Tim Jordan and Adrian
Soar, and of course of Graves, continued to be important. But, increasingly, I was becoming confident in my own ability to judge whether or not a poem "worked".

That said, it should be said that most writers, including writers of poetry, find it extremely helpful to receive feedback from critical and perceptive readers. Sometimes it turns out that one has overlooked the possibility of an unfortunate connotation, pun, double entendre, or some other wordplay -- or that a word of some weight has been repeated without apparent reason, i.e., unintentionally. However, in the end, in judging a poem, there are only two major questions to be answered: is the poem finished? and does it work? (Many poems are never really "finished"; one eventually agrees to leave them alone.)

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Australia In 1967 I made a break from my life in England by taking up a post as Lecturer (later Senior Lecturer) in Early English Literature and Language with the University of Sydney in Australia. I lived in Australia for twelve years (1967-80), a period, for me, of great poetic activity and output.

Australians seemed to me very supportive of their poets. Even on my first flight to Sydney, I found the Australian sitting next to me, an engineer, was able to chat knowledgeably about such contemporary Australian poets as A. D. Hope, James MacAuley, and Judith Wright. In Sydney I was to discover a much greater
awareness of all sorts of poetry, not just Australian, than I had ever found in Britain or in Canada. I was quite surprised to find that even the major daily newspapers there routinely printed a poem or two by a known or a "new" poet in their Saturday feature pages. Premier sites for a poem were The Australian (the only national daily), The Sydney Morning Herald, The Melbourne Age, The Adelaide Advertiser (the largest metropolitan dailies), or The Bulletin (a national current-affairs weekly). And there were many more specialist magazines widely available, most notably New Poetry and Poetry Australia, both of which had large subscription lists.

Public poetry readings were, and still are, popular in Australian cities. I greatly enjoyed taking part in many of these. On the whole, I tried to hold the audience's attention by diverting them as much as possible, choosing "public" poems that were on the whole enjoyable, and even, at times, funny. More "private", personal or abstruse, work runs the risk of alienating an audience; one has to develop the ability to "play" an audience "by ear", the object being to capture the listener's whole attention by whatever means.

The distinction between "private vs. "public" poetry (to which could be added "serious" vs. "comic", "contemplative" vs. "dramatic", &c.) is of importance. The fact is, certain poems of great artistic merit do not go over well in large-scale public performance, especially on first (and, often, only) hearing, while other undeniably light-weight works will, particularly if they have some kind of punch line at the end, take the audience
in, surprise them, delight them. Above all, poems with some humorous or comic component allow the poet immediate feedback from the audience, in the form of laughter (or lack of it), confirming the poem's communicative power not only to its interpreter but also, in a reinforcing way, among all members of the audience, moment by moment, as the poem is experienced. It can thus become a group experience, a sharing between interpreter and audience. This is the basis of all the performing arts, of course. Even the most "serious" and "personal" poets know that more "public" pieces will usually get a more solid response than more "private" ones, which run the risk of puzzling or simply boring a large audience.

I was given a great deal of freedom at the University of Sydney to create new courses dealing with subjects that particularly interested me. The one I enjoyed most was "The Language of Poetry" -- really an outline of traditional prosody, but enlivened by the presentation of real, live, contemporary Australian visiting poets discussing individual poems and how they came about. Usually the class was provided with copies of the visiting poets' early drafts as evidence of the creative process, though often the poets were not very clear as to exactly how the poem had come about or what the earlier drafts revealed. The course was advertised as avoiding "subjective, literary judgments" -- something of an exaggeration, no doubt. I saw it as a corrective to the more typical hortatory, "literary" approach where one studies certain poets because they are judged significant.
Students have to understand the workings of an individual poem, its metre, rhythm, and sound patterns, before they can even begin to talk about its other merits. Once they are confident enough in their understanding of a few easily-grasped concepts, they are able to come to enjoy searching for poems that "speak" to them as individuals. Students need to be assured that a poem others esteem may not do anything for them, and that the main thing they have to do is keep looking -- and listening.

I taught the "Language of Poetry" during most of my twelve years in Australia, and found it always attracted a good number of lively and interested students; it was certainly far and away the one I most preferred teaching, and I am sure this was evident to them.

During my second year in Australia (1968), I was surprised to receive a letter from Seán Haldane, a fellow-student at Oxford (I think Trinity) who had also known Graves, and whom I had briefly met at one of Graves's Oxford get-togethers. He was now living in Ladysmith, Québec with his wife, Marnie Pomeroy, and together they were now operating Ladysmith Press, emulating Graves and Riding by publishing hand-set books of new Canadian poetry on an old platen press. They wondered if I had enough poems for a book, and, if so, whether they might publish it. This resulted in my first published collection of poems, Just Passing Through (1969), and a long and happy collaboration with Seán and Marnie.

It also led, one year later, to my decision to follow their example and start publishing books myself, as Island Press,
Sydney. I acquired a treadle-operated platen press from a printer in western Sydney, together with six cases of Garamond type. I wrote to all the Australian poets that had been involved in the "Language of Poetry" course, as well as others I hadn't met but whose work I admired, asking each one to choose one poem, their personal number-one choice of all poems written during the past year. Every poem submitted would be used. The first book, Poet's Choice 1970, was successful enough that the idea was repeated every year through that decade (the last was in 1979). Island Press also went on to publish new collections by such well-known figures as Robert Adamson, J. S. Harry, Martin Johnston, John Tranter, and others. By the end of the decade, when I left Australia, Island Press had published twenty-six books of new Australian poetry. (See "Island Press", Australasian Small Press Review 6 (June 1978) 3-8 for a much more detailed account of this period. All manuscripts, correspondence, and other material relating to Island Press and my own personal correspondence and papers 1960-84 are in the Archives of the National Library of Australia, Canberra: see Acquisitions Newsletter, National Library of Australia, Canberra 34 (Feb. 1976), p. 2. Island Press still flourishes, now under the aegis of Phil Hammal, American expatriate artist and poet.)

My next collection was actually half a book, Single Eye (the title borrowed from Hopkins), part of Two Poets, published by Queensland University Press in 1971. The other poet in the book was Geoff Page; I was happy to share a book with him. I think each of us provided a nice contrast to the other. Then followed
Crux (1973), published simultaneously by Ladysmith Press in Canada and Island Press in Australia, Will’s Dream (QUP, 1975), and Selected Poems (Island, 1978). (More recently, in 1990 a selection of poems from each of the preceding books together with some new ones, was published by Lancelot Press, Hantsport (Nova Scotia) in 1990, entitled Letters Home.)

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U.S. and Return to Canada A certain amount of depression and disillusionment followed on my departure from Australia in 1980. I had not realized how much I had come to take for granted the great popular interest in new poetry there. In Bloomington, Indiana, in the U.S. mid-west, where I lived for the next five years, there was some small amount of poetry being written locally, but almost no general public interest in it. Unlike Australia, the U.S. provided no widespread national medium for publication of new work. It is still the same. The most a mid-west poet can hope for, it seems, is publication in some small periodical, typically the product of some university English Department, with recompense usually limited to one or two copies of the same periodical. It was unlikely that the "average" American was ever going to glimpse any of these poems, or any poetry whatever except for the rhymes on greeting cards and the doggerel of "In Memoriam" columns in the newspapers. Of course, there was also New York City and "the West Coast" but both of these were thou-
sands of miles away from where I was living, and even interest in these tended to be relatively local.

Five years later, in September 1984, when I returned to my native Canada to live (exactly twenty-five years after I had left it), I found more or less the same thing. In English-speaking North America, poetry is the least "visible" of the arts -- mainly, as I said at the outset, because so many people have lost touch with how to read it, or even with the awareness that it must be heard in order to work. In Nova Scotia (where I live), there doesn't seem to be a lot of popular interest in poetry. Perhaps as a result, my own output declined during my first years back. At one point, hoping to stimulate something more comparable to the Australian literary milieu, I tried to persuade the editors of the Halifax Chronicle-Herald to publish new poetry on Saturdays in their literary/arts section. Their response was that without doubt this would yield nothing but "doggerel". This attitude seemed condescending, not to mention short-sighted: how can potential poets possibly know what is going on in new poetry unless they can regularly be exposed to it, in a medium widely available to the public?

Having said that, I should add that audiences at poetry readings in Nova Scotia, though they be few and far between, are usually attentive and appreciative. Further, in the small town of Annapolis Royal, where I now live, there is a very active regional arts council, with a yearly arts festival that regularly brings such Canadian writers as Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, and Al Purdy to read from their own works.
I have often tried to comprehend why it is that poetry appears to be appreciated so widely in Australia and so little in the U.S. and Canada. Population concentrations probably have something to do with it. The vast majority of Australians live in relatively large cities: Sydney and Melbourne with around four million residents each, are substantially larger than either Toronto or Montreal, Canada's two biggest, and Canada has a larger rural population. The countryside outside Australia's cities is generally empty. By contrast, the majority of Nova Scotians live in diminutive towns or in rural settings. (The same is true in the American mid-west.)

Poetry is essentially an urban phenomenon, and the success of poetry readings or poetry magazines depends on having a sufficient urban population base to support them. Although the proportion of people writing in Nova Scotia may be about the same as in New South Wales, a great proportion of it is "doggerel", poems typified by relentlessly regular four-beat lines, highly irregular rhythms, and forced rhymes. (See "Getting Off", in this collection, for a factitious "example" of this.)

Australians, by contrast, seem to me more generally aware of recent developments in poetry not only there but throughout the English-speaking world (particularly the U.S.), and there seem to be, relative to the total population, more strong poets writing. One might mention, in particular, Les A. Murray, a candidate in 1994 for the Oxford Poetry Professorship, at once unmistakably Australian and at the same time an international English voice. I believe that relatively more Australians than Canadians read
new poetry and attend readings than write it; and there is a correspondingly greater awareness in Australia that poetry is an art, and that, as with any art, one may spend a lifetime seeking to perfect it. This all helps.

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Prosody  Around the time that I returned to live in Nova Scotia (1983), I began work on How Poetry Works. This book grew out of the "Language of Poetry" course I had taught in Sydney. After a brief introductory chapter, touching on the acquisition of language by children and the origins of poetry in simple jingles and nursery rhymes, the book then, in the next chapter, moved on to consider rhythm and metre.

I should explain here that my schooling in and teaching of matters of prosody, particularly those relating to rhythm and metre, had been pretty conventional. As a student, I had learned such terms as iamb and dactyl, as well as such phenomena as "substitution" and "inversion" of "feet". I had never really questioned these matters, and had presented them to successive classes at Sydney as givens.

Now, faced with writing a book on the subject, I began to consider the whole matter afresh. I had, of course, read Seymour Chatman’s authoritative Theory of Metre (The Hague, 1965), and was totally in accord with his views on isochrony of stress as
the basis of all English metre; in other words, that the stresses of ordinary language in a line of poetry are perceived in metre as temporally equally-spaced beats, exactly like the beats of a bar of music (e.g. as in the case of a waltz, which is invariably in triple time, isochronous enough to allow one to dance to it). It doesn't matter whether they are absolutely isochronous or not: the culturally-ingrained perception will be that they are. Also mentioned in Chatman's book, and also of great importance, is the "tick tock" phenomenon: one tends to hear a succession of absolutely similar sounds as having a duple organisation (as in "TICK tock"), even when they do not. (Throughout this work, I use capital letters to indicate stressed or "beat" syllables, while lower-case letters indicate unstressed or "off-beat" syllables.)

These two phenomena -- isochrony and duple organisation -- lead to several conclusions. Given that the beats of English poetry are isochronous, equally spaced in time, then it follows that the unstressed syllables, the metrical "off-beats", must fit in wherever they need to. The off-beat syllables in successive quadruplets (e.g., "Elevator OPerator" will be perceived as coming faster than those in successive duplets (e.g., "TWINKle TWINKle"). The more off-beat syllables there are between beats, the faster they have to be delivered, if the beats are to remain isochronous.

Here a parallel with music may be drawn, the regular beats of the stressed syllables in the line of poetry corresponding to the regular beats of music, and the rest, the off-beat syllables,
corresponding to all the other notes, fast or slow, that come between the beats, providing rhythm. To complete the analogy, the line itself corresponds to the bar in music, by convention containing a fixed number of beats. Apart from this, everything else is up to the creator. Take the four-beat line, for example, the "popular" line of English poetry. It may be absolutely regular:

    TWINKle, TWINKle, LITTLE STAR
    TERence, THIS is STUpid STUFF
    JENny KISSED me WHEN we MET
    BY and BY, nor SPARE a SIGH
    WHAT can AIL my DAUGHTer SO

(all in duplet rhythms) -- or quite irregular:

    they ALL ran AFter the FARmer's WIFE
    RATHer at ONCE our TIME devOUR
    i CROSSED a MOOR with a NAME of its OWN
    MARgar- ET, ARE you GRIEVing
    LOVliest of TREES the CHERRY NOW

If all ten of the above lines were to be recited by ten individual speakers at the same time and at the same speed, each of the four beats in their lines would occur at the same time. Such a simultaneous recitation of different lines of poetry would of course completely obscure the rhythms, sound-patterning, and emotive "message" of each line, but the the beats, and therefore the metre, would be quite obvious. (It might be compared to the effect of listening to different pieces of music in the same metre -- for example, "Waltz of the Flowers", "The Blue Danube",

121
and "Under the Bridges of Paris" -- all in triple (waltz) time, performed together all at once, at the same speed: the melodic and harmonic identity of each musical line would be lost in the dissonant din, but the common beats would be very audible, and one would be able to waltz to it -- just.)

The isochronic nature of English metre raises some questions. For example, what about the notion of the "inverted foot" of traditional prosody? Surely, all we can talk about is what we hear: the number of beats in a line and whether the rhythms are regular or not. I finally concluded that the concept of the "inverted foot" is entirely an import, one of the conventions of Classical quantitative scansion, where prosodic patterns are a function of vowel length rather than syllable "strength" (i.e., stress), and having no equivalent in the natural prosody of our own language. (The interested reader may consult "Appendix C: Quantitative Metre" in How Poetry Works, pp. 266-273, for a more ample treatment of this subject.) This ultimately led to my jettisoning of all the old quantitative terms (e.g., "trochaic tetrameter") and the development instead of a simpler system, one better suited to accounting for the metres, rhythms, and other sound-effects of English poetry.

Though I was aiming at simplicity, I now think that my treatment of English rhythm and metre in How Poetry Works was unnecessarily complex. The facts are plain enough. English is a stress-based language, so poetry in English must likewise be stress-based. Secondly, not only in poetry, but in any emotive language (e.g., a sermon, a political speech, a parent's scolding
a child), stress is conventionally exaggerated, particularly through isochronous delivery:

how MANY of us HERE toDAY are LIKE that MAN?!
the TORies are RUNning this COUNTRY INTO the GROUND!
i'm SICK and TIRED of TELLing YOU to DO it!

(with additional emphasis often provided by regularly pounding fist or stamping foot). The tone of a poem is not predictable in the way of these other utterances, however -- it may as easily be loving, soothing, private, humorous, bombastic, or understated. Different subjects of course require different idioms. But underlying our appreciation of poetry is a general, if unconscious, awareness that emotive language will feature exaggerated stresses, with isochronous delivery of these stresses. The emotive effect of isochrony is the oxygen for the fire the poet kindles with words.

Many readers seem to have trouble perceiving which are the stressed or "beat" syllables in a line of poetry. This is especially true of non-English students whose native languages are not stress-based (e.g., French). There is a simple, if mechanical, way to solve this problem. Begin by marking in the conventional stress-patterns of all polysyllabic words, verifying these in a dictionary if necessary. Even a foreign student will have no trouble with this. Then, as far as possible, and without changing any of the markings already made, assume that, on the whole, "lexical" monosyllables (i.e., monosyllables with assigned meanings one may look up in a dictionary) usually will be stressed while "grammatical" ones (articles, pronouns, auxiliary
verbs, prepositions) usually will not. Even in the examples of "everyday" emotive speech given above, one sees that the polysyllables are generally lexical words, with conventionally-dictated stress patterns: "HERE toDAY are" (duplets); "TORies are RUNning this" (triplets), &c. Conversely, the grammatical monosyllables are usually unstressed: "how, of, us, are, the, this, and", &c.

Teachers of poetry should be aware of the fact that, just as with any other art, certain conventions have to be learned. For example, students may be unaware of the fact that, historically, most English poets favour regular metrical forms: i.e., lines with a predictable number of beats, as in the sonnet which by convention always has five beats in every line, or in stanzas such as the quatrains where lines one and three may have four beats each, and lines two and four only three. (Invariably these latter lines are bulked out to four by means of an implied "silent beat", a period of silence equivalent to that of a realized beat.) Non-metrical poetry is the exception, not the rule. This is simply historical fact.

In determining metre, another word of advice to the student is to sample several lines at random (or whole stanzas, if the poem is stanzaic) from deep within the poem: opening lines are often highly irregular, a segue from "ordinary language" to something more rhythmically predictable.

Students also need to learn the convention that once regular metre has been established, the usual stress-patterns of our language may go by the board. For example, in ordinary speech, in the utterance "Jenny kissed me when we met", one might normal-
ly expect three stresses: "JENny KISSED me when we MET". But Leigh Hunt's little poem is in four-beat lines (the rest of the poem makes this absolutely clear), and so from a purely metrical point of view, its opening line's four beats can only be realized thus: "JENny KISSED me WHEN we MET," with the grammatical mono-syllable "when", normally unstressed, "promoted" to occupy a beat-syllable position.

The reverse may also occur: for the same reasons of metrical convention, normally-stressed "lexical" words may be "demoted" to occupy off-beat positions, as in Donne's nominally five-beat sonnet-lines:

all WHOM warre DEATH age Agues TYran- NIES
deSPAIRE law CHANCE hath SLAINE and YOU whose EYES

("At the round earths imagin'd corners", ll. 5-6)

where, lexically speaking, "warre", "age", and "law" are certainly co-equal with "death", "agues", &c., but in terms of nominal metre they are not.

In realizing "promoted" syllables (as in "WHEN we MET") or "demoted" ones (as in "deSPAIRE, law, CHANCE"), a good interpreter will never try to enforce the demands of the nominal metre of the poem by sacrificing the natural rhythms of the words. The best readers will convey something of both the natural stresses of its language together with a sense of its metre. The worst readers go to one extreme or the other, either by reading the poem as though it were only ordinary language, with no underlying metre at all, or else by taking a rigidly "metrical" approach, in which the poem is declaimed in rigidly isochronistic periods,
with large pauses at the end of every line. (This latter approach can help, like music practice with a metronome, to initially determine the metric framework before one goes on to develop a freer interpretation.) In a good reading, the feeling of "danceability" is there, but its sound is never mechanical.

The prosodic conventions of English metrical are few and simple. Every line has a usually-fixed number of "beats" — places where the natural stresses of the words in the line tend to fall. The vast majority of English poems are in either four- or five-beat lines:

\[
\text{TWINKle TWINKle LITTle STAR} \quad \text{(four) or}
\]
\[
\text{when I con- SIDer HOW my LIFE is SPENT} \quad \text{(five).}
\]

The "metre" of the poem is simply a statement of how many beats there are in a typical line — if this is inconsistent, the poem is said to be "non-metrical", or in "free verse". Following each beat will be an undetermined number of unstressed, "off-beat" syllables (one or two of these is the norm, though, exceptionally, the number may range from none to three). These off-beats, in combination with the beat itself, constitute the rhythmic "measure". The poet may decide to distribute the off-beat syllables absolutely regularly, as in "when I conSIDer HOW my LIFE is SPENT" (yielding duplet rhythms), or "i SPRANG to my SADDle and JORis and HE" (triplet rhythms). On the other hand, such a poet as Hopkins may, in creating a nominally five-beat sonnet-line, depart from rhythmic regularity altogether:

\[
\text{of the ROLLing LEvel underNEATH him steady AIR, and STRIDing}
\]
\[
\text{("The Windhover", l. 3).}
\]
Here, there is no regular rhythmical pattern whatsoever, as in another line from the same sonnet:

brute BEAUTy and VAlor and ACT, oh, AIR, pride, PLUME, here.  

(1. 9)

In both of these examples, as in the Donne lines quoted above, the five-beat metre is conceived as purely nominal, an acknowledged but barely perceivable underpinning, with frequent "demotions" being necessary. (It may have to be explained to the student that we "know" these lines are in five-beat metre only because we understand the whole poem to have been cast as a sonnet, which, by convention, will be in five-beat lines.)

Usually rhythms are duplet (beat-offbeat, as in "HAMmer" or "HIT me") or triplet (beat-offbeat-offbeat, as in "HARmony" or "GET me it"). However, two more uncommon rhythms may be used for special effect. These are the singlet, a single beat-syllable on its own with no off-beat syllables following:

reBUFFed the BIG WIND. my HEART in HIDing  

("The Windhover", 1. 7).

Here "big" is the singlet. Note how it prolongs itself, occupying time until the next beat-syllable, "wind" — if we are aware of the underlying convention of metrical isochrony. Also possible is the quadruplet, where three quick offbeats fill the temporal gap between two successive beats (e.g., yet again from the same Hopkins sonnet):

of the ROLLing LEVEL underNEATH him steady AIR and STRIDing,  

(1. 3)

containing two successive quadruplets. Usually singlets and
quadruplets are used on their own, and even then only occasionally, as a contrast to regular duplet or triplet rhythms. More than one at a time, and the listener's ear tends to convert two singlets to a duplet (as the "tick-tock" phenomenon would suggest) or a succession of quadruplets to double that number of duplets: for example, "Elevator Operator" may be conceived as two successive quadruplets, but listeners will eventually tend to convert them to more conventional duplets, thus: "Elevator Operator". Hopkins runs this risk with his "Level under-Neath him steady Air (vs. "Level Under-Neath him Steady Air") cited above.

I have already noted that the people who have the most trouble with English metre are, perhaps not surprisingly, those whose first language is not English. Many languages are perceived by their native speakers as being quantitative rather than stress-based -- their speech-rhythms being a function of patterns of long and short vowel-sounds, the vowel being the heart of every syllable. What matters in these languages is how long the vowel of the syllable lasts. It is not a matter of increased loudness or pitch, as stress manifests itself in English. (This explains why, in English, one may underline a word to show unusual stress -- something that makes no sense in French, say.)

Once, when I was an undergraduate, a newly-arrived tutor asked each of us in our small class to recite T. S. Eliot's lines "Garlic and sapphires in the mud/ Clot the bedded axle-tree" (from "Burnt Norton", Four Quartets, II, ll. 1-2) in an aesthetically-satisfying way. It didn't matter how hard each of us tried,
and we all tried repeatedly: none could satisfy him. After each failed attempt, he would recite it again as he wished us to recite it. In vain, we tried again. None of us could grasp what the man wanted, or what was wrong with the way in which we were doing it. The reason, I think now, may have been that his first language was Polish, and, while his knowledge of English was impressive, he had matured in a linguistic climate where emotiveness was a function of vowel-length, whereas we (his students) heard emotiveness mainly in isochronous and exaggerated stress. He was listening only to our vowel-lengths; we were aware only of the stress-patterns of whole syllables.

All this is a matter of cultural perception. We perceive that meters will be stress-based because that's what we've been used to ever since we first heard a nursery rhyme or sang a song. That is why we even hear stresses in spoken French, while the native French do not understand the concept. (On the other hand, they undoubtedly hear quantitative patterns in spoken English, which we do not.) Some English poets, e.g. Longfellow and Bridges, wrote poems attempting to duplicate the effects of Latin hexameters -- but Longfellow and Bridges had had sufficient training in these other languages to have some idea of the effect they were aiming for. To an untrained native ear, English is always and only a stress-based language, and poetry that does not take account of this will never reach the general reader.

I have already mentioned my avocation as printer and publisher of Island Press in Sydney. Apart from familiarizing me with most contemporary and emerging poets in Australia, running
Island Press brought me closer to matters of typography, layout, and general book design which indirectly led to the "downbeat-column" layout used in How Poetry Works (there called the "stress-column"). In some of the poems included in the present project (e.g., "Cat and Dog") I have returned to this layout, with the addition of an actual vertical "downbeat line" below the start of the title and between stanzas to provide extra emphasis. This downbeat line, akin to the barline of music, shows the reader graphically where the first metrical beat is (usually corresponding to the first naturally stressed syllable in its words). The unusual appearance it gives the poem, will, I hope, also remind the reader that every line is going to have audible beats, with the first one being the "downbeat" that kicks the line off -- ignore this first one or get it wrong and the whole line will fall flat.

The downbeat column, then, is a guide to realization of the isochronous metrical pattern of each line. It also, of course, points up the importance of "hearing" poetry as essential to one's experience of it, not only guiding the reader to a coherent realization of the metre, but, in its unexpected appearance, also reminding the reader that this poem must be experienced as something primarily to be heard, not read. What is on the page is no more than a record of an aural art-form. The poem must be heard to work. I may run the risk of belabouring this, but the point is often overlooked.

I had braced myself for all manner of objection from the contemporary poets included in the How Poetry Works anthology to
the idea of this typographical rejigging. This did not happen, however; and even the literary executors of such august figures as E. E. Cummings and T. S. Eliot gave the downbeat-column concept their blessing. Some expressed the view that anything that might potentially broaden the appeal of poetry should be assumed to be at least unobjectionable. Nor did a single review of the book, once it was published, say anything negative about the typographical liberties I had taken, with the exception of a single review (I think in The Spectator) that compared the effect of the largely irregular left margins to that of a "Noddyland typesetter". (The reviewer still liked the book, on the whole.)

After How Poetry Works came out, I was both amused and bemused to discover that readers with little formal education and exposure to poetry seemed to have less trouble figuring out the point of the downbeat-column than did certain teachers and university professors of English poetry, who on the whole found it puzzling. Some of these, once it had been explained to them, suggested that they saw little value in it. This, of course, only confirmed my opinion that, on the whole, academics (unless they themselves happen to be poets) are the worst teachers of poetry as an aural art-form, tending to treat it as just another print genre, like the novel, the short story, the essay, &c., and on the whole viewing it as some type of cryptogram that needs decoding or "explaining" in terms of "what the poet is trying to say". Try "explaining" "The Rite of Spring" or "Blue Poles" in terms of what the composer or artist is "trying to say" or what the composition "means"!

131
Poetry came from a time when most people couldn't read and were read to, by a monk, a scholar, or a teacher. For this reason, in order to reach the summit of its artistry, it must still continually engage the individual aural imaginations of its listeners. How better to achieve this than with the natural rhythms, metres, and sound-patterns of ordinary speech, combined artfully into memorable lines?

A corollary is obvious: readers (note: not listeners) that scan poetry in the way they might scan a textbook or manual -- mainly for information -- have missed the way in which the art-form works. They might as well "read" the printed score of Beethoven's Ninth and totally overlook the sound it makes.

* 

The Present Collection I may say that I began the present project with some misgivings. It seemed it was calling for inspiration "on demand", and I felt the ghost of Graves looking over my shoulder disapprovingly, or at least with apprehension. I began with regular daily exercises, at the beginning done quite mechanically: writing a page of English cynghanedd sain in imitation of Hopkins (e.g., "trip, flip, and fly"), then moving on to writing pieces with all the vowels and diphthongs of English (I count 14 in my Canadian pronunciation) in predetermined order. I then attempted pieces in lines decreasing from four to three beats per line, then back from three to four. In others, I tried to reverse the cultural associations of four- and five-beat lines.
-- i.e., by keeping the five-beat subject and vocabulary "light",
or by using the four-beat metre for something more "serious": the
poem "Fives" in the present collection resulted from this.
Others in the collection, such as "Exercise, New Year's Eve", use
proper nouns in every line of some stanzas and none at all in
others. The poem "Aardvark", which comes first, is another type
of "exercise", as the reader will see -- just as the concluding
"Zygote" is its counterbalancing "reflection".

The first "real" poem, the start of a good creative flow,
was "Cat & Dog". This grew out of the experience of a camping
trip with my dog; on returning to the town, the dog moved back
into the house, while the cat, at home during our absence, disap-
peared into the back fields. So the details of the cat's activi-
ties during the trip are entirely imaginary (though likely),
created as counterpoint to the dog's doings. The contrastive
activities leading to the reversal of the whole thing at the end,
together with the simple language and varied metre, all contrib-
ute to the impact of the poem.

The decision to place the poems in some sort of "random"
order (alphabetically by title, as it turned out, as this made
organisation simpler) came as the collection grew, and made it
possible to concentrate on each poem as an individual piece
rather than as part of a thematic group. ("Aardvark" and "Zy-
gote" are obvious exceptions to this "randomness", being very
precisely placed at either end as a framing device.)

*
The Creative Process

Since completing the present collection, which I decided to call *Quarry*, after its central poem, and then writing the notes to each of the poems, I have attempted to consider the process of its composition. Speaking very generally, the poems had their genesis in one of three ways. First, there is the "rhythmic" type of poem, built up through exploration of a "heard", or strongly-perceived opening rhythm, usually accompanied by actual words. "Coyotes" is the most obvious example of this: the opening "They moved in overnight/ They must have come by air" was "heard" as rhythmic lines first and written down days later; the rest of the poem simply grew from this beginning, with no prior plan whatever. Second, there is the type in which the whole theme and its development were clear to me at the outset, and where the main focus, during the writing, was on achieving the most vivid and memorable expression of this theme -- which is why I call it "thematic". An example is "Agony & Sequel". The third type, the "personal", begins with some sort of first-person situation, the poem then being created as an exploration of this situation, until the point where its emotiveness is exhausted and there is nothing left to say. "January Rain" is an example of this type. In a sense, these poems are the most interesting to me, as tending to be the most deeply-felt and also the most unpredictable in conclusion.

I have found that decisions as to metre, sound patterning, and stanzaic organization (or the lack of it) are generally made
unconsciously as the poem is being written, or after one or more
drafts have been completed; they are not usually part of the
inceptive impetus to write, though the fact that even a first
draft seems to be falling naturally into three-line stanzas, for
example, will have some effect on the final result. Even this
regularity, once set up, may interrupt itself — as the words
"into a train", set in isolation, disrupt the three-line stanza
pattern of "November Third (II)"). Any efforts to create further
metrical effects come with the revision of the poem, and as a
rule are subordinated to the realization of a vivid and memorable
expression of an image or narrative or theme.

A poem may require only one or two revisions; indeed, a very
few in the present collection ("Kick, Relative" and "Waiting" are
examples) appear just as they were first written down. On the
other hand, some may need ten or more extensive revisions ("Cat &
Dog" being an example of this), and without doubt some in the
collection could do with yet more.

Choice of a title usually comes after the poem is finished,
(at least in first draft. The title may be seen as serving a
function analogous to the title of a painting (e.g., "Les demoiselles
d'Avignon") or a piece of music ("Claire de lune"), in
that it is not usually conceived of as part of the poem, but
rather a means of distancing, or "framing" the work and giving it
some sort of objective perspective in the the mind of the reader,
viewer, or listener, as the case may be. Most of the titles in
this collection are clearly denotative of the content of the
poem, providing an extra dimension for the poem, perhaps by means
of a double-entendre (as in "Getting Off") or by the highlighting of a key word ("Hunkering"). An exception to the usual process is the title "Anomie, A Clear Case of", derived from the "heard" words that gave impetus to the creation of the poem in the first place (see note).

Incidentally, it seems strange that public recitations of poetry usually begin with an announcement of the poem's title and creator. By all means, announce the title first: but the title is part of the whole work, while the poet's name is not -- of interest, perhaps, but not part of the "work" itself. It would seem more helpful to give the name of the poet either before the title, or on completion of the reading.

Now that work on this collection is, at least for the time being, finished, with the notes and introduction completed, it might be useful to attempt an overview of the collection as a whole, and to discuss what its themes and their treatments reveal about their creator. In so doing, the creator, so close to the work, is at a great disadvantage. Just as it would be easier for anyone else to describe one's physical characteristics, facial expressions, voice, gestures -- the way one walks down the street, for example -- it would be easier for the callowest critic to suggest themes, areas of interest and concern, and personal quirks that the creator of a poem is either quite unaware of, or simply does not see as worthy of note.

That having been said, and having re-read the poems and their notes, now several months after first writing them, and trying to put oneself in the position of the critic rather than
the creator, I found this part of the exercise to have been the most difficult, like attempting to self-induce a state of schizophrenia. It was also difficult writing the poems without trying to pre-judge their effect before they were actually finished. And as in the latter case one had to take pains to maintain a continual "suspension of critical awareness", so in the present one I have had to guard against the urge to go back and revise the poems so as to make them better fit the larger patterns I may now see.

I believe that most of the value of analysing any art-form, whether it be painting, music, dance, or (as in this case) poetry, lies in the act of analysis itself, the exercise, rather than in the end product. However, the poem-by-poem analysis of the notes that follows this introduction has enabled me to be clearer about what is stylistically typical of my work. On the whole, I note that it tends towards four-beat metre, the metre of song, of popular poetry, of the traditional ballad -- the metre of the people. Only occasionally does it use the five-beat line of "high-art" poetry, and then in a rather self-conscious way, a prime example being the poem "Fives" itself. Elsewhere, it uses lines ranging from one to as many as six beats, though there is no consistency in this. The most non-metrical poems are "Quarry" (in which I was aiming at a Whitmanesque, breath-determined, line), the penultimate stanza of "Flu" (a reflexive demonstration of non-metre), "Hunkering", and "January Rain".

From a rhythmic point of view, as one would probably expect, the main variety is between two- and three-syllable measures --
i.e., duplets and triplets. Except for special effect, I have tried to keep these fairly irregular, to avoid the "galloping" effect of runaway metre -- particularly triplets. (See Robert Graves's comment, in Appendix B, letter IV, about my early tendencies towards "relentless" metre.) As I have said, some of the poems began purely as strongly rhythmic lines, often with some of the words missing, before going on to become anything else. For me, rhythms are the basis of poetry; whatever else the poem may or may not have, it must have rhythm, though the degree of rhythmic regularity or lack of it will vary from one poem to the next, its presence or absence being part of the total effect.

Next in importance is the matter of sound-patterning. Only rarely have I attempted to use rhyme; and when I do, as in "Getting Off", this tends to be done in a tongue-in-cheek way. On the other hand, the half-rhyme effects of alliteration, assonance, and consonance, are used frequently -- often in conventional ways (at line-endings, on stressed syllables). In this, I see my work as being in the Anglo-Welsh tradition that begins with Hopkins, continues with Wilfred Owen, and continues on through Dylan Thomas.

Only then does the subject of the poem become of interest. Here, I am not so sure whether there are any larger patterns to be demonstrated. It could be said that the only predictable aspect of my subject-matter is its unpredictability. On the other hand, I imagine a reader would be able to identify certain repeated subjects or areas of concern: dreams, Native rituals and ceremonies, personal relationships, French grammar, domestic
pets, religion vs. spirituality, nostalgia (particularly for vanished TV and movie personalities), indoors vs. outdoors, music, the act of writing itself, individuality vs. communality, small-town life, and death.

As the notes make clear, the register of language varies from poem to poem. For example, the poem "Missing" is conceived as a dramatic monologue, its speaker having a strongly independent personality, in no way autobiographical. Here, I had in mind a rather gossipy middle-aged woman of rather limited education and perception. "Hunkering" is another example of this: here I hoped to convey the tone of a blind old man, somewhat defeated and resigned to his failing senses. In "Lover" this process is carried further: the poem has two independent "voices", though there is some possible latitude of interpretation here (i.e., one reader might conceive of them as representing two people having a conversation, while another might take them as an internal dialogue).

Other poems are more autobiographical, the speaker's linguistic register more obscured by the web of events or situational contexts depicted. These vary from extremely personal (e.g., "Cordless", "Hostel, Backpacker", "Ite", "Power", and "Tent") to merely neutral (e.g., "Church/Search", "Mogul", "Pickup", and "Smells").

The tone of the poems ranges from the intently sober ("November Third," parts of "Yule") to the light-hearted and flippant ("Getting Off", "Ottawaphonie", "Triples"). Occasionally, there is a sudden switch within the poems, as in "Prayer", 139
where the high seriousness of the Henry VI original is followed by a dismissive modern phrase, or "Moon over Magog," which begins personally but moves to a kind of dubious communality.

Another aspect of the collection not so easy to qualify has to do with the "hidden clue" type of poem, where something is hidden from the reader, though hinted at. Thus, the central characters of both "Looking Back" and "Hunkering" were conceived of as being physically blind. Though there is nothing in either of the poems to specifically indicate this, I hope their mode of expression may at least suggest that more may be contained than is immediately apparent. In the first, the conclusion tells us that there is nothing moving "except... some crazy crow is calling". For a blind person, the sound of an animal, even a call, is equivalent to movement. In "Hunkering", the clues are stronger: "probably you [note, not "we"] can see the flag...", the general focus on sounds rather than anything else, and the conclusion, "It feels like noon." Other more obvious "hidden clue" poems are the acrostical "Aardvark" together with "Zygote", its mirror image.

Most of the poems are less than one page in length. There are exceptions, though: the three-part "November Third", the long title poem "Quarry", and the four-part "Yule". It could be stated, though, that my tendency is towards the lyric: the short, musical (and musically conceived), personal evocation.

This stylistic analysis has revealed a couple of surprises. Although my surnames (Davies, Roberts) are obviously Welsh, I had not really noticed before how much my interest in, and fascina-
tion with, sound-patterns in English, puts me firmly in an Anglo-Welsh tradition running from George Herbert though G. M. Hopkins and Wilfred Owen to Dylan Thomas and Robert Graves. The Welsh are equally celebrated both for their musicality and their poetry, and I can see now that the concerns of my own poetry and its appeal are very much a function of what might be called its "music" -- that is, its rhythms and its sound-patterns. Given their relatively small numbers, I believe the contribution of the Anglo-Welsh to the spirit of English poetry has been important, and I hope to have been able to become part of it. (Note that I claim no expertise in Welsh prosody itself; it is merely the fascination with sound that I think of as a particularly Welsh characteristic.)

This may be an opportune time to speak of the poets whose influence I have felt most. I have to say that I have been most impressed by poets writing in some other language, either an earlier version of English (especially Chaucer and the Gawain-poet) or another language altogether: in particular the Greek poets Seferis and Kavafis (Cavafy), the Czech Holub, the Spaniard García Lorca, and, perhaps above all others, Rimbaud. (I have enough French and Spanish to be able to enjoy the latter two in their own languages.) What is striking about most of these is their unique way of looking at things, their unusual "angle to the universe" (to borrow Eliot's description of Kavafis), a perspective that is often able to transcend the limits of translation.

Of more recent poets writing in English and having some
influence on my style and subject, apart from Graves, I think first and foremost of Hopkins and Owen, then of Dylan Thomas (a strong early influence), Robert Lowell (for his self-assured idiom, interestingly at odds with his self-doubting persona), John Berryman (for his ability to contain wild and crazy linguistic exuberance within a conventional form), John Crowe Ransom (for his unmistakeably personal style), Stevie Smith (for her endearing eccentricities), and Elizabeth Bishop (whose Nova Scotian roots make her of interest, especially for her unusual blend of colloquial and formal diction).

I am always uneasy talking about poets: I am much more aware of the impact of specific poems than of the totality of a poet's work. For example, I have always thought Les A. Murray's "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow" to be a great poem, whereas I find much of his work is not on my wave-length; and I could easily think of a hundred more similar examples of specific poems in English that have had a significant impact on me but whose creators I am hardly aware of otherwise.

As to what is innovative in my own work, I would suggest it is a greater flexibility applied to standard prosodic conventions. Thus, sound patterning has traditionally been applied only to stressed syllables, syllables in "beat" positions; I have frequently used these patterns in unstressed positions (e.g., the assonantal link between the pronunciation "kigh-OWE-tee" (for "coyote") and "Fido" in "Coyotes", in which the /ai/ sound is unstressed in the first word though stressed in the second). Not quite so innovative, though still a departure from
convention, is the use of internal rhyme (for example, "You read about I say I doubt" in "Getting Off").

The poems in Quarry might have been grouped thematically, up to a point: dreams, particularly dreams with Native backgrounds, feature in many, simply because I had experienced them at the time. Matters to do with a personal relationship are explored in some, while others deal with some aspect of spirituality. The notes that follow, which I consider to be the most significant part of this project apart from the poems themselves, while attempting to bring thematic concerns together, in no way exhaust this subject. They touch on what seem to me to be the main features of interest, sometimes adding autobiographical material. At the beginning, I spend quite a lot of time on technical matters; towards the end I rely more on the reader's own perceptions.

The greatest sin in poetry, as in any art, is to be predictable. That is why most new poetry may irritate people: if it is any good, it will certainly not meet all their assumptions and expectations of what poetry (or music, or painting) should be.

This leads to the matter of the relationship between the poet and the reader, via the poem. Obviously, the poet expects the reader to approach the poem "in good faith", which means, above all, comprehending the extent of its spoken speech-rhythms and other sound-patterns -- just as a painter will expect his public to be able to see, or a composer will assume that his public will not be deaf. On the other hand, the reader of a poem has to trust the poet to remain relevant, not to deliberately
insert material that inexplicably weakens the intended effect, and not to be willfully obscure. Possible failures of communication are more obvious when one is reading a poem to someone physically present, but, as in all writing, they need to be borne in mind even more when the reader is absent.

*

**Conclusion** Inspiration arrives at totally unexpected times, and in totally unexpected ways. The inspired artist may not even be aware of it at the time -- one thinks of Sullivan discounting public esteem of his operettas over his symphonies and oratorios, his unwillingness to accept that his forte was the light, whimsical, clever. There is probably nothing immoral or wrong in pottering away on a daily basis in hopes that some flashes of inspiration will from time to time arrive -- though at times one feels there is enough inspiration around as it is without one's having to feel obliged to court the Muse. Poetry, some of it good, much of it not, will continue to be written, with or without inspiration, though the chances of another Rimbaud turning up are forever slim.

Before getting down to work on this project, in a letter to Kathleen Bell of De Montfort University, my first supervisor, I remarked that I was going to have to "cudgel the muse". I had grave doubts about the wisdom or propriety of this, especially as I had never before presumed to treat her (the Muse, I mean)
cavalierly. I kept the cudgelling gentle, however (though a whole page of cynghanedd sain might have been excessive), and in time she responded generously, with more poems than I would have dreamed possible, enough for a book, indeed. It was a great and wonderful experience.
AARDVARK

I needed a title that would place this "bookend" at the beginning of my "arbitrary" alphabetically-by-title ordering, so "Aardvark" was an obvious choice, just as "Zygote" is for its counterpart at the other end of the collection. That done, a genuine aardvark is given a walk-on part in the three-line tag at the end of the poem. I hope the upper-case letters make the poem's acrostic "signature" plain enough; as an added hint, the first and last lines start with words having the same opening letters as "De Montfort". There are some elements of Leicester in it -- references to the city centre and the "market cobbles" -- but on the whole it's about what the "poem" (symbolizing not only the work itself but the nature of the inspiration behind it) is saying to the "poet", the creator of the work, in reference to their "common past". Note that here the "poet" is silent, the listening participant. The roles are reversed in "Zygote"; and just as this poem gives a foretaste of what is to come in the rest of the collection, looking to the future, "Zygote" looks back and sums the whole experience up.

I'm not happy with "Numinous" (too grand, a buzz-word in spiritual circles) though it actually is what I mean. The frequent use of adjectives in the acrostic positions was also perhaps too easy: at least the last three lines escape this. There
are many sound patterns, though none too obvious, I hope; a repeated one is the assonantal ending of each stanza with the vowel /i/ (all sound notations in these notes, set within slashes, are in International Phonemic Alphabet symbols, based on my own pronunciations) preceded by two lines with consonantal connections. Other random patterns are "glare/where", "got/where", "rooted in rite", "deftly dove-tailed/ Velvet-"); also the apparent paradox of "Ineffable yet still" (italics added), which turns out to be no paradox at all: still is the adverb meaning "until now", not the adjective meaning "quiet": it's "still forever talk", just as at the conclusion of "Zygote" "the fact we're even speaking/ Demonstrates we're still alive and kicking".

The second-last line was intended to be ungainly -- the "message" being that one may force anything into a line of poetry one wishes but it has to somehow be balanced by what follows. The "was, always will be, is" is a variation of the "was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be" of the Gloria from the Catholic Mass, prefiguring the many religious references in the rest of the collection.

AGONY AND SEQUEL

An exploration of the commonplace probability that people advertising in personal columns for lovers would probably come to hate the very qualities they had specified if they had to live with them -- particularly the hackneyed "must enjoy long walks along lonely beaches, dinner by candle-light," &c. A cynical and
thoroughly unpleasant, if lightweight, poem.

The metre is fairly steady four-beat, rhythms uneven, though some lines are quite regular; e.g., the triplet rhythms in "walking along a deserted beach". The five-beat conclusion parallels the tedious unending future awaiting the woman.

ANOMIE, A CLASSIC CASE OF

The words "a classic case of anomie" came to my ears while I was driving along a deserted highway, alone -- rather in the way I "heard" the opening lines of "Coyotes" while walking. For me this is fairly unusual. Also, as with "Coyotes", the words were still securely in my head hours later when I started to write the poem. However, the "heard" words appear only in the title, and even there, because of the alphabetization of titles by key word, they never appear in their "heard" order.

The poem is something of an exercise as it turns the various definitions of the word "anomie" into specific metaphorical terms: the insomnia caused by caffeine, the estrangement from people caused by lack of communication, the specific pessimism of not believing you will see tomorrow, for whatever reason.

The metre is mainly four-beat at the beginning, with only occasional three-beat lines ("forgetting what happened this morning", "immersion in Latin and Hebrew" -- though note that these "short" lines have the maximum "allowable" (i.e., conventionally expectable) number of syllables, all their rhythms being triplet). However, there is a shift at the line "would be something of an understatement": it is quite irregular, and might be
read as either three-, four, or five-beat:

WOULD be SOMETHING of an UNDERTSTATEMENT (3)
WOULD be SOMETHING of an UNDEr STATEMENT, (4)
WOULD be SOMETHING OF an UNDEr STATEMENT (5)

The first of these possibilities has two quadruplet rhythms, highly unusual. The second has only one and is perhaps the easiest to accommodate. The third, which looks regular enough, promotes the normally unstressed "of" to a beat-position (a place in the metre where a stress would normally occur), so is only nominally regular. However it is read, this irregular line heralds a shift to three-beat lines for the rest of the poem.

The imagery of stanza 3 picks up the "religious" theme of the collection insofar as it recalls the elements of Christian communion, two of the historical languages of the Church, and an image of Masada, in Israel, overlooking the Dead Sea. The final stanza makes an obvious return to this. It seems inevitable that a poem about anomie would ultimately come to a religious conclusion.

AWAY, THE ONE THAT GOT

A fairly straightforward presentation of the problem of getting something that "came to me" down on paper -- a poem about the poetic process, in fact, complete with a direct appeal to the "muse" or "goddess"; here, a "tease". The poem concludes with the speaker's interest diverted, suggestively, to something completely external and natural but mysterious and unnamed -- "that odd shape looming/ under the cedar by the river". (Compare
this with the conclusions of "Looking Back" and "Zygote", where a similar image is suggested.)

On the whole, the poem is in three-beat lines, with an occasional four-beat ("something soft, possibly sad") or two-beat ("your peace, tease") exception.

Sound patterns are not particularly pronounced, the most obvious comprising the /i/ and /s/z/sounds of the penultimate stanza ("speak/ ...peace, tease") and the assonance of "luminous" and "moving" in the last stanza.

BEDFELLOWS

The most obvious "effect" is the that of the two ambiguities towards the end. The first of these works through the temporal nature of the art, as words are revealed sequentially, and never predictably:

  wait till you yourself come (sexual)
  wait till you yourself come to (regain consciousness)
  wait till you yourself come (arrive) to/ disarm me

The concluding " between us nothing either" could mean, literally, "there is no obstacle between us, we are as close as it is possible to be"; metaphorically, however, it could be paraphrased as "We have nothing whatsoever in common, there is no spiritual or emotional connection between us."

The phrase "two common words" uses "common" in a multiplicity of senses, chief of these being "vulgar", perhaps, but also including "ordinary", "linking" (as in "common denominator") and the grammatical term (as in "common (vs. proper) noun"). (The contrast between common and proper nouns underlies much of
"Exercise, New Year's Eve", "Magog Moon", and "Market", among others.)

This is the first of many poems in the collection that I have termed "punctuationless". In these, I dispense with end-of-line punctuation (except, in this one, for the termination of the quote in stanza 4), the principle being that a line-ending may do duty for anything from a period (full stop) to a comma -- or may equally be taken as "run-on" and having no implicitly understood punctuation at all. (This allows for the ambiguity in stanza 7, already mentioned, which would not have been possible had conventional punctuation had been used.) On the other hand, upper-case letters are conventionally used to show sentence openings.

Metre: irregular. Rhythm: ditto, though often triplet with mid-line pause, as in

i SEEM to end UP \ SHAR-ing my SPACE
who ONE windy NIGHT \ HISSED in my EAR i’ll
or YOU who by DAY \ affect not to CARE

Sound-patterns: some assonance, "eye-rhyme" between "over" and "lover" (stanza 3), the concluding off-beat link, fairly obvious, between "ether" and "either".

BELLES-MERES

An "entertainment", extension of the "franglais", macaronic joke poems first hit on in "Genres" (1970), which explored the "gros ineptitude" felt by many anglophones of Canada in their vain attempts to achieve perfection in a language that appears perversely to do everything to make this as difficult as possi-
ble.

The reference in the last stanza to "spinning straw/ squat in the ashes" creates, I hope, a composite of Rapunzel, the princess in Rumpelstiltskin, and Cinderella -- only now the roles are reversed and it's the mothers (not the step-mothers or mothers-in-law) that are dispossessed. "Real" for them is in contrast to the "belle" of the title.

Metre: irregular. Rhythm: frequently triplet, but on the whole irregular.

CANNOT BE

A brief lyric, another of the "punctuationless" pieces. Really a fragment (see also "Frag I" and "Frag II"), as it begins in mid-sentence. More conventionally it could be rendered, "I'm thinking of being," &c., the second stanza being in apposition to the first (the paper being white, &c.) and running on to the third, which ends with a syntactic pause. "The love getting nowhere" balances the participles of the opening, and could similarly be paraphrased: "The love gets nowhere." "Likewise", neither does the song. At this point, in the middle line of the mid-stanza there is a tacit contrastive -- BUT the rest of the paper still shines, things are still possible in its whiteness, it has not been totally overwhelmed by the ruination and "black" sadness of the song.

This is an example of a "private" poem; I would probably not want to use it at any but the most intimate of readings with a highly sympathetic audience. I hope I have left enough space for
it to work in the reader’s mind. I personally like it; there is a lot going on in its short length.

Metre: often four- (or two-) beat, as in the opening:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{THINKing of BEING} & (2\text{-beat}) \\
&\text{aBOUT to WRITE} & (2\text{-beat}) \\
&\text{a SONG of LOVE that CANnot BE} & (4\text{-beat})
\end{align*}
\]

but this pattern becomes less and less dominant as the poem proceeds, till the last stanza

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{STILL SHINES} & (2\text{-beat}) \\
&\text{STILL POSSible (*) HOLDing (3- or 4-beat)} \\
&\text{its OWN against HIDden FORces (*) (3- or 4-beat)}
\end{align*}
\]

The last two lines may be read as four-beat if one allows in each of them a pause equal to one beat (shown here, as in How Poetry Works, by an asterisk surrounded by parentheses), the "silent beat", equivalent to a rest in music. The spacing of the second-last line suggests this alternative.

CAT & DOG

Typographically, the ampersand is reserved for situations where the two linked items are grammatically equivalent, as they are are here: two nouns. (Often an "and" in such a position would be elided to ‘n’ in informal North American speech, which the ampersand also suggests, as in "ham & eggs" -- ham’n’ eggs.)

In order of composition (i.e., not in the alphabetical order used here), this is the first of the poems composed for this project that I was completely happy with. I like the formal balance between the cat and the dog in the opening stanza, relaxed somewhat in the penultimate stanza, where the contrast
takes place midway through the first line --"She dreams of a lap: he snores"-- and by means of a linking colon rather than expressed as separate statements. The growing awareness of an actual link then leads to the final stanza, still contrastive but with no punctuation needed, as the two animals have their only face-to-face encounter, brief though it is. (The matter of natural enmity is explored more openly in "Game".)

Metre: irregular, frequently varying between four- and three-beat lines. Rhythm: irregular, tending towards duple. Note that although in the opening and closing stanzas "cat" and "dog" are given equal stress-weight (i.e., they both regularly occur in beat-positions in the line), the middle stanzas with their repetition of the rhythmic pattern

```
SHE'S on the PROWL UNder the PORCH
He POUNCES through WOODS in a SHOWER (*)

SHE spends the NIGHT IN the garAGE:
He CURLS up with US by the LAKE (*)
```

stress "she" but not "he". (May these really be taken, then, as having equal contrastive weight?)

Sound patterns: some assonance ("expeditions with us" in the opening stanza), alliteration ("grazes the ground"); frequent partial (off-beat) patterns ("up with us", "snores"/"embers", "with us"/"wilderness").

This poem is the first in the collection in which I use the "downbeat-column" layout, first used in How Poetry Works (there called the "stress column"). For this project, I have emphasized it further by adding a vertical line from the title down through the stanzas. The objective of the layout is two-fold: first, to
indicate where the first beat of the line falls, and, second, to remind the reader that the poem must be heard in order to be fully realized. (This is equally true of all the poems, regardless of their layout.)

CAVEAT

Almost too brief to need comment, this poem explores the irony of someone's declaration of honesty or trustworthiness having the effect of planting the first suspicion of dishonesty or mistrust, even though before the declaration no such suspicion may have existed. (Notice how much wordier this paraphrase is than the poem itself!) The lines are very short, either one- or two-beat. Sound patterns include the repetition (surprisingly, given that the poem is so brief) within stanza 2: "You know you can trust me, you/ know you can" and the extremely conspicuous line-end rhymes "wouldn't// ... couldn’t/ shouldn’t".

CD/CV

This is a direct descendant of "Time Study" (1961), one of my earliest poems. In that poem, the speaker talks of running movie film backwards so it can be replayed, and of the visual effect of watching an artist "unpaint" a picture, an orchardist "ungrafting" apple trees, and, finally, lovers, one of whom is the speaker, "unquarrelling", concluding with the line "Do you think we could try it again from the start?"

Here a similar "metaphysical" gimmick is used, one which directly plays on the similarity between the abbreviations CD
(compact disc) and CV (curriculum vitae), exploring the notion of CVs being submitted in CD-ROM format, which I've no doubt they soon will be. (It's also of minor note that when I wrote "Time Study" one didn't get the opportunity of seeing movies run backwards very often -- and one had to stand on your head for the effect as the reverse-flow images came out upside-down -- whereas now the "rewind play" effect is utterly commonplace to anyone with a VCR.)

This is definitely an expansive poem, one suggesting an expansive speaker. The only thing "poetic" about it is the absence of end-line punctuation, where the reader has to use context to determine pause (if any) and intonation, the latter being suggested by the personality of the speaker, perhaps a jaded minor white-collar worker in some large personnel department.

Metre: irregular, though mainly four-beat. Rhythm: irregular. Sound patterns: random assonance ("slip the disc" -- note the echo of the medical term "slipped disc" --, "clouds, & power"), internal rhyme ("well-honed...tone"), conventional rhyme ("screen.../keen"), consonance ("tone.../keen", and alliteration ("the suavity is somewhat more strident", a three-beat line, and "decent drama").

CHOPIN HOUR

The title, which came after the poem, is a pun on "Schopenhauer", though there is no particular significance in this. In this poem, I have added extra emphasis to the downbeat column
layout by printing the first stressed syllable of each line in bold print. This seems as far as I can go in this direction; I haven’t bothered with the bold in any of the other poems, with or without stress-columns.

The historical background of this poem is obvious from the reference to Mallorca, and the naming of Chopin in the title. The "famous writer" is, of course, George Sand; and the words "Alas, my poor hands!" were supposedly spoken by Chopin on his death-bed. Beyond that, I hoped to convey not only the semi-tropical locale ("Mallorca moon") but the fact that it was actually cold and rainy for a lot of the time, that Chopin was slowly dying of consumption, and that the couple were ostracized by the locals. Hence the dish on the piano bench (to collect leaks), rattling teeth (which began as an elliptical reference to enameled saucepans but ended up more suggestive of shivering), candles for light but also for warmth, and "in this cell/ out of time, out of tune", as social pariahs.

There is a deliberate confusion of ideas and terms in the last two stanzas. First is the two-fold way in which the lines may be read either "No matter how many candles surround [you], you keep [your] eyes locked [on the music]" or "No matter how many candles surround you, keep [imperative] eyes locked...". The reference to "fresh singing" (new music) connects by half-rhyme to "fingers/ intending never to die// yet three weeks from now/ to be buried alive..." and finally the speaker’s reference to the hands. The last two lines convey a somewhat naive "reading" of the term "Opus Posthumus" under which so many of Chopin’s
last works, presumably from the period of the poem, were published.

The opening is ambiguous: "the hand runs crazy, rags and a dish," &c., in contrast with "the hand runs crazy rags [i.e., referring to "ragtime" pieces], and a dish sits next to you...". However, in the end, "sits" makes the second the more valid interpretation. (As a matter of fact, I had in mind here the G Major Prelude with its rapid left-hand sixteenth-note (semiquaver) ostinato, a piece many pianists find fiendishly difficult to play.) Further ambiguities exist between the readings "famous writer, affecting desperat[ion] to be your lover [who is] rattling teeth in the scullery [i.e., hiding her own cold and misery]" and the "famous writer, affecting [her readers with powerful emotions], desperate to be..." &c.

Note the references to disparate body-parts: hand, teeth, knees, eyes, fingers, and, again, hands, also found in "Scarf".

Metre: often two- or three-beat. Rhythm: tending to triplet (e.g., "Rattling TEETH in the SCULLery"), though tending to the irregular. This is especially true of the last line, which could be rendered as

your MUsic has a1READy outLIVED you (3-beat), or
your MUsic HAS a1READy outLIVED you" (4-beat).

The first reading calls for a quadruplet ("music has al-"), then a triplet ("ready out-"), and finally a duplet ("lived you"). Given the context, I would suggest the slowing effect of these rhythms as more in keeping with the subject of the poem.

Sound patterns: many "-ing" endings in stanza three; asso-
nance in the verbs and nouns of stanza two: "tune/...bruised/moon".

CHURCH/SEARCH

Here the rhyming near-pun survives in the title, with "search" being reprised in the final stanza. The poem is straightforward enough, and quite "prosaic", going as far as the vapidity of "there are announcements".

The "anagram" of GOD can only be, of course, DOG. This parallels the use of a "dog" in a religious context in other poems, particularly in "Layout, Cathedral" and to a lesser degree in "November Third". Thus, it is intended as not so much disrespectful of conventional religion but, rather, I hope, resonantly suggestive of another way of looking at the matter.

Metre: irregular, generally ranging from two- to four-beat (with one five-beat: "its iNItials ARE an AnaGRAM of GOD" to point up the most "significant" line), this being balanced by the two-beat line that follows. Rhythms: irregular, though ending with a three-beat line of regular triplets. Stanzas: two-line, generally in concord with syntax and subject.

CORDLESS

A "personal" poem, the reference being, of course, to a cordless phone, and developing the idea that others can listen in to both side of a conversation on one of these if they have an easily-available radio-wave "scanner" to do so. The cliché "for all to see" thus becomes a very basic metaphor for this. These
is an evident link between the "cordless" of the title and the invisible "line" thrown out (i.e., the broadcast wave) connecting "both sides" of the telephone conversation.

Beyond this is the pine tree, which on the one hand secures "our words" and also supports the end of the "line" away from the "base unit" in the house (note the reversal of conventional syntax in stanza 3: the line is secured, our words hang from it). At the same time, the tree also interferes with reception when the speaker goes "under" it. The phrase "hear both sides" recalls the expression "hear both sides of the story": perhaps the eavesdroppers may also be viewed as umpires in some kind of dispute. The last four stanzas are a concrete rendering of the notion of failure of communication; hence, the tone of the poem is somewhat pessimistic.

Metre: begins two-beat, soon progressing to three-beat, returning to two-beat by the end. Rhythm: irregular. Sound patterns: rhyme: "me...tree/ ...tree", "ears/ ...hear/ ...hear" (the latter two internal), "voice/ ...noise" (half-rhyme), assonance: "scanners/ ...can't", alliteration: "line/ lances", "see/...say".

The use of "read" in the conclusion may be taken two ways: one may not only "read" the other in the sense found in conventional communications jargon (= receive clearly) but also in the sense of recent slang usage (= to comprehend).

COYOTES

The first line and the opening half of the second line were "heard" while I was walking in the woods, not really thinking of
coyotes in particular. However, that much of the "poem" is true: over the past few years coyotes, native to the American south-west and never before found in Nova Scotia, have moved in in large numbers and have become a pest and a nuisance -- especially as they are extremely intelligent, resourceful, and difficult to control. Apart from that, the poem needs little explanation.

The speaker of the poem is a "local", given the frequent colloquialisms: ("a regular [typical understatement for "huge", "major"] convention", "Tex-Mex", "on the sniff", "calico cat", "and him getting confused", "some kind of scratching", &c. The ellipsis in "learned to bunch/ at the foot of [the] North Mountain [during the] nights" is also typical colloquial usage. On the other hand, the speaker clearly has had enough "education" to be able to use such phrases as "deepest alien... jade" and "scent of musk-ridden breath" (rhyming with death, though this suggestion remains tacit).

Metre: generally short (typically three-beat) and long (from four to six beats) lines alternate, as the look of the poem suggests. Rhythm: irregular duplet/triplet.

Many random phonic patterns: assonance in "coyote/...local [internal]/... owners", "tuned to the moon", "cat/... scratching... back"; alliteration in "Fidos & Fifis", "flip-flopping" and "calico cat". Also note the assonantal link between "high-OWE-tee" and "Fido". None of this is very pronounced, though, given the length of the poem.

DAWN

161
A brief, personal lyric (by which I mean a short poem suitable for singing). The poem's first stanza is "punctuationless", but the second is an extended question, in two parts. The rhythms of the poem are very strong, but there is no regular metrical pattern. The keen-eared "of a certain age" may recognize the pun in "up up and aware" (the battle-cry of Superman, much trumpeted by boys of that era: "Up, up, and away!"). The "hand in hand" image of the last line is reprised in "Zygote": "pick up your hand again" -- though here there is also an additional association with playing cards. The poem's many "-ing" endings give it a continuous, ever-present quality, and the whole poem is cast in the continuous present.

DEATH OF A FRIEND

A fairly autobiographical poem: I really did dream of the death of this particular friend (I never told him about the dream afterwards, though) shortly before writing the poem.

The strong verb-form "dreamt" connects via consonance with "night" at the beginning of the first line, and via assonance with "dead" at the end of it. The strong rhythms of the first line, either

LAST night i DREAMT my FRIEND was DEAD or
last NIGHT i DREAMT my FRIEND was DEAD

suggest the tone of the popular, traditional ballad.

There is a deliberate echo of the seventeenth-century in "smilingly chided", with its pronounced assonance, continued in "minor". The third stanza highlights the sounds /f/, /l/, and
/r/, similarly /n/ and /g/ in the last stanza. The quoted sentiments (stanzas 4 and 5) are obvious clichés. Also note the contrast in tone between the polysyllabic, Latinate, technical "parietal sutures" (anatomical) and "adventitious" (botanical) and the monosyllabic, Germanic, "steel hair" and "fluff".

The poem is relatively "punctuationless", the reader being expected to participate to the extent of determining appropriate syntactical pauses at line-endings. Some readers may find this difficult, and it must be admitted that it is perhaps asking a lot of the average "armchair reader". On the other hand, I feel it is useful, not only for the increased possibility of ambiguity that it opens up, but also for the opportunity it provides the reader to bring more to the active "re-creation" of the poem.

DEDICATION

I considered adding a stanza to the end of this poem:

This poem should come first in the book
and would if D came first in the alphabet

because, thematically, it certainly should have. A private poem, but no more "private" than any published dedication.

Again, this is one of the many "punctuationless" poems in the collection. In the last two stanzas there is some repetition of /r/ and the consonants /l/, /n/, and /s/ -- "...invisible ink, thus/ keeping forever expanding/ the wilderness between us". The final syllables of "limitless" and "wilderness" would not normally be stressed, but to some degree they are "promoted", in the first case, to avoid the consecutive quadruplets "LIMitless the"
and "WILDerness be-". In performance, I would expect these to hover somewhere between wooden duplets and tongue-twisting quadruplets -- though metrically, of course, they have to be one or the other. It's up to the sympathetic performer to maximize their effect of their metrical ambiguity.

DISNEY

A "weird" poem that I am very happy with. The scene is Disney World in Florida. Europeans will not have any trouble with the idea that the Disney Corporation is a somewhat less than admirable business, and that even good clean fun has its shady side. (This idea is also explored in "Mogul"). Disney World does have its dark side, and it is a fact that although injuries are not uncommon, no legal action is ever taken because the corporation’s compensation cheques are sufficiently large, and (the dark side) their lawyers are so powerful that any suer’s chances of success are small.

I have also always been intrigued with the fact that all the "workings", the "dark side", in another sense, of Disney World really are underground, with the various professional masqueraders emerging from tree-trunks, cave entrances, &c. into the "never-never-land" magic of America’s best-known fantasy.

The "dark" side of the imagery comes with the progression from "Goofy [i.e., the Disney character] teeth/ Mickey Mouse ears and Papa Doc [i.e., Duvalier, the former Haitian dictator] glasses" -- a deliberate confusion between "Doc" of Disney’s Seven Dwarfs and "Papa" Smurf. (In an earlier version of the poem, the
surgeon had "steel teeth" — but I decided later to tone it down a bit.) The "Yankee dollars" suggests the victim is not of the American culture, and her maroonment on the shores of the flat saline wastes of Kissimmee Lake is in contrast to the extravaganza of the Disney experience.

The emphatic "We do hope" of the last stanza recalls all those stilted, wordy, announcements one hears in the US, particularly aboard commercial aircraft ("We do ask that you do remain seated...").

I like "one echo, the echo", which of course itself is an echo, but also a progression from the indefinite "one" to the very definite all-encompassing "the". In fact, it was the result of an accident, one of these echoes originally having been marked for deletion — which somehow never happened.

DIVORCEE

The preceding few poems are departures from the prominent rhythms of the opening numbers, but here we return to fairly regular (three- or four-beat) lines with a tendency to triplets, reaching a peak in the last stanza's

with the Woman he CHOSE over HER for his MATE

though this is in sharp contrast to the solidly duplet concluding line

STARING BLANKLY AT the CAKE.

There is also a fairly regular phonic pattern in the line-endings, XAXA, though most of these links are merely assonantal or consonantal — "mother/ ...Hut", "earlier/ ...girl", 165
"breath/...with", "'mother'/...teacher" (unstressed consonance), "close/...toast" (assonance and partial consonance), and "mate/...cake" (assonance). These get closer and closer to full rhyme as the poem proceeds, though never quite attain it.

Note the variety of terms for the woman, her ex-husband, and his wife: "mother", "ex-husband", "man", "girl", "son-of-a-bitch", "she", "bastard" "'wife'", "'mother'" (in quotes, note), "teacher", "birthday boy" (ironically jocular), "woman", and "mate". The irony implicit in many of these terms underlines that of the poem's conclusion.

DREAM

The inchoate nature of the dream itself is conveyed through the use of participles to introduce its main sections: "heading", "waking", "beginning", with the last conveying the possibility that the dream may still not be over. This is also suggested by the line "the dream itself now become a dream" -- there are levels of dreams at work within the one experience, and one is not sure whether one is actually out of them and truly awake at the end. ("Death of a Friend", already discussed, explores the same idea, while the concluding poem, "Zazen", also presents a dream within a dream.)

This is a fairly literal account of a dream I had while working on this project. The most difficult part of the dream to convey in words was how the beams of light "projected" by the dreamer's eyes are so dim at first that he is not immediately
aware of the phenomenon -- or at least cannot believe it.

The poem falls naturally into three-line stanzas, the divisions coinciding with syntactical periods on the whole. Triplet rhythms dominate, e.g., "STARing as HARD as he CAN down a RAdient/ RATHole to QUENCH...", and lines are either three- or four-beat. Sound patterns include alliteration ("soft & silent", "crimson cups", "magnetic moss", "radiant/ rathole"), rhyme ("sounds of the roundup" (internal), "gray/ ...away"), and assonance ("finding his eyes", "seeds of the tea-").

The poem is also an exploration of the "Native" theme, though here the speaker remains an outsider rather than a participant.

DRIVEWAY, VIEW FROM THE

A rather metaphorical, animizing view of a perfectly ordinary visual manifestation: the curious sight of one of a pair of deck chairs, out on the lawn, being moved around by the wind during the week after Easter (note seasonal/calendar placement), while its perfectly identical mate, due to some quirk of air currents, remains in the same place. The movement of the first chair is seen as a slow-motion "formal dance" around the second, "which no one ever uses now".

The tone of the poem is conversational, though fairly formal, with occasional irony, as in the word "'discussion'", with its inverted commas. Occasionally, it moves towards something slightly more colloquial: "maybe trying to catch some sun/... maybe trying to hide/ Who knows if some kind of camera...", yet
the last sentence, beginning with these words, becomes quite
grandiloquent and adjectival -- though it ends simply enough.
The third line of the poem, "after our Easter 'discussion'"
provides the only clue that the positioning of the chairs may be
taken as symbolic of relations between the speaker and someone else.

The poem is predominately in three-beat lines, though four-
beat lines (e.g., "enjoy the view of the river better") are not uncommon.

The "empty-chair" theme of the conclusion is also developed in an earlier poem, "The Dark Town Poker Club: "the empty chair/
with arms in which/ only the true/ king can sit/ not even his son." (See Appendix A.) The "vain display" of the concluding
stanza may be taken in two senses -- the display itself shows
vanity, and it is in vain, wasted, given that "no one ever uses"
the other chair anyway.

EXERCISE, NEW YEAR'S EVE

This poem was conceived as a kind of warming-up exercise, akin to "Fives", "Flu", "Triples", and a few others in the collection. The "exercise", slight in itself, was to use proper
nouns in every line of the opening and closing stanzas and no-
where else in the poem.

The quote in the second stanza is an easily recognizable
line of Hopkins's sonnet "Windhover", the swallow simile replac-
ing his skate's heel one. There is a contrast implicit in this, of course: Hopkins compares a bird's flight to skating on lake
ice, while here skiing on snow-covered lake ice is compared to the flight of a bird.

Like the previous poem, this is cast in the "habitual" present, a tense that makes no sense in such a context in "ordinary" (i.e., non-performative) language, but has become a common literary convention.

The character "Will" is a resurrection from an earlier book, Will's Dream (QUP, 1973), and might be taken as representative of an aspect of my own personality that could be described as mesomorphic, external, deterministic, and frivolous. This underlies the poem's exploration of his movement from future through present to past (symbolized by the breaking of the ski trail) and the switch from an unknown future to a "known" one that occurs when Will turns around and "hitches a free ride back". The "end" this time is clear, assuming he doesn't make the "huge effort" to step out of the tramlines (even though "he really can't see" it) and the descent "back home" entirely predictable. (Compare the "anabasis/catabasis" theme here with its fuller development in the poem "Quarry".)

FIVES

This began as another "exercise", a self-referential (or "reflexive") exploration of the nature of the five-beat line, the line of the "highest" English poetry. So the title leapt to mind at once, and itself provided the ostensible subject -- the game of "fives". Much to my delight, when I checked, the OED's (quoted) non-explanation of the etymology of the name of this
game was itself a five-beat line. From there it was easy enough to "explain" the reason for this name in terms of its being a hand-ball game, then go on to allude to the five cards of a stud-poker hand, before moving on to consider the five-beat line of English prosody, together with its potential -- the whole thing demonstrating the full range of possibilities inherent in it. These range from the wild Hopkinsian expansiveness of

so Obviously if it's a [! septuplet] BALLgame you [triplet] PLAY with your [triplet] HANDS, it's [duplet] FIVES! [singlet]

to the contrast of the immediately following duplets:
LIKEwise IT may BE a Poker HAND.

The quote in the sixth line, together with the allusion to a "song", is recalls, once more, the 1940s cult favourite song, "The Dark Town Poker Club" (particularly as recorded by the US band-leader Phil Harris and his All-Stars). The song is also the subject of a poem of the same name which first appeared in Crux (Island Press, 1973) (see Appendix A) and is also recalled in "Driveway, View from the".

The concluding line suggests one of the reasons why the five-beat line is so useful -- its inherent "incompleteness" to ears that have grown up since infancy accustomed to the "finished" sound of the four-beat line. This "incompleteness" gives the five-beat line a protean utility and, even more importantly, unpredictability that, in the hands of a great (or even simply competent) poet, can make a poem continually fresh, surprising, and alive.

Apart from being based on the five-beat line itself, nothing
much about the poem is in any way regular. The rhythms jump from the regular duplets of

the NUMBER TO our EAR sounds OFF -- or HIGH
to the regular triplet rhythms opening the line

had EVER been MET with a CRY to GIMme FIVE

and also such highly irregular lines as

AS in the SONG FIVE ... FIVE...then STOP

and

DIFFicult amBITious poETic or SIMply HARD.

Note the progression in most of these irregular lines from "higher" (i.e., more weak syllables) to "lower" (i.e., fewer) rhythmic numbers.

The other effects of the poem are evident enough, particularly in the last two lines, the first with its two alliterative triple-rhythm similes (the second contrasting the unvoiced /k/ of "keen" with its voiced equivalent, the /g/ of "gun", and with the consonance of final /n/s uniting them all), and the second with its four extremely obvious rhymes.

I felt the footnote was required, as the game of fives is not widely known in North America, though other forms of handball are popular enough.

FLU

A four-beat-line exercise using various rhythms. The "joke" of the poem is in the narrator's obsessive marking of ordinary speech as regularly rhythmic, here in a radio news bulletin; thus
The "spreading/ my nerves" that follows this last line refers to effect of the lines' rhythms themselves (and their insidious effect on the speaker), as opposed to their content or "message".

I suppose a more general way of describing the poem would be as the exploration of an obsession. The second stanza represents an attempt to break free of the "disease" in terms of rhythmless (i.e., "prosasic" lines); ironically, however, the concluding couplet is not only in extremely regular four-beat triplet lines, but the line-endings themselves rhyme, and both the rhythm and the rhyme recall those of the opening line.

I see the speaker in this poem as being a non-poet, perhaps the friend of a poet, who, struck with the usual poet's fixation on the rhythms and sound patterns of ordinary language, conceives of it as a disease. The opening explores the way in which ordinary speech starts to sound as possible, potential poetry, regardless of subject. The "cure" for the disease us expounded in the arhythmic, non-metrical penultimate stanza -- but, unfortunately, the speaker seems to have been left unable to hear the "relapse" that occurs in the last stanza. Recovery may be out of the question for this sad case.

FOX, SILVER

This is based on a real incident (the retirement of our local mayor and his farewell speech to his council, during which he coined the name "Silver Fox" for me, as a bit of a joke during
a very emotional moment). In keeping with the (North American aboriginal) Native theme of some of the other poems, and the Native sound of the name, the story is retold in such a way as to suggest a larger and more timeless context -- though there is nothing in the poem that was not part of the actual event. I like the poem very much, and it came very easily, the day afterwards, in fact.

The "timeless" flavour is achieved through choice of words and rhythms suggesting the language and style of the Greek and Anglo-Saxon epics. This is particularly true of stanza three, in which the first three lines convey the same notion, that of leave-taking ritual, in three different ways, suggesting the epic style. The opening line too, could be from any period, and the use of capitals in "Old Man" suggests anything from a fairy-tale to a modern novel.

The syntactical structure of the poem and its relation to its stanzas is significant. The first two lines are each separate sentences, while lines three and four comprise another independent statement. From there, the syntax becomes more expansive -- with the second stanza itself being a single sentence, the sentence that begins in the third stanza running on to the fourth before it is completed. This pattern of increasing sentence length is abruptly ended in the penultimate stanza, each of its four lines being an independent statement.

Rhythmically, the poem's generally four-beat lines tend towards duplet rhythms, particularly in the almost completely regular penultimate stanza, with its end-stopped lines:
This regularity continues into the first line of the last stanza; the poem, however, concludes with a relentless three-beat triplet line followed by a silent beat:

and THAT'S how I reCEIVed the NAME
i would CARRY the REST of my LIFE (*)

Some alliteration occurs in the penultimate stanza; generally, however, there is little other obvious sound-patterning in the rest of the poem. Note, however, a more complex phonic link between "honorifics" and "Silver Fox" (/an 3r i fiks/ /sil v3r faks/), a link which itself becomes symbolic within the context of the scene. Here, in these two phonic groups, the only sounds not duplicated in the second are /n/ (in the first word) and /l/ and /v/ (in the second).

With the exception perhaps of "heartfelt", the language of the poem is extremely "unpoetic". Its tone, however, is highly "serious", with extensive use of Latinate terms of a very specific nature: "tribute", "councillors", "solemnity", "successor", "honorifics", and "received". In contrast, the pivotal penultimate stanza contains few words that are not very basic monosyllables -- and none of these are Latinate except for the commonplace plural "faces".

FRAG I

"Frag" is short for "fragment", a fragment of "fragment".
True to this title, the poem begins elliptically in mid-sentence with the conjunction "and". The poem is, again, one of the "punctuationless" ones, where the reader has to participate to the extent of supplying end-of-line pauses where appropriate.

Although the subject appears to be slight (the tenuousness of communication between two people who may or may not ever have been lovers), the poem's construction is fairly complex: three-line stanzas in each of which the lines are longer and longer. The first line of each stanza has only one beat, and generally, though not always, the second has two and the third three. Thus:

and SO
AFTER  a BAD
NIGHT   and BURNT-out reCALL

Phonic patterns abound: assonance ("after a bad", "fall.../ along", "close... choked", "-room/ ...-noon", "take... weight", "understatements [here there is also an assonantal link back to "weight"]/...sun", "smoke/...knowing", "ever/...whatever/...meas- ures to get", "close.../ going.../ heroic"), consonance ("night & burnt-out", "recall/ ...stroll", "smoke/ ...rock", "this is as close as this/ is"), rhyme ("all/ the fall", "knowing/ ...going"), alliteration ("bad/ ...burnt-", "going.../ to get"), allitero-consonance ("fall/ ...full"), and absolute repetition "close/...close", "this... this", "ever/ ...-ever").

The vocabulary of the poem is ambiguous, with many possible double-entendres: "burnt-out" (worn-out, exhausted, cheated, and/or branded), "recall" (memory, calling back), "go along" (travel by, agree), "close" (near, secret(ively), strict, stuffy, stingy), "choked" (held tightly, held far down, throttled), "full
weight" (fair measure, heaviness, complete import), "rock" (boulder, stone, foundation, rocking movement as in dancing or copulation), "measures" (means, musical or prosodic units). Beyond that, and linked to it, is a certain amount of double-entendre resulting from the disposition of the lines; for example "take the full weight [i.e., burden]" vs. "the full weight [i.e., import]/ of two/ or three understatements", "we smoke/ up [high] on a rock" vs. "we smoke/ up [i.e., get "high"] on a rock [i.e., "stone"]", and the double-entendre implicit in "heroic measures" (i.e., either "extreme means" or "heroic lines, metres"), the suggestion being that even the most dazzling celebration of the situation in lines of the "highest" poetry will not make it any more than it actually is -- a fleeting, and not wholly satisfactory, encounter.

The downbeat-column layout also reveals another kind of symmetry in the poem: each stanza begins with a "rising" line (i.e., with an off-beat) and ends with a "falling" one (i.e., starting with a beat), while the middle lines of the three central stanzas "rise" and those of the opening and closing stanzas "fall".

FRAG II

Like the previous fragment, this poem also begins and ends in mid sentence, and has "punctuationless" line-endings. Unlike "Frag I", however, this one does have one full stop, halfway through the last line. The effect is to switch the focus of the poem from the "interior" of "you"'s mind and home to the sound of
the winter wind "roaring" (an everyday, natural sound? or the sound of laughter? or of anger and rage?) outdoors.

The contrast in the poem is between the fictional situation conveyed in the well-known poem "Marriage" by the American poet Gregory Corso, and with the real-life situation of "you". The narrator in the Corso poem agonizes over whether or not to get married, and the poem ends with him dreaming of "SHE", (a reference to the Rider Haggard novel and the motion-picture film made of it) "in her lonely alien gaud waiting her Egyptian lover", then compares his own situation: "so I wait -- bereft of 2,000 years and the bath of life." (The poem appears in Penguin Modern Poets 5 (1963), pp. 15-19.) The ambiguity here is that although "you" in Corso's poem dreams of "She" awaiting her lover, "you" in this poem is in a bath, this time a hot-tub, with a razor and mirror nearby. The razor and mirror may suggest an act as everyday and natural as shaving, but they also have connotations of drug use (specifically cocaine) and possibly suicide -- all three possibilities linked to the three possible interpretations of the wind's roaring.

Like Frag I, this poem is replete with sound patterns of every type. (I will not detain the reader with another recital of these.) The stanzas are, once more, three-line, only now the lines throughout are of random metrical length, usually varying between three- and four-beat. The rhythms here are more regular, however, tending towards triplets, as in

HAVing by THEN tasted ONE or two MOMENTS,
...SONG after PASSionate SONG (*)
MARRy, have CHILDren, split UP (*)
EMPTy rePETitive TASKS (*) and

177
SLOWly become the inVISible MAN.

The poem also makes frequent use of a kind of mid-line pause, not a caesura, but a pause enjoined by a momentary switch from regular triplets to a duplet or singlet, as in

PRAISing the BLISS (') of BEING the outSIDer and
SIT by the STOVE ('' ) WINTER aLONE.

Here, the marks ('') and ('' '') denote the "missing" off-beat syllables that would have to be present if the line were rhythmically regular -- this is where the "pause" effect is felt.

To some degree the poem is autobiographical: in my twenties, I read Corso's "Marriage" at many readings, and to some degree identified with the "I" of his poem. I can't be sure I haven't used the line "empty repetitive tasks" before -- it seems very familiar to me. I hope I haven't unknowingly cribbed it from someone else.

FREAK WAVE

The shape of this poem recalls Marianne Moore's "The Wave", with its wave-like stanza shapes. Here there is only one such shape, just as there is only one of these "freak" waves (it could hardly be held to be a freak otherwise). This is the converse of Moore's wave-shape -- starting with long lines, moving to short, then back to long, in this way paralleling the subject of the poem: the paradoxically tangible reality of absence.

The poem arose from a conversation with my Australian friend Tony Gibson (to whom it is dedicated) about the use of the term "freak wave" in popular journalism whenever anyone was swept from
a rock while fishing. (As this was not altogether uncommon along the rocky cliffs south of Sydney, it appeared to us that the term was being overused.)

The motif of removal (through death, moving away, whatever) by an agent "with your particular name/ only yours and yours only/ emblazoned all over it" recurs in "May, The Waters of" and "Pickup". Here the removal is a metaphor of the separation between two friends when events takes one of them "away/ to another country", leaving the other "just... being there still smiling", hardly aware of what has just happened. To this degree, it also has thematic links to the two chairs in "Driveway, The View from".

GAME

A companion piece to "Cat & Mouse"; like the other poem, in three-line stanzas that accord with the syntax of the narrative. One of the poem's main features is the gradual introduction of Latinate words following the monosyllabic Germanic opening: "The dog saw the cat first" -- starting with "deserted", and moving on to "insignificant", "advanced", "precarious balance", and "common foe", before once again returning, in the last stanza, to everyday Germanic monosyllables. Although there is no fixed metre, on the whole, the first line of each stanza is the shortest and the last the longest.

Going against Graves's dictum that one should avoid naming colours in poetry, but present things that themselves have colour (see Appendix B, letter VI for his statement of this), in the
fifth stanza, I have used in the space of two lines, "gray-green", "orange", "black", and "brown", the latter preceded by the potentially fey "tiny". This is a calculated risk. Also notable is the use of the old-fashioned "mannerly" (as opposed to "well-mannered").

The fifth stanza is also the pivotal point of the poem, the "precarious balance" (picked up from "froze in their play" from the previous stanza) followed by the naively "primitive" use of primary-colour adjectives (e.g., "orange cat"), then the details of the cat's, then the mouse's, eyes. Visually, the effect is of a zoom lense moving from the long-distance view of the opening to the extreme close-up detail of the eyes of the mouse, and then a reverse-zoom back to long-distance in "(I glanced back to check)" and the distantly-perceived, generalized detail of the ending "game". I also conceive of a balance between the "Game" of the title, the "play" of the fourth stanza, and "the game" at the very end.

I am not sure about the long, ungainly, sixth line. I wanted the effect of the narrator telling this "story" to an incredulous listener who cannot believe that the mouse was "running towards -- yes, I said towards -- the cat's front paws". I have used italics to stress the repetition for the same reason.

The double-entendre of the title hardly needs pointing out -- occupational, structured play, and target prey. (This also links it to one of the senses of Quarry, the collection's title.) I also wanted to convey the hierarchy of control, of relative dominance and passivity -- human, dog, cat, mouse -- the whole
thing held static, in balance, by the "mannerly" (but ultimately unnatural) deportment of the "good" dog in the presence of the narrator, whose singular presence is revealed only in the parenthetical second-last line.

GETTING OFF

The whole point of this one is in the title's ambiguity -- it may refer to "getting [one's rocks] off" (i.e., male sexual climax) and/or "getting off [easy]" (evading the issue, not "paying the price" for something). I would hope that both are conveyed.

The poem itself is roughly fashioned in short lines, with no real metrical rationale (though many of the lines are two-stress). There is plenty of unsophisticated phonic patterning to convey the most obvious effects of the "poem" which this poem is about: assonance, as in "guy... thighs", "crying/ ...everything rhyming" (i.e., as in doggerel); alliteration and consonance, sometimes reversed, as in

HARD and HUMPing
SHOUTing SHUT up BITCH and
WATCHing STOPping to WASH

and rhyme, plain and simple: ("brass/ ...ass", "skies... surprise"). The irony is that the narrator himself lapses into similar simplistic (conscious? self-mocking?) rhyme in

you READ about i SAY i DOUBT.

This is perhaps the most informal poem of the collection. It is relatively "punctuationless", but even this is inconsist-
ent, as there are exclamation marks and the poem ends with a
question mark. (There are, however, no full stops.)

GLITCH, PERSONAL-TOUCH

An "entertainment", a light-hearted treatment of one of the
inescapable curses of late-twentieth-century life, those comput-
er-generated "personal" letters that emblazon the title and
surname of the sender in an attempt to be eye-catching. ("Glitch" is computerese for a fault.) Here the final descent
into macaronic chaos takes the thing to its limit.

The structure is fairly formal, in contrast to the subject:
quatrains with, on the whole, a beat-scheme of 4334. The only
notable sound pattern is the heavy use of /i/ in the line-endings
of the last stanza.

GRASS JELLY

In contrast to the above, this poem has a fairly rigid
structure in which I tried to convey impressionistically (as
opposed to imitatively) the effect of Japanese haiku. So, in all
but the last stanza the second line ends with a colon, and the
third lines on the whole synthesize the emotional effect of the
other two lines in terms of metaphors drawn from the natural
world: grass, pearl, barnyard, day, snow.

There is a fair amount of sound-patterning going on, though
it is fairly loose. The first and last lines of each stanza are
linked, either through assonance, consonance, or rhyme. The /i/
sound dominates throughout the poem, particularly in final sylla-

182
bles of many lines: "musty", "grocery", "jelly", "tea", "week", "sweet", "heavy". Many of these are off-stress, so the effect is not too heavy. The sound-patterning of the final stanza is also quite intricate.

Colour plays an important part in this poem, not only the brown, blue, and white that are specifically named, but also the implicitly suggested green of "grass". Also, smells are suggested in "musty", "jasmine", "brown smell of barnyard" (here I have boosted the weak "smell" with the visual "brown").

Another pattern in the poem is in the seasonal contrast between the "July" of the first line and the "January" of the last, with "autumn" and "October" intervening. To this degree, it accords with the references to seasons and months in many of the other poems of the collection.

HOSTEL, BACKPACKER (VANCOUVER)

A very "oral" poem that gets off to a lively start with steady four-beat lines and frequent triplet rhythms:

    the FIRST night THERE you're PUT in a DORM
    with THREE other GUYS you're afraid will RAPE you
    in another ROOM in the DARK i STEP
    with my BOOT on the FOOT of a Sullen FINN

(Note the conventional internal eye-rhyme "boot... foot", which actually in readings I tend to pronounce as rhyming, to suggest the "foreign" flavour of the "Finn", as does, more obviously, the "'FAWCH!'" of the following line. The words "without apparent emotion" are a kind of interpretation guide, a "stage direction" for the benefit of the reader.

183
The poem contains a few connotative suggestions: "cruise" (as in male homosexual picking-up) being the most obvious of these; also, "gazed" (at what? no object is specified) of the third-last stanza, which contrasts with "watch the summer solstice sun" of stanza five, where the object of the verb is spelled out in great, alliterative, detail.

Sound-patterning is also more than usually significant. The "echolalia" of

so IN the END we END up UP in

in which the words "in", "end" and "up" are all repeated but with quite different meanings, i.e., "in the end [adverbial phrase, "finally"] we end up [verbal phrase, "we finish"] up [locative preposition, "above"] in [ditto, "within, inside"]", is, I hope, not too "clever" -- I like it. One might also note the sound-repetitions in "the Greyhound Bus roundhouse" or "watch the summer solstice sun", as well as many more phrases in the poem.

The reference to "the tent" in the penultimate stanza turns out to be a link forward to the poem of the same name, where its significance is more fully explored. The poem concludes with three lines in which /r/ dominates a series of Latinate polysyllables: "resting inert", "radiator/ reusable recharging".

The poem is generally "punctuationless" except for the one direct quotation in stanza 3 and the parenthesis of stanzas 10-11.

HUNKERING

In contrast to "Looking Back", where the possible blindness
of the central subject was not apparent to me until after the poem was written, the speaker in this poem, which was written later, was conceived of as blind from the outset. Thus, all sensory perceptions of the speaker are those of the skin, nose, and ears ("out of the wind", "the thud of a car door", &c.). Mixed with these are observations that have to depend on memory: "those elm trees", the details about the flags -- qualified, note, with the revealing "probably you can see". So confident is the speaker in his ability to recall the visible details of the scene that he is able to expand: "You can't/ see it unless you stand up." So we know quite a lot about the "you" too: he (or she) is not blind, is new to the scene (otherwise, why all the information?), and is "hunkering down... behind the brushpile" with the speaker. We also know something about the speaker's attitude to society from his repeated "general hum, suspicions", suggestive of a mild paranoia, perhaps.

Although the opening of the poem may suggest that it will be "punctuationless", it is in fact a long modificatory adverbial phrase, continuing on to the subject "you" in stanza four. In contrast, the closing sentence has four words only: "It feels like noon." The speaker's evidence for this may be tactile (maximum heat of sun, highest angle), olfactory (aromas of mid-day meals), or simply internal (hunger, or a usually-reliable "biological clock"). Moreover, he has already, in the opening lines, said it was "noon"; hence the word "feels" in the conclusion may be given unusual emphasis -- not only is it noon, it feels like noon. It is also significant that there is no "I" (=
"no eye") in the poem, and that the word "see", in reference to "you", which occurs twice, is both times placed at the beginning of the lines where it occurs.

As poetry tends to dwell on the visible, often to the exclusion of all other sense, use of a blind narrator is one way to counter this. Not that the visible element is absent -- but here it is second-hand, so to speak, and entirely "non-poetic". The only mildly poetic language has to do with sound: "rumorous noise" (a macaronic pleonasm, from the Italian rumore, "noise"), the "whining" of the cube-truck (how does he know it's a cube-truck? -- because he's heard it often enough leaving the delivery bay of the self-serve grocery already mentioned), the "chitter of littler birds in the briars" (the double sound-pattern here reinforcing the sound of the birds). The "long cry" is comparable to that of a cat or a baby, but "not quite" -- and it occurs only once, so cannot be securely identified. Its nature remains a mystery, along with that of the "suspicions", mentioned again at the end of the poem.

I have long had a great fascination with depictions of blindness in the literature (starting with Blind Pugh in Treasure Island, no doubt), and some of my earlier poems have explored this (see "A Kind of Blindness", already mentioned, in Appendix A). My second collection (in Two Poets, 1961) was called Single Eye, the phrase itself coming from a line in Hopkins's The Wreck of the Deutschland. The poem "January Rain" in this collection has a semi-blind narrator -- the sub-title, "Without Glasses", is a clue to this.

186
ITE, AMOR EST

Until recently, it wouldn't have been necessary to point out the derivation of the title from the "Ite, missa est," ("Go (sing.), the Mass is [i.e., has been performed]," spoken by the celebrant at the end of a Catholic Mass. I am pushing that "it is done" just a bit further: "It's over!"

As this adaptation of the Latin for the title suggests, this may be seen as another of the "religious" poems of the collection. There is has something of a prayer in it, and the "dark smell of their smoulder" recalls the powerful olfactory accompaniment to the conclusion of a Mass.

The poem's visible shape suggests a progression from shorter to longer lines in each three-line stanza; however, as in earlier pieces, there is no regular metre. Even shape-pattern becomes considerably relaxed by the penultimate stanza. Only the shape of the final stanza recalls it.

The rhythms of the poem are strong, but there is no regular pattern to them. There are more than the usual number of one-syllable measures, all of them as the first beat of a line:

we FLY Solo toGETHer were SUDdenly SNUFFED
in the DARK SMELL of their SMOULder and
with SUCH MYTH

(though note that pronunciation of the obvious pun on "solo" in the first line, "so low", would eliminate the singlet in the first of these).
ITINERARY

Another of the "Native" poems. In the opening, I attempt to create the idea of a contiguous geo-political link between the Abenakis of south-eastern Quebec, where I was born and grew up, and the language-related Mi'Kmaw of the Maritimes, where I live now. Some of the nomenclature is fanciful, e.g., "Kaskassi" (instead of "Casapedia", i.e., northern New Brunswick). But the "Maliseet" are a cousin nation, and "Maine", of course, is a real US state, which interposes itself between us and the rest of Canada immediately to the west. The poem continues as a fairly straightforward account of a trip across the continent, through the middle of the U.S. Thus, "Mohawk/Huron" suggests territory further south and west, well into the US Midwest. The "Coloured" River is the Colorado; the "parallel ranges" are the Rockies and the smaller parallel chains to the west of them.

The outward trip ends anticlimactically, "[to] back where we lay claim", i.e., in their own country, their own people, the only surprise of the return "straight through Canada" being a freak "two-headed bat" in the otherwise nondescript town of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

JANUARY RAIN

I find this is a difficult poem to account for. Like "Project" it is about something that turns out never to have happened, yet in being named, recorded in the poem itself, it nevertheless is brought into some kind of existence. Thus, it
also concerns itself with the thin line dividing fiction and "reality". This theme has always fascinated me -- see "Now I Shall Reveal Everything", from around 1969, in Appendix A.

The details presented by the poem are easy enough to "understand"; it is the order of presentation that is curious. We first of all have an apparently objective description of "an old woman in the graveyard.../ kneeling in the grass". However, the second stanza clearly shows everything perceived in stanza one to have been illusory: "the old woman herself is the back of a gray granite tombstone," &c. So far this is all pretty conventional; the surprise comes in the third stanza, where background details of the "old woman's" life are presented as being at least "certain possibilities" (read: the existence, the fact of "possibilities" is "certain"). The concluding stanza's "she is here & now" suggest that the "old woman" and her story are more solid, more real, than stanza 2's presentation of the "facts" underlying the illusion.

In the last line I had written first, "in the warm, amazing January rain," which I liked because of the assonance between "amazing" and "rain". But on consideration I felt that "amazing" was begging too much, and the given fact of "warm" (transforming) rain in a Canadian January was amazing enough anyway.

This is the first poem in the collection which moves from a long, metrical line (in the first stanza) to lines which, because of their length, have to be called non-metrical. All I mean by this is that the number of beats in the line is irrelevant -- you stop counting after a while -- but its rhythms are just as real,
and realizable, as those with the most regular metre: 
the old WOMan herSELF is the BACK of a GREY granite TOMBstone
The non-metrical line is also the basis of the title poem, "Quarry".

KICK, RELATIVE

Individuals reading this poem have variously interpreted it as being "about" jazz, sex, drugs, &c. Of course, it delights the writer when a poem gives rise to a range of personal responses, when this happens, even if it was not intentional. The poem is written in an attempt to recreate something I have experienced; others are free to decide for themselves what it's "about".

There is some obvious phonic patterning going on: the alliterative names of the three "suppliers", the consonance of "stuff... Biff", "feel/ ...all", the assonance of "sleep/ ...feel," and "Bud/ ...up up", and the rhythmic duplication of

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{ANY} & \text{TIME what-} \\
\text{HAPPy} & \text{HOURS} \\
\text{EVER} & \text{LATER} \\
\end{array}
\]

The repetitious "I end up up" may be translated as, "I finish by staying up" (Cf. the similar phrase, already mentioned, in "Hostel, Backpacker"). The final "up" should probably be taken as figurative, though the poem supplies no "explanation" for it.

I am aware of the echo of William Carlos Williams' "So much depends" opening (of his much anthologized "The Red Wheelbarrow") in my opening here, though I am not sure I was aware of it when I
first wrote the line. I'm happy to keep it, though.

LAYOUT, CATHEDRAL

Another of the "religious" poems, as the title makes clear; an extended metaphorical description of a deserted quarry, with the speaker acting in the role of a cathedral guide. Apart from its external descriptiveness, the guide's prevailing emotion comes to the fore towards the end: "it's pretty steep and you're close to the edge// and it's better not to look down/ and you might as well stop worrying..." proceeding to take up, once again, the "anagram of God" (see "Church/Search", "its initials are an anagram of God"), here spelled out for the reader: "If God wills the dog back...." (= spells "dog" backwards).

The line "if people can think God, people will" suggests a good reason for supposing the existence of God -- that people everywhere, left to their own devices, have come up with some sort of prevailing spiritual belief simply because the human brain is capable of it. (This parallels the old joke, "Why does a dog lick his private parts? Because he can.")

The conclusion may seem emotionally ambiguous: the fear, the worry is still there, but so is the rock on which the narrator is sitting, and the world, God's creation, is still spread before him from where he (He?) gazes down from on high. The power is in the rock, it is a power that is "discharging its might" continuously.

The guide reveals something of himself in many lines of this poem ("(rare in this diagonal province [i.e., Nova Scotia, which
runs from southwest to northeast)...", "avoiding the direct
approach/ to the front...", "for abasement [pun on "a
basement"],/ and the other things one expects in a church," "the
celebrant/ has a staircase, private & narrow." The suggestion
here is that guide may also be the priest (otherwise, how does he
know the staircase is "narrow"?), and his position "at the top",
above the "altar" is that of a priest, an intermediary between
God (= the Rock) and the World (= the Valley).

"Klicks" = kilometres, "metric miles".

The poem has evident thematic links to "Church/Search",
"November Third", and "Quarry".

LIST

An "entertainment": fragmentary (cf. "Frag I" and "Frag
II"), hence "punctuationless," colloquial, oral -- confirmed by
the "token" spelling, "helluva". At one point, rhyme takes over
("escargots/ ...into the snow/ ...sex you don’t know", and the
extremely evident "life/ wife" rhyme linking the last two stan-
zas). Variable register of language, ranging from "street" to
"academic".

The "logic" of the poem is not obvious, beginning as it does
with a refusal to use lists of threes for easy conversational
effect, then proceeding to give no fewer than THREE lists, each
containing three items, in the rest of the poem. This could be
taken as equivalent to the mediaeval rhetorician’s negatio .

The thought underlying the rhetoric, expectably, is quite
commonplace: certain experiences are guaranteed to strike you as
weird the first time you try them (hence, most people can remem-
ber the first time they ate an olive or had sex), even though it's equally guaranteed that later you too will become part of the "detestable peanut gallery" in treating them familiarly and urging other "virgins" to experience them without hesitation as "just part of life".

The aardvark of the opening poem makes a cameo appearance in the last stanza of this one.

LOOKING BACK

The tone of this poem is timeless, its subject archetypal. Only the phrase "a number to call" shows that its setting may be modern, though even this could be interpreted metaphorically.

The only words in the poem that seem at all out of the ordinary are two descriptive adjectives: the first one in "regular, bitter herb" (stanza three), and the second in "crazy crow", in the last line. "Regular" in a colloquial sense has already appeared in "Coyotes" -- "a regular convention", and here it is only the suggestiveness of "bitter" that make it unusual. (Could it denote a Biblical connection, for example?) The knife also presents a mystery: why did "he" leave it, especially if "she knows it has just been sharpened"?

The focus of the poem moves from the initial domestic setting to the outside world, culminating with the descriptive "nothing moves/ except in the woods by the river/ some crazy crow is calling". (The image of something moving "by the river" is also explored at the end of "Driveway, View from the".) "Crazy"
of course "alliterates" with crow, but, once again, it leaves the reader puzzled: is to be taken literally? does it reflect reality or the emotional state of the woman? is it a real crow or something else?

There is something about this final statement that does not quite make sense either: the only exception to the observation that "nothing moves" is the fact that the "crazy crow is calling". One thus has to give "moves" an unusual interpretation: it is an audible rather than a visible phenomenon. This is the main clue that the woman in the poem may be blind. If so, one may read the earlier line "She pictured him there at the end of the driveway" and the information about the knife ("she fingers it gingerly", &c.) in a very different light.

The meter generally varies between three- and four-beat lines, though one line, "Later she found the pouch at the foot of the tree", has five beats, and "She fingers it gingerly," only two.

"Hunkering", as already mentioned, features a blind narrator, though that poem was conceived as such from its inception. In this poem, the idea of the woman’s being blind began to take shape only once the poem had begun to be written.

LOVER

Although I don’t think there is any other way to accent the first line, given the nature of the actual question, I’ve taken the precaution of using the downbeat-column layout here to show that it has to have a very specific rhythm and intonation:
and how WAS that LOVer (i.e., two beats)

In other words, we may take it that the context of this conversation is a discussion about the other person’s past experience with a certain "lover". The question, therefore, must have an ironic intonation: So, after everything you’ve told me about everything else in the relationship, how was he as a lover? Likewise, the second question is

and what DID he Offer then?

i.e., after everything promised, what did he actually offer?

The poem is "punctuationless", apart from capitals, so we can imagine the second speaker’s answer is comprised in the second stanza. However, because of the absence of quotation marks, we don’t know whether this second speech continues on into the third stanza, or whether the third stanza marks a return to the opening speaker. It doesn’t really matter: the poem could equally be two (or more) aspects of an interior monologue.

As it happens, stanza three introduces a long, reflective sentence (including, in "heaped & risked/ & lost", some half-remembered lines from Kipling’s "If": "If you can make one heap of all your winnings/ And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,/ And lose, and start again from your beginnings/ And never breathe a word about your loss...") that continues for the next five stanzas.

The third-last stanza, when the other speaker reenters the conversation, introduces another question, again, with the same ironic stress:

so where DID he GO, this LOVer

195
The answer, "to China" is unexpectedly specific, as is the information that the ex-lover is "honoured by granite statues and plaques".

The poem as "dialogue", then, might be outlined thus:

I. So how was this lover you've been telling me about?
II. Physically, of course, fine, otherwise, nothing.
I. or II. Yes, well, the bloom of youth can make up for many less attractive qualities.
I. or II. Strange how he wrecked that last affair -- especially as he's getting too old to charm people with his youthful good looks any more.
I. So what happened to him after that scandal?
II. He went to China where he received the public esteem and respect that his age merited.
I. I know, I understand in China they esteem him highly.
II. But, locally, here, not.

There are some ironic contrasts at the end of the poem. The word "bloody" is meant to be highly-charged, hopefully recalling the phonic memory of "greedy" earlier, introducing the notion of physical damage in contrast to the abstractive "too old", "bitter & hurt", "playing at 'friends'". This concrete/abstract opposition continues in "deconstruct [a lit. crit. dig here] walls/ as a lama disappear" (note the two overlapping possible readings here, to bring down barriers as a lama, and/or to disappear -- perhaps figuratively, into this new identity -- as a lama).

Then, having managed to abstract himself so completely, that his memory should be symbolized by these extremely "concrete" granite
while this is not an "entertainment", the dominant emotion in this poem is good humour. (The very name "Merry’s Point" may suggest this.) The negativism conveyed by the narrator’s "shock" and "pique" is of the mock variety. The only hint of true alienation is in the words "in the closet/ lonely anglophonic" (strengthened by assonance). The anglophone’s ("anglophone" and "francophone", invented in Québec, are now official Canadian usage) perception of the French-dominated town (itself, ironically, having a Native name), is still solidly English-based, however: Green Point, East Bolton Road, and Austin are all part of the scene. Even "St Patrick’s Catholic Church", the seat of the majority francophone culture, is referred to in English instead of by its "proper name", l’Église Catholique de St-Patrice.

A shift of objective focus occurs at the beginning of the poem. In the second stanza, the narrator may be referring to the "thought" of the town, but by stanza six we realize his attention is mainly on the moon, "rising, hanging fast/ silvering the roof and spire". The serenely distant, utterly non-cultural and asocial moon makes the place "worth a poem" (the poem "Moon over Magog" mentioned at the beginning), but even without the moon Magog is at least worth a song, "vaut bien une chanson", even for most anglophones, echoing Henri IV’s "Paris vaut bien une messe". A song is hardly comparable to a mass, but then Magog is hardly comparable to Paris either.
At this point, the poem ceases to be a monologue, and other voices are introduced. The concluding ditty, in a "patois" of my own creation, is a childish expression of glee and delight and joy, and no more. It's introduced by the (probably raucous and beery) "voice" of a francophone "animateur" quite external to the narrator: "Chantons, ensuite". The plural imperative implies the presence of a group of singers, then the singers themselves are implied by the song, and, dancers are implied by the words of the song.

Dramatically, then, the poem moves from the first-person soliloquy of the anglophone, concluding in the revelation that Magog, somehow, "vaut bien un chanson", by whatever means, then moves to the public display of singing and dancing in the song, which, of course, as a communal manifestation, has to be in French. There's a certain irony in that too, of course, though the final tone seems to be one of acceptance of the majority language and values.

The "[bis, fading]", a not-to-be-read stage direction in both French and English, suggests a cinematic close: both the dancing and the singing gradually fade during the "bis" repeat.

MAN CALLED UPON TO COMPLAIN, THE

I'm not sure where this one "came from", though I know in the title is a distant echo of Banjo Patterson's, "The Man from Snowy River", and the fragmentary opening of the poem suggests the laconic flavour of an Australian bush-ballad.

The scene is firmly Canadian, though, and is to some degree
based on real-life encounters with three Native medicine men. (Their initials are presented dedicatory below the title.) In this poem, though, the function of these "healers" is to "complain", no more: to vent emotions the community find "difficult", perhaps, or for some reason wish to be spared. The poem makes clear that they need this: they "choose" them, after all.

The poem is in long lines, with a metrical "norm" set up very clearly in the opening line's ballad metre:

Every TOWN and HAMlet HAS one. DRESses ALL in BLACK (*) but immediately the lines move away from this, much closer to the random rhythms of ordinary speech, phrased in five- and six-beat lines:

it's USually AFTER SOMEone DIES not WELL
in a CAR SMASH or from SOME unSPEAKable disEASE
they CALL HIM. they CHOOSE him at BIRTH HE
GRUMbles like HELL, MUTters CURSes, KICKS
[ROCKS

Syntactically, the poem, after the fragmentary first line, is a long sentence with the one subject, "he", "the man", repeated three times, reaching a climax in the question "WHY?", then moving in a diminuendo to "disappears with his dog". Then the poem ends with a series, similar to the opening, of single statements, culminating in two that counterbalance the two that began the poem.

Much of the poem is based on fact, particularly the parenthetical conclusion. Of the three men the poem is dedicated to, one is blind, one is gay ("two-spirited", is the Native term), and the third's home is his truck, "dangling with roots & feath-
Undoubtedly, the social role of the "healer" may be comparable to that of the "artist", and to some extent the poem is an exploration of this theme.

MARKET

An "entertainment", the typographical "joke" being in the segue from the thick-and-fast, capitalized, brand names of the wares, through to the upper-case letter that marks the start of the next sentence, and on to two brands of things most definitely not for sale, culminating in the generic (everything lower-case) mix used for daubing on the walls, then finally the solidly upper-case graffitti. The actual "junk-food addicts" remain invisible, both physically and spiritually (the link suggested by the well-known pun on "soul" and "sole", reinforced by the last line, "not even the faintest print").

"Will", already featured in "Exercise, New Year's Eve", (which also happens to be an exploration of the effect of proper versus common nouns) is a survival, one of the central characters of the book Will's Dream (1975). The situation is typical of the kind of thing that Will of the earlier book would get involved in -- some kind of bright idea for a business, some kind of all-engrossing hobby replete with specialist vocabulary, some kind of love affair peopled with well-known literary characters. There was, in Will's Dream, an attempt to come to terms with the spiritual in Will, though the ending of the saga pictured him and the three other main characters -- Blake (younger, physical),
Pymbal (older, verging on Prufrockian), and Mary (the all-embracing female), locked in a never-ending cyclical stasis. The ending of this poem suggests the tone of other Will poems, questioning, suggesting, in the end spiritually neutral, but still curious. (Compare the tone of the conclusion of "Zygote", the last poem in the present collection: "still awake & kicking").

MAY, THE WATERS OF

The inspiration for this comes from the words and music of Antonio Carlos Jobim's song "The Waters of March," in which a patter list of items borne by the March floods of Rio is sung to a hypnotically repetitive melodic fragment against a passacaglia-like descending ground-bass. Its opening words are:

A stick, a stone, it's the end of the road, it's the rest of a stump, it's a little alone. It's a sliver of glass, it is life, it's the sun, it is night, it is death, it's a trap, it's a gun...

The close reflects the calm that follows the flood:

...a sliver of glass, a life, the sun, a night, a death, the end of the run, and the riverbank talks of the waters of March, it's the end of the strain, it's the joy in your heart.

after which the music gradually slows down to a long instrumental close, quadruplet (eighth-note/quaver) rhythms slowing to triplets, then to duplets (quarter-notes/crotchets), and finally fades away.

In contrast to Jobim's song, however, this poem presents a scene of horror near a river. The fast-paced but irregular (= syncopated?) rhythms of the music carry the details of the near-
fatal accident:

it's the TRUCK HURLing straight AT us (3)
the HORN the HORN (2)
it's the SHADES are UP BUT (3)
is there ANyone HOME (2)

The "musical" section comes to an abrupt close, the last detail of the scene being the distant crows circling. This is spelled out literally in the next line of the poem, "When the music stops/ we are facing the other way", and the agent/angel of near-death is "now just a jaunty cloud". The poem ends with a reference to a pending flood, returning us to the river and Jobim's flooding "waters".

This is an amalgam of two real experiences. One, is a strong visual, impressionistic recollection of the lands, actually in eastern Missouri, across the Mississippi River from Chester, Illinois. Chester is famous for being the birthplace of E. C. Segar, creator of the American comic-strip "Popeye". There I discovered that Popeye, renowned to kids as a heroic, clean-living, bulging-biceped, spinach-charged sailor, was actually based on an unsavoury riverboat roustabout and bouncer. (Similarly, Olive Oyl was modelled on a local librarian, while Wimpy was a town councillor, so the strip caused some controversy.) Segar moved to the West Coast after the strip became popular, but Chester is where it all started. There is a Popeye museum in the town, as well as a life-size bronze statue of Popeye in a place of honour at the entrance to the town.

Another explanatory point to make is that the Mississippi was running very high when we crossed it (May 1993), and, not
many weeks later, a large area was severely flooded for over a month; whole communities had to move, and lives were lost. The land where the poem’s scene is set, the road on which the action of the poem takes place, was many metres underwater not long afterwards. So whereas Jobim’s song takes us to the end of one flood, this poem takes us to a point just before the beginning of another.

The other true-life experience underlying the poem was near head-on collision last summer (1994) on Long Island, off Digby Neck, Nova Scotia. A driver pulled out to overtake on a very narrow road as I was approaching, failed to pull back, continued on beside the car being overtaken, coming straight at us at great speed, and only averted collision at the last moment by pulling off onto the verge on my nearside, continuing at top speed, then somehow managed to kick back onto the road and disappeared into the distance, still at top speed. I had a vivid close-up picture of the driver only at the last moment, as the vehicle flashed past. It was a young woman; her face was drawn in what I thought was horror but my daughters thought was insane merriment.

The aspect of the experience that struck the most vividly was how until that moment it had seemed that we were about to be annihilated by an utterly anonymous, faceless machine; only at the last moment was it possible to see an individual, emotional, human face behind it.

The red pickup (small utility truck), both the colour and the type, was invented. I wanted something cheerfully vivid but generic. The same vehicle, landscape, and situation, equally
fictitious, appear again in "Pickup".

The poem began as an homage to Jobim, and a desire to pay some kind of tribute to the mixed crazinesses of life on hearing of his untimely death. It is also, of course, a tribute to his song.

A "dialect" poem, as the first couple of lines make clear, one that is transcribed as "heard" in south-west Nova Scotian dialect, though entirely fictitious. The rhythms are by and large irregular, though the gratuitous information always re-MAILED so they COULdn't be TRACED happens to be in entirely regular triplets, one may imagine, delivered in lowered, "significant" tones.

The conversational "Yep [inhaled]" (the latter word, like the "[bis, fading]" at the end of "Magog Moon", is strictly a "stage direction", not to be spoken) is very typical among speakers in the Annapolis Valley region of Nova Scotia, where I live. One does it as a kind of agreement with oneself, possibly to mask any perceived lack of phatic encouragement from one's listener. (It's quite tricky to do, and people "from away" attempting it have been known to choke and explode in fits of coughing.) The "I don't miss much" aspect of life is of course taken for granted in a small Nova Scotia town, where residents provide one another with the equivalent of a live, only slightly underrehearsed, on-going soap opera, with anyone and everyone else ripe for discussion.
The title suggests possibilities, "Missing" could merely refer to the status of "Bobby-Jim". It could also be that the speaker (or, indeed, the "other" person in this conversation) could in some way be "missing" him. The ironic use of the word in the conclusion also suggests that the speaker may be "missing" all kinds of things about Bobby-Jim, what made him tick, what was at the bottom of his troubles, perhaps not even recognizing him now (though we are not sure whether he is "back in town"; at least, the speaker isn't).

The poem ends relatively regularly, with three four-beat lines, each opening with triplet rhythms:

they THOUGHT he was BACK in TOWN (*)
but I never SEEN him and i DON'T miss MUCH
YEP like i SAY i DON'T miss MUCH.

MOGUL

This poem began with a kind of very loose quasi-rhyme scheme that goes on xaxa for much of the poem: "teacup/ Zagreb, Blutwagen/ perfect pain, Bali/ trolley, vacation/ victims [rather tenuous here, I admit], hinted- print, note/ joke, gazebo/ go".

One aspect is, of course, the "urban legend", usually characterised as the experience of a "friend of a friend", and, hence, always unverifiable. (The poem takes this one further: "friends/ of friends of friends".) The point here is that one doesn't know whether the experiences mentioned in the poem, one in "the former" Yugoslavia, the other in Indonesia, actually happened or not; hence, the speaker doesn't know whether to take it seriously -- it may be a joke, after all.

This connection between real danger and perceived "fun" is
also explored in "Disney", "Game", and "Triples". The central character of this poem ends up with a far "safer" alternative -- though we are not sure how much "fun" there may be in "pacing/round an exotic gazebo".

A mogul is a hillock of snow carved by the turns of many skiers at the same place on a downhill ski run. People used to try to avoid them, but today's hot-dog skiers seek them out as launching pads.

MUSICAL, PROSE

Very much in the character of the "Will" poems, such as "Market" in this collection: essentially, the exploration, to the point of ridiculousness, of a single fragmentary thought -- though here, Will is not present. Here the thought is that of using the mood of a piece of music as counterpoint to poetry with similar emotion -- as opposed to, as in the Walton settings of Edith Sitwell, where one encounters more of a rhythmical and metrical correspondence between words and music.

Here instead of correspondence we have "connection" between poetry and music. The point here is that this "connection" is so "right" that the music effectively deactivates the words and the words do the same to the music: "so close, members of the audience/ later had difficulty in remembering any of it". The additional point is made, I hope not too simplistically, that just as the non-verbal aspect of music will obscure the "music" of poetry so the non-musical images of poetry will mask the inherently quite different "images" of music. This may seem quite basic,
but the idea seems worth exploring.

What makes this essentially different from any of the Will's *Dream* (1975) poems is the extra dimension, a framing effect, resulting from the placing of the whole idea within the context of a remark made while playing a game of backgammon with "you". So the poem's use of personal pronouns is therefore highly contrastive: "he" and "they" in the first five stanzas; "I" and "you" in the last. Apart from the central "idea" of the poem, then, is the concluding observation that poems spring from random events and chance remarks, sometimes a mere word or two being enough to cause a flood of ideas and images.

I am just not certain of the third stanza: I wanted a direct and dramatic way to sum up the effect of linking an ode to Handel, a lyric to Bartók, or an elegy to Chopin (see "Chopin Hour").

**NATIVE DREAMS**

In a sense this poem wrote itself, being a fairly literal account of a dream, written down as the first draft of the poem, the morning afterwards. The actual "dream" content begins with the chief's dream, in stanza five; everything up to that is introductory.

The opening detail is autobiographical: my move to Nova Scotia from Quebec 40 years ago was a move from the mountains of Abenaki territory (the northernmost reaches of the Appalachian Mountains) across the Maliseet territories of Maine and New Brunswick, crossing the tides (reputedly the highest in the
world) of the Bay of Fundy ("Big Bay"). Here, the traveller is a messenger, from the Wannabees. This last, a pun, on "want-to-be" is widely used to describe people with no Native blood connections but who identify with Native interests. To some degree, I identify the details of the "chief" with myself, the flute-playing (see also "Tibia"), the feather (an actual tattoo), the eyes' projection of light at night (an actual dream: see "Dream").

As I have said, the dream itself, ending with "the chief wakes up" is a very straightforward account of as recorded in my notebook.

The closing of the poem, the "tune" that "has no ending", is in contrast to the "silence" of the opening. Note, however, that the poem does not say that the actual music is unending, simply that the melody lacks a conventional final cadence. Obviously, the music will end sometime, when the player gets tired or hungry or when everyone else has heard enough, but the tune itself has no completion. There is still the connection between the flute itself, the music it continues to make (as in "Tibia"), and the fact that, paradoxically, the endless life of the tune depends on the natural fact of death.

Why "Native Dreams"? In a sense the poem contains two dreams, the one embedded in the other, one a dream from sleep, one a dream of waking life (being the "chief" of "the Wannabees"). So there is more than one dream. In another sense, the poem describes the images and scenes in the mind of a native as he "dreams".
NEW YEAR

Another in the series of poems in this collection that is about specific dates or seasons in the year. Months are specifically named in many of the poems and/or their titles, and frequent reference is made to specific seasons in others. The "presiding genius" of this poem is Janus, the two-headed god, the "janitor" of the new year, looking backwards to the past and forwards to the future.

The look backwards, into the past, which takes up most of the poem, begins with the nearest of these decade celebrations, moving backwards, away from the present, to a time of no memory at all. All these observances have elements in common: reference to historical decade-dates (except for the 'forties, when the narrator was too young to understand the concept); location with some physical action stated or implied (listening to an organ in Chicago, in a shack surrounded by fires, on an Australian rooftop looking at fireworks, on a Norwegian freighter in a gale, subdued at home, asleep in bed); a state of mind or physicality (alone, stuck, high, toasting, subdued, asleep); and reference to presence or absence of others (alone, with mother and daughter, with "me mates", with "the skipper", with (implied) "my mother", asleep alone). The parenthetical stanza 8 suggests a desire that even this earliest celebration might have been a social one -- so even the young baby (asleep, alone) may possibly have been awakened and carried into the adults' party, plied with a drop or two of drink "for luck".

The focus shifts abruptly in stanza nine from past to
present ("Counting them off like this", i.e., now) before the Janus-narrator turns "the other way" to consider the approaching ending of the present millennium. The conclusion is strongly anti-climactic, as the day itself undoubtedly will also be, though there is still the suggestion that these commemorative occasions somehow give quite ordinary days an extraordinary significance.

NOVEMBER THIRD

I. The poem begins with a strongly rhythmic opening:

   THIS would BE the DAY (*)
   if EVER there WAS one to WORship my ANcestors
   she'd BE a HUNDred & NINE (*)
   toDAY (*) the ONly GRANDmother

indicative, in this section, of a fairly formal metric: on the whole, a short (often three- or two-beat) line is followed by a longer line (four beats or more) invariably ending in a triplet rhythm -- "ancestors", "grandmother", "shoemaker", "Anglesey", "Canada", "brother (two", "after her", "daffiness", etc. Beyond this, there is quite extensive, though irregular, use of rhyme and half-rhyme, e.g. "jokes/ ...comatose/ ...stroke", the assonance of "pre-empted the... Testament", &c.

   The Welsh for "Be still in the Lord", "Distawa yn yr Arglwydd" actually appears on my grandmother's gravestone. There is an ironic contrast between this and the details presented in the next section of the poem.

II. The focus is now on "Nain" (Welsh, "grandmother") herself, very much alive and full of personal mannerisms -- her
frenetic pace, her baking, her "quips", her "bad" habits of smoking and playing cards. This is very much a picture of my grandmother as I knew her and loved her.

This section begins as "punctuationless", but we move into full, high punctuation mode with the quoted "quips", followed by the speaker's aside in Welsh (= "Thanks very much, Grandmother"). The information about "Taid's" (= Grandfather's) sudden death and that he may have been having an affair at the time brings the regular metrical procession of stanzas to an abrupt end with a single short line:

IN to a TRAIN (*) (*?)

completely, I hope, changing the reader's perception of the whole picture; hence the tone of the concluding detail, "You Are Ever In My Thoughts", is quite ambiguous. It may be simply descriptive; it may be heavily ironic. The two possible silent beats (I have put a question mark beside the second -- its presence is arguable) following this short phrase suggest the continuing rhythmical chugs of the train engine as "unperceived" by the accident victim.

The topic of adultery and betrayal was explored in a late-'60s poem, "My Welsh Grandmother in Pine Hill Cemetery", which appears in Just Passing Through (1969). (See Appendix A: Early Poems.)

III. So far the poem has been about the narrator's recollections of his grandmother; now the description, though still first-person, shifts to the immediate past, with the description of a hike up a mountain to a quarry. The poem "Layout, Cathe-
"dral" presents a more objective treatment of this locale, and it is the central focus of "Quarry". These three poems all have in common the narrator's bestowal of ecclesiastical/architectural terms on this natural, outdoor site. Here, the terms have all been set within in quotation marks, as "unnatural", alien to the real, outdoor world.

As far as the action goes, the narrator has come to this place "on the hunt/ for a significant chunk of rock" -- we are not told why, but we know the significance of the date (from the poem's title, and the opening lines of the poem) is important, so we may assume the search for this piece of rock has something to do with it. (Cf. the end of "Layout, Cathedral": "feeling the Rock discharge its power"). By the end, the narrator has "found my rock, it/ fit snug in my pocket// snug down the hill:/ she be with me still." The image and symbol of "rock" is more fully explored in "Quarry", along with that of the "smiling old woman", which may well be seen as a spiritual manifestation of the grandmother of this poem.

There is, then, some type of symbolic connection between the narrator's memory of the grandmother and the finding of the "significant" piece of rock, which the last line solidifies, though ambiguously and (through the infinitive/subjunctive "be") without grammatical tense: the discovery and existence of the one implying (assuring, even) the re-discovery and continued presence of the other.

NUB
A fairly prosaic idea, that of falling in love with the romantic ideal built around someone else instead of the real person with all his problems, which, ironically, themselves are an aspect of the initial attraction. See also "Agony & Sequel" and "Getting Off" for further explorations of the same theme.

A few small points. Stanza two inverts the expectable pronouns -- in this context, I would find more conventionally "meaningful" "what he could be" and "who he actually is", but what I wanted here was a certain amount of self-deception on the part of the speaker -- who is really more aware of "what" this person is than "who" he is, yet dreams of him as a "who" (i.e., in all personal respects equivalent to a pre-existing epitome) rather than considering what he could be. Stanza six's "pop like soap in the warmth" suggests soap-bubbles, with their "iris-arcs" (i.e., rainbow) effect in the sun. These images of sunlight and warmth are dissipated by the following line: "the old black clouds come scattering back", which links with the last lines' "stars'/ icy shine" -- here, light, but without warmth -- "at the craziest times" (perhaps in the middle of the night, when "someone... just like you" (the speaker's self-reference?) would sooner be asleep.

Apart from being in two-line stanzas in generally four-beat lines (though the opening stanza's lines are three-beat), there is not a great deal of metrical structure to this poem. Some lines are extremely regular in rhythm, however:

transFORM it to SOMEthing creatIvely WILD and
the OLD black CLOUDS come SCATtering BACK
but on the whole the rhythms are mixed, close to the randomness of ordinary speech-rhythms:

GETS to know WELL the FEEL of the STARS’
cold SHINE at the STUpidest TIMES (*)

Note, in these concluding lines, an internal abab rhyme:
you/...shine ...stupidest ...times.

OTTAWAPHONIE

Another macaronic, "franglais" "entertainment" (see also "Belles-Mères", "Magog Moon", and "Son Monde, Sa Terre"). In this one, there is a great deal of rather forced rhyming (and half-rhyming) going on, in keeping with the essentially light-hearted tone of the poem. So we have the English "belong" rhyming with the French "bilengue", "secs, slow-/ fresco", "cost/ pas (Fr.)", "Cree/ soigné", "pig/ infra dig", and, most outrageous of all, "Outaouais/ to you, eh?"

A word should be said about this last syllable, "eh?", the universal Canadian phasis, equivalent to the "n’est-ce pas?", "¿verdad?", and "yn te?" (Welsh) of other languages. Though it is conventionally spelled "eh?", its pronunciation invariably makes it rhyme with "day". To Americans, "eh?" is the one dead-giveaway Canadian speech characteristic. (A Yankee joke has it that the original spelling of "Canada" must have been "C, eh? N, eh? D, eh?".) There is also a piquant irony in the use of the "Québec" spelling "Outaouais" (an anglophone’s nightmare of vowels) in place of the more familiar "Ottawa" for the name of the river that flows behind and below Canada’s Parliament Hill,
marking the border between Québec and Ontario.

Some explanation may be necessary for non-Canadian readers. The "péquiste secs" are secretary-typists loyal to the PQ ("pégé), le Parti Québéquois" "les séparatistes", who want an independent Québec. "Innus" are the natives of the north-eastern Quebec-Labrador area, sometimes called Montaignais or Nauskapi or both; their language is Innuemón (which rhymes with a Canadian's "lawn"), just as Inúktitut is the language of the Inuks, the Inuit, the "Eskimos". Other North American nations' names follow, ranging further westwards (Sioux is out of order); Gaelic survives in rural Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The Canal Rideau runs through Ottawa, giving people a great cycling, paddling, jogging facility in the warm months, and a skating rink miles long in the winter -- you can skate to work. Ottawa is said to be the world's second coldest capital city (the coldest is Ulan Bator). The canal links the Rideau River (which, true to its name, disgorges as a waterfall "curtain" into the Ottawa River just below the Parliament Buildings). Hull, Quebec, the enemy's outpost, is just across the bridge, on the other side of the river. Ottawa is much closer and much better linked to Montréal than to any other Canadian city, both by road and by rail. Interestingly, the present leader of the federal (Ottawa) opposition, Lucien Bouchard, is a PQ supporter and was elected on that platform, as was a close majority of the opposition.

Given that all this information may be required by a British reader, it could be that this poem is really suitable for Canadian consumption only.
The word "paper" occurs three times in this brief poem, each time with figurative overtones. In the first instance, "paper" is the second dimension (ink being the first) of the three-dimensional construct symbolizing the actual poem. The metaphor is one of physical reality -- the third-dimensional world created by the poem requiring the second-dimensional paper in the same way that the paper requires the first-dimensional point of ink between the tip of the pen and the paper.

As the title suggests, the poem is particularly about this second dimension, the page. The "dot" of ink is the active agent here, "a jig, a snare, looping, skipping", with the paper merely the passive recipient of this action -- to the point where it "begins to look/ like a half-papered attic room/ with the old look and the new 'vying for supremacy'".

The second half of the poem gives a classical example of another pen-and-paper art, this time the Asian art of calligraphy -- conventionally associated with the Japanese, but here with "the Cantonese". This part of the poem is more strongly phonic: the assonance of "use huge", the alliteration of "brushes of black with abandon". Note that "ink" here is not specified -- the brushes are "of black" and are used "with abandon", no more. The sheets are (literally? figuratively?) the size of a tablecloth, and the artists "go through/ paper like water". Of course, the literal meaning of this is simply, "they use up a lot of paper", but this linking of two idiomatic expressions "go
"through" (i.e., consume) and "like water" (i.e., wastefully, as in "He goes through money like water") evokes an image of the essential transience of the arts, even the graphic arts, recalling Lord Houghton's epitaph on Keats: "Here lies one whose name was writ upon water." It also suggests a magicial ability to treat the medium magically, to go beyond its physical limits, to be able to go "through" it metaphorically as through it were liquid rather than solid.

The concluding lines are an evocation of the Oriental ying-yang principle of balance, the search in art for "the message/that equals the effort//exactly", as this poem itself tries to do. The isolation of the last word in its own final "stanza" gives it additional weight -- it could almost be read "Exactly!", a kind of Q.E.D.

In a sense, the two foci of the poem -- the examination of the two dimensions of media, followed by the example of Oriental calligraphic art, parallel the two dimensions themselves, moving in two completely different manners and directions.

PAPER & PENS

By purely alphabetic happenstance, this poem carries on the theme of exploration of the media of writing, specifically in terms of their physical requirements, which are negligible -- "any old paper, any old pens" (echoing the bygone "Any old iron?" street-cry of itinerant scrap-buyers) -- "any old", here, of course, being equivalent to "it doesn't matter what", not a matter of chronological age. By contrast, the narrator points
out, one could create "a consummate rhapsody" with expensive
electronic gear -- but the virtue of poetry is that "for a reader
with ears/ for the whirl of its words, its voice" it costs almost
nothing to produce or to experience.

The second section of the poem, in contrast, considers the
reader of the poem, in an extended comparison of the effect of a
poem that "works" for the listener with one of those newly-popu-
lar computer-generated three-dimensional images usually overlaid
with an masking two-dimensional "camouflage scrim", a graphic
design. The comparison continues: usually it's younger people
that can see the three-dimensional effect with little apparent
effort -- perhaps because their senses are more flexible, more
likely because they have fewer preconceptions about what is and
is not "possible". The conclusion is that, as with these pic-
tures, the poem may not reveal its hidden "image" immediately,
but "for sure in time" it will -- in other words, an element of
faith is required, so that "when you suddenly close the book/
you'll return to earth another way." There will have been some
kind of transformation, not only of the poem's words (= the
"camouflage scrim"), but of the reader's or listener's mind,
whose world-view will be to some degree changed by it, will be in
effect of "another way".

Although this and the preceding poem are in two-line stan-
zas, with quite a structured look, in reality they are among the
loosest metrically in the collection. On the whole, though four-
beat lines, often of suplet rhythms, dominate:

and for SURE in TIME COULD be a SUMmer
FLOATING IN and OUT of FOCUS
YOU'LL beCOME the HIDden IMage and
you'll reTURN to EARTH anOTHER WAY

PARABLE OF BEING

This poem was absolutely a donnée, and its dedication over 40 years later to Marcel Carrier, my Grade 8-9 French teacher is entirely just -- since it was M. Carrier who suggested we memo-
"être" in
rize the 16 French participles that have the auxiliary "avoir" in their past tense instead of "avoir" (hence, je suis allé, I went, not j'ai allé). These he conveniently grouped into five pairs of opposites,

allé venu (went, came)
arrivé parti (arrived, left)
entré sorti (entered, went out)
monté descendu (went up, went down)
né mort (was born, died)

followed by three synonyms,

retourné rentré revenu (returned)

and, finally, three miscellaneous items, which had to be memo-
rized by sheer effort of will,

resté tombé devenu (stayed, fell, became).

M. Carrier made it easier for us to remember the first five pairs by suggesting a story-plot concerning someone who went somewhere, arrived, entered, went up(stairs), and was "born", for example, because it was a revival meeting (i.e. he was "born again"). One could easily then go on to list their five antonyms, follow these with the three synonyms, then the concluding three miscellaneous items, et voilà!
Somehow, decades later, this little "plot" came floating back into my mind, except that now, somehow, it occurred to me that the whole thing could be a telling of the story of the arrival of a messiah, and that even the final three "miscellaneous" items could thereby be incorporated and make sense. So, essentially, all I did was use, in order, all five participles of M. Carrier’s "plot" in the first stanza, then the five antonyms, also in order, in the second stanza. This happily provided the extremely stark and resonant line "& died". The three synonyms for "returned" then not only provided the crucial "resurrection" motif, but did so three times, like the underlining of a miracle, or a paraphrase of the Creed:
"was crucified, dead & buried, descended into Hell, the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into Heaven..." Note how many of the verbs of the Creed are the same as those in M. Carrier’s list -- though the order is of course quite different. Here, the subject of the poem goes down, then dies, then returns.

The effect of the three miscellaneous verbs is wonderful -- especially as I had nothing to do with their choice! "He fell" suggests, metaphorically, corruptibility (after all!); "He stayed" suggests resistance to change; "He became" suggests adaptability to the ordinary, physical world.

Most of my additions to the "given" verbs are in the form of proper, localizing, nouns -- "Jordan", "Messiah", "She'ol or the Vale of Gehenna", with "this life" (l. 9) being the only exception to this.

Finally, the title, "Parable of Being", which came after the
poem was completed, suggests that the on-going saga of this particular messiah (who it was or is we aren't told) may offer some larger universal truth. I can't be too specific about what this might be. Maybe "the Messiah" will have to experience the verbs in a different order.

PICKUP

A return to the scene of "May, The Waters of". Here, the picture is not localised, and the action, the pending collision, begins from the first line, in mid-sentence. There is in the poem a continual change of tone and register -- beginning with the highly colloquial, ironic "like when you first glimpse.../ I mean, who'd automatically assume", through a rather high-flown "poetic" style of description "headlights bland and vacant/ ...a drop of dew/ on the front plate, the warm-/ breath'd engine..." (In "warm-breath'd, I intended a distant echo of Wilfrid Owens's "Futility", particularly lines "Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides/ Full-nerved -- still warm -- to hard to stir?", which itself recalls late nineteenth-century and even earlier poetic diction -- though, note, the spelling "breath'd" is more of a guide to pronunciation than an attempt to revive archaic spelling conventions.) The ironic tone of the opening returns: "I mean, just because this time/ this one has your number on it/ is that any reason...". The clash of tones continues with the reference to "weeping willows and skulls" (typical motifs on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century gravestones) followed by the obviously late twentieth-century "bumper sticker" bearing the
colloquial spelling "WHO'DA THOUGHT...".

In contrast to the treatment of this subject in the earlier poem, here we never see the human behind the agent of destruction, the windshield (= Br. windscreen) remains "a viewless blank", the truck itself, as in the earlier poem, has a kind of appealing innocence in its appearance, with an echo of childhood: "the sweet little red/ riding horror".

I suppose the theme of both poems is the ordinariness of death, even unexpected death on the road.

PINE

I first called this poem "Pinus" and even contemplated "Pinus erectus". However, pine trees are already such conventional phallic symbols, it seemed unnecessary to belabour the point. Besides, "erect" appears in line four, and the images of the second stanza, "curved straight up, solid as hell/ ...naked, immersed, slowly shifting" reinforce this. However, there is some possible confusion here -- is it Will "under a pine... on a totally different point" that is "naked, immersed, slowly shifting," etc., or the pine itself? (In fact, the latter was what I first had in mind, but I now see the former is equally possible.)

There is, of course, a great contrast between the poetic comparison of Will as "proud, majestic, solitary, erect, &c." and the "real" Will (as seen by himself?) "poor soul, uneasy, supposing/ this had to be a thin request/ for something he couldn't give." The state of nervousness dominates: he sees the sun "lick the boughs' nether sides like nerves/ flashing synapses with
disabling news..." and an explanation for the earlier situation is directly stated in the fourth-last line: "Maybe he was just unnaturally nervous." The word "unnatural" is fraught with meaning here -- not merely that it was unusual for him to be this nervous, but that this was actually contrary to the dictates of nature.

It could also be that Will has never come to terms with the nervousness that the girl's poems inspired; the vision of the very real pine tree in the second part of the poem ends with an image of the tree floating loose from its roots, ebbing away, as if on an outgoing tide, to "lose/ itself somewhere deep in the blue". This is, if you like, a very "unnatural" end for a perfectly natural tree, to "float loose/ from its roots". I should say I also had in mind the Australian slang "roots" (= fucks) here -- so the sexual connection remains strong, the phallus ceases its part in the natural act of procreation, the tree removes itself from the nurturing earth, even the laws of gravity are suspended.

This is one of the relatively few poems in the collection that is in verse paragraphs rather than stanzas, with obvious temporal functionality: first, the distant past; second, a gradual move from then to the near, almost-present, past ("yesterday.../ years later"), third, a return to the opening situation but now seen from a new perspective, that of the present: "it could be [present]/ all she meant/ in the first place was an actual tree."

The word "point", in Shakespeare's time, was a common syno-
nym for "erect penis". Here, it occurs three times -- first, an actual geographical feature (line 3), second, as part of the cliché "case in point" (stanza 2, line 3), and third, "a totally different point", linking back to the first, but also perhaps recalling the second.

POWER

The opening of this poem suggests a very low-key, conversational situation: "When I was just a kid". The subject is "the power of music & words"; i.e., the spoken word in the form of performative sound: which can be so strong that "the right tone/ of conviction" can even "forestall a writ of execution."

On the whole, the rhythms and tone of the poem are mixed, ranging from the colloquial, prose effect of stanza four, where the line breaks seem no more than arbitrary, to the alternating 3-beat 4-beat metre, regular rhythms and phonic patterns of

and YOU and YOU aGAIN
ALL those YOUS called INTO BEing
by the MERE slick FLICK of a PEN
is ALL it WAS all the WAY up to YOU
when this POWER runs INTO a BARN
of black GRANite and ME without ARMS

(This final image is based on my memory of witnessing a gruesome sight, on the ski slopes at Madesimo, in the Italian Alps, of an expert though armless skier's losing control at the bottom of the final downhill slope and running straight into a stone outbuilding at high speed -- with absolutely no means of breaking the impact.)

The nub of the poem is in the rhythmical lines above. The
speaker in the past has been able to get his way through the magic spells of "music & words": incantation -- whether as poetry or music doesn't matter. But now, in the case of the final "you", the "'power'" collides with reality; the speaker is left "looking for something physical", even if it's only ersatz, not real -- the "shape of a flame/ if not the actual heat". Far from being the master of incantation, the speaker now talks of "risk". The power is gone, "every plea... met with the same guarded gaze/ the same considered distance."

The poem ends with a question that is only partially rhetorical, though it has the high-flown syntax of rhetoric: "Is it written thus that this/ should turn out to be/ my final-curtain speech?" The hyphen here is important: this is the actor's last speech in this particular drama (not the last speech of the actor, as it might be read without the hyphen).

Note, the doublet "larding & farcing" is derived from the anonymous Complaynt of Scotlānde (1549): "i thocht it nocht necessair til hef farcit and lardit this tracteit witht exquisite termis...."

PRAYER OF HENRY VI, DEVOUT

The original, printed in a leaflet available at King's College Chapel, Cambridge (founded by Henry VI), is "O Lord Jesu Christ, who hast created and redeemed me, and hast brought me hither where I am; thou knowest what thou wouldest do with me; do with me according to thy will, with mercy. Amen." I have attempted to broaden the appeal from "Jesu Christ" to "Great God".
(Originally I had "Great Spirit", but this is too closely associated with Native usage to be sufficiently non-specific, and "God" is now generally accepted "shorthand" for "a presence or power... different from your everyday self" or "a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself," as defined by David Hay, Exploring Inner Space, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 113-4.)

The aspect of spirituality I have most trouble with is the concept of "eternal", so I have attempted to spell it out, more specifically, even if only for my own benefit: "from before forever/to beyond forever". The word "eternity" is very commonplace, particularly in a religious context, so I have tried to deepen its true meaning by defining it not as simply "forever", but so much without beginning or ending that it runs from before forever to beyond it, going further even than Thomas Traherne’s "from everlasting to everlasting" (Centuries of Meditations, c.1670).

King Henry was able to use "created" and "redeemed" on their own as spiritually powerful verbs, but for many today they have lost that power and forcefulness. Here, creation is linked to personal physicality and redemption to personal spirituality in "Creator of my body/ Redeemer of my soul", and the parallel syntax underlining the correspondence.

The poem ends with five independent lines. The first three of these, all four-beat lines, contain an interplay between "you" and "me" phrased exclusively in monosyllables of relative regularity:
YOU bring me HERE to WHERE i AM
YOU know WHAT you would DO with ME
DO with me AS you WILL (*).

The phrase "with mercy" is perhaps the most striking personal feature of Henry's original prayer -- it suggests an appeal for emotional generosity based on love that can outweigh just deserts -- so I have left it untouched. "Mercy" perhaps because not much used today, still seems to have a good deal of strength.

I have rendered the King's "Amen" as "That's it" in order to ground it in the present. The archaic "So be it" meaning of "Amen" is, I think, better caught in the modern phrase. It also recalls something akin to the East-End Londoner's ironical, "Wol, that's it, then, in't it?", as well as the emotion expressed in the popular song "Is That All There Is?" (well-known as sung by Peggy Lee). (The concern with "Amen" is also explored in an earlier poem, "Amen", in _Crux_ (1973), included here in Appendix A, which is closer in spirit to the poem "Viewing an Anthem by William Mathias" in this collection.) The total effect, to me, is of a very non-magical, non-performative conclusion -- "That's it, that's all you have to say, try it, it works" -- to a very powerful, magical, and performative use of language that takes us back over five hundred years.

PRIEST

At first, it struck me as notable that the alphabetical order of the titles should have resulted in this poem's position immediately after the "Prayer", above. However, there is certainly an etymological link between a prayer and a "prayster" --
it simply hadn't occurred to me at the time I chose the titles.

A fragmentary, "punctuationless" piece; also, like many other poems in the collection, a "list", this time of certain items contained in the house of the speaker, who sees it "as the house of a priest". This suggests that it is not in fact the house of a priest, but the concluding "me, dressing in black/ to church every Sunday for my sins" complicates this perception.

The objects contained in this "house of a priest" have aspects in common: they all lack vivid colour, and nearly all the descriptive adjectives have negative connotations: "non-descript", "unswept", "battered", "sullen" (recalling the "small but sullen horn" of William Collins's "Ode to Evening"), "dusty", "severely functional", "withering". The only begrudging positive descriptive term is in "the one decent-cutting knife". (Note the etymological link between this and "severely functional", in the preceding line.)

The great contrast is between these adjectives and the "green, rich, rotting earth" of the last line. In a sense, this is contrastive -- "green" as opposed to the lack of colour of the interior objects, "rich" as opposed to the mean furniture and other accoutrements of the house. "Rotting" is more complex in effect, suggesting a natural process of death and reconstitution. In this, it is in contrast to the objects, dusty and withering, held in a type of artifical (as shown by all the proper nouns) stasis inside the house.
The tone of this poem is one of nostalgia — for a past that (it turns out) never existed. The "project", to somehow record the events of a cross-continent trip in terms of people encountered, rather than generalised scenery ("hills", "rivers", "forests", "mountains", "towns", "counties" — all the vaguest possible generic terms) or other scenic attractions, results in a number of very specific records about very individual people doing very specific (and sometimes illogical or puzzling) things.

The poem's use of personal pronouns is suggestive. "It" is the only pronoun until the stanza 5's "lent us his school bus to sleep in". From there we move to "you", twice: "made you jump" (st. 6), "the medicine man who drilled you" (st. 8); we also find "his", "she", and "his", all in reference to these various "people", before the poem returns, in the penultimate stanza, to "It was going to have all of these things". Only in the last stanza, after a final reference to "you", do we reach the first-person: "I stayed home," immediately followed by the negative, non-specific "No one went anywhere".

The title casts a further complicating light. As a noun, PROject, it could refer to the record of "people". As a verb, proJECT, not only is this scheme projected, but, as rendered, it seems to be a projection of who was going to have been encountered. Grounded in the historical past tense throughout as it is, though, the speaker "projects", in terms of "real" time, backwards: "No one went anywhere". The "real" things in this poem turn out never to have happened; what actually happened is dismissed in the very bald language of the last stanza.
Just to complicate things unnecessarily, all the "non-events" of this poem actually did happen during a real trip (though there was no specific "project" to "record" anything at the time): the "CD [read, "seedy"] Motel manager" (in Carbondale, Illinois) had accidentally thrown out the copies of "next week's TV Guide" that should have gone into the rooms; the guest quarters of the "old hippie pal" really were in a well-furnished former school bus (in Ashland, Oregon); the "hooker that made you jump" was on Main Street, Vancouver (BC); the "Blessed Sacrament Father" was a Hornby Island (BC) pro-cannabis activist, who referred to the herb in these terms, the "exotic offerings" being of the imported, burnt variety; the "medicine man who drilled you [i.e., tested you orally] on the four doors [i.e. the rituals associated with entering and leaving, four times] ...of a sweat [i.e., sweat-lodge, native sauna ritual with spiritual cleansing overtones] was encountered between Port Alberni and Qualicum Beach (BC). And, as the trip really did take place, the "factual" conclusion of the poem is in fact a lie. In this light, the "Project" of the poem has more to do with the conversion of truth to fantasy and vice versa.

At the same time, this is much more information about a poem than a reader needs, and most of it could rightfully be regarded as irrelevant. The fact is, every poem has a kernel of truth, or "reality", yet no poem can ever be faithfully, wholly true to life.

Metre: fairly irregular. The two-line stanzas coincide with the major syntactical phrases; the syntax itself is highly con-
ventional, and the tone and register of the language is informal, conversational. The poem is "punctuationless" on the whole, the only notable exception being the full stop in the middle of the last line.

QUARRY

The title-poem of the collection, itself an "omnium gatherum" of themes, symbols, motifs, and topics explored in many of the other poems. In particular, the quarry as compositio loci is the focus of "Layout, Cathedral" and "November Third", and aspects of the three "meanings" of the word "quarry" itself (namely, rock-source, prey, and a diamond-shaped pane of glass) have been touched on in many others, as these notes indicate.

This poem is, on the whole, non-metrical, each of the lines conceived as a single breath, and in this way comparable to the non-metrical styles of Walt Whitman, Allan Ginsberg, John Olsen, and John Cage. In this poem, I conceived of each line as a "last message", each one presenting its most important features in the most vivid (often not particularly "poetic") language that came immediately to hand.

Although the two other "quarry" poems mentioned above treat the location metaphorically in terms of a cathedral, in this poem the correspondence is never explicitly stated. The quarry itself remains a quarry. However, the spiritual nature of the speaker's experiences in this locale are very much in the spirit of the other poems, and much of what is stated here could equally well be used in the cathedral context: "I go once a week if I can,
more often when I need it" -- though in this line what follows is
unexpected: "or when the weather makes it urgent" (line 4). The
section in the first stanza beginning "I used to return" presents
the three denotations of "quarry" as given above: the rock-
source, prey, glass, each preceded by one of the synonyms for
"return" found in "Parable". (This triple, cyclical "return" in
my own mind was modelled after the part of Eric Crozier's lyrics
for Benjamin Britten's Saint Nicholas in which Nicholas attempts
to "satisfy Love" three times, the first two ending with the line
"But Love desired more still" and the last "And Love was satis-
fied". This connection, very real in my own mind, is as much
based on Britten's music as it is on the content of Crozier's
lyrics.)

In stanza two, the nature of the "rock" changes: it becomes
"a cloud of basaltic [a made-up word, one step more figurative
than "basalt"] bits" that bursts, its "individual constituent
components" then becoming part of "the allover rockiness", i.e.,
the abstractive concept. Note the counterpoint between the
Latinate terms used to describe the specific "components", and
the Germanic abstract "rockiness", the converse of the usual
Germanic-concrete/Latinate-abstract convention.

Although the poem is on the whole non-metrical, the two
central, short stanzas four and five approach conventional metre,
with their dominant, repeated rhythms and syntax. In this way,
stanza 4 explores the three, sometimes conflicting, aspects of
light: as the antonym of dark, the antonym of heavy, and the
synonym of spiritual illumination.
As in so many other poems, the use of personal pronouns is notable. "I" and "you" (often impersonal) figure largely, followed by "he", referring to the "young man" of stanza six. The "smiling old woman", recalling the "grandmother" of other poems, particularly "November Third" is always referred to as such, as is the "dog". "It" and "they" are reserved for the inanimate aspects of quarry: the rocky scene, the hunted game, the pieces of glass "frags... there on the ground". "Frags" specifically recalls the two poems of that name, which metaphorically themselves could be seen as "pieces of glass", just as the "tesserae" that "pave the nave" ("Layout, Cathedral", stanza nine), may symbolize the individual poems of the whole collection. This possibility is not followed up in "Layout", but this poem raises it quite specifically. Thus, the adjectives "green, brown, clear" could symbolize the three different approaches to the creation of the poems: rhythmic, thematic, personal, as explained in the Introduction, p. 135.

Some miscellaneous points: the rock in "the shape of a human figure" is meant to be equivalent to the "inukshuk" (= "stone man") of the Inuit, traditionally built in wilderness areas by piling up angular stones as a means of showing others that people have been there, but also recalling the line from Wordsworth's "Michael", "and never lifted up a single stone". The Greek terms "anabasis" (ascent) and "catabasis" (descent), besides specifically recalling Xenophon and St-John Perse, are terms from the Orthodox service.
RICKY, REACHING OUT FOR

This poem grew out of the news of the death, last fall (1994), of Harriet Nelson (née Hilliard), renowned first as a big-band singer (her debut with Ozzie Nelson's dance-band resulted in marriage to its leader), and then as the real-life wife and mother in the late-1940s American radio comedy, "Ozzie & Harriet". This show thus coincided with the period immediately following the Second World War, a time not only of emerging personal consciousness for me, but also of such amazing new developments, emanating from the U.S., as nylons, ball-points, chemically-dyed margarine, zesty food additives, and, above all, plastics.

From a personal point of view, the couple's two boys, David and Ricky, were very close in age to my brother and me. Ricky, the younger, was the "cute kid", the wisecracker piping up from the back seat of the car, that kept us all amused. David, older, was more serious and not as outgoing, perhaps a "typical" older brother. As an older brother myself, I identified with him; no doubt there was an element of hero-worship, he was a whole year older, he was famous, an accomplished athlete, good-looking, &c.

I lost touch with the Nelsons at a time when their fame was growing even more greatly as the result of their move to a weekly TV show, "The Nelsons", in which millions of Americans (and Canadians) saw the boys grow up. The next time I became aware of them was when Ricky made his debut (first on the TV show, later in solo gigs) as a rock guitarist and singer in the Elvis Presley mode. He was fresh-faced, good-looking, with long, shiny black
hair and the kind of sneer that Elvis did so well. It was hard for me to take him as anything more than a joke -- I could still always imagine the wisecracker piping up from the back seat -- but he did pretty well, considering the competition. Some years later, when I had lost track of him again, he was killed in a helicopter crash. It transpired that he and the others in the copter had been high on various drugs at the time. So crashed this image of wholesome American innocence -- but not for the first or the last time, in my experience.

The other aspect of the poem that may need some explanation has to do is a photograph I saw in a magazine accompanying a reader's query as to what had happened to David Nelson. David had turned out to be the real unconventional: he had turned his back on TV fame and fortune, and, literally, "joined the circus", as a trapeze artist. A photograph accompanied this information showing him, his legs hooked over the bar, reaching out in mid-swing for an invisible partner. So although the poem began as a result of hearing about Harriet's death, and recalls the death of Ricky nine years earlier, it really is about David and about the "reaching out" graphically rendered by the photograph.

After all this, not much needs to be said about the poem. The reader will notice a fair amount of sound-patterning: the /r/ sounds of the opening's "reaching out for his brother// rockstar Ricky". A foretaste of rhyme is conveyed by the last lines of stanzas five and six, reinforced by their rhythmically counter-balanced three-beat lines:

NIGHTS after WORLD war TWO trip/dup/singlet
HAVing JUST become TRUE dup/trip/singlet
The rhyme becomes more insistent in stanza eight, with its solidly four-beat lines ending "pip-", "quip", and "up". There is a fair amount of phonic patterning from there till the end: "thunderous thrusting", "black... fans" (stanza nine); "guess... kept... grace... Ozzie's... guest-spot (stanza ten); "time... them" (st. 11), finally moving to rhyme in the final stanza: "my guy/ ...still alive/ ...still 25".

SCARF

Although the slang "my dick... the size of a peanut" suggests the present, the rest of the vocabulary and the situation of this poem could be from any time in the past millennium. The references to green as "dangerous magic" and then to "Gawain" bestow some specificity, but the latter is only a comparison, not the actual situation described by the poem. The scarf and the ring could also be conventional tokens worn or carried by a medieval knight at a tournament; hence, the "arms" of stanza 3 convey the notions of "weapons" and "heraldic device" in addition to the "arms" of one's own body (i.e., "I embraced each of you"). The "headless trunk" and the "lady" are, of course, figures in the medieval Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight. The "nephew" (stanza four) of this poem correlates with the "uncle" of "Native Dreams" and "Tibia".

The naming of disparate body parts ("dick", "arms", "neck", "headless trunk" and "bones") may recall similar effects in "Chopin Hour", "Dawn", and, further in the collection, "Tent" and "Tibia".
On one level, the opening of the poem might be paraphrased thus: "We enjoy the fact that birds, composite flowers, and Homo sapiens all evolved at about the same time -- it seems fitting that as our senses woke, these sensorily-rich creations were there for us to enjoy." The experience is so rich, in fact that on the "particular day" of which the narrator speaks there is a confusion of sensory information -- "a bird blossomed/ a flower sang... [on] that particular day". This leads onto the last stanza: that's how it was on that day when we first kissed (with all that implies leading back to the opening "It tickles us" only (not only "we enjoy, are amused" but "all our senses are pleasurably stimulated").

The senses specifically referred to in the greater part of the poem are those of sight, smell, hearing, and touch. Only the sense of taste is missing; it is not mentioned until the last line, and then is a function not of either birds or flowers but of "each other". The "taste" of the kiss is linked to the slightly saline (relative to today's degree of saltiness) taste of the sea (this is only implicitly stated), leading to an "understanding" of where we came from, not only evolutionarily, but also through sex and procreation. The rich gift of love, the discovery of "each other", forever colours the sensory stimuli of this new world. Thus, the whole thing may be read as a parable.

This poem is tightly organised, relative to most of the others. Although the metre is variable, line-endings often show phonetic patterning (e.g., the "earth/ birth" rhyme of the opening
stanza, the partial consonance of "seemed/ smelled", the alliteration of "looked" and "listened" and bird blossomed", culminating in the patterns of the last two stanzas, here rendered in the International Phonemic Alphabet:

/st/ bird blps əmd
a flaʊər sɑːɪŋ ənd əʊnts
hwɔt hæptænd əʊnt ˈpɑːrtɪkjuələr ˈdʒi
wɪ tɜːrnd tu fəs ɪtsɨf ˈʌðə
smaɪld əmˈbræst ənd strɛɪtwəi
tɛistəd əndərstrʌd əs si/

Most of these phonemes are repeated at least once, sometimes in identical clusters (e.g., /st/ in "embraced and straightway/tasted, understood", sometimes reversed (/ts/ of "that's"). The concluding three-beat lines are also in highly regular duplets, bringing the poem to a "well-turned" close:

we TURNED to FACE each OTHER
SMILED emBRACED and STRAIGHTway
TASTed, UNDER- STOOD the SEA

I particularly like this poem because although there is a lot of technical stuff going on in it, its "meaning" comes through clearly, and its vocabulary is extremely simple.

SMELLS

By sheer coincidence, another poem on the subject of senses immediately follows -- this one specifically about the sense of smell. The "message" is simpler, though, and relatively commonplace: one forgets, in a cold climate, how pervasive and strong the smells of warmer places can be. And it immediately recalls, as the sense of smell does (being a function of a "primitive" part of the brain) a particular experience, flying from London to
Malaga on a midnight flight and being assailed by the incredibly varied aromas of the area as one emerged from the plane and walked across the tarmac. So there is nothing very recondite about what goes on in this poem -- it is mostly an attempt to vividly recreate the particular scene, especially the strength of pleasant and unpleasant odours equally commingled. As remarked in an earlier note, poetry typically tends to focus on the visible, often at the expense of the other senses; this is an attempt to redress this balance.

The title, together with the concluding thought "You know as long as you’re here// your nose, not you/ will be in charge// getting you into spots/ you don’t even want to think about," recalls the final lines of William Carlos Williams’s poem "Smells", in which he speaks to his nose:

...What girl will care
for us, do you think, if we continue in these ways?
Must you taste everything? Must you know everything?
Must you have a part in everything?

(The poem is included in How Poetry Works, p. 239.)

A few miscellaneous notes: "stepping out of a plane in Spain," not only rhymes but recalls, in the common "plane/plain" pun, the well-known song "The Rain in Spain" from Lerner & Lowe’s My Fair Lady. Metrically, the lines run from two- to four-beat. Sound patterns are fairly obvious: "smells... selves" (1.2), "instantly/...omniverous" (11.3-4), "purple burn/ frangipani" (11.7-8), "stench/...ditch" (11. 11-2), "nutty must" (1.14), "outside/...drive" (11.15-6), "taxi... ashes" (1.17). This "purple" effect ends at line 17, the explication conclusion of
the poem being in less "enhanced" language.

The ending needs no explanation, really, except for any reader that does not know that "No shit!" is familiar North American slang for the quasi-phatic conversational "Really?!" -- except that here, with a full stop instead of a question or an exclamation mark, it may equally be a meaningful comment on what has immediately preceded; hence, a reference to the careful elimination of anything so unpleasant (especially to the olfactory sense) especially in a tourist agency brochure. See also "Disney" and "Mogul" for reworkings of the same theme.

SON MONDE, SA TERRE

Very much an "entertainment"; another of the "franglais"-theme poems, though here the only French words are the articles "le" (masculine gender) and "la" (feminine), now transformed, with upper-case Ls, to the proper names of male and female characters. The poem grew out of a playful suggestion I made to Jean Mathieu, a teacher at a French "immersion" school near where I live, that in order to help anglophones master the problem of memorising grammatical gender in French, it might help to create two "universes", each one containing nouns of only one gender -- the idea being that students could easily learn to associate all items of the same gender as present in that particular universe.

This led, in the poem that followed, to the idea of turning Le and La into the sole inhabitatants of each of these two forev-
er separate universes. All nouns (also with upper-case initial letters for extra effect) found in the "World" of Le are masculine in gender, just all nouns in the "Earth" of La are feminine (this also applies to the words "World" and "Earth" themselves, by the way).

Even a novice in the study of French will recognize a few entries: "the Pen of her Aunt, there on the Table" recalls the familiar "La plume de ma tante est sur la table." All students of French at some time learn that "la poêle" (f.) is "the frying pan", while "le poêle" (m.) is "the stove"; similarly, "la Manche" (f.) is "the English Channel", whereas "le manche" (m.) is "only a sleeve".

I am especially amused by the fact that after all the confusion (to an anglophone) of grammatical gender, of having to memorise such things as that "monde" (world) is masculine while "terre" (earth) is feminine, the title of this poem, which carefully gets its genders absolutely correct, is in itself utterly ambiguous in meaning: both "son" and "sa" could equally well be "his", "her", "its", or "their", thus yielding sixteen possible combinations! Of course, the one that undoubtedly accords with best with the given situation is "His World, Her Earth". However, the fact remains that all this grammatical precision in French can still result in amazing lexical ambiguity.

The poem is "punctuationless" in its line-endings, though conventional punctuation is used within the lines. It was something of a challenge: first, to come up with suggestive but appropriate nouns for each of the separate worlds, and, second,
to keep up the syntactic contrast between these two "universes" throughout the whole poem without becoming predictable. I did this by using sentences of different lengths, and by varying the location of the two agents in each stanza. So the poem opens plainly with one stanza about Le followed by another about La, except this time the sentence continues into the third stanza with more information about Le. This pattern of syntactical variation continues to the end of the poem. It was also difficult to come up with different ways of saying the same thing: that whereas Le has this, La has that.

The poem is generally in four-beat lines of irregular rhythm. There is some sound-patterning, though this is not particularly insistent. The eye-rhyme "Move/ ...Love" linking the two concluding stanzas is no more than a nod in the direction of convention.

The reader may well surmise that I have found grammatical gender to be a particularly difficult aspect of learning French. An earlier poem of mine, "Genres", (1972) (see Appendix A) explores the same matter, except this time the world of the lovers is a shared one. Their only problem is that one of them (we are not told which) suffers from a "grosse inefitude/ in remembering ce qui est feminin,/ what male."

STANDARD TIME/DOPPELGANGER

There is a metaphorical link in this poem between the "parallel" moments of Daylight (Summer) Time and Standard Time (i.e., two "identical" times separated by one hour) and the echo
of a rising and falling siren falling in a time-trajectory in an absolute parallel to the "voice" of the siren itself.

The poem opens with a paradox: "the noon siren went off at eleven", comparable to Wallace Stevens's "It was evening all afternoon" (which is included in How Poetry Works, p. 235). In the present poem, however, the "explanation" immediately follows: "they forgot to set the clock back/ yesterday night" (note also the visual paradox implicit in the collocation "-day night"). The time and season of the poem is implicitly set (at least for a Canadian) with absolute precision: twelve noon on the last Monday morning in October. A similar error in the spring would have caused the siren to sound late, not early; the change is always made on a Sunday, and in the fall it happens at the end of October. The first part of the title makes the situation clear anyway. "People on the street" also suggests a weekday rather than Sunday (at least in the small-town locale that is the poem's setting). Line 6, "especially on that day" underlines the specificity of date -- that is, because the siren was blown "on the dot of the [wrong] hour/ like that", on the day after all the townspeople should have set their clocks back.

The communal nature of this "laughable error" is underscored by the poem's references, firstly, to "people on the street", secondly, to "you" (in the impersonal, "one," sense), in "you know it has to be true noon", and, thirdly, to "I" (specific), in "What is the chord [i.e., musical interval] they make, I wonder", and then by the return in the last line, to the community, the "townful of burgers heading for lunch".

243
Just as the preceding poem, "Smells", attempted to evoke the olfactory sense through the spoken word, so this poem attempts to convey the aural effect of the rising and falling tones (the original blast and its trailing echo) in terms of a visual metaphor of a kite with its tail following soaring to the top of its trajectory, then, as it reaches the "zenith" and begins its return to earth, its tail crosses its "path" -- so that on the way "up" the siren is the upper of the two notes of the "chord" and the echo is the lower, but on the way down, though the "chord" is the same, the positions of the two "voices" are reversed, the echo now being the higher of the two. This was not easy.

The detection of the "note of conviction" in the siren (though surely the first blast sounded the same as the second, objectively speaking), as well trying to "place the chord they [the siren and its echo] make" shows the narrator ("I") to have a keen ear: it is hard for him to identify the interval (the "vertical" span between two notes of a chord) because the "chord" is forever changing "through an infinite/ series of microtones". As it falls, and it "sets in the west", they are finally "lost in the mufti [civilian, non-descript] hum" of the town. The ordinary background noises of the community finally overwhelm it. Just as the opening reference was to "people on the street" at eleven o'clock going about their usual late-morning business, now, at "true noon" the main business "burgers" of the town is "lunch". Again, the collectivity, the social nature of the experience, is stressed. (This may recall a similar "simultane-
"ous" effect, the sound of Big Ben on different characters nearby, in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, though there is no attempt in the novel to make the experience a communal one.)

With one exception, the poem is in three-line stanzas. The stanza-shape symbolizes the characteristic "sound-imprint" of "the blast" (the siren itself) as well as "its echo", following at exactly a stanza’s distance. The only exception occurs at that "moment" when the echo continues upwards, "lingers above it a moment" when the original "voice" itself has already started downwards. I have isolated this "moment" in a single line, set by itself, before the three-line stanza pattern, graphically symbolizing the "minor third" of the "chord", is re-established, this time with the echo taking the upper note.

TALULLAH

As far as I know there has only ever been one Talullah -- Talullah Bankhead, the US actress and comedienne noted for her rebarbitive voice and outrageous behaviour through the 1930s and 40s. The remark, "A day away from Talullah is like a month in the country," underlying the poem, was made, I believe, by one of her agents. Likewise, Carmen Miranda’s flamboyant "fruit salad" hats of the same period came to symbolize her on-screen persona (though she was never the tornado Talullah was). Steve Lawrence and Edie Gormay were a real-life married couple of singers popular in the '50s and '60s -- their duets were typically frenetic and extremely loud. I used to wonder what breakfast at their house would be like (which explains the reference in line 7: a
private joke).

So, this appears to be "another of those poems", like "List", in which three examples are given before some kind of general conclusion is drawn from these. But here the conclusion consists of three comparisons between the "wild" and the everyday: a roller-coaster vs. a car, a gaudy garment vs. more understated, functional wear, and (incomplete) a once-a-month experience, which "works better for us/ with its attendant rush of rockets", vs. ? -- here its "everyday" counterpart is left unstated. It's obvious that "once in a moon" is anything but "everyday", but now, unlike the other two situations, the "wild" "works better for us" than something more commonplace. The speaker seems to be suggesting that excitement needs to be an integral part of this once-a-month experience, whatever it may be.

The poem concludes with a reference to "the country (at the top)", i.e., the opening "month in the country" remark. In this parenthesis, the visual and aural components of the poem overlap: an audience listening to the poem would have, with "(at the top)", to visualise the poem as a printed object. The speaker compares the experience of being "a day away" as more like being in "a kind restful jail" (i.e., non-threatening seclusion) "for thirty days at a time" (recalling the "once in a moon" reference), lying on a bottom bunk, staring "up through/ the pregnant sag in the mattress roof" -- aware of a meaningful shape and weight on the bed above him. "Through" suggests both a non-focussed gaze, and, at the same time, an imaginative focus
through the "roof" and onto the cause and nature of the "sag".

The main contrast in the poem, then, is between the notion of "a day" and "a month" (or "a moon", which I take as being equivalent, except that "moon" also correlates with "rockets" as something one sees in the sky). At the beginning, a "day away/from her" is given as equivalent to a "month in the country". In contrast, towards the end of the poem the speaker reveals that he prefers "once in a moon" to anything else -- but then goes on to say that the "month in the country" of the opening "to me" would be like being locked up in a quiet, peaceful cell for thirty days with someone else (who remains out of sight, out of reach, but always overhead, in a separate bed), with "no chance of early parole".

The poem's two-line stanzas closely parallel its syntactic and logical organisation, and there are frequent examples of sound-patterning. From this point of view, most of it is quite specific and easily paraphrasable. In contrast, the conclusion, with its irregular rhythms and lack of aural patterns, is extremely "open", giving the reader plenty of room for imaginative interpretation.

TENT

A fairly straightforward poem, one of the "travel" motif numbers relating to the cross-continental trip spoken of in other poems, either with or without "Native" overtones. The opening stanzas convey, in the past tense, the direction of past travel from east to west ("close to home", "on the prairies," "above
gray Pacific breakers" -- though note that in North America "gray" is generally more associated with the Atlantic than the Pacific, so there is a confusion of conventional images here) though the action of the poem is located in a still-continuing present. The "amazing" thing about the tent is not how far it, and "we", have travelled, but how its cloth walls "demark the fabric of our life" -- as the strong emotions existing between "us", the "ancient prides[,] resurface". The excitement of untrammeled forays into the daytime world, as in "Exercise, New Year's", is again conveyed by a direct reference to the same line of Hopkins's "Windhover" -- "off, off/ forth on swing", only this time it's "through forest".

This "wild and free" exploration of the limitless, natural world contrasts with the description of the tented enclosure at night: some of the "cubes" of space within its limits are empty, others contain "only the top of your head" or "an elbow", while one in particular is "packed tight// with everything that grows/ between us, including the point [see "Pine" for more a more suggestive use of "point"]// where we come together...". The dreams of the two sleepers are full of negative emotions: "treachery, escape, shame/ defilement, death," but "defiantly [in defiance of all these negatives, in defiance of conventional social mores -- these are just two of the possibilities here],/ just before we wake up, pleasure." So that although these emotions are intense (and the pun "in tents" remains always a possibility), the poem is not at all specific as to the outcome of the dreamers' explorations.

248
In contrast to all the dramatic activity centred on the tent, "the dog" takes this nomadic existence as normal, as if static, "awaiting [figuratively!] the morning milk and mail," while the speaker, while not "dismissing [underestimating? deprecating?] some of the rankest/ moments" within the tent's "phantasmical [an original creation; a figurative, metaphorical step beyond "phantasmal"; cf. "basaltic" in "Layout" and "Quarry"] walls," declines to discuss them "for fear of offending libraries" (i.e., conventional mores). The final impression is an appeal to the most primitive senses, "taste" and "smell", though the smoke which stimulates these senses is described only qualified as being "thick" i.e., the metaphor is visual and/or tactile. (The only sense omitted here, hearing, is of course the basis of the poem itself.)

The "tent" has already appeared, in "Hostel, Backpacker". There it is mentioned only briefly, at the conclusion of the poem: "curled up, resting inert [not unlike the dreaming pair of this poem] // limply over the radiator [regaining warmth]/ reusable [regaining utility] recharging [regaining power] expanding". These two aspects of the tent, the active, enclosing, three-dimensional aspect, as presented in this poem, and the passive, "deflated", two-dimensional aspect presented in the other, are in balance.

TIBIA

The word "tibia" may mean either the shin-bone, or a type of flute or flute-like organ-stop. The etymological link is via the
use of a shin-bone as a flute, so the poem takes as departure the
tradition among some nations of fashioning flutes from the shin-
bones of the departed — the dead thus continuing to play a part
in the recreative rituals of the living.

Here, "the bone flute/ is fashioned from the still-warm
shin/ of a defunct warrior uncle." (Cf. the flute at the end of
"Native Dreams", "made from the shin of an uncle/ who died of the
plague aged fifty-six"). "Defunct" was chosen carefully (one
being aware of the danger of its recalling John Cleese's comic
"dead parrot" sketch), not only because of its strong sound-link
with "uncle", but because its French cognate, "défunt", recalls
Ravel's "Pavane pour une infante défunte", with the emotions of
stateliness and homage that this particular music evokes so
powerfully.

The vocabulary and inverted syntax of the opening lines
suggest nineteenth-century "poetic" diction: "Atop the dusty
upright [piano]/ gathering time...// shines the bone flute", but
the syntax and content rapidly become both more contemporary and
more prosaic, concerned with practical matters: "None of us can
play it/ the holes are spaced so wide// you have to have a mighty
[finger] span," &c. "Only Mr Henry/ down the road" played it
once. At the time of writing the poem, I had no idea where the
name "Mr Henry" had come from; now, months later, I can see a
link between "Henry" and "Mr Bones", perennial characters in John
Berryman's Dream Songs. In this poem, however, the link is
between "Mr Henry" (the surname of Berryman's former, the honor-
ific of his latter) and the "bone flute", itself a "character",

250
the living aspect of the dead warrior-uncle.

As in so many other poems in the collection, a kind of omni-sensory metaphorical approach is used. Here, the music of the flute creates a "row of sparkling notes/ turning & turning in the air", the repetition "turning & turning" suggesting the repetitive regularity of musical metre and rhythm. The image represents something akin to dust-motes, as explicitly stated in the first line and metaphorically suggested by "gathering time" in the second. The "time" that is "gathered" is gradually more clearly apprehended as the metre of the music played by the flute. This music has a "husky voice": it is primarily aural in appeal, and its "phrygian mode" (a musician's term referring to the natural diatonic scale of E to E') seems also to convey a message, "urging us through/ unbearable perils ahead".

At this point, "we" in the poem are compared to "Tamino & Pamina", central characters in Mozart's opera The Magic Flute, recalling the opera's theme of progression towards "the knowledge of absolute truth". In both this poem and the opera, this knowledge is "revealed by the ghost of the flute". In the Mozart work, the "ghost" may be ascribed to the underlying numen of the music; in the poem, it seems to be more connected with the power and presence of the "defunct warrior uncle" -- not only a warrior but also a blood-relative. Both of these latter identities remain present, metaphorically linked, through the "voice" of the flute.

The last three stanzas of the poem then consider the effect of the music on the two listeners. This is cast as a series of
paradoxes, answering their "riddle with a question." Although they "heard the husky voice", they now "heard nothing." Nevertheless, "it seemed the silence could sing." How did they know this? The answer, "That's what people told us later," is not a full explanation. The ending is, to a degree, enigmatic.

The "diamonds still spinning/ in the air" not only directly suggest "the row of sparkling notes" earlier, but may be taken as an emblematic nod in the direction of the collection's title, Quarry (and the poem of the same name), here specifically in the sense of diamond-shaped pieces of glass.

Flutes are mentioned in at least two of my earlier poems. There is a brief reference to "music for flute, harp,/ in purest pre-classical modes" in "The Fountain" (1964), and a much more extended treatment in "Blake's Flute" from Will's Dream (1975), where the flute seems to shrink, first to the size of a piccolo, then to the size of a charm: "Blake wears/ the twinkling silver on his neck./ And the music goes round & round." (Both poems are included in Appendix A.)

TOCCATA ASSIDUA

Really a musician's poem, this "entertainment" is full of "in" jokes. For example, the theoretically possible but practically non-existent key of "B# major" would actually, when played, turn out to be identical to C major, the simplest key, with no "accidentals" (sharps or flats). In B# major everything would be sharpened. Similarly, "Bbb" (B double-flat) minor, where every single note would be governed by complicated accidentals, would
be played on the same piano keys as A minor, the simplest minor. I hope even the non-musical reader can get some of the rest of the humour, particularly the impossible physical demands the piece makes of the player in return for cheap and tawdry effects. Here I was thinking of much of the more demanding salon music of the nineteenth century, not excluding some works of Liszt, where technical virtuosity quite overshadows musicality. The "composers" mentioned are fictitious: the names are meant to convey the memory of some of the renowned virtuoso-composers of yesteryear, whose work is now all but forgotten. The concluding, utterly visual, image will, I hope, redeem the poem for anyone who is not deeply into music.

TRIPLES

When I was working on the text of How Poetry Works, well over ten years ago, I wanted an example of terza rima -- which uses an interlaced rhyme scheme (aba bcb cdc, &c). To demonstrate this (as frequently elsewhere in the book), I created the first nine lines of this number, simply as a sample of the form. From time to time, after the book was published, I found myself wondering where the "story" set up by these lines might have led had I continued with it.

On the return leg of the trans-North American trip that is the background of other poems in this collection, crossing the uneventful Canadian prairies in a Greyhound bus, I took a bit of paper, recalled the opening lines without difficulty, and pushed the story on. "Triples" is the result. The reader will easily
have spotted that the final stanza links back to the opening, its middle line being a repetition of the first line of the exercise.

VIEWING AN ANTHEM BY WILLIAM MATHIAS

The reader should note the title specifies "viewing", not "listening to". The anthem that is the subject of this poem came into my hands in my capacity as an organist and choir director.

The tone of the poem, in contrast with its subject, is quite irreverent (though should not be taken as anything other than a kind of affectionate chaffing), opening with the trenchant Australianism, "carked it" (i.e., became a carcass, died). The reader will undoubtedly know of the unfortunate state of the marriage of "HRH The Prince of Wales// and Lady Diana Spencer" (the names being thus presented on the cover of the anthem); at least, the speaker's ironic tone seems to assume this: "Can you believe Di connected// as the choristers intoned.../'Bless us and show us the light'?" (The words are from the anthem.)

The introduction is followed by a certain amount of technical material, the sort of thing that would interest a church musician (cf. "Toccata Assidua", above): "split sections" (i.e., the two higher sections of the choir -- treble and alto -- each splitting into two independent lines), "vast tessituriæ" ("tessitura" refers to the range, from high to low, of a single part; in this particular anthem, the tessituriæ are well over an octave, which is fairly demanding for the average amateur choir), &c. The details of the anthem's "Amen" specifically recall my earlier poem of that title, already mentioned (under "Prayer"), which
appears in Appendix A.

The poem segues from the details of the "Amen" to the echo that is still " resounding/ round the Whispering Gallery [of St Paul's Cathedral]" by the time the composer, "glistening with competence", is "halfway back to Abergavenny" on the train. Mathias really was Welsh, as have been so many other notable British musicians and poets, but all the rest of these details are pure fabrication. (I have no idea whether Mathias ever saw Abergavenny.)

When the sound "finally dies", it leaves behind an echo, which also "finally dies". (See also "Standard Time/ Doppelganger" for another treatment of the "echo" theme.) There is a phonic link here, of course, with "Di", but, beyond that, and apart from the composer's own death, there remains the suggestion that as soon as the anthem dies, something also dies between the Royal couple. This is harped upon by the obtuse speaker, in the harping tones of a Anglo-Welsh "chapel" preacher: "Do you imagine Prince Charles even noticed a note?" His dreadful "Mathias is decomposing" (this joke, applied of course to a defunct composer, is usually ascribed to Sir Thomas Beecham) has its equivalent in the world of the still-living: "Charles & Di have split up".

The poem ends with the down-to-earth observation that there is not much demand for composers of wedding anthems any more (the implicit suggestion being that society's expectations of both marriage and religion may have changed), comparing the trade to roof-thatching, "where maybe a few can make a bundle". (The connection between "thatching" and "bundle" may be too obvious.)
The bald tone of the concluding line is particularly dismissive: "otherwise no one cares". It is also, in my opinion, a pretty fair view of the present state of church music and musicians.

VIRGINIA (Take Two)

Over thirty years ago, I wrote a poem called "Virginia", which appeared in Just Passing Through (it also appears in Appendix A), an impressionistic tribute to Virginia Woolf, whose life and dramatic death impressed me then perhaps even more than her writings. In that poem, "Virginia" is a "small girl" tied to a tree, surrounded by a ring of jeering boys who are whipping her with switches and worse for not giving up her "vision". The poem's ending, "under livid sky-flares she is drowned", recalling the wartime bombs, rockets, and flares, which the author had found so depressing, and the perversion of the "normal" world that war had brought.

Many of these themes survive in this "Take Two", though it opens with a much more "realistic" picture of the author, and its tone is much more autobiographical -- "I" really is me, and I really do have a letter from Leonard Woolf in which he thanks me for my draft screenplay for To the Lighthouse (written while I was at Oxford), but feels it does not work. (He was probably right.) I also attended lectures by Lord David Cecil, and subsequently met others who had been part of the "Bloomsbury Group", while Graves in a letter to me writes, "I did know V.W. herself -- she was my publisher." (See Appendix B, letter VII). Her
nephew Quentin Bell had written an appreciation of her (to him, she was a "jolly aunt"), while her husband had seen her in her worst moments of manic-depressive "madness" (with, as she said, "birds talking Greek"). Her death in the shallow, "innocuous rivulet", the River Ouse by her home near Lewes, East Sussex, was achieved "with rocks in [her] pockets".

However, the speaker in this poem points out, although it is "hard to believe it was possible/ to achieve death" (note the irony of death as an "achievement", a goal, a proud laurel won) in such a low-key, quasi-rural environment, "many more things come into it". Here, the poem returns to elements of 1941 England: "wartime shortages, whiffling bombs" (the word "whiffling", Echoing German, recreating the sound of rocket bombs passing overhead on their way to London), and "gramophones with failing springs" (the running-down wind-up gramophone image is from Between the Acts, Woolf's last, not very good, novel, written very shortly before her death). The "gaggle of looney suitors/ of every possible gender" is a reference to the general bisexual bent of the Bloomsberries, particularly to Lytton Strachey, who seriously proposed marriage to her at least once. It may also recall the sexual abuse she suffered as a girl at the hands of her "loony" cousin, Gerald Duckworth.

We move from these very particular, biographically-based, images to ones that are much more part of the general, collective experience of the War -- "the lack of hot water/ smelly smalls [I had to point out to a Canadian reader that "small" was British slang for women's underwear, so this might be recorded here],

257
daffy hats [worn by all, as may be seen in wartime photographs; but particularly descriptive of photographs of the author herself]// that made even the butcher's boy/.../sneer at her." Here I had in mind Leonard Woolf's observation, made somewhere in his memoirs, that strangers frequently stared at his wife and even mocked her, though others saw her as amazingly beautiful. (This beauty is especially evident in photographs of her as a young woman.)

The title's "(Take Two)" is a recording or film-making term -- thus, it may be taken as indicating a second attempt, following the first poem of the same title, as well as a private joke: the poem may be viewed as part of the Virginia Woolf "movie" I never got to make. In contrast to the first "Virginia", this poem begins with a first-person reference to the speaker, delaying mention of the poem's subject until the end of the second line: "When I first woke up to her/ there were still people alive who'd known her," then moving to fairly objective biographical detail. In the earlier poem's second stanza, "the quick ring of boys/ circles and throws old taunts"; here, the "sneer" of the "butcher's boy" (lowest representative of the despised tradesman class) is not mentioned until the end. The main focus of the earlier poem is the author's uncompromising artistic integrity: "refusing to open her hands// to let her prize fly back to the dark". This poem has no such clear point to make, and is more in the tone of a reminiscence. In fact, the only link between the two, other than the writer's sympathy for and interest in the author, is the correlation between the "livid-sky flares" of the
From a technical point of view, the poem opens prosaically, with no hint of regular rhythms until the third stanza:

**Even her** **husband** **wrote** me a **letter**
**I imagined I** **still** have it **somewhere** (*)
**I wanted to make** **to** the **lighthouse**
**Into** a **movie** he **threw** it **out**

Thereafter, however, the language becomes noticeably more "poetic", with frequent and obvious sound patterning and a regular four-beat metre (with frequent silent beats):

**In** such an **innocuous** rivulet (*)
**But** many more **things** come **into** it (*)...

**Most of** **all** the **lack** of hot **water**
**Smelly** **smells** **daffy** **hats**...

**Knickles** **bloody** **suet** **smeared**
**Sneer** at **her** for **her** **airs** (*)
**The wild** **distracted** **stare** (*)

I suppose there are still "people alive who'd known" Virginia Woolf, though they would have to have been fairly young at the time of her death, over half a century ago.

**Waiting**

Another "punctuationless", fragmentary poem; like "Frag I" and "Frag II", this begins with present participles: "sitting.../ thinking", though these turn out to modify the main subject and verbs of the sentence, "I find I have on my knee..." Still further delayed is the list of objects following these verbs, "the phone book open to Aylesford", &c. The stanzas of the poem themselves become a graphic rendition of the "sandwich" of open books described. Underlying the picture of the narrator with
these books on his knee is a kind of conflicting or at least ambiguous emotional state: he is "sitting... waiting... thinking you might show up" (all of which suggests the possibility of tension or even irritation) but the next words, "(relaxed, uncomplaining)" seem to belie this. On the other hand, the dictionary is "open to 'obloquy'" (double meaning here: the book is open, and the dictionary offers the possibility of obloquy, denigration of "you", perhaps).

The pile of books recalls many of the concerns of earlier poems in the collection: "the phone book" (see "Cordless", for example, as well as "Looking Back"), "smoothest hottest skin" ("Dawn", "Getting Off"), "Mi'Kmaw History" (the various workings of the Native theme: "Itinerary", "Native Dreams", &c.), and the "dictionary" ("Anomie", where the "dictionary meaning" of a word is explored metaphorically"). The concluding "power and might/ of the Roman alphabet" suggests the strength of the written word, poetry above all because, unlike the others, it is, in the end, spoken.

Once again, the poem relies for effect on the contrast between proper nouns -- here, mainly book titles or headings, listed in the poem's middle stanzas -- and the generalized nouns of the opening and closing. ("Roman", in the last line, is the single exception to this.)

YULE

Apart from the general theme indicated by the title itself, these are four very different pieces. The first, "Chimneys &
Smoke" is set in the present, with a fragmentary opening: it would be easy (for the speaker) to think of "many/ meretricious [i.e., cheap, pretentious, "significant"] examples" of chimneys & smoke. This is followed by four such examples, all well-known (though the Kingsley novel may not be as well known now as it was when I was young), followed by the superstitious saying, "Smoke goes up the chimney," pronounced after an oncoming stranger has walked between a strolling couple, and accompanied by a linking of little fingers. The contrast between this communal superstition and the situation of the speaker "standing alone" is telling. The rest of the poem is a descriptive setting, not only of the speaker's own chimney and smoke, but of the time of year (the shortest morning of the year; i.e. 21 December, the winter solstice). To some degree, this may be taken as a prelude to the other sections of this poem.

Sound-patterning is quite noticeable in the descriptive section of the poem, especially the /s/ and /t/ sounds of "straight south// out over the steaming seawater/ where the saltstream is transformed", &c.

The second section, "Log", is a vastly different scene, one of many centuries, perhaps a millennium, past. The "storks" and "log" refer to the ancient Roman legend: the frogs had asked Zeus for a god and he had given them a log; finding this less than inspirational they petitioned him for something more spirited, whereupon he gave them a stork that immediately began to eat them. In this "telling", the storks have gone, and are replaced
with a log, a "moss-bearded totem". Here there is an echo of the conclusion of James K. Baxter's "Election 1960" (which appears in How Poetry Works, p. 250):

And Log is Log, an old time-serving post
Hacked from a totara when the land was young.

In this case, the "people" that find the log and the instruction book take them (we don't know whether this is out of stupidity or deliberate bloody-mindedness) as fuel for the Yuletide hearth. As they burn, there is general rejoicing. The speaker suspects "there may be/ something to pay for all this joy" once the log is consumed, "but for now the feast is all their care". Their children have never known anything like this before, this feasting, this abandonment to pleasure. "Now they can see clearly how little/ their fathers & mothers have ever understood". Yet even they, perhaps do not realize the ultimate truth: "None will escape this magic, these songs", not even they. This may be taken as equivalent to the "dance of life" we are all fated to perform until death. (I am also aware of an echo of the medieval "Dancers of Kolbeck" tale, in which the dancers profaning a churchyard, having been cursed by the priest, are condemned to go on dancing forever.)

The title of the third section, "Midnight", a much more intimate, personal piece, not only recalls the opening of Thomas Hardy's poem, "The Oxen": "Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock", (it appears in How Poetry Works, pp. 232-3), but there is also a direct quotation from Hardy's poem in the fifth stanza.
Just as "The Oxen" is about ancient Christmas folk-superstitions fondly observed and still remembered, "Midnight" is about the childhood beliefs associated with the same festival. It is notable that in this poem there are no humans at all, only a single reference to "the deer", and only a few imagined animate details: the hoofs of the deer, "the steel sleigh-runners," "the huge sacks bulging". Correspondingly, the actions of the central imaginary presence are only infinitives: "to toss down" the wine, to "rise", to "be everywhere else in the world at once".

As in the Hardy poem, the point of view of the speaker is clearly an adult one, though the remembered concerns and puzzle-ments of the child are expressed as still-present: "It's hard to figure/ why two glasses are needed...." and "be everywhere else in the world at once".

The subject of this poem in some ways also recalls an earlier poem of mine, "A Kind of Blindness" (1970) (see Appendix A), a recollection of childhood, which is set early on Christmas morning and ends with the lines

But nobody stirred. The snow went on falling.
I stayed there, hungry and waiting for morning.

The fourth and final section of the poem, "The Return of the Sun" recalls the origins of the Yule feast as a means of encouraging the sun to return to the land. Although it seems to be set in the same faraway past as the second section, "our own children... bring us back", not only to "what this [festival] always was", but back to the minutiae of Yuletide celebrations today,
with references to such late-twentieth-century phenomena as "harping of carols & hymns [actually, commercial pop songs on Muzak systems, in supermarkets, departments stores, shopping malls, and other public places]/ of snowmen that walk & talk [i.e., "Frosty the Snowman]/ deer that fly with noses that glow [i.e., "Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer"]/ of sleighbells ["Jingle Bells", "White Christmas"], of love in the snow ["Let it Snow", "Winter Wonderland", &c.]". There is an obvious discrepancy between the actual nature of these commercial songs and the speaker's categorization of them as "carols & hymns" -- yet the suggestion is there, that these are our Yuletide "carols & hymns" now.

This poem proceeds from the fact that Christmas has been almost completely secularized now; Canadian (and most English-speaking) children all know the twentieth-century secular songs such as "Frosty" and "Rudolph" (both still well under copyright protection, and earning fabulous royalties), but surprisingly few (at least in Canada) know "Away in a Manger" or "The First Nowell". One has become used to the ritual hand-wringings of the churches over what a pity this is, and how we should strive to reinstall the "true meaning" of Christmas -- but, after all, Yuletide, which preceded it, was entirely a secular feast -- or if it had anything to do with religion, that religion was assuredly not Christianity. The Church, having taken hold of a popular pagan feast for so long now finds it has lost its might -- as symbolized by the "water, mouldy loaves, and rancid fish" -- a sorry substitute for the powerful Biblical wine, loaves, and
fishes.

In some ways, this section of the poem resurrects the "Na-
tive" theme of the collection, inasmuch as these people have been
instructed by "the tonsured strangers" (missionary monks, of an
alien culture) to change their views of what had long been tradi-
tional, and accept this religious hegemony. The "non-English"
responses, "Who God. How Sun," parody a typical "whiteman's"
view of Native speech and supposedly slow-witted reaction: "This
difficult." The fact that the missionaries are presumably not
talking about "the Sun of God" at all, although they sound as
though they are, is an obvious added irony.

The poem concludes with an eight-line "hymn" of two-beat
metre (i.e., half-lines) with rhyme scheme abacdbdc, in celebra-
tion of the awaited "return of the [as in traditional Inuit
mythology, female] Sun to her throne".

Zazen

The word "zazen" refers to a kind of Zen spiritual exercise.
Here, I was thinking more of something like the "compositio loci"
spiritual exercise of Loyola: vivid recreation of a place, a
scene, as stimulus for some kind of spiritual enlightenment.

The subject of this poem is really the nature of poetry.
The exhortation not to write poetry for money was one I first
heard from Robert Graves (who might well be seen as one of the
identities of the "zazen master" of the poem); in this case I
have taken the proverbial expression "not for love nor money" and
inverted it. The examples that follow are from poems written
much earlier in my career. "I think to sing songs/ and I see you-
enchanted", from "Anticipation", written in 1963, "coming out of
a decades-long dream", from "Jacksonville Beach", written in
1982 (both appear in Appendix A). The line "love that cannot be"
is from another poem in this collection, "Cannot Be", while the
poem as a whole recalls, also from this collection, "Power", in
which the strength of incantation is examined.

I suppose the best way to paraphrase the opening line would
be: "Do not use your talent for worldly ends", love or money
being the most obvious of these ends. The second stanza is a wry
look at a misguided attempt to win love through "songs". The
third stanza, meanwhile, begins an exploration into the subject
of poetry as self-delusion, where "reality" turns out to be a
dream, and where the supposedly "real" one returns to when the
dream ends turns out to be yet another dream, the onion, as
usual, having an apparently infinite number of skins.

In this case, the dream-within-a-dream really did occur, not
long before I wrote the poem (autumn 1994). In it, I was hiding,
in a game of hide-and seek, under the thick branches of a cedar
tree. I was trying to remain motionless, but the branches of the
tree kept moving (I was vexed because I was sure it would give me
away), with more and more strength, even verging on violence,
till I woke to find this movement was being caused by someone
lying on my bed beside me. It was a young woman, very small,
quite dark. I had never met her. I asked her what her name was;
she replied, in Spanish-accented English, "That is for you to
find out." "Entonces ¿podemos hablar en español?" I asked,
pleased to be able to talk to her in her language. "No," she said, still in her accented English, "it's not that easy. " "What is your name?" I asked. No answer. "Then," I said, "I will call you Angeles." Still no reaction. At this point, I felt as though I wanted her to be close to me, but I also felt unclean, and got up to wash myself first. Essentially, that ended the dream.

The words from the Daniel Johnston song given as an epigraph were playing on a bedside radio just as I woke from this dream, around 4 a.m. In my mind, at that time, they seemed significant, and to have something to do with the dream, so I decided to include them with the poem without knowing why.

The poem ends with a reference to a "real" person (really? or is this still the angel of the dream?) with "wild hair & gapped teeth". (In fact, I did have the memory of a real person here, though the reader cannot possibly know this from what is given in the poem.) It ends with an expression of hope of "waking up to a life" with that person as a result of singing "such a song" -- a reference back to the song of "love that cannot be," evidently.

I would characterise this ending of this poem as optimistic, but in a limited, realistic way. It recalls the conclusion of an earlier composition, the title poem in Letters Home (1990): "...yet still able to hear/ as they go, this song/ become tomorrow's music". (See Appendix A.) The speaker in this poem, quite sensibly, ascribes great power to the magic of incantation (i.e., "song", including both words and music), but it is still primari-
ly a pleasure rather than a means to an end.

From a more personal and immediate point of view, the writing of the collection itself began as a means to an end (a degree in creative writing), but the importance of this end has long since been subsumed by the "joy of the hunt", the prowl after "quarry" itself. So although the speaker in this poem may be deluding himself as to the goal of this "magic", the magic itself and its redeeming power may be seen as none the less significant for all that.

This is the last time the downbeat-column layout is used; with the extra guidance this provides, and under the assumption that the reader by now has become accustomed to my prosody, I have felt quite free by now to use extremely irregular rhythms, including many quadruplet rhythms, in mainly two- and three-beat lines (though the first and last stanzas contain obvious exceptions):

i THINK to sing SONGS
and i SEE you enCHANTed
how LONG ago i WROTE that
and how ILL-adVISed it WAS
i see NOW iMAGining mySELF
coming OUT of a DECades-long DREAM

The poem also has evident links to "Dream" and "Native Dreams". In all three poems, the details of the dreams are given ikonic (i.e., spiritually generic, non-specific as to period or society) status. The contrast here comes in the word "coffee", which, in recalling the recently-popular catch-phrase, "Wake up and smell the coffee!" and other similar associations, grounds it firmly and specifically in a modern Anglo-American context. This

268
then gives reality and specificity to the images of "wild hair and gapped teeth" that follow. The poem ends firmly grounded in the immediate geographical and personal present.

ZYGOTE

Bookends come in pairs, and this poem is first and foremost the other half of the "frame" set up by the first poem, "Aardvark"; its acrostic is a mirror of the first. And just as that poem is addressed from "Poem to Poet" (from creative inspiration to creator, as it were), so this one, from "Poet to Poem", is its reflection.

In the first three lines, an envoi set at the beginning (the poem being in inverted form, after all), the speaker, the "poet", speaks of finishing work (possibly on completing the present collection, though this is not stated). His quotation of a couple of lines from the conclusion of Rimbaud's Illuminations, together with the two words from the opening line of Hopkins's sonnet, "No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief", are a kind of acknowledgement of at least two of his spiritual mentors. But the scene threatens to change: "Yet now, it seems" leads us directly into the unsettled, disorganized present depicted in the rest of the poem.

The two ten-line stanzas that form the main body of the work are in basically "big" (in the Hopkinsian sense; rhythmically highly irregular) five-stress lines that explore the nature of the relationship between the "poem", the addressee, "you", and the "poet", the speaker, "I". In stanza two, the speaker berates
his (silent) partner for apparently wishing to end the collabora-
tio, "to be off with someone else", in language suggesting that
of a jilted lover. He accuses his partner of being proud, will-
ful, skittish, loose, outlandish, vain, and destructive. But at
the same time, he remembers, apparently with some fondness, the
day the love-affair began, and reminds his partner of the things
they "worked so to create". The stanza ends with what appears to
plea to "come round, pick up your hand again" -- superficially a
reference to a card game, metaphorically a suggestion that this
"game" works with two players.

Another contrastive "Yet", this time at the end of the
second stanza leads us directly to the speaker’s admission in the
final stanza that he too "can’t stand to hang on", that he needs
some kind of sensory charge, something new, "something hefty to
hurl/ or to hear, to fear or to feed on" (the last three of these
verbs form a *cynghanedd sain*, and are thus both a final nod in
the direction of my own Welsh blood and a recollection of how the
process of writing this collection began) while the "chestnut’s
flambeaux" is my one overt homage to Housman ("The chestnut casts
his flambeaux", *Collected Poems* (1939), pp. 76-7), whose influ-
ence I have not sufficiently acknowledged elsewhere.) A kind of
mental and spiritual weariness, perhaps akin to the anomie de-
picted in the poem of that title, and not unexpected at the end
of a long creative endeavour, has overtaken the poet: "Nowhere a
sign of anything even slightly out of tune/ Or even askew" -- a
metaphorical way of saying that the "divine discontent" underly-
ing so much of the genesis of all art finally now appears to be
Yet this is immediately followed, in the same line, by an observation that perhaps there is something unusual happening after all — "soft, in the cedars:/ Movement", recalling related images in "Looking Back", "Zazen" and other poems of the collection. The reader is still no clearer as to what this movement may be, but it immediately wins the full attention not only of the speaker but of his partner: "Don't say you don't see it!" Yes, they are still ready to be intrigued by "the shards of/Events" — reading eternal meaning into everyday fragments of life. This suggests the two "Frag" poems, the "tesserae" of the cathedral/quarry poems, as well as the "glass pieces" meaning of "quarry"; the word's other two meanings also occur in the poem: "on the prowl" (for prey), and "flying stone/Icons & totems", recalling the whirling cloud of stone and the "inukshuk" of the poem "Quarry" itself.

The concluding statement has two levels of meaning: speaking to each other, as a sparring couple that have agreed on some kind of modus vivendi; and, as in a true partnership, speaking together to the reader. As long as the partnership survives, the partners will remain "awake & kicking" — lively, alert, and vigorous.

Although the order of poems in this collection, it will be remembered, is alphabetically by title (that is, in more or less random order), the title of this poem was obviously chosen so that it would come last, just as "Aardvark" put the other "book-end" at the beginning. By pure lucky coincidence, however, the
dictionary definition of "zygote: a cell formed by the union of a male and a female germ cell", makes it an apt metaphor for the situation explored in the poem. Living poetry, like a living, growing body, requires both inspiration and work, the first coming from without, the second from within. Both partners are essential to its genesis, in the same way that poet and reader work together to bring the living poem into being.
APPENDIX A: EARLIER POEMS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Dawn</td>
<td>completed 1958</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Father</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The White Devil</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Study</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipation</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fountain</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Welsh Grandmother in Pine Hill Cemetery</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now I Shall Reveal Everything</td>
<td></td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Kind of Blindness</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genres</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dark Town Poker Club</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amen</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake’s Flute</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacksonville Beach</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poème sur Blanc Sablon</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters Home</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LAKE DAWN

It is dawn and I am there
With you at the lake of woods
I remember how it is now
Dully gleaming with its beauty veiled
By sweeping coldsweet mist
Clammy on the rock lined fringe
Your eyes... .

Hard black merciless dream
Floating shivering
Pebbles at my knees and elbows
Plunging to the deepest dark
Suspended in silence and stark rushes
Your eyes... .

Jet of the vaporous pool
Curbelling plash of fish distantly
Arched back from the shimmering surface
Like so much quicksilver lashed
By the tiny droplets
Your eyes... .

The dream is mine, not yours.

In a whooping wild blizzard
the year I was twelve
I packed off to the bush
with the great dreamer, Ken.
We severed a number of things that winter,
cut them together in a straightforward way:

firewood of frozen sap-lacings that fought the cross-cut;
buckets' bluecrusted rims in the morning;
a bulletproof cabin lock designed
after a Brinks Bros early model;
powder shaken from doorjambs,
bolt-rust down to our chokeboxes;
crumbling mantles, flywings broken;
Stove, manly fellow, who shed his door in disgust;
a stubborn thumb that coughed up blood and never
really healed;
studded snowcrust, broken with skipoles and ankles,
plates of it sliding away.

In the night, after midnight, the lake ice snapped,
growled at the screaming cold.
The stove went out. Wind at the log chinks.

Quick

over the snowdunes
ball yourself into winter nights
over trees, lakes, lights
there sits someone's mother, bored
sipping sherry
plucking eyebrows
sitting up with a snapped emery board.

I cut them with him in a straightforward way
that winter; the time my old man ran away.
The older boy turned and said to his brother: "Winter is the White Devil come to get you!"
They were cutting across the frozen lake and cloud had overcome a thin moon. He knew for a fact that his brother was crying, afraid of the cliffs, the ghost-birches, the cold, the danger of hoping to skip across water, the heaving lake ice on which they now walked. Somewhere, now hidden by lips of sparse snow whipped out by the wind on this flatness, the ice had opened up under a three-point buck, then sealed down in silence the deer's lonely thrashings. The younger child prodded. They were well off the lake. "Wait -- angelwings! I want to make angelwings," he pleaded, flopped backwards into a bank, fanned intent-stiffened arms about his small shoulders, feathered up sparkling clouds of dry snow. Back to his brother he scrambled. They looked at his splendid angelwings. The cold moon shone on these two with their once sacred symbol, admiring... A nervous gust, darkness, snow started to fall, and I, the White Devil, grinned in their eyes.

TIME STUDY

Run it through backwards, so I can dissect it. A tired gardener is possessed, pulls grafts off his trees with care, leaves furl stringily back into buds, catkins and blossoms jerk back into twigs -- only blank ash-ribs and branches remaining. But he, a spring younger, has hope in his eye.

Now, run the next one through the wrong way as well. The artist, resting content beside his great painting, is suddenly struck, peels off oily wedges of colour, the brush draws them up, spews them out on the pallet, they are sucked back up pure by the swelling tubes. Bleak canvas remains, but he feasts on a promise.

Now let's do the same with our last little scene. The anger I speak stops, flies back in my gullet, tears hang, crawl fantastically back up your cheeks, are lost in your eyes where an old spark rekindles, you whirl and go, wild as when I first saw you. . . . Do you think we could try it again from the start?

Just Passing Through, p. 17.
ANTICIPATION

The thought act I take
as the act accomplished.

The first leaf to fall
and I shiver with cold.

I think to sing songs
and I see you enchanted.

The early farewell
touches tears for the ending,

and now-wished-for death
makes me kiss the cold stone.

Just Passing Through, p. 9.
VIRGINIA

The small girl is tied to the tree,
dangerous face and hair
too old for the pipe-limbed body,
lashed with barbed ropes and thongs
while the quick ring of boys
circles and throws old taunts.

Tears are dry on her cheek,
crystals crowding the eyes,
brightness in the strength of her hands,
white silly willow-torn hands;
wands slice and fall on her neck
and the thin lines of blood.

Crash! falls the sun; the boys run.
She outstares the moon with her sadness,
refusing to open those hands

to let her prize fly back to the dark,
until with a moan the rain comes:
under livid sky-flares she is drowned.

Just Passing Through, p. 15.
THE FOUNTAIN

We take him out to the Gianicolo, Central Park, the Retiro, Russell Square --
the green hearts of twenty-odd cities --
and he gripes his heart has stopped.
Is this a man? his room
located somewhere towards the east
no more than a cube, one window
admits a select patch of the sky.
Even the sexless gray of it
is filtered through anodised grids
that let out music for flute, harp,
in purest pre-classical modes.
The walls are white, his few books
are rolls of Victorian birds,
plants that bloom no longer,
people not met again.

But in this park is a single fountain
which lights up his eyes, a stark jet
springing up proudly as high as the trees
and spattering down on a squat round stone.
The birds hustle down, around,
lift shy wings to catch the drops --
but the sterility, lack of design!
The old man's eyes have pupils like cats',
slitting in cores of autumn light.
Tonight will he still the music?
will the fountain play in a dream?

*Just Passing Through*, p. 20
Nain turns black with vitriol, sweeps her tiny space up and down, end to end.

"The chaos, the disgrace of it all!" she mutters, the old face hard with scent, every pore glazed, gagged with bound-up tears and sweat.

What a way to pack you up, I agree! No fuss: DISTAWA YN YR ARGLWYDD half-hidden by a crust of Canadian levelling unpatriotic snow.

Though no one visits Nain the brassware's still on show, cleaned weekly just the same.

Overhead a tower erected by the Lions' Club draws couples by the hour to stare beyond the stones to the empty lake, the cow-shaped mountain.

The unexpected ache is what surprises Nain -- especially when you think who's closest to her now: the long-awaited link reforged in great reunion with Husband, Harold, Taid!

What they never told you, Nain, was just before he died he got off with the butcher's wife, kept it back somehow; town took counsel, held its tongue.
Why do I tell you now?

God, I love you, Nain, more than any other (easier to dote on bones than lie all day with Mother).

*Just Passing Through*, pp. 4-5.
NOW I SHALL REVEAL EVERYTHING

Now he will reveal everything:

he is exactly six foot six
yellow hair drawls
ponders a lot on the
depths of the world
is five foot eight blue-eyed
hot & athletic has
left his wife one can
read this in later works
diminutive uses an
unfortunate lisp which
explains this obsession
with sibilants which usually
he cannot stand
pronounced limp
dislocated patella
from streetfighting
his sinewy songs
reflect this black
nevertheless
celebrate soft love
as the dark eyes
are sometimes clouded
in a way that is right
for six foot one
who has seen so much
his subject range
all-embracing all
first-hand experience
in nineteen short years
of spoonfed existence
sweet family man
first decadent star
to drive motorised
wheelchair play dulcimer
accompaniment to pieces
not at all lyrical
more like statements
of a wheeling world
he builds up
and sings
being exactly
six foot six
yellow hair

Now he will reveal everything:

*Single Eye*, pp. 36-37.
A KIND OF BLINDNESS

That Christmas Eve the snow started. Now at five in the morning the street lamp lit a white cone of spruce and fir. I was nine. The house cracked in the cold, furnace grumbling under the floor.

Behind me on the coffeetable were the empty glasses -- Santa's midnight feast: always two Tio Pepes with cheese. My brother never woke up like this! Gran had made me an addict to sugar butties in the dark.

All the gifts were heavily wrapped. Mother had studied the knack of making the most: soap and socks cloaked like rayguns or telegraph sets until the Morning. My father ignored it, once accidentally one day early released a sick pup from the cellar.

I pictured the thin clouds of breath in their room at the end of the hall. The white outside began to clot with not a space left in the air for more flakes to fall. In a moment all could seize up, lock us all snug in a duff: blind. All sound stopped.

The parcels that year under the tree seemed to shrink in the gray. Maybe Gran had stuck them for luck with one of those lethal hatpins.

For any more light to have dawned then one of them would have had to get up robed in a toga, lay hand on my shoulder, and solemnly state: "My Son, It's All Over."
But nobody stirred. The snow went on falling.
I stayed there, hungry and waiting for morning.

addez les accents vous-même

Ici nous sommes très French-orientes. Dans la bedroom il y a une lampe tres cunning faite d'une empty bouteille -- Champagne Lanson Pere et Fils, Reims (France) de Black Label -- sur my piano la usual musique: Valses Nobles et Sentimentales, Le Tombeau de Couperin (publies par Durand at vast expense), Debussy, Poulenc, Messiaen, la flute methode de Taffanel, in the bath Eau Sauvage, Tabac, dans la cuisine the demi-lune pour chopper herbs, Mouli Parmint pour faire la meme chose, knives de Sabatier, et our fantastic cafe au lait which reminds us so much of the times sous les ponts de Paris we used to walk sur l'autre cote du jour. We even dream en francais; en effet might even dare to speak it were it not for your grosse ineptitude in remembering ce qui est feminin, what male.

THE DARK TOWN POKER CLUB

When he took off
my father left
wild blue label
Phil Harris record
with his All-Stars
the fastest chat
in snappy Quebec

Bill Jackson was a pore ol' dub
who joined the Dark Town Poker Club

When I played it
the first few times
nothing happened
then one Friday
Bill Jackson and
the Club moved in
now all winter
I shove supper
round the plate
while the sharks
flick out cards

and he curst the day he told them he would join

The kitchen light
burns all night
over the scene
my brother says
Bony-Knees
has a cut-throat
under the baize
sad and shy
Lantern-Jaw
can't close one eye

his money used to go like it had wings
if he held queens someone had kings
and each night he could contribute all his coin
My mother resents it
won't speak of it
spends her days
emptying ashtrays
nights huddled up
in the bleak bed
loathing the clank
of dead beercans
into the sink
They hardly speak
but every so often
Mr Jackson
leans to me:

Son

if you'll break the seal
on that new deck of Bicycles
we can go on from there

It's taken this long
to realise they're
as much of a fixture
as the dining chair
with arms in which
only the one
ture king can sit.

Not Bill Jackson.

Not even his son.

When you come to the end of a perfect hymn, you long to conclude with a good body blow which is why someone invented Amen, the plagal cadence that plagues your soul. See the choir rising to it: petty castrati dropping a tear, Baltic altos singing it boiled tenors & basses calling ships back . . . . But it really takes a person like a mayor or an alderman mothball robes chains of office to add some meat make something of it squeeze it out till lungs cry Uncle So be it Ainsi soit il then you know they’ll digest the Sunday roast all the better for their efforts. I knew a man organ blower when the Queen came to visit the congregation so filled with zeal the first syllable went on eight minutes "men" for twelve! When it finished they found this fellow mangled between the Voix Sirene and Diapason.
"Hip hip hooray!"
cried the Queen
thus declaring
half-holiday and
knighting the man
(posthumously) who'd
pumped us through
that epic close.
But I regret
to have to impart
a little bad news
for you to consider
as you rise to sing
"O God, Our Help":
hidden away
in the terrific
Pseudepigrapha
are these words
not widely known:
"Jehovah detests
the long Amen
and rains hellfire
everlasting
on all who take
over five seconds" --
that even includes
Adelaide A.
Procter and Sullivan*
who're frying in Hell
for their indulgence.
Meanwhile, in future
you might consider
damping your ardour to ppp:
When you get to the end
just think to yourself
a brief "We'll see . . . ."
(And of course we know we'll surely see.)

*The creators of the Victorian song "The Lost Chord". The chord itself is described as being "like the sound of a great Amen".

BLAKE’S FLUTE

Against the advice of his tyrannical teacher long as a bagpipe with beanstalk gut Blake left his flute on the windowledge instead of putting it away -- mainly because the magpies liked to dance before it. What teacher hadn’t told him was silver sublimes: thus flute grew perceptibly smaller & smaller; fingers had to be squinched up more & more, and tunes that Blake had once used at anti-abortion marches became ethereal. Halvesize, when it got there, was OK, as Blake smuggled it in as a piccolo -- but after that? Tsk. There lies the case, big enough for an elephant gun, Blake wears the twinkling silver on his neck. And the music goes round and round.

Coming out of a decade-long dream
I barely remember
how I went into it,

Jacksonville beach
Goodman & Hammer
December mist

under arrest five minutes
after I arrived --
a body found on the beach --

thence progressing to love,
a move into someone else's head
till spring floods us out years later.

I cut my losses,
marry, have kids,
run my own one-man fan club . . . .

○

From the other side of the door
come rattles & raps:
"Come on, Dad, time's up!"

I pull myself back into being
the last mean-eyed
grey-parsed grizzly

left to take
another bite of
Annapolis Royal

Letters Home, p. 69
POEME SUR BLANC SABLON

Blanc, c'est bon.
Bon, c'est blonde.
Blonde, c'est belle.
Blanc sablon.

Un phoque nous arrive, ma chérie

Letters Home, p. 62
LETTERS HOME

Into the leathery jaws of Katmandu
into the brazen maws of Timbuctoo
into a thousand anonymous slots

flutter the white rectangles
each with identical message, each stamped
with the faraway gaze of a ruler

The effect is intense, an instant
crystallization, each razoring away
towards the poles, round the dizzying tropics

veering into temperate cities
leaves from a Laurentian forest
feathering finally down to land

on vicarage teaparty parquetry
into tubercular garrets
onto a president’s toes

I open, you open
we all of us open with wild surmise
the testament of the new

symbols to spell the millennium
words to fix the flux of the century
the doing of the assumed undoable

The sun, unnoticed, has set
and evening continues to hum
with crickets and telephone bells

In the dark the air feels live
with the crackle of suddenly altered plans
the nervous thrill of escape
Old plans are packed into trunks
as all the sailors of time prepare
immaculate diaries for the journey

forgetting the actual words
the seals, the stamps, the marks on paper
crumbling in misty rooms

yet still able to hear
as they go this song
become tomorrow's music.

Letters Home, pp. 85-86.
APPENDIX B: LETTERS FROM ROBERT GRAVES

The following letters are all that survive of my correspondence with Robert Graves. Originals are in the Archives of the Australian National Library, Canberra.

I

An answer to a letter accompanying some of my first poems written at Oxford at the beginning of my final year there.

St. John’s College
Oxford
6 Nov [1961]

Dear Philip Roberts

Thanks for the poems. They are so personal that you don’t feel always obliged to explain the references -- as in a letter to a friend you assume that he knows exactly what it’s all about. They are in part real and mean a lot to you and the reader who picks up their private letters feels their reality. But the question arises whether, although I can guess at the setting and your private code, a poem should be published in which the sense is not explicit for all readers of the same intelligence (say) as yourself.* I like the central part of My Father very much.

Ever,

Robert Graves

*The "hope neither for him" [from a since discarded poem] is the most puzzling: the last person mentioned is the preacher: who is unidentified unless perhaps as the one who read his burial service.
St. John’s College
Oxford
Nov 8 [1961]

Dear Philip Roberts:

So sorry we missed. Last night we got punch-drunk with lute music played by Julian Bream in our house in London and arrived very late this morning. *White Devil* is good.

Please try again at my rooms -- forgive me!

Ever,
Robert Graves

Dear Philip Roberts:

Make it Tuesday please -- I’ll be in London all Monday.

Ever,
Robert Graves

The next letters were written from Graves’s home after his return from the first year of his Oxford Professorship,
Dear Philip:

Sorry I don’t like the poems much, the metre gallops away with the sense mercilessly. But then I expect an impossibly high standard from you.

--Busy on Hebrew Myths and my Latin Oration for the Encaenia on June 29. And too much correspondence always.

--Some poems, but I don’t dare send copies lest you might feel impelled to like them, in perfect retaliatory gentlemanliness of heart.

Look forward to seeing you.

Yours ever,

Robert

Did I number and autograph Poems 1959? I don’t think so. Maybe it was "The More Deserving Cases" just published -- a selection of revised old poems.

The following letter began with a reference to my query as to whether the press Graves had used for the Seizin Press was still around, possibly for sale. At this time, I was preparing for final examinations at Oxford, and casting around for something to do afterwards.

Canelluñ
Deya
Mallorca
Spain

May 20 1962

Dear Philip:

The Press was sold some years ago because it got in the way, and anyhow I could get my poems published by publishers by then. Sorry. It is in some beastly convent, now, and of course I was swindled; I always am.

I haven’t the least idea how I would proceed in England now: I suppose, read the advertisements in Exchange and Mart or some trade paper.

--Thanks for poems: you’re en bonne voie.

--Have just passed proofs of New Poems 1962: they’re as nearly good as I can write. I wonder when another like that will
happens to: me: or; if. Usually it’s every seven or ten years: which would: make: me: about 74 - 77, a bit. late. By then you may be in full production: the "Age of Roberts".

Deya is going to be dreadfully full this summer, I fear. All the nooks and crannies I control are already taken. But there are always sturdy campers around.

Ever,

Robert

VI

The following letter must date from February - April 1963, shortly after my arrival in Madrid to teach English for a year. I had evidently asked Graves what he thought of the idea of the Greek poet George Seferis (whom I much admired) as a possible Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

Canelluña
Deya
Mallorca
Spain

[no date, 1963]

Dear Philip:

I had a letter of yours to answer but mislaid it; glad to hear again. Yes: teaching is abominably paid in Spain. About acceptance of poems: it doesn’t really matter: once I didn’t send anything to any journal for about ten years. I don’t think any agent would handle only poems; the 10% doesn’t cover postage, unless one has a NAME already (it doesn’t matter what sort of a name). Only prose interests... George Seferis is all right [twice-underlined]. I met him once. But his English is elementary and he has a weak heart; neither of which would be a recommendation. Besides he hasn’t a Master’s degree.

--I like The Wolves: though I don’t know the reference [the poem appears in Just Passing Through, p. 13; ironically, the "reference" is to Graves himself, though I never told him this], it makes sense.

--One Morning at Chess [an early poem; since discarded] the same as above; my only trouble is your laying on of crude colour.* Colours should I think always be read indirectly, and the ‘purple fish’ is unfortunate because it means the animal that possesses Tyrian purple: which lives in a pretty long-stemmed shell and is dark-red. And colour can best be described readily by hinting at laurel, emerald, spring grass, sage; or lobster, sea anemone, coins, garnet, sand, []* indistinguishable], blood, raspberries, etc.

I find that poems get no easier: have just written one in

301
nineteen; no, twenty drafts. The test is after breakfast the next morning. The number of poems written shouldn't matter; in fact, I'm embarrassed now by writing so much instead of the normal four or five a year, and yet know that they are as good as any I have published so can't throw them out. Am preparing my 1963 lectures now; and find that a sort of Grand Testament of my experiences in poems is a useful line. All about fire in the stomach & wings at shoulders and lead at feet. I think it's far worse when one is young; but it never stops.

The Minister of Information, Naga, called here last week & invited me to lecture at the Ateneo. I suppose I ought to, but I have hateful memories of Madrid and don't want to return there except to have them removed by the same hand as created them; and that may never be.

Anyhow, good luck & hope we meet soon!

Yours ever,

Robert

Glad you're learning guitar. All our children play.

VII

The reference in the next letter is to my poem "Virginia" (Just Passing Through (1969), p. 15; see Appendix A: Early Poems)

Canelluñ
Deya
Mallorca
Spain

June 8 1963

Dear Philip:

Yes we'll be here still in September, and back again early in December.

Is that a reference to "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?" I haven't seen the show, but I did know V.W. herself -- she was my publisher. It seems to be an expressionist poem & I can't follow its symbolism -- even old ferret-eyed me. But it has something; like Orpheus V [one of a series of Spanish-guitar-influenced poems that appeared in Single Eye (1971)]. "Dame Kindness" ... [a citation from another discarded poem] one should never say in a poem that one is sick of so-ë-so, but always make the reader sick by a statement of the ambiente.

By the way, in "en ninguna manera", surely [probably refers to some grammatically butchered Spanish quotation]? No: I haven't been to the Ateneo, only to M.I.T. Boston and various other insts in the States.

Yours ever,
Robert

IX

Written not long after my return to Madrid from a ten-day stay with Graves and family in Canelluñ.

Deyá Oct 1 1963

Dear Philip:

Thanks for your letter. We do hope all goes well with you. There turned out to be far more happening here than I'd expected, things I had to attend to: as you saw.

Yes, Sonja [Grey] is a wonderful girl. No Muse, neither is Cindy [rest of name forgotten]. Which means no cruelty or betrayal, but simple goodness in Sonja; complex goodness in Cindy. After all there's about 15 years difference in age.

--Cyril [Connolly] behaved pretty well... We had our lunch at Can Horqué on Sunday with Gina Lollobrdignida & her entourage. She's a good woman but caught by the hair in this publicity machine which she really hates. Cinema cameras were busy with us. Cindy used a Brownie & may get the best results.

The sea is wonderful.

I struggled with the Civil Governor and he will grant the Indigo [jazz club in Palma, where the husbands of one of Graves's daughters played; Graves was a shareholder] the necessary extension to 3 a.m. He's a bit scared of my influence on the matter of Electricity with the Minister of Turismo, who forced him to use the Civil Guard on the intransigent Countess at Valldemossa.

--Oxford next week. We all send love.

Yours, ever

Robert

X

Written shortly after Graves's return for his second year of the professorship; I was still in Madrid, contemplating a return to England at the end of the year.

St John's College
Oxford
[no date, 1963]

Dear Philip:

Thanks for the poems. They have power but it seems to get dissipated in violent unbeing through some lack of direction in you. The guitar ["His Guitar", in Single Eye, p.43] is the one nearest to what you are after, I think; because there it is with
you as a companion and fellow sufferer. I hope you re-integrate.

Sonja's address is: 74 Fernshaw Road, London S.W.10. She's as dear a person as ever but not really enjoying being an air hostess.

We go back in the 2nd week of December.

Yours ever,

Robert

IX

By the time of this letter I had left Spain and taken up a position with an international news agency, Reuters, in London.

Deyá

Ap 18 1964

Dear Philip

Glad you have a job with Reuter's. One of the top men is Patrick Crosse, my son-in-law (my daughter died a month ago) who is a marvellous man.

--Reuters is a wonderful organization; 1000 times better than BBC. But one can't be lazy in it!

--I don't know anything about publishing poems; it's all done for me. Enchufes [Sp. = bribes] are no use; unless one is a [word indistinguishable] which you're not.

--Terribly busy.

Yours ever,

Robert

XII

Deyá

Sept 17 1964

Dear Philip:

The report was incorrect -- a simple twist of a knee ligament -- but today I'm in hospital having a cyst removed from my elbow and full of injections. I will rise to fight again.

No: it was a horrible summer and that I wrote a good many poems which stand up, but which I haven't yet had the heart to send round to the journals, makes it no better.

I'm glad you're really with Reuter's. I also have written a not exactly a pop song but a way-out jazz ballad called Mend Them Fences which is liable to get around a lot where faces are dark and teeth are white and gold.

The poems are getting tighter and tighter: the unfortunately titled Scenario [retitled "Fall", in Just Passing Through, p. 11] is the one that means most to me. And Tristram [JPT, p. 1].

Should it be "snug as a wallflower", or "sung as a wallflow-
er" [since discarded]. The German Higher Criticism boggles. I think that "excremental" [in "Dream", JFT, p. 21; the poem survives but the phrase was discarded] is too strong for the poem, and the image of melted cheese or putty too weak [changed to "chewing gum or cheese"]! Anyhow. Thanks.

Yours ever,

Robert

XIII

I was able to take up the invitation of the following letter, travelling up to Oxford to do so. Ava Gardner was at the post-lecture party. This was the last time I saw Graves.

St Johns Coll
Nov 18 1964

Dear Philip

Nov 24th is the day I give my last lecture at 5 pm (with drinks afterwards in the Dolphin Lecture Room, St John’s.) All my family will be arriving, which is a bore.

On Nov 25th all is quiet -- apart from a dinner at the King Charles Club which I have promised to attend.

See you

Robert

XIV

I re-established communication with Graves after a lapse of seven years, after I had moved to Sydney, Australia. I had not realized until I received this letter that he had family connections there.

Ap 16 1971

Dear Philip:

Recovering from another surgeon’s neat 1 1/2 hours’ carving of the interior of my nose -- broken in 1913 -- badly patched in 1916. I can breathe again & I feel no pain. Since then I got bitten by a scorpion, a rare fate for a would-be poet, and am now recovering from that too.

--I like your poems very much more than G.P.’s [Geoff Page, in the QUP paperback Two Poets (1971)]. They say something and keep close to the O.E.D.’s definition of poems, which is getting more and more out of fashion. I hope that Australia makes a better fight against Americanism than the Americans.

305
Sonja Grey married a man of evil. She came to see me recently and when I heard that she was still with him, I said goodbye again. Pity. I used to be a very close friend, but her husband treated me unforgiveably, breaking four absolutely unbreakable tabus in the process. Forget it though -- none of our business -- leave him to God.

--Love to Sean and Marnie [Sean Haldane and Marnie Pomeroy, of Ladysmith Press, Canada]. They are very good for each other & that's saying a lot, because each is good in his/her own right.

Yes, sorry if I didn't acknowledge the other book. The fact is I get some 280 mss a year sent me, and no more than 1 1/2 are worth reading or reposting with comments. So although Poet's Choice was easily the best I probably forgot to say so.

My daughter Catherine, whose husband the great Cliff Dalton was murdered, wrote a book called Without Hardien[?] and published this document in Canberra (printed it herself in linotype). Certain people tried (once more) to murder her (with a bomb attached to the ignition key), and to wreck the press too, but failed. But they nearly killed my grandson Robert, broke his nose & hand in a 10 - 1 scrap. The book still may wreck the Liberal Party who have not quite yet succeeded in suppressing it. I sent 10 copies to the Senatorial Library & they all queued up to read it. Patience!

Yours ever,

Robert

This was the last letter I received from Graves. It was around this time that the British TV production of I. Claudius brought Graves a huge boost in both fame and fortune. Not long after this he underwent a minor operation and never recovered fully from the anaesthetic. He died in 1985.
Many of these terms are quite conventional, and are included simply for the convenience of the reader. On the other hand, certain of them will be unfamiliar: beat, beat position, demotion (borrowed from Derek Attridge; see Appendix D: Bibliography), downbeat, downbeat column, duplet, off-beat, phonolexis, promotion (also from Attridge), punctuationless poem, quadruplet, singlet, silent beat, and triplet are largely terms of my own devising. Cross-references to other definitions are indicated by words in bold type.

**ALLITERATION** A sound-pattern in which one or more of the opening consonant sounds of a stressed syllable are repeated in other stressed positions (i.e., coinciding with beats) in the line; for example, the phrase "a noble but nearly unknown gnome". Alliteration may also be partial: some, but not all of the opening consonant-sounds of stressed syllables are repeated; as, for example, in the phrase "cantankerous travellers". Note that conventional spelling is not necessarily a guide to alliteration (the use of International Phonemic Alphabet symbols provides a much more visible indication of this and other sound-patterns), and that by convention sound-patterns involve stressed syllables only.
ALLITERO-ASSONANCE  

See assonance.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM  
The giving of human shape or characteristics to a god, an animal, or an inanimate thing. Examples from this collection include "the dog/ ...awaiting the morning milk & mail" ("Tent", pp. 82-3, sixth- and fifth-last stanzas) and "Where was the tent?/ curled up, resting inert" ("Hostel", p. 34, second-last stanza).

ASSONANCE  

One of the sound-patterns of poetry featuring repetition of stressed vowel sound(s). The phrase "explain the way at eight" is an example of assonance. Note that, as in all sound-patterns, the sounds, not the spellings, have to be the same, and that they have to occur in stressed syllables. Other types include allitero-assonance, in which both the opening consonants and the vowels are repeated in other stressed syllables (an example is "unplayful plaintiff"), and rhyme, in which both the vowels and the closing consonants are repeated.

BEAT  
The metrically prominent sounds in a line of poetry, generally corresponding to the stressed syllables of natural speech. For example, the line "Michael, row the boat ashore" has four beats, while "'Tis very sweet to gaze upon the fair" has five. The metre specifies how many beats a typical line in a given poem has: in English poetry, four-beat lines are by far the most popular, while five-beat lines are generally reserved for
sonnets, verse-dramas, epics, and other ambitious work.

**BEAT POSITION** The place in a line of poetry where a stressed syllable is normally found. Awareness of beat position depends on the impression of a constant metre being present; this being so, the poet may occasionally, for variety, use an weak syllable in a beat position; as in "Jenny kissed me when we met", where the third beat position is occupied by the naturally unstressed "when". See also promotion.

**CONSONANCE** A sound-pattern in poetry and other speech: repetition of the final consonant sound(s) of stressed syllables. The phrase "sick of addictive muck" is an example of simple consonance. (Note that as in other sound-patterns, conventional spelling may be no indication of repetition; and that the syllables must be stressed.) Other types are partial, in which some but not all the consonants are repeated, as in "Dot has Pete's hatchet," and full, in which both the opening and the closing consonants of the stressed syllable are repeated; for example, "tap the top". We may also find consonance that is reversed, in which the opening and the closing consonants of the stressed syllable are repeated, but with their positions switched, as in "tip the pot"; or reversed with assonance, in which all the sounds of the stressed syllable are repeated, but the opening and closing consonants of the first are reversed in the second, as in "top of the pot". Generally speaking, the term "consonance" may be understood to include any or all of these effects.
CONSONANT Any speech-sound made by stopping and releasing the air stream (/p, t, k; b, d, g/), by stopping it at one point in the mouth while it escapes at another (/m, n, ŋ, l, r/), by forcing it through a loosely closed or very narrow passage (f, s, ŋ, θ, h, w, y; v, z, ð, ð/), or by a combination of these means. Consonants may be unvoiced, in which case the vocal cords are damped while the consonant sound is made (e.g., /p, t, k/) or voiced, in which they case they vibrate (e.g., /b, d, g/). Because vocal cords have to vibrate in producing the central vowel-sounds of any syllable, voiced consonants take less effort to pronounce distinctly: poetry with a preponderance of these is often described as "musical", "flowing", or "gentle". On the other hand, poetry with many unvoiced consonants is commonly described as "abrupt", "clipped", or even "harsh".

CYNGHANEDD A set of sound-patterns commonly found in Welsh poetry and occasionally imitated in English. Hopkins's phrase "fall, gall, and gash" (from "Windhover"), in which the first stressed syllable rhymes with the second and the second alliterates with the third, is an example of one of these, cynghanedd sain.

DEMOTION Once a constant metre has been set up, a poet may, for variety, "demote" use a normally-stressed (in ordinary speech) lexical word by using it in an off-beat position. For example, in the nursery-rhyme line "Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full,"
the normally-stressed lexical words "sir" (twice) and "bags" have been demoted.

**DOGGREL** Popular poetry supposedly of little or no literary worth, characterised by four-beat lines, irregular rhythmic measures, and forced rhymes. The subject of "Getting Off" (p. 31) is an example. May also be used for burlesque or comic effect.

**DOWNBEAT** The first beat of a line of poetry, normally corresponding to the first naturally-stressed syllable of its words; the ictus that sets the metre ticking. See also beat.

**DOWNBEAT COLUMN** A visual aid to the reader: the first beat (equivalent to the musician’s "downbeat") of each line in a poem, usually corresponding to the first naturally-stressed syllable of its words, is set out directly below the start of the poem’s title. This is further emphasised by the addition of a vertical "guide-line" below the title and between stanzas. For example:

```
HICKORY DICKORY DOCK

Hickory dickory dock
The mouse ran up the clock
The clock struck one, the mouse ran down
Hickory dickory dock
```

**DUPLLET** A two-syllable rhythm in which the first syllable is stressed and the second is not; for example, "empty" or "drink it". See measure and rhythm.
FALLING RHYTHM  A line of regular metre that starts with a
downbeat: "Michael, row the boat ashore" is said to be in falling
rhythm. See also rising rhythm.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE  The use of non-literal expressions to
convey certain ideas of things more vividly; includes all varie-
ties of hyperbole, litotes, metaphor, personification, and
simile.

FORM  The physical appearance of poetry on the page; also, the
structural units of the poem -- couplet, quatrain, and so forth
-- and their arrangement.

FORMAT  The physical lay-out (margin sizes, type style and size,
line arrangement, pagination) of a book of poetry or any other
printed material.

FREE VERSE  Poetry of no regular metre. Also called non-
metrical poetry. The poem "Quarry" (pp. 72-74) is largely non-
metrical.

FULL CONSONANCE  See consonance.

GRAMMATICAL WORDS  Words which have little or no independent
meaning, but are used to show how the meaningful (lexical) words
in a phrase are related. Articles ("the", "a", "an"), auxiliary
verbs ("to be" and "to have" when used in combination with other verbs), and prepositions ("to", "from", "by", &c.) are examples. On the whole, grammatical words, particularly if they are mono-syllables, are unstressed in ordinary speech, while lexical words are stressed.

HYPERBOLE A type of figurative language characterized by exaggeration or overstatement; for example, "...a clinic of skiers/chanting a paean of perfect pain" (from "Mogul", p. 52, lines 7-8).

ICONIC LANGUAGE A term describing the notion of poetic language's being its own reality, instead of merely symbolizing some other external reality. Contrasted with referential language. See also performative language.

IMAGERY Vivid description of a visible object or scene. Also used loosely to mean figurative language.

IRONY The rhetorical convention that allows for an interpretation of meaning that may be quite different from the denotative meanings of the words. For example, within the context of the poem "Disney" (p. 18), the words "We do hope you enjoyed yourself" (second-last line) are obviously ironic. Appreciation of irony depends mainly on context and tone. Another common meaning of the word refers to a development that is the opposite of what one might have expected: "a buddy/ had crashed one of the bug-
gies// all tourists are exhorted to rent/ ...for maximum fun in
the sun" ("Mogul", p. 52, lines 11-15).

ISOCHRONY A phenomenon central to all English metres and ob-
servable in most declamatory or emotive speech, in which stressed
syllables are perceived as falling at regular intervals of time,
in the same way as the tick of a clock or the beat of a metro-
nome.

LEXICAL WORDS Words which carry independent meaning: nouns,
main verbs, adjectives, adverbs, in contrast to grammatical words
which mainly state the nature of the relationship between the
lexical words in a phrase. In the line "My father told me life
was good," the words "father", "told", "life", and "good" are
lexical; the rest, grammatical. Lexical monosyllables in ordi-
nary speech are usually stressed while grammatical ones are not.

LITERAL LANGUAGE Language that means what the sum total of its
words denote, as is usually the case in everyday speech. Opposed
to figurative language, where meaning may be quite different from
what the words denote.

LITOTES A type of figurative language in which understatement
is used to heighten the reader's or listener's sense of reality.
A type of litotes occurs at the end of "Smells" (p.78), with the
words "No shit" -- a common phatic tag-phrase in informal Ameri-
can speech, but carrying significantly greater sensory force
within the context of this poem.

**MEASURE**  The basic rhythmic unit of metre, consisting of one stressed syllable and any weak syllables that follow it. See metre and rhythm.

**METAPHOR**  A type of figurative language in which one thing is described in terms of some other thing: the ski-tracks in "Exercise, New Year's Eve" (p. 23) are called "tramlines" (stanza 5, line 2), for example. The poem "Layout, Cathedral" (pp. 41-42) is wholly metaphorical, the deserted quarry being described in terms of a church building.

**METRE**  Literally "measure", this word refers to the number of beats (usually, but not always, corresponding to the natural stresses of spoken English) that occur in a typical line of a poem; it may also take into account the line's predominant rhythm, if there is one. For example, the sonnet is traditionally in five-beat metre, with nominally regular duplet rhythms:

```
shall I comPARE thee TO a SUM-mer's DAY?
```

(Note that here "I" and "to", unstressed in ordinary speech, have both been promoted to occupy beat positions). On the other hand, popular poetry is invariably in four-beat metre, no matter how irregular its rhythms:

```
ROSes are RED VIolets are BLUE
SUgar is SWEET and SO are YOU
```

**NON-METRICAL POETRY**  Poetry with no fixed metre; that is, no
predictable number of beats in a line. The same as free verse.

**OFF-BEAT** Usually, the syllables in a metrical line of poetry that in ordinary speech would be considered unstressed or weak. In the presentation of rhythmic examples throughout this treatise, the off-beats are printed in lower-case letters, while the beats are in upper-case:

CHRISTmas EVE and TWELVE of the CLOCK

The number of off-beats in a line is commonly quite variable. In this example, the first two beats are each followed by one off-beat, but the third is followed by two off-beats, and the fourth by none. See also demotion, promotion and rhythm,

**ONOMATOPOEIA** A word whose sound symbolizes its meaning; for example "hiss". The meaning of a truly onomatopoeic word should be evident to speakers of every language. True onomatopoeia is extremely rare. A more frequently useful term is phonolexis: the phenomenon of one word recalling the meanings of other words that have similar sounds in that particular language.

**OXYMORON** An apparently self-contradictory phrase: the words "-day night" at the start of line two of "Standard Time/ Doppelganger" (p. 80) form a kind of visual oxymoron. (The full phrase is "yester-/ day night".)

**PARADOX** A statement or observation which seems self-contradictory, but which usually has a logical explanation. An
example is "...the noon siren went off at eleven" ("Standard Time/ Doppelganger", p. 80, line 1).

PARTIAL CONSONANCE  See consonance.

PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE  A term applied to poetry, as well as ceremonial or ritual language, conveying the idea of language that works inherently primarily as performance, and only secondarily as a bearer of some external reality. Contrasted with referential language.

PERSONIFICATION  Often loosely used as equivalent to anthropomorphism, but more usefully limited to describing the convention of addressing an inanimate object or an abstract quality as though it were a living person. "Zygote", the final poem in this collection (p. 96), has personification as its underlying convention, being an address from the poet to the "poem".

PHONEME  The smallest meaningful unit of sound. The concept is an abstraction derived from the actual sounds ("phonetics") of language, which vary from speaker to speaker. The International Phonic Alphabet symbols used in this treatise are enclosed within slash marks: for example, /g/ for the first phoneme of "get".

PHONEMIC PATTERN  See sound-pattern.
**PHONOLEXIS** Meaning conveyed through associations with the meanings of other words (in English) with similar sounds. For example, the word "clump" may recall the meanings of "stump", "bump", "rump", and "plump". Works only in the context of a single language; often confused with onomatopoeia.

**PROMOTION** Once a constant metre has been set up, a poet may, for variety, use a grammatical monosyllable, normally unstressed, in a beat position, where a stress is expected. For example, in the nursery-rhyme line "As fast as he could caper", "he" is "promoted" to occupy the second beat position in the line.

**PROSE** Any kind of non-poetic literary work. The sound of prose is usually of less interest than in poetry, with more attention thereby being focussed on its referential content. The second-last stanza of "Flu" (p. 25) uses language which is meant to be prosaic: "keeping/ to sentences like this that don’t rhyme or scan or anything".

**PUNCTUATIONLESS POEM** A poem in which most or all conventional punctuation is omitted, particularly at line-endings, where the reader has to supply appropriate pauses as necessary. In some of the poems of the collection forming part of this project, lack of punctuation is used deliberately to create a range of overlapping meanings, as in the second-last stanza of "Bedfellows" (p. 5), where the lines

wait till you yourself come to
disarm me with two common words
have three possible interpretations, all of them making sense
within the context of the poem. (See Notes, p. 150, for further
elucidation of these.) Use of conventional punctuation would
have made this effect impossible.

QUADRUPLET A rhythm in which a stressed syllable is followed by
three weak syllables; for example, the words "elevator operator"
constitute two quadruplets. Quadruplets are common enough in
ordinary spoken English, but may be used only rarely, and usually
only singly, in poetry; otherwise, the listener tends to convert
them into duplets: ELe- VATor OPe- RATor.

REFERENTIAL LANGUAGE Used to describe everyday language, in
which words are taken as referring to some external reality.
Contrasts with the performative or iconic nature of the language
of poetry.

REVERSED CONSONANCE See consonance.

RHYME The most common sound-pattern in English poetry of the
past five hundred years, in which the vowel and closing consonant
sounds of a stressed syllable are repeated, together with any
weak syllables that may follow. Rhyme may be one-syllable (e.g.,
"house/ mouse"), two-syllable ("cooking/ looking"), or, rarely,
three-syllable ("bicycle/ icicle"). In the past, one-syllable
rhyme was called "masculine rhyme" and two-syllable rhyme "femi-
nine rhyme". Because of the difficulty of finding three-syllable
rhymes in English, their use is strictly limited to light-hearted, comical contexts such as the patter-song lyrics of W. S. Gilbert.

**RHYME-SCHEME** A conventional way of noting how rhymed line-endings are arranged in a stanza or group of lines. The letter $a$ is used for the first rhymed sounds, $b$ for the second, and so on. The letter $x$ denotes lines which do not rhyme with any others.

**RHYTHM** A general term, describing the effect of the contrast between stressed and weak syllables. In the conventions of metre, stressed syllables occupy isochronous beat-positions in the line of poetry, with weak (off-beat) syllables fitting between the regular beats of the stresses. The rhythmic unit within the line is the measure, with the most common measures in English being the duplet (one stressed and one weak syllable) and the triplet (one stressed and two weak syllables). The singlet (a single stressed syllable on its own) and the quadruplet (one stressed and three weak syllables) are occasionally used for special effect.

**RISING RHYTHM** A line of regular metre that starts with one or more syllables in off-beat positions preceding the initial down-beat: "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day" is said to be in rising rhythm. See also falling rhythm.

**SIMILE** A figure of speech, the most basic kind of metaphor, in
which an explicit comparison is made between two things, using either "like" or "as". The doggerel effect of "Getting Off" (p. 31) contains an example: "cock like brass" (line 6).

SINGLET A rhythmic measure containing one stressed syllable -- of necessity, a monosyllable -- and no weak ones. In the phrase "Dear Mary" at the beginning of a letter, the first word is a singlet. Singlets can be used only rarely, and on their own, in poetry, or the listener will begin to convert them to duplets. For example, Hopkins's phrase "big wind. My heart..." (from "Windhover") opens with a singlet; but if he had inserted another, say, "big loud wind", the ear would probably interpret it as "BIG loud WIND", not "BIG LOUD WIND". What makes singletsaurally distinctive is that because there are no weak syllables following, their sound has to be prolonged in order to fill up the isochronous space between that and the next beat. They are for this reason an extremely interesting disruptive effect.

SILENT BEAT A period of silence equal in time to one rhythmic measure, indicated by an asterisk within parentheses; equivalent to a rest in music. For example, use of the silent beat notation shows a simple nursery rhyme to be in four-beat lines, even though many of these beats are silent:

```
THREE
THREE
SEE
SEE
they ALL ran
she CUT off their
did EVER you
as THREE

BLIND
HOW they
AFTER the
SEE such a
BLIND

MICE
RUN
FARMer's
THING in your
MICE

(*)
(*)
(*)
(*)
(*)
(*)

321```
The silent stress also shows the limerick, its five lines typographically quite irregular looking, to really be (metrically speaking) in four quite conventional four-beat lines rhymed aaba (see rhyme-scheme), with line three having an internal mid-line rhyme:

```
as a BEAUTy i’m NOT a great STAR (*)(*)
there are OTHers more HANDsome by FAR (*)(*)
but my FACE i don’t MIND it/ beCAUSE i’m beHIND it
it’s the PEOple in FRONT that i JAR (*)(*)
```

SIMPLE CONSONANCE See consonance.

SOUND-PATTERN The repetition of certain of the sounds in two or more stressed syllables. This repetition must be relatively close and obvious (rhyme conventionally occurs at the end of a line, for example) if the listener is to perceive it. The principal sound-patterns in English are alliteration, assonance, and consonance. Rhyme is a combination of the latter two of these.

STANZA A group of lines forming one of the divisions of a poem. A stanzaic poem commonly uses the same stanza form throughout, repeating its rhyme-scheme, if any, and metre.

STRESS A feature of all English speech, referring to the prominence given to certain words or syllables in an utterance. The components of stress are loudness, raised pitch, and prolongation of the stressed syllable. Loudness is the chief of these; the other two may be entirely absent, and yet stress will still be perceived. In the phrase, "i’ve TOLD you Over and Over", the
upper-case letters indicate the three-stressed syllables. In poetry, natural stresses (those of ordinary speech) tend to coincide with the isochronous beats of the metrical line, occurring at more or less equal intervals of time. Stressed and weak syllables combine (one stress with zero to three weeks) to form the rhythmic measures that make up the line. The above example contains three rhythmic measures: a duplet (TOLD you), a triplet (Over and), and a concluding duplet (Over). Any weak syllables opening a line (e.g., "i’ve" in the above example) are ignored (though they may be taken as part of the measure ending the previous line). The more weak syllables there are between the isochronously stressed beats, the more rapidly these are perceived as occurring. In reality, departure from strictly equal timing of stresses is a continual part of the realization of poetry; nevertheless, our perception of English metres, culturally conditioned, is that they are isochronous.

STRONG SYLLABLE Same as a stressed syllable. See stress.

SYLLABLE The smallest combined form of English speech-sounds (phonemes), a syllable must include a central vowel or diphthong (a few words, "eh?" (Canadian /ɛi/), "I", "eye", "ah", "O", "oh", "owe", "ewe", "yew", and "you", contain no more than this), and may be preceded by as many as three and followed by as many as four consonant sounds. The word "oak" contains one syllable, "acorn" two, and so on. In polysyllabic words, one syllable receives the main stress, though other syllables may receive
secondary stress: (these may be considered either as strong or weak syllables, whichever seems to meet the demands of the poem's metre better). The rhythms of stressed and weak syllables in polysyllabic words cannot be changed: they are set by usage, and the poet must fit them to the rhythmical measures and metre of the line.

SYNTAX The conventional arrangement of words in a sentence to show their semantic relationship to each other. Disruption of the usual subject-verb-object syntax of everyday English is a common feature in poetry. The first stanza of the poem "Dream" (pp. 20-21) is a long adverbial phrase preceding the subject and verb that open the second stanza: "Will stops". This sort of syntactic inversion is often used for dramatic effect, to keep the audience in suspense as to what the identity and action of the subject will turn out to be.

TERZA RIMA A three-line stanza form in which the middle line of each stanza rhymes with the first and last lines of the stanza that follows: aba bcb cdc and so on. "Triples" (p. 86) is an example. See also rhyme-scheme.

TRIPLET A rhythmic measure consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two weak syllables: examples are "relative" and "give me it" (or "give it me", more common in some Northern British dialects).
UNVOICED CONSONANT  See consonant.

UPBEAT One more off-beat syllables preceding the opening downbeat of a line of poetry, resulting in rising rhythm.

VOICED CONSONANT  See consonant.

VOWEL  A prolongable speech-sound made by using the interior of the mouth as a resonating chamber, varying its shape according to the vowel-sound desired, and allowing the vocal cords to vibrate as air is exhaled. A rapidly sounded combination of two vowels is called a diphthong. The vowel is the heart of the syllable.

WEAK SYLLABLE  A syllable that is not stressed. For example, in "Mary", "-ry" is the weak syllable, whereas in "Marie", "Ma-" is. In a line of poetry, weak syllables typically occupy off-beat positions, though they may, on occasion, be promoted to occupy beat positions. See also beat, stress, and syllable.
APPENDIX D: SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX E: COLLECTIONS OF POETRY BY PHIL ROBERTS

Just Passing Through, Ladysmith Press, Ladysmith, Quebec, 1969,


Will's Dream, Queensland University Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1975.


Quarry, unpublished, included in present doctoral dissertation for De Montfort University, Leicester, 1995.