

THE
ANANSI
READER



FORTY YEARS *of* VERY GOOD BOOKS

Edited by LYNN COADY

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Forty Years of Very Good Books

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I used to think of it as wandering into a clearing in the forest with a bow and some arrows and sitting down and firing an arrow into the air . . . It plops in the ground. But then you fire another one and it hits a tree. You happen also by sheer coincidence to have a pot of paint and a paintbrush, so you chug over to the tree and you paint a target around where the arrow has landed. And now it's clear you've hit the bull's-eye.

I don't mean that to be derogatory, either, because to actually recognize when something has substance, when something resonates, when something has landed somewhere—it takes an eye. But the overall shape of what you're doing emerges gradually.

—Dennis Lee, in conversation, 2007

In the corner of my cramped desk, Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee lay interwoven. This is what I do when I read two books at once, two books I'm trying to hold in my head simultaneously. I use one chunk of the first book as a page marker for the place I want held in the second book, and vice-versa. So Dennis and Margaret are lying there, holding each other's place for me.

In Lee's *Nightwatch*, I am reading his long poem, *The Death of Harold Ladoo*. In Atwood's *Second Words*, I am reading her essay on the poetry and death of John Thompson. That is to say, I'm reading an essay about a poet and a poem about a writer of prose.

Both Thompson and Ladoo were electrifying writers, unnerving personalities, and early discoveries of House of Anansi Press, the Canadian publishing house founded by Lee and David Godfrey in 1967. And, as you may have intuited from the above, both writers died in a tragic and untimely manner. Harold Sonny Ladoo, author of the novels *No Pain Like this Body* and the posthumous *Yesterdays*, was murdered in 1973 during a visit home to Trinidad. Thompson, similarly, published two books of poetry with Anansi—*At the Edge of the Chopping there Are No Secrets*, and the shattering *Stilt Jack*—before his grim and mysterious death three years later.

I don't mean to kick things off on a morbid note; it's just that over the past few months I've had Anansi books embracing in the way I describe above—Thompson folded into Ladoo, Lee into Atwood and vice versa—all over my apartment. I only want to underscore the parallel way in which these four decades' worth of books and writers have begun—it seems to me—to call out to each other, and reflect one another, across eras, genres, and those infamous geographical distances that have been so celebrated, so bemoaned in our ongoing cultural conversation. Since starting this project I've been experiencing these echoes and reflections with increasing intensity. The furious heartbreak of Lynn Crosbie's 2006 long poem *Liar* folds back into 1967, to Atwood's *Circle Game*, a more circumspect, yet no less tortured autopsy of love gone wrong. Sheila Heti's gnomic snippets in *The Middle Stories* are strikingly of a piece with the playful vignettes of David Godfrey's first book, *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, or the surrealist tales of Québécois writer Jacques Ferron. Marie-Claire Blais' breathless *These Festive Nights* seems to nod in retrospect to Graeme Gibson's formally trail-blazing *Five Legs*.

Admittedly, Atwood and Lee started out peas in a pod in life as well as literature, shuffling across the dance floor at a Victoria College freshman mixer, and they continued to shuffle around together—creatively, at least—for years. To this day they refer-

ence one another in countless instances. In conversation, Atwood refers to her early, quasi-volunteer activities devoted to keeping Anansi afloat as “giving blood.” Months later, Lee reproduces the phrase exactly, and in the same context. You can almost imagine their marathon editorial sessions, blue-pencilled pages flying, Atwood intermittently exclaiming, “Dammit, I’m giving my *blood* here, Dennis!” One way or another, it seems the phrase became lodged in Lee’s consciousness—particularly in association with Anansi’s foundational years. In *The Death of Harold Ladoo*, he writes of Ladoo’s “three horrific childhoods,” observing:

it was *there* you first
gave blood, now you could use it
to write.

What metaphor could be more apt when it comes to writing and publishing? Why, after all, do we give blood? Not *bleed*, mind you. Nobody bleeds happily, or, at least, voluntarily. But to give blood is an act of faith—an act of communion. It’s not fun, exactly, but it is ultimately, I think, joyous. You don’t start up a publishing house on nothing but artistic and political ideals (and I mean *nothing*, and I mean *starry-eyed* ideals) without opening up a few veins. To quote Anansi poet Eli Mandel, *You think it’s easy?*

Let’s talk about those ideals. By “starry-eyed,” I mean the kind of nationalist cultural sentiment that today is only given voice on the obscurest of blogs or most insufferable of beer commercials. And even consigned to such an utterly non-threatening no-man’s-land, many of us will still sneer reflexively at such ideals. God knows I get as fed up with Canada as any other self-respecting Canadian—and the fact that I just stopped to titter at this oxymoron only goes to my complaint.

But it wasn’t always like this. In the late 1960s—my god. Two young literary unknowns decided to start a joint publishing ven-

ture in the basement of a rented house. OK, so this is nothing new. They were spurred on by a shared frustration with the cultural norms of their time and place, and an antipathy toward “the establishment.” Again, not exactly unheard of. But, get this: *the entire country was listening*. The entire country was on their side. Anansi was propitiously founded in Canada’s Centennial Year, the year of Expo, and the house found itself riding a wave of pro-Canadian cultural fervor.

In the pages of the national media, Dennis Lee was saying things like:

... Anansi was born out of a desperate anger about the fact that we’ve never taken this country seriously enough to fight for it.

Elsewhere, he referred to himself and Godfrey as “ubernationalists,” insisting:

Literature is a whole dimension of being a citizen of a country, which we’ve generally been deprived of. . . It’s a civilized act to wrestle with the mind and passions of our own time and place. And if we don’t do that, we’re less than civilized.

And since the creation of Anansi was news, for no reason other than—according to Atwood—“it seemed such a daring and provocative and peculiar and weird thing to do,” so, then, were its authors.

Graeme Gibson found himself at loose ends after being briefly courted by McClelland and Stewart, introduced at parties as the next big thing, and then summarily dumped. A friend put him on to Dennis Lee, even though the only fiction Anansi had published to this point was Godfrey’s, and the house was otherwise assumed to be shaping itself into a poetry press. Gibson headed to Lee’s, manuscript in hand, where he found Dennis “up a ladder,” working on his house. It was a long way from the cocktail par-

ties at M&S, but it didn't stop Gibson's novel from garnering rapturous media attention, followed by instant bestseller status. Everyone involved in the publication of *Five Legs* was gob-smacked, and a slushpile of fiction manuscripts soon materialized. Suddenly, Anansi was the first stop for would-be writers of cutting-edge Canadian fiction. An immediate result was the birth of the Spiderline series—five first novels released simultaneously with identical covers. Matt Cohen's first novel, *Korsonilloff*, was a Spiderline edition. He is said to have hated it. When all the back copies were destroyed in a fire in '71, there were playful suggestions that Cohen had struck the match. Meanwhile, the likes of Harold Ladoo, Austin Clarke, Marian Engle, and Roch Carrier were waiting in the wings.

Anansi had already experienced success as a poetry publisher with its wildly popular reprint of Atwood's *Circle Game* in '67 ("You're mad," Atwood told Lee, when he said he was planning a print run of two thousand copies; the book has not been out of print since). Then *Five Legs* came along, and Anansi was a new force to be reckoned with in fiction. The house was no stranger to non-fiction by the time Atwood and Lee hatched the idea of publishing a sort of self-help guide to Canadian literature. Anansi's of-the-people political leanings had already led them into similar DIY forays. There was Clayton Ruby and Paul Copeland's *Law Law Law*—guess what that was about?—and Mark Satin's coyly titled *Manual for Draft-Aged Immigrants to Canada*. (This title briefly attracted the attention of the FBI and RCMP, leading to a half-assed attempt at surveillance. A man from the phone company is said to have stumbled upon the wire tap, disgustingly pointing out its shoddy workmanship to the Anansi staff.) But my favourite of these early, well-intentioned tracts—at least in terms of title—would have to be *vd: The People-to-People Disease*.

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature was conceived along similar lines—"Let's do a *vd* of Canadian Literature!" piped Atwood in a meeting. They thought it would sell at best

3,000 copies. It sold ten times that amount. And suddenly, as Atwood writes in her introduction to the 2004 edition, “CanLit was everybody’s business.”

To put it another way, the shit hit the fan. Controversy! Backbiting! Warring, or at least sniping, factions! In *Canada!* About *books!* Jim Polk, editing for Anansi and married to Atwood at the time, remembers the “fierce and agonized reviews,” musing, “it seemed as if the nation at large was beginning to wake up to itself.” Now we were overtly, publicly grappling with our own image and culture—we were finally, as Lee foretold, taking the country seriously enough to fight for it—wrestling with the minds and passions of our time and place. To this day, people can’t stop bickering about *Survival*. In John Metcalf’s meticulous essay, “A Collector’s Notes on the House of Anansi,” published in 2002, he touches only briefly on “Atwood’s unfortunate *Survival*,” which “has done incalculable damage to the idea of Canadian literature.” And there he leaves it. You can almost hear the author’s molars grinding.

So, depending on where you stand, Anansi either manfully forged ahead through the post-*Survival* CanLit ruins, or rode the enthusiastic momentum it had no small hand in generating into the subsequent decade. *You think it’s easy?* It was not. Even during the heady period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, “easy” is not a word that applies to the care and maintenance of Anansi. Lee and Godfrey parted ways early on, and who can say if the end of the founding partnership was fractious? All anyone will tell me is that Godfrey’s wife Ellen went on to write a murder mystery set in a publishing house, and the killer bears an unmistakable resemblance to Lee.

Lee himself left around the time *Survival* debuted, perhaps as a means of securing his own survival, or at least that of his poetry and mental well-being. Here’s a taste of the mood he was in, from *Sibelius Park*:

shitwork in a cold basement, moody
triumphs of the mind
hassling printers hassling banks
and the grim dungeon with friends

After Lee, Anansi moved out of the cold basement and continued to be more-or-less run by committee, with Shirley Gibson—who had assisted with the promotion of her then-husband Graeme’s novel—taking over the management role from Lee. The resident saviour however, was by all accounts Ann Wall. She and her husband Byron had moved to Rochdale College in the 1960s to avoid the American draft, and there they met Lee. They invested in the floundering press when things were at their most desperate, but perhaps more importantly, they contributed basic business sense. The aptly-named Ann Wall—in her role as managing editor and then publisher—kept the roof from falling in well into the 1980s.

Now only Polk, flourishing in his new role as editor, remained of the old guard. Imagine this: Polk says that when he started at Anansi in 1972, “the early days had already crystallized into myth.” This was only five years into the venture. But, true enough, the core Anansi values had been well-established: to publish “fine, iconic books” (Lee’s words in *Sibelius Park*) of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Even its ongoing mandate to showcase the most exciting new French Canadian writers in translation had been kicked off by the publication of Roch Carrier’s *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* as early as 1970—a practice that has continued throughout the decades with authors like Jacques Ferron, Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais, and Gaétan Soucy—and thanks in no small part to the award-winning translation work of Sheila Fischman.

So began a period when today’s brightest stars were only beginning to twinkle. A poetry manuscript by a relative unknown

named Erin Moure arrived, and by 1988, her fourth Anansi publication, *Furious*, had won the Governor General's Literary Award. The prize coincided with the sale of Anansi to Jack Stoddart of Stoddart Publishing, which marked the beginning of an entirely new era. Suddenly, Anansi was part of a group of companies. Although Stoddart reportedly had the best intentions, there were some raised eyebrows amongst the old-guard idealists. When Ryerson Press was sold to Americans in 1970, this act provoked a storm of protest. Graeme Gibson climbed up onto the statue of Egerton Ryerson, wrapped it in the U.S. flag, and led the crowd in a caustic chorus of "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy." The eighties weren't like that, is my point. Most people were happy to see Anansi still kicking up dust.

Still, certain parties looked askance. "Stoddart was seen as the big bad wolf," remembers Michael Davis, who was brought in from Irwin to act as publisher. "People had a certain image of Anansi," he recalls, and in their minds, the Stoddart Publishing Group wasn't where the independent brainchild of two radical 1960s intellectuals belonged. It was a tricky situation for Davis. He had worked at Macmillan—the house that had offered to buy out Dennis Lee for a single, smart-ass dollar back when Anansi was starting up. "There was a certain amount of sneering on the part of the larger presses around that time," he admits. Now, here he was, being sneered at by the true believers of Canadian literature. But Davis was well aware of what Anansi had accomplished since the late 1960s. Dennis Lee et al had made the kind of editorial decisions that had defined and shaped the culture. "I'm a publishing apparatchik," Davis freely admits. He knew that if the house's reputation and relevance were to remain intact, he was going to need help.

To that end, Davis assembled an editorial board of academics, critics, and writers—many of whom were all three at once. There was David Arnason, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Esta Spalding, Gordon Johnston, Pamela Banting, and—for good measure—

Jim Polk. The rationale was that not only were these people in tune with what made good literature, they were also—through their work on university campuses—frequenting the places where the newest young writers and readers were most likely to be. It was a strategy that would eventually snag them the upstart likes of Ken Babstock, Lynn Crosbie, and Stephen Heighton.

The board also proved invaluable to the education of a twenty-four-year-old editorial assistant named Martha Sharpe, later to become publisher. Today, Sharpe insists she learned everything she needed to know about books and editing from sitting in on those meetings. “We had these great brains coming in once or twice a year, watching closely what was going on, [and] caring deeply.” The board had no tangible stake in the house itself—they were not shareholders or marketers or publicists; their only concern was whether or not the books under discussion were in keeping with the good name of Anansi. Counter to expectation, both Sharpe and Davis use the word “pure” when they talk about the way editorial decisions were made under Stoddart.

But let’s hear it one more time: *You think it’s easy?* Every once in a while, Jack Stoddart thought he’d found the perfect title for Anansi. For example, there was the time he signed up Slobodan Milošević’s wife. There were the threats of mass resignation from the board. And there was, finally, the bankruptcy of Stoddart Publishing and General Distribution Services.

It happened in 2002, just when things at Anansi were really starting to hum. Lisa Moore’s *Open* was a dark-horse nominee for the Giller Prize that year, and this was just one of the nominations that had begun rolling in under Sharpe, who had become publisher in 1998. Before his departure, Davis had secured rights to publish the CBC Massey Lectures, and they had become some of the house’s best sellers. And with a renewed commitment to showcasing the best new poets, Anansi’s poetry roster was every bit as robust as it had been under Lee. (In order to distinguish itself, Anansi proffered an advance of \$500—generous for poetry—to

every poet, as well as a “nice lunch” and the promise of French flaps on the books. “We just thought it was a nice thing to do,” Davis recalls. “Poets *love* French flaps.”)

In short, anyone could see that Anansi was approaching full bloom as Stoddart was being disbanded. It could not be left to wither on the vine; you’d have to be *crazy*. Philanthropist and celebrated Canadian poetry-lover Scott Griffin was not that. He bought and saved the press in the nick of time.

Fast forward five years to 2007, because here is where things really get exciting. The energy, success, and quality generated by the house these past five years is inescapably reminiscent of the headiest of Anansi’s early days. The difference is, whereas in the 1960s the very fact of a successful small press was an achievement to be lauded, the Anansi of today has evolved into another creature entirely—one distinct on the Canadian publishing landscape. Anansi can no longer be rightly called a “small” press, for one thing. It is a successful *independent* press, and the fact that the house has managed to disentangle those two categories is astounding unto itself. In 2002, even with Stoddart disintegrating all around it, Anansi was awarded Small Publisher of the Year by the Canadian Bookseller’s Association. But five years later, after an unprecedented domination of the awards lists in 2006, including two Giller nominations and six Governor General’s Literary Awards finalists, it shrugged off its small press status and walked away with Publisher of the Year (and Editor of the Year for Lynn Henry, Anansi’s publisher since Sharpe’s departure in 2005). Until now, Publisher of the Year had been a category tacitly reserved for the “big boys”—houses owned, for the most part, by foreign multinationals. Somewhere, Dave Godfrey—always the more “uber” of Anansi’s founding uber-nationalists—must have been chuckling. Maybe Egerton Ryerson smiled to himself in the great beyond.

Under Sarah MacLachlan, the house’s new president, and publisher Lynn Henry, Anansi has entered a new phase of evolu-

tion. The always-popular CBC Massey Lectures have erupted—with the publication of titles by Thomas King, Ronald Wright, and Stephen Lewis—into out-and-out blockbusters. The new generation of Anansi fiction and poetry talent—people like Babstock, Crosbie, Moore, Heti, Michael Winter, Rawi Hage, Peter Behrens, Bill Gaston, and Gil Adamson—seems every bit as era-defining as the founding crop. Moreover, in the past three years Anansi has successfully brought these very good books into the international market, selling rights around the world, and in turn brought international luminaries like A. L. Kennedy, Jim Harrison, and Simon Armitage to Canadian readers.

Now roll ahead a few months, to me in the Anansi offices, trying not to geek out completely in front of MacLachlan and Henry, who have just asked me to do this book. Here's how it felt: as if that kid you went to high school with, the one who wore Vulcan ears to school every day no matter how many times he was beaten up for it, had been contacted by William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy to curate the Gene Rodenberry Museum of All Things Trek. Am I making myself understood? I was precisely the CanLit nerd for the job, is what I'm saying. I practically used to dress up as Milton Acorn for Halloween. There was nothing else to say but thank you, which I'll say again now.

Thank you, Sarah MacLachlan, Lynn Henry, Margaret Atwood, Graeme Gibson, Dennis Lee, Jim Polk, Michael Davis, Martha Sharpe, Ken Babstock, and Laura Repas.

Thank you, readers, writers, and blood donors all.

Lynn Coady
Toronto, 2007



THE
FIRST DECADE

—
1967-1977

1 A SAMPLING OF THE POETRY

MARGARET ATWOOD

Excerpts from *Circle Game* (1967)

The City Planners

Cruising these residential Sunday streets
in dry August sunlight:
what offends us is
the sanities:
the houses in pedantic rows, the planted
sanitary trees, assert
levelness of surface like a rebuke
to the dent in our car door.
No shouting here, or
shatter of glass; nothing more abrupt
than the rational whine of a power mower
cutting a straight swath in the discouraged grass.

But though the driveways neatly
sidestep hysteria
by being even, the roofs all display
the same slant of avoidance to the hot sky,
certain things;
the smell of spilled oil a faint

sickness lingering in the garages,
a splash of paint on brick surprising as a bruise,
a plastic hose poised in a vicious
coil; even the too-fixed stare of the wide windows

give momentary access to
the landscape behind or under
the future cracks in the plaster

when the houses, capsized, will slide
obliquely into the clay seas, gradual as glaciers
that right now nobody notices.

That is where the City Planners
with the insane faces of political conspirators
are scattered over unsurveyed
territories, concealed from each other,
each in his own private blizzard;

guessing directions, they sketch
transitory lines rigid as wooden borders
on a wall in the white vanishing air

tracing the panic of suburb
order in a bland madness of snows.

A Meal

We sit at a clean table
eating thoughts from clean plates

and see, there is my heart
germfree, and transparent as glass

and there is my brain, pure
as cold water in the china
bowl of my skull

and you are talking
with words that fall spare
on the ear like the metallic clink
of knife and fork.

Safety by all means;
so we eat and drink
remotely, so we pick
the abstract bone

but something is hiding
somewhere
in the scrubbed bare
cupboard of my body
flattening itself
against a shelf
and feeding
on other people's leavings

a furtive insect, sly and primitive
the necessary cockroach
in the flesh
that nests in dust.

It will sidle out
when the lights have all gone off
in this bright room

(and you can't
crush it in the dark then
my friend or search it out
with your mind's hands that smell
of insecticide and careful soap)

In spite of our famines
it keeps itself alive

: how it gorges on a few
unintentional
spilled crumbs of love

ALLEN GINSBERG

An excerpt from *Airplane Dreams* (1968)

History of the Jewish Socialist Party in America

In a meeting hall, a small room or foyer of private house downstairs on street storefront level—we're inside—me, and my friend, a square FBI agent who is arresting us all, but wants more information so doesn't take us in but lets us continue our activity, which is all internal regulation of the party which now has very few members anyway, being, as the FBI boy knows to his chagrin, much more concerned with psychic regulation of the idealism of its members than any activity relating to the US Govt—in fact we are completely unconcerned with the US Govt. and far from spying on it we welcome spies in our midst in the hope they be converted and learn something about us—since the internal structure of the party is a mystery still unresolved even to us—a fact which embarrasses the FBI fellow further since he guesses our general crazy goodwill and devotion to some mysterious politics of complete integrity, so extreme that the policy of the party is really dedicated to discovering what the policy is and who the leaders really are—we being willing to share the info with anyone—even the US Govt—with complete faith that with such an open policy no harm can befall anyone, even jail or execution is further opportunity for study, revelation, or martyrdom to the Mystery of Idealistic Socialism and a further chapter of the Jewish S. Party's profound activity in America—no less

profound because limited to a small group which pursue the basic study, for the intensity of their dedication.

Thus we are having a meeting in the foyer—as Aunt Rose’s tho smaller 1930—& the FBI man, with tie askew & coat over arm, sweating in summer heat, pistol in one hand & other on telephone, is undecided what to do, so I advise him, after a nervous walk in the plaza, to trust us & wait awhile till something definite develops. He seems to agree, nodding his head, tho worried we’ll all escape, vanish, and he’ll lose his job & be fired by his intemperate boss a cruel Faggot named J. Edgar Hoover.

The subject of tonite’s meeting was announced by President Berg last week to be a speech—manifesto of policy—by an old & trusted member Dr. Hershman—who arrived earlier very disturbed, took over the meeting—and announced—“The Subject of my Announcement will be the Follows—please take note and understand why I am announcing it so that anybody who does not wish to be further implicated may leave the room: *Why I killed President Berg and Member Hoffman.*” This throws everybody into turmoil—there are only 5 or 6 members & all realize they will be held as accomplices—but maybe he had good reason, so why leave & betray his mad trust?—It’s an apocalyptic party full of necessary mistakes. The FBI man is thrown into a crisis of nerves—He is ready to telephone to arrest us all, but wants to hear why they killed Berg & Hoffman—But also afraid he might be implicated, since he too is (tho spy) a member of this small Socialist Party which long ago agreed to be mutually responsible & share all guilt. If the FBI man waits he might wind up in jail with all of us, if he don’t wait he’ll never fulfill his mission to find out what the Mystery of the Party is and arrest us on basic evidence of conspiracy—Arrest now for mere murder means little but regular cop crime to the FBI not a political triumph. I advise him to hold his horses and stick with us, we all want to find out.

Horowitz is in the chair, talking furiously: “Comrades, Berg was a traitor to the Party, he wanted to end the Party & had legal

power to dissolve it—I realized the danger, so did he, he invited me to address you on the subject & he also invited me to take the necessary action on the subject—an action which hadn't occurred before because a similar situation had not arisen.—

“And here is the can of Naphthaline with which I killed him—gagged him & poisoned his soda water with it, & made him drink, and his co-conspirator Hoffman—I'm going to burn the Evidence—in the Fireplace right now—”

He opens the (Ether type) Naphthaline can in the floor of fireplace & lights it—it burns & gives off dull blue flame & great fumes of wierd gas—everybody coughs—I sniff & realize you can get high on it, so I want to stick around & not call firemen or cops—

“Let it burn” we all yell—the FBI man rushes outside but I rush him back in—“Smell it & get high maybe we'll all get the Answer that way. Don't give up the Ship.”

The girls are nearly fainting, the can is burning in the fireplace, fumes dizzy us, one girl faints in chair, her Jewish girlfriend rubs her hands & fans her, the FBI man is sweating, Horowitz is sniffing furiously—the room is in turmoil—we will all be arrested for murder—“Destroy the Evidence & let's get high” shouts the killer—on this scene of evident excitement, a new chapter of the history of Jewish socialism nears its end & the Dream concludes prematurely.

JOE ROSENBLATT

An excerpt from *Winter of the Luna Moth* (1968)

Annie Mamba

or The Evolution of a PIG

Annie Mamba loveth boys & girls
effeminate males are her pidgins
deep in her heart she's a virgin.
Sweet 19. Mamba split with parentulas
exchanged 60 grand serpentarium
for shab solarium in the suburbs
there to contemplate a fallen navel.
Afterwards came the girls: quick taxi hacks:
butches the size of Soviet tankers
then weed, speed & pops of horses
with He & She, who in reality
was Ace Laius: labour columnist
for the Daily Helium . . . a real gas!
What a smashing scene
Mamba in Alice Land losing gravity
& beyond theology: CANCELLATION.
She dug to lay her analyst
“. . . after hours baby, after hours . . .”
Gentle Mamba: every cat after her asp.
She had it on for Hippies
don't mean a diaphragm,

Every hirsute was her playmate. Cheap bunny girl.
If I had a Centennial dollar for every crab she grabbed
I'd be a jumping millionaire.

Who could love Mamba?

Why that would be like falling in love with cancer
though for Mamba I have a certain fondness.

like snakes

I believe Annie evolved from something personal
an Egg.

Two suicides for Mamba, wow

Narcissus hung herself

Taurus went to Dreamland.

The bureaucracy of Love is cruel
around the pubic regions.

GEORGE BOWERING

Excerpts from *The Gangs of Cosmos* (1969)

Dobbin

—for Mike Ondaatje

We found dead animals in our sagebrush hills,
every day it seems now, deer, heads of
unimaginable elk. Or rattlesnake killed
by some kids we likely knew, upside down,
wrong coloured in the burnt couchgrass.
But my first dead horse. It was something
like mother, something gone wrong at home his
opened & scattered body was tethered,
the old shit surrounded his tufted hair
& his skin, the oil gone, just twisted
leather without eyeballs. A horse, as if
someone had lost him, obeying the rope
thru his open-air starving.
I was then, then, no longer another one
of the animals come to look, this
was no humus like the others, this
was death, not merely dead; that rope
may now hang from some rotted fence.
Words Like Our Daily Bread

Today at a place you might know about
called Saltery Bay
I found clear shallow water
unlike anything I've seen in the East
with discarded oyster shells
as a base
or floor.

& also that I'd lockt myself
out of my car.
I said God damn it
that crystal clear water I could always look into it
& those fine blue & white shells.

The gulls fly away.

Tonight I saw a baseball game
sitting in the bleachers in the night
with an old Swede
who won three golf balls
& there was a bunch of kids, moving.

Denver 6, Vancouver 4.
None of the light bulbs were out
& there were three clear home runs.

In between I was reading
Le president by Georges Simenon
when I lookt up to see some land for sale
so pretty
I wanted to buy it.

That's not quite clear.
I was moving in a car or boat
south on 101.
 The gulls fly away
when the boat hits the pilings.

Harbour Beginnings and That Other Gleam

She has it in her power
(continually or not)
to give me back my face
when she will.
But this world (I constructed it
from whole cloth)
is a world of bargain.
That is, I have my part to do,
continual tailor, to ply this needle
(yes, relentless metaphor)
or this manly implement, to seek
its well-known place. It is often in
the dark.
Then a halo of her excitement
settles around my neck, & there by her
term magic,
my face, shining. She has told me
it does. then.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE

Excerpts from *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970)

(page 15)

After shooting Gregory
this is what happened

I'd shot him well and careful
made it explode under his heart
so it wouldnt last long and
was about to walk away
when this chicken paddles out to him
and as he was falling hops on his neck
digs the beak into his throat
straightens legs and heaves
a red and blue vein out

Meanwhile he fell
and the chicken walked away

still tugging at the vein
till it was 12 yards long
as if it held that body like a kite
Gregory's last words being

get away from me yer stupid chicken

(pages 17–18)

The barn I stayed in for a week then was at the edge of a farm and had been deserted it seemed for several years, though built of stone and good wood. The cold dark grey of the place made my eyes become used to soft light and I burned out my fever there. It was twenty yards long, about ten yards wide. Above me was another similar sized room but the floors were unsafe for me to walk on. However I heard birds and the odd animal scrape their feet, the rotten wood magnifying the sound so they entered my dreams and nightmares.

But it was the colour and light of the place that made me stay there, not my fever. It became a calm week. It was the colour and the light. The colour a grey with remnants of brown—for instance those rust brown pipes and metal objects that before had held bridles or pails, that slid to machine uses; the thirty or so grey cans in one corner of the room, their ellipses, from where I sat, setting up patterns in the dark.

When I had arrived I opened two windows and a door and the sun poured blocks and angles in, lighting up the floor's skin of feathers and dust and old grain. The windows looked out onto fields and plants grew at the door, me killing them gradually with my urine. Wind came in wet and brought in birds who flew to the other end of the room to get their aim to fly out again. An old tap hung from the roof, the same colour as the walls, so once I knocked myself out on it.

For that week then I made a bed of the table there and lay out my fever, whatever it was. I began to block my mind of all thought. Just sensed the room and learnt what my body could do, what it could survive, what colours it liked best, what songs I sang best.

There were animals who did not move out and accepted me as a larger breed. I ate the old grain with them, drank from a constant puddle about twenty yards away from the barn. I saw no human and heard no human voice, learned to squat the best way when shitting, used leaves for wiping, never ate flesh or touched another animal's flesh, never entered his boundary. We were all aware and allowed each other. The fly who sat on my arm, after his inquiry, just went away, ate his disease and kept it in him. When I walked I avoided the cobwebs who had places to grow to, who had stories to finish. The flies caught in those acrobat nets were the only murder I saw.

And in the barn next to us there was another granary, separated by just a thick wood door. In it a hundred or so rats, thick rats, eating and eating the foot deep pile of grain abandoned now and fermenting so that at the end of my week, after a heavy rain storm burst the power in those seeds and brought drunkenness into the minds of those rats, they abandoned the sanity of eating the food before them and turned on each other and grotesque and awkwardly because of their size they went for each other's eyes and ribs so the yellow stomachs slid out and they came through that door and killed a chipmunk—about ten of them onto that one striped thing and the ten eating each other before they realised the chipmunk was long gone so that I, sitting on the open window with its thick sill where they couldnt reach me, filled my gun and fired again and again into their slow wheel across the room at each boommm, and reloaded and fired again and again till I went through the whole bag of bullet supplies—the noise breaking out the seal of silence in my ears, the smoke sucked out of the window as it emerged from my fist and the long twenty yard space between me and them empty but for the floating bullet lonely as an emissary across and between the wooden posts that never returned, so the rats continued to wheel

and stop in the silences and eat each other, some even the bullet. Till my hand was black and the gun was hot and no other animal of any kind remained in that room but for the boy in the blue shirt sitting there coughing at the dust, rubbing the sweat of his upper lip with his left forearm.

(page 27)

His stomach was warm
remembered this when I put my hand into
a pot of luke warm tea to wash it out
dragging out the stomach to get the bullet
he wanted to see when taking tea
with Sallie Chisum in Paris Texas

With Sallie Chisum in Paris Texas
he wanted to see when taking tea
dragging out the stomach to get the bullet
a pot of luke warm tea to wash it out
remembered this when I put my hand into
his stomach was warm

(page 57)

When Charlie Bowdre married Manuela, we carried them on our shoulders, us on horses. Took them to the Shea Hotel, 8 rooms. Jack Shea at the desk said Charlie—everythings on the house, we'll give you the

Bridal.

No no, says Charlie, dont bother, I'll hang onto her ears
until I get used to it.

HAWHAWHAW

bill bissett

Excerpts from *Nobody Owns th Earth* (1971)

Another 100 Warrants Issued

*newsflash: 7 men enterd a Vancouver graveyard
only to disappear in a flash of white light*

Whats it like o straight person
square john to be abul to shop
around say at th 3 vets or th
Army & Navy without being stoppd
harassd etc. by th Narks at every turn
yu take, hey, whats it like
to get up in th morning, gatherd,
yu nd yr friends close ones, around
th warming stove without th R.C.M.P.
crashing thru th veils within th
bardos of mistrust, Canada, etc.,
how duz it feel, yr children,
terrorized, hiding, facing jail
or what is sumtimes worse, parole,
to have a nark recognize yu so
that there is no recourse, markd
yu advocate nothing except
humanity and only th overthrow
of this state's tyranny, yu go thru

th streets on fire as an alarm
to yr friends as they get nabbd
this week of Jan 7/69 in Vancouver,
th Narks go thru th houses, ripping
apart floor boards, cupboards, children's
dolls, in a red convertible, Caesar's
computer men, bullet heads, pigs,
whats it like o yu who feel yu are
citizens of this sold-out Grandmother's
land to not have pigs vomitting at yu
all th time, to stand trial for
ovr a year, to see friends jaild
for 3 years for keeping th peace
with themselves their world etc.

No clean white snow can cure this bummer,
no apologies, no justice, feeble pretenses
can resolve th heartache, th parted
friends and lovers, all th tears thru th
falling volcanoes, nothing can be done
now by government to assuage th grief, it is
too late Mr. and Mrs. Square John,
as yu stand by, watching yr children
burn, yu blew it, yu pricks, get
it, have yu heard a child scream
as a Mountie breaks down a door, yr
wrists bleeding, handcuffs, jeers, etc.,
for perhaps one joint, 5 mos in th
can, a years probation, yu are
perhaps 20 years old, yu are now
too old, ancient, yu wanta join us
in these timeless wails yu pricks,
yu have allowd all this to take place
as yu support th war in Vietnam,
yu have watchd, glazd eyed as all

beauty, love, gets destroyed, you can
go fuck yourselves, like don't cum
near me ever until you can see
what you've done with all our love.

The Emergency Ward

So as I was regaining consciousness alone paralysed then shrink
was screaming at me that he'd never
seen such an obvious case of a
psychologically feigned manifestation of an apparently
physiological injury someone
had phoned in or something that
I was a painter so he said that
again it was obvious that I was
trying by pretending
paralysis to get out of
painting that damn it

he'd make me move again if he
had to shock me into it but
doctor he's bleeding nurse
shut up you should know
that advanced catatonia
and bleeding are not in
compatible sorry doctor
the ambulance is getting
ready so they were under
his orders he kept shouting at

me bout yu and yur
kind hel fix us alright

bunduling me off to River
view th out of city mental
hospital extremely undr
staffd for shock treatment
when as they were rollin me
onto th stretchr this
beautiful neurologist chick
staff doctor sz stop thats
an inter cerebral bleed

if i ever saw one so as
th shrink had got me
first they had to
make a deal so this

is my re entry i thot so far out
so th trip was if th neurologist
chick cud get proof of an
inter cerebral bleed then i
wud go to th neurology ward
othrwise th shrinks wud get
me with inter cerebral bleed
shock treatment sure wud kill
me alright iud go out
pretty fast i gess so befor
th operation th neurologists
came to see me askd whethr i
wantid to go ahead with th
trip to th o.r. why not i
sd what have we got to

lose maybe yr life she sd well
lets get on with it alright she sd
do yu want partial total or local
iul take total evry time i sd
playd jimi hendrix water
fall thers nothing to harm yu
at all in time to th blood gushin
out of th ventricals up there to
keep them relaxd 12 neurologists
inside my brain like fantastik
voyage woke up in th middul
of th operation gave em a poetry
reading sure was fun they
put me out again sd i mustuv
known my way round drugs
cause they sure gave me a lot
well they got proof of th inter
cerebral bleed thing rescued
me from th shrinks who

still usd to sneak up th back
stairs to get at me but th nurses
usd to kick them back down
those neurologists and th nurses
in that ward sure were good
to me usd to lift th covrs off my
head which was liquifying or sum
thing my eyeballs turning to
mush ask me if there was
very much pain strong tendr
angel eyes iud say theres

so much pain don't worry we'll
bring yu anothr shot thank yu
iud moan and now i can even
write this tho th spastik fine
print in th elbow or wherever
it is is kinda strange but ium
sure lucky and grateful
fr certain that it was an intr
cerebral bleed

DENNIS LEE

Excerpts from *Civil Elegies* (1972)

Sibelius Park

I

Walking north from his other lives in a fine rain
through the high-rise pavilion on Walmer
lost in the vague turbulence he harbours
Rochdale Anansi how many
routine wipeouts has he performed since he was born?
and mostly himself;
drifting north to the three-storey
turrets & gables, the squiggles and arches and
baleful asymmetric glare of the houses he loves
Toronto gothic
walking north in the fine rain, going home through the late afternoon
he comes to Sibelius Park.

Across that green expanse he sees
the cars parked close, every second licence yankee, he thinks of
the war and the young men dodging, his wife inside
with her counsel, her second thoughts
and the children, needing more than they can give;
and behind him, five blocks south, his other lives
in rainy limbo till tomorrow
Rochdale, yes Anansi

the fine iconic books, sheepish errata
 shitwork in a cold basement, moody
 triumphs of the mind
 hassling printers hassling banks
 and the grim dudgeon with friends—men with
 deep combative egos, ridden men, they cannot sit still, they go on
 brooding on Mao on Gandhi
 and they cannot resolve their lives but together they make up
 emblems of a unified civilization,
 the fine iconic books;
 he is rooted in books & in
 that other place, where icons come alive among the faulty
 heroes & copouts, groping for some new tension of
 mind and life, casting the type in their own
 warm flesh
 hassling builders hassling banks
 and he is constantly coming and going away, appalled by the force of
 wishful affirmations, he thinks of the war, he
 hears himself 10 years ago affirming his faith in Christ
 in the lockers, still half-clasped in pads & a furtive
 virgin still, flailing the
 lukewarm school with rumours of God, gunning for psychic opponents
 though he could not hit his father and what broke at last was the
 holiness; and he can't go back there any more
 without hearing the livelong flourish
 of Christ in his mouth, always he tasted His funny
 taste in every arraignment but it was himself he was burying.
 And the same struggle goes on and when
 he drinks too much, or cannot sleep for his body's
 jaundiced repose he can scarcely read a word he wrote,
 though the words are just but his work has
 the funny taste and his life pulls back and snickers when he begins.

And then Sibelius Park!

The grass is wet, it
gleams, across the park's wide
vista the lanes of ornamental
shrub come breathing and the sun is filling the
rinsed air till the green goes luminous and it does it
does, it comes clear.

II

Supper is over, I sit

holed up in my study. I have no
answers again and I do not trust the
simplicities, nor Sibelius Park;
I am not to be trusted with them.

But I rest in one thing. The play of

dusk and atmospheric, the beautiful rites of
synthaesthesia, are not to be believed;
but that grisly counter-presence, the warfare in the lockers, myself
against myself, the years of desperate affirmation and the dank
manholes of ego which stink when they
come free at last
—the seamy underside of every stiff
iconic self—which are hard which are welcome
are no more real than that unreal man who stood and took them in;
are no more real than the fake epiphanies,
though they ache to bring them down.

For they are all given, they are not

to be believed but constantly
they are being
given, moment by moment, the icons and what they
suppress, here and

here and though they are not real they have their own real
presence, like a mirror in the grass and in the
bodies we live in we are
acceptable.

There is nothing to be afraid of.

Third Elegy

The light rides easy on people dozing at noon in Toronto, or
here it does, in the square, with the white spray hanging
upward in plumes on the face of the pool, and the kids, and the thrum of
the traffic,
and the people come and they feel no consternation, dozing at lunch-
time; even the towers comply.
And they prevail in their placid continuance, idly unwrapping their food
day after day on the slabs by the pool, warm in the summer sun.
Day after day the light rides easy.
Nothing is important.
But once at noon I felt my body's pulse contract and
balk in the space of the square, it puckered and jammed till nothing
worked, and casting back and forth
the only resonance that held was in the Archer.
Great bronze simplicity, that muscled form
was adequate in the aimless expanse—it held, and tense and
waiting to the south I stood until the
clangor in my forearms found its outlet.
And when it came I knew that stark heraldic form is not
great art; for it is real, great art is less than its necessity.
But it held, when the monumental space of the square
went slack, it moved in sterner space.

Was shaped by earlier space and it ripples with
wrenched stress, the bronze is flexed by
blind aeonic throes
that bred and met in slow enormous impact,
and they are still at large for the force in the bronze churns
through it, and lunges beyond and also the Archer declares
that space is primal, raw, beyond control and drives toward a
living stillness, its own.

But if some man by the pool, doing his workaday
job in the city, tangled in other men's
futures with ticker-tape, hammering
type for credits or bread, or in for the day, wiped out in Long Branch
by the indelible sting of household acts of war,
or whatever; if a man strays into that
vast barbaric space it happens that he enters into
void and will go
under, or he must himself become void.

We live on occupied soil.
Across the barren Shield, immortal scrubland and our own,
where near the beginning the spasms of lava
settled to bedrock schist,
barbaric land, initial, our
own, scoured bare under
crush of the glacial recessions
and later it broke the settlers, towing them
deeper and deeper each year beneath the
gritty sprinkle of soil, till men who had worked their farms for a lifetime
could snap in a month from simple cessation of will,
though the brute surroundings went on—the flagrant changes
of maple and sumach, the water in ripples of light,
the faces of outcrop, the stillness, and up the slopes
a vast incessant green that drew the mind
beyond its tether, north, to muskeg and

stunted hackmatack, and then the whine of icy tundra north to the pole—
despotic land, inhuman yet
our *own*, where else on earth? and reaping stone
from the bush their fathers cleared, the sons gave
way and they drank all year, or went strange, or they sat and stared outside
as their cars settled back to slag and now what
races toward us on asphalt across the Shield—
by truck, by TV minds and the ore-bearing flatcars—
is torn from the land and the mute oblivion of
all those fruitless lives, it no longer
stays for us, immemorial adversary, but is shipped and
divvied abroad though wrested whole from the Shield.

Take Tom Thomson, painter; he
did his work in the Shield.

Could guide with a blindfold on. Was part of the bush. Often when night
came down in a subtle rush and the scorched scrub still
ached for miles from the fires he paddled direct through
the palpable dark, hearing only the push and
drip of the blade for hours and then very suddenly the radiance of the
renewed land broke over his canvas. So. It was his
job. But no two moments land with the same sideswipe
and Thomson, for all his savvy, is very damp and
trundled by submarine currents, pecked by the fish out
somewhere cold in the Shield and the far loons percolate
high in November and he is not painting their cry.

Small things ignite us, and the quirky particulars
flare on all sides.

A cluster of birches, in moonlight;
a jack pine, gnarled and
focusing heaven and earth—
these might fend off void.

Or under the poolside arches the sunlight, skidding on paper destroyers,

kindles a dazzle, skewing the sense. Like that. Any combination of men and time can start the momentary ignition. If only it were enough.

But it is two thousand years since Christ's carcass rose in a glory, and now the shiny ascent is not for us, Thomson is done and we cannot mangle among the bygone acts of grace. For many are called but none are chosen now, we are the evidence for downward momentum, although despite our longing still restrained within the real, as Thomson's body really did decay and vying to praise him we bicker about which grave the carcass fills.

New silences occur in the drone of the square's great spaces.

The light overbalances, shadows appear, the people walk away.

But massy and knotted and still the Archer continues its space, which violates our lives, and reminds us, and has no mercy upon us. For a people which lays its whiskey and violent machines on a land that is primal, and native, which takes that land in greedy innocence but will not live it, which is not claimed by its own and sells that land off even before it has owned it, traducing the immemorial pacts of men and earth, free and beyond them, exempt by miracle from the fate of the race—that people will botch its cities, its greatest squares will scoff at its money and stature, and prising wide a civil space to live in, by the grace of its own invention it will fill that space with the artifacts of death.

On Queen Street, therefore, in Long Branch, wherever the people have come upon it, say that the news is as bad as we thought: we have spent the bankroll; here, in this place, it is time to honour the void.

ELI MANDEL

Excerpts from *Crusoe* (1973)

A Cage of Oats

(To James Reaney and Jay Macpherson)

How many prisons do I count?
Here is the wall I first ran from
and here there is a second wall,
the wall I ran against to flee
the first, and here there is a cage.

Inside the cage there is a second cage.
Inside the second cage there is a third.

Inside the third
there is a bird.

A Quaker holds a box of oats
on which a Quaker holds a box.
A mirror mirrors oats
for oats are mirrors of their crops
which farmer-quaker-man will thresh
and eat to put the seeds inside
the Quaker man who holds a box.

There may be stars inside of stones
(or other stones): inside of stars
there may be burning seeds.
What boxed bird so great
it can eat
stone, man, star and seed?

Cassandra

This has nothing to do with brothels.

Sometimes it seems my daughter or my wife
or my neighbour's wife, bright-eyed,
imitates an image out of sleep. They walk
as if I had dwindled, looking past me
toward unreasonable parliaments
crouching beside senatorial hills.

I have been practising this poetry in secret.
Also I have made advances toward pregnant women.
But there have been no unusual shadows,
all the swimming pools remain clear of blood,
and by the gates the watcher has not raised his arms.

Songs from the Book of Samuel

i

the intellect does not age, the body dies
daily the mind declares its lies
about the soul, about the self
about the body and its ageless cries

now mind grows freer as the body dies
daily the body ages in its lies
about the mind, about the self
about the mind's dear sense of paradise

ii

I forgive the adulterer, I forgive the song
I forgive the straw man in my bed
I forgive the old man his lies about the bed
I forgive my armies for their arms
I forgive the generals for their boots
and the mayors for their homes
and the councillors
my mother
for her prophecies, my father
for his mistaken comfort in failure
my teachers for their religion
I forgive the girl's face in the flower
the instrumental poet hung on his strings
the colonies for the times they did not eat
I forgive the food of the armies
and the carpets under the general's feet
I forgive the poet for lying about god
I forgive god for tomorrow
I forgive the arisen prophet
the man who is a weapon

the weapon
death
the song
the singer dying in his song
even myself

PAULETTE JILES

An excerpt from *Waterloo Express* (1973)

Clocks

The clock's hands dislodge hours—
sticking them to the walls.

I never notice them until
strangers bang at the door,
newspapers replace themselves,
and my associates begin to fold their lives into tidy squares.

Now they are in my eyes, shifting
in batik patterns.
I see my life

through a clear pane of minutes and hours
like the faceted spectacles of flies,
those nitwits, their quick
garbagey lives.

AL PURDY

Excerpts from *Poems for All the Annettes* (1973)

At Roblin Lake

Did anyone plan this,
set up the co-ordinates
of experiment to bring about
an ecology of near and distant
batrachian nightingales?
—Each with a frog in his throat,
rehearsing the old springtime pap
about the glories of copulation.
If not I'd be obliged if
the accident would unhappen.
The pike and bass are admirably silent
about such things, and keep their
erotic moments a mensa et thoro
in cold water. After which I suppose
comes the non-judicial separation.
Which makes them somewhat misogynists?
In any case frogs are ignorant
about the delusion and snare women
represent—they brag and boast
epicene, while piscene culture doesn't.
This tangential backyard universe
I inhabit with sidereal aplomb,

tho troubled with midnight debate
by frog theologians, bogged
down in dialectics and original
sin of discursiveness
(the god of boredom at one remove,
discreetly subsidized on wooden plates)—
Next morning I make a shore-capture,
one frog like an emerald breathing,
hold the chill musical anti-body
a moment with breath held,

thinking of spores, spermatozoa, seed,
housed in this cold progenitor,
transmitting to some future species
what the wall said to Belshazzar.
And, wondering at myself, experiencing
for this bit of green costume jewellery
the beginnings of understanding,
the remoteness of alien love—

—1958

At the Quinte Hotel
(for Alan Pearson)

I am drinking
I am drinking beer with yellow flowers
in underground sunlight
and you can see that I am a sensitive man
And I notice that the bartender is a sensitive man too
so I tell him about this beer

I tell him the beer he draws
is half fart and half horse piss
and all wonderful yellow flowers
But the bartender is not quite
so sensitive as I supposed he was
the way he looks at me now
and does not appreciate my exquisite analogy
Over in one corner two guys
are quietly making love
in the brief prelude to infinity
Opposite them a peculiar fight
enables the drinkers to lay aside
their comic books and watch with interest
as I watch with interest
A wiry little man slugs another guy
then tracks him bleeding into the toilet
and slugs him to the floor again
with ugly red flowers on the tile
three minutes later he roosters over
to the table where his drunk friend sits
with another friend and slugs both
of 'em ass over electric kettle
so I have to walk around
on my way for a piss
Now I am a sensitive man
so I say to him mildly as hell
“You shouldn'ta knocked over the good beer
with them beautiful flowers in it”

So he says to me “Come on”
so I Come On
like a rabbit with weak kidneys I guess
like a yellow streak charging
on flower power I suppose

& knock the shit outa him & sit on him
(he is just a little guy)
and say reprovingly
“Violence will get you nowhere this time chum
Now you take me
I am a sensitive man
and would you believe I write poems?”
But I could see the doubt in his upside down face
in fact in all the faces
“What kinda poems?”
“Flower poems”
“So tell us a poem”
I got off the little guy but reluctantly
for he was comfortable
and told them this poem
They crowded around me with tears
in their eyes and wrung my hands feelingly
for my pockets for
it was a heart-warming moment for Literature
and moved by the demonstrable effect
of great Art and the brotherhood of people I remarked
“the poem oughta be worth some beer”
It was a mistake of terminology
for silence came
and it was brought home to me in the tavern
that poems will not really buy beer or flowers
or a goddam thing
and I was sad
for I am a sensitive man

—1964

PATRICK LANE

Excerpts from *Beware the Months of Fire* (1974)

Passing into Storm

Know him for a white man.
He walks sideways into wind
allowing the left of him

to forget what the right
knows as cold. His ears
turn into death what

his eyes can't see. All day
he walks away from the sun
passing into storm. Do not

mistake him for the howl you hear
or the track you think you
follow. Finding a white man

in snow is to look for the dead.
He has been burned by the wind.
He has left too much

flesh on winter's white metal
to leave his colour as a sign.
Cold white. Cold flesh. He leans

into wind sideways; kills without
mercy anything to the left of him
coming like madness in the snow.

Mountain Oysters

Kneeling in the sheep-shit
he picked up the biggest of the new rams,
brushed the tail aside,
slit the bag,
tucked the knackers in his mouth
and clipped the cords off clean—

the ram stiff
with a single wild scream

as the tar went on
and he spit the balls in a bowl.

That's how we used to do it
when I was a boy.
It's no more gawdam painful
than any other way
and you can't have rams fightin,
slammin it up every nanny...

and enjoyed them with him,
cutting delicately
into the deep-fried testicles.

Mountain oysters make you strong

he said
while out in the field
the rams stood holding their pain,
legs fluttering like blue hands
of old tired men.

2 DAVID GODFREY

An excerpt from the novel

Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola (1967)

Mud Lake: If Any

Death too, I think at times, is just another one of our match box toys.

I am now, as the lecturing surgeons say, preparing the electrodes for insertion. I am now, into the alien elements, inserting myself. My colleague, gentle Nye, will observe the reactions of the patient, if any. If any?

The duck boat has been swamped, almost suddenly. We are clinging to its metal sides. Cold; somewhat reassuring. Beyond us and around us, when we have recovered from the shock, from a frightened awareness of chill waters to which we submit not, there appears one of those dinky visions the times are wont to grant us. The Sporting Goods Department at Simpson's, struck by flood, floats toward shore: six wicker goose decoys, a worn pair of oars, one green Alpine tent, eight hand-carved mallards with their neck-wrapped anchors, two Arctic down sleeping bags, a box of Cheerios, my ragged lambswool vest, a soggy blue duffel bag, Nye's insulated pants and jacket of cross-hatched nylon, a spare pair of sole-up rubber boots. Lo, the affluent surface of things.

The waves are gentle. The water not too cold—for mid-September near Flin Flon. Shore less than a mile off. We can

push it in thirty minutes, *je me dis*. We bob beside the camouflage-green boat, two anchored heads, and observe one another. A perfect layout of decoys, *je me dis*, if one wanted to call down some passing, strange flock of honking department stores, a migrating flock of Sears-Roebucks, Batons, Fitchs, Saks, Morgans, Simpsons, Magnins.

Except who then would be the hunters? What high-ball could lure down such monsters? Nye and I are both submerged to our shoulders. The guns, the ammunition, the camp stove, all things of solidity, are already at the bottom of Mud Lake. Amidst this absurdity of floating paraphernalia, buoyed by their still waterproof lace of feathers, float the one single redeeming object, our afternoon's booty of mallards and coots and buffleheads.

It has been, so far, an unusual voyage but not bizarre.

Relying upon childhood memories of a far more southerly portion of Manitoba, I had blind-guided Nye, a fellow trumpet player and sojourner in Iowa, a veteran of African campaigns, on a long, long trip up beyond the 55th parallel, beyond Snow Lake, beyond the cessation of roads, to the inlet of Little Herbe Lake, to a perfect, marshy river mouth, untrampled by even one other hunter, and as fat with ducks as is a Christmas cake with sweet rinds. It was almost too good a spot, the kind one should visit once and then leave, letting its memory remain to alter and modify your impression of later places both mediocre and uncommon.

So we did only visit it once. It was no regular trip up Little Herbe, and we had progressed as much by intuition as by map-knowledge. We came back down below the 55th (and thus south of the early season), to wait for our one afternoon of regular-season hunting. Off a rock ledge, in deep, clean water we did get some pike; and we thought we might get some Canadas. At nightfall we could hear them, high, high overhead.

Down off the road from Flin Flon to the Pas, we found a suitably ugly lake, with a harsh, muddy, cat-tail shore, and spent the

morning getting our gear through the two hundred yards of shore mud and crossing the lake. Shooting opened at noon; we had a good afternoon, and set off back across the lake.

I'm not sure why the boat was so loaded. Whether we were afraid of theft or had developed a possible plan of spending the night on the far shore and then driving night and day back to Iowa. But loaded it was. I was scanning the shore with Nye's monocular, looking for a break in the shore mud, when I realized that the waves we had been moving through had slowly been attacking us, gently but progressively spilling over the bow, sloshing into the bottom of the boat beneath its mask of gear. I moved back as soon as I could get my legs untangled, but it was too late. We had made our mistake.

I must have scrambled, because the monocular never showed up, but I don't remember being frightened. Nye responded to some pre-imagined plan and freed the motor before we swamped. I stated that we were in trouble, but I was only thinking of wet-clothes trouble, not of the *aglaecean*, hungry water-monsters with which in childhood old trappers frightened me. No mile-long pike troubled me.

I watched our bobbing gear spread out and move ridiculously towards shore, and that expressed our destination. Never leave the boat. We would hang on, and kick behind its stern—our camouflaged, water-heavy, turtle board. But first we had to rock as much water out as possible, and it was on the recoil from one of these foundationless heaves, pushing against the elements that melt away, that I hit the Leacock bottom of that muddy, ugly lake. It oozed beneath me, an ooze of treacle and slushy cement. Which did frighten me. I thought of sinking-sand. And I laughed, rather loudly. Once I had my footing.

Nye turned full-face to me. And I saw, laughing, thinking really only of Lake Wissanotti, that Nye was truly frightened. The *aglaecean* were taking teeth-sharp bites at him. I remembered then, back in Iowa, his wife bending across to warn me that

Nye's response to penicillin was lost in the war, that for him pneumonia could have no sure cure. And he had his hip boots on still, ready for the shore mud, not for this quick calamity. Or say that the German mine was finally tripped beneath his ambulance still rambling across the Sahara, and, wounded and thirst-wracked, he could see the whole muddy lake as no other than a tongue-split mirage.

"Hey, hey," I said. "Bottom. It's the old muddy bottom. Get out the bread-balls and we can bob for suckers."

A mile from shore, we were only neck-deep from bottom. And he laughed too, letting go. Welcoming the mud.

We became surface-floaters again. Collected some of our decoys and protective clothing. Spread by the waves, and soggy, it had lost some of its absurdity; still we let much of it go. We turned down the chance to practice an enforced economy; we dried the gear in the sun and by a fire and slept dry.

Nye knew his Thoreau better than I. "Minks and muskrats," he mumbled. "We go from the desperate city into the desperate country and console ourselves with the bravery of minks and muskrats."

In the early morning, long before sunrise, there was a single shot.

"Poachers," said Nye, mocking my Englishness.

"Somebody who really lives here," said I. "Probably that old Indian who bummed the smokes. Potting a fat hen for Sunday dinner." Said I from my Arctic down, mocking something else, something to do with my own sense of most questionable survival. Was it not my true ancestor who had fired the single shot?

It is one of the strangenesses of youth that you can treat a specific chance of death with no more care than you'd give to your old Dinky Toy, that one-inch, green-camouflaged, British Army troop lorry.

3 MARK SATIN

An excerpt from the nonfiction book
Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada (1968)

Preface: Words from Canadians

“WE ARE HAPPY TO WELCOME YOU”

by VINCENT KELLY, L.L.B., *Barrister and Solicitor*

Even though circumstance and not choice has made Canada your haven, we are happy to welcome you. Those of us providing service to the Anti-Draft Programme assume that your opposition to the war in Vietnam stems from principle and therefore you are likely to become outstanding citizens.

Be forewarned that this opinion is not shared by Canadians generally. Our society is no less conservative, no less enthusiastic about containing Communism than yours.

If we had not burdened ourselves with participation as the Western representative on the International Control Commission (icc), we would now be undoubtedly another Uncle Tom ally in South Vietnam.

Legally, too, our societies are similar. We adhere to most of the Anglo-Saxon precepts of natural justice but have no entrenched Bill of Rights. As a result, significant differences arise in connection with right to counsel and admission of illegally obtained evidence, to cite two instances.

But if you do enter our country legally and abide here peacefully the likelihood of deportation is remote. Deportation is probable if you become involved in criminal offences involving moral turpitude.

Entry is a straight-forward administrative matter. I am confident that the average young American could fulfill our legal requirements just as thousands of young English, Italian, French, and other foreign nationals do each year.

Introduction

THIS IS YOUR HANDBOOK

Slowly at first, and now in growing numbers, from Maine to Alabama to California, from ghettos, suburbs and schools, young Americans are coming to Canada to resist the draft. There is no draft in Canada. The last time they tried it was World War Two, when tens of thousands of Canadians refused to register. Faded “Oppose Conscription” signs can still be seen along the Toronto waterfront. The mayor of Montreal was jailed for urging Canadians to resist—and was re-elected from jail. No one expects a draft again.

It’s a different country, Canada.

This is a handbook for draft resisters who have chosen to immigrate to Canada. Read it carefully, from cover to cover, and you will know how. It was written by Canada’s major anti-draft programmes and their lawyers. Part One goes through the immigration process step by step. If you are still unclear, or face special difficulties that are not covered here, make sure to write. Or come in as a visitor and get help and advice.

Immigration is not the best choice for everyone and this pamphlet does not take sides. Four other alternatives are open

to draft-age Americans: deferment, Conscientious Objector status, jail or the armed forces. The groups listed in Chapter 24 can help you choose among these alternatives or fight the Selective Service system as long as possible. Canada is not an easy way out; in many cases it means cutting yourself off from parents and friends. But there are many reasons draft resisters have chosen Canada—as many reasons as Americans. What these Americans are like is described at the end of Part Two.

Canada has not “opened its borders” to young Americans. There is no political asylum. But an American’s possible military obligations are not a factor in the decision to permit him to enter and remain. FBI agents on official business are barred from Canada. Most other Americans are welcome, unless they fall into one of the “prohibited classes” (see Chapter 16).

On April 12, 1967, General Mark Clark asked the Canadian Embassy in Washington to help return all the “Draft Dodgers.” He was told that it would not be possible. Canada’s extradition treaty with the U.S. lists the extraditable offenses one by one (see Appendix A); resisting the draft is not among them, nor is desertion. Americans can enter Canada as immigrants, visitors or students (see Chapters 2–4) at any point in their induction proceedings.

You do not leave civilization behind when you cross the border. (In fact, many Canadians would claim that you enter it.) Part Two will tell you about Canada. We have not tried to sell you on Canada—our chapter on climate is chilling—but the truth is that Canada is a nice place to be.

There is little discrimination by Canadians against draft resisters, and there is a surprising amount of sympathy. Most Americans lead the same lives in Canada they would have led in the U.S. Americans who immigrate are not just rejecting one society; they are adopting another. Is it really freer? Most draft resisters—and most Canadians—think so.

It cannot be overstressed that draft resisters will probably never be able to return to the U.S. without risking arrest. This

applies even to family emergencies. When a draft resister's father died last summer, two FBI agents showed up at the funeral.

Draft resisters have had and should continue to have only normal difficulties immigrating. Probably any young American can get in if he is really determined, though all will need adequate information and many may need personal counselling. We cannot emphasize too much that people should send us their questions or visit before they immigrate (see Chapter 25). This applies to all except those with a minimum of two years' skilled job experience and a B.A. Even these people should check with us by phone before applying at the border. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPLY AT THE BORDER BEFORE CHECKING WITH US.**

Finally, the toughest problem a draft resister faces is not how to immigrate but whether he really wants to. And only you can answer that. For yourself.

That's what Nuremberg was all about.

. . . .

FBI agents have told some parents that their sons can be returned. This is not true. Rumours have been circulated by U.S. authorities because there is no other way the government can keep young Americans from coming. One AP wire had it that 71 "fugitive warrants" had been issued for young Americans in Canada. The story implied that the warrants were valid in Canada. They were not; they cannot be. Unfortunately, some Canadian consulates are staffed partly by Americans and partly by Canadians who have been "Americanized." Draft-age Americans are often refused legitimate information and given incorrect versions of the law by these self-appointed recruitment officers. For example, some officials are telling young Americans that they can only apply through the consulates. Americans are very seldom told that they can apply at the border or from within Canada. One young New Yorker was told simply that "Canada doesn't want

draft dodgers.” It is a violation of Canadian law for an immigration or consulate official to give you false information to deter you from coming to Canada. Canadians’ anti-draft groups would appreciate receiving a notarized statement of such incidents. So would the Department of Immigration in Ottawa.

Public officials, amateur draft counsellors, lawyers who do not specialize in draft work, and, unfortunately, the “underground” press are notorious sources of misinformation. Read this handbook again and again, and contact a Canadian anti-draft programme.

From Part Two: Canada

Your son, as he was growing up, has been learning a lot of living skills—common sense, initiative and self-reliance—that you thought he was never going to acquire. When he is in situation where the chips are down he uses these skills. Many times I’ve heard a boy say, “If my mother could see me now, she wouldn’t believe it,” as he goes through all the business of getting status as an immigrant, getting a job, and accepting responsibility for himself. And, even though most of the job he must do himself, he has friends here who will help as much as they can.

It’s important that you not worry too much because right now, while he is here in Canada trying to make a new life for himself, he needs your support. Sometimes when we are worried ourselves it is hard to give the kids we love the support they need. You may think that he is wrong to be here but you can still be proud to know he has the guts to do what he thinks is right. Perhaps, the way you brought him up, he can’t bear to see dripping napalm on little Vietnamese babies.

Another thing, even if he has to stay here in Canada he isn’t going to be lost to you forever. Our countries are much more

the same than they are different. It will be very easy for you to visit here and you will be very welcome. Your son will be a respected citizen who really belongs, not a fugitive. Canada isn't a northern wilderness. The climate in Toronto is very like that of New York. But Canada is growing faster and this often increases opportunities. It might even be quite a good place for your grandchildren to grow up.

Those of us here who are interested in your sons know that our support is not the same thing as your support. So please write letters, maybe bake a few cookies or send him a warm scarf against the northern winds, and come for a nice visit after he gets settled.

“CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED FIRST TO LOVE RATHER THAN JUDGE”

*by the REV. ROY G. DE MARSH, Secretary, Board of Colleges,
United Church of Canada*

From early childhood I recall stories of my maternal forebears who renounced their New England home and at great personal sacrifice came to live in Canada. History labels them United Empire Loyalists. The name implies fidelity to higher ideals than personal or family fortune, or the unquestioned support of the colony which aspired to sovereign nationhood through revolution. Freedom of dissent, whatever the cost, is a basic ingredient of the history of both Canada and the United States. In vastly more complex and tragic circumstances today, Canada is again receiving a procession of people of a new generation who, in dissent from the Vietnam war policy of their nation, have made the often agonizing decision to leave the U.S.A., perhaps forever. In this informational guide no attempt is made to promote or discourage, to defend or attack the basis of the decision, or the ideals which are implied in making so painful a choice. The fact of that decision, and the value and autonomy of the person is accepted without question and the booklet focuses most helpfully on the consequent procedures and provisions.

As a minister of the Church in the receiving country and having often said that Christians are called first to love rather than judge those who are in need, I find here a valuable example. Hopefully I urge all Canadians to reach out in the same spirit of this booklet, with concern and assistance to all facing the difficult transition to a new life. Some will need temporary accommodation or financial assistance, and help in finding employment. Many will suffer loneliness being away from family and friends. All will need friendship and acceptance.

4 GRAEME GIBSON

An excerpt from the novel *Five Legs* (1969)

There was a boy
A very strange enchanted boy
They say he travelled very far, very far
Over dum dee-dah
Dah dee dah-dah

Glancing with his wry smile at the wryly-smiling self above the basin, carefully rolls his crisp blue sleeves. Not a bad shirt after all. Dee dumm dah-dah. But it isn't quite the same. Rubbing his fingers on his beard he stares more closely. Critically, I don't look too bad. Hah. Not an unhandsome face although I couldn't rely on it to see me through. A face of character. Yes, behind that face lies a man who is interesting to know. Ironic. Snorting briefly through his nose he wryly smiles again. A quizzical smile, objective irony. That's it. Hmmm. He takes the razor from its shelf, blows briskly to clear the hundreds of tiny cutting edges, bangs it on his hand and plugs it in. Jeez! This noise will waken my head again. So enjoyed this summer here with you. Certainly seemed appreciative with her golden thighs and sun-bleached hair. Sweet thing. And I'm really looking forward to working on Teahouse with. Would you mind awfully Doctor Crackell? I just can't reach right up the back. Would I mind sweet thing in this dark green summer's fancy heat, would I mind? The razor pushes folds of skin along his cheek. Baby oil and iodine heavy

in the sun and I smoothed it in small circles on her back. Aah Doctor Crackell! That's nice. Crescents of youthful flesh, her ears revealed by tangled hair. And my hands seemed strangely rough.

Pleasantly conscious of my stolen summer's drink and that beautiful pale doe of a girl at the cash desk casting her eyes at me, I browsed among the conjuring books. Tapping the side of my foot with the old invisible cane. Tap-tap. Good grief but there are lots of books. Who writes them all? And in all colours. Tap. Nothing like a haircut and a shoe-shine to liberate the social man. And whistling lightly. When I look up, casually, she'll be watching you bet; and the warm quick flush will reveal her. Hah! Can't keep her eyes off you, you sly young fox. Just easily raise the old head and throw a wry and enigmatic smile in her direction. Ready? Now! Well hello there. It's Susan. All crisp and pretty in her starched sun-dress. How are you this fine afternoon and why aren't you in the warmth of the garden? Hmmm. I see. Well perhaps you'll join me for a drink on this hot thirsty day. Dah dee dah-dah. The light was shining on her face and her dress rustled sharply as we marched out past those almond eyes. Ah-ha! A nod of my head and the cheerful goodbye.

The terrible noise this razor makes outside my head reemphasizes the necessity of water. Lots of water before I sleep. Oh boy. Dilute the poisons of a night like that. Jeez! There was nothing for it but go down and meet her when the play had ended. Closing his eyes he massages them with a careful hand. And the razor snarls. Stinking parties with her friends are like an entry to another world, across a frigging ocean to an unreal world. Watching themselves in the mirrored walls they moved in vague and frantic forms: they twittered about me like bats in a desperate dream. Shrill with laughter above it all, the actors removed their make-up while we watched until tired and greasy their faces appeared; they sat in undershirts or robes with flaccid skin pale in fluorescent glare. Pushing the razor into the top of his

throat, he tries to catch the last remaining whiskers. My name was called but the voice was carried away in the crowd and my face too, was there on the wall. Dark and nervously drawn. And because I once danced with useless joy and absurdly flowed out and overlapped my world. It is only drink that saves me.

Once again the summer street's hot afternoon with air contained by stores on every side. Carefully on the hot pavement we went to the light click-clack of her heels. With dignity. A trim pony beside me on the window's bright and jumbled face. Then in through the side door with sudden darkness on the eyes. Click-clack. And coolness, blessed coolness as blinking you wait for Bert with buttons tarnished by the air-conditioned air. The tray of frosted glasses on his hand. Back again Mister Crackell, you weren't gone long. Then with languorous and familiar ease the drinks were ordered, cigarettes were lit and easily we settled in to talk. Really nice and cool Doctor Crackell. I don't come in here very often.

You don't? Well goodness gracious me my dear you really should. Yes indeed. You really should. A womb away from home as it were. Ha-ha.

Well Martin doesn't like it very much. He says he prefers the taverns to a bar. I don't know why. I think this is very nice, don't you? It's not so dark when you get used to it. I couldn't come in alone though. And anyway men are always waiting for girls in bars. I remember once in Detroit... You heard the lady. Coldly staring from my dangerous eyes; my pale hands resting on the table's top. You heard the lady, so bust off. Right away fella and play your games with someone else. Hah! Then lunging at me with strangled rage and I'd drop to my knee like a shot and out with the right arm, pow with straightened fingers driving under his breastbone! Arrgh! And the poor bastard's writhing on the floor. Make the others pause as well. Jesus mack, his voice astonished, you've killed him! He can't breathe. Then I'd loosen his belt and set him right. Oh Doctor Crackell. Thank you, thank you

Doctor Crackell. Surprising speed for a man my age and size but it's the thought-out move that triumphs every time. Smooth pads of his fingers on the now-shaved face and his cool and calculating smile. Now I think you should stop this Doctor business, and call me Lucan. Think quickly, clearly and then the execution with finesse. Pow! Wonder if I could. Self-discipline and the rigorous control of movement should do the trick. Jeez! A worker's bony fist against my nose and mouth. Squash! The pain of it wow and I'm blinded by my tears and blood. At his mercy. Oh boy, it's best to run like hell. If possible. But a man has responsibilities, inescapable commitments. Certainly wouldn't want to get hurt though. Winding the cord securely about the razor he returns it to the shelf, brings down Old Spice and liberally smoothes it stinging on his face. Nevertheless, self-control and. Could do the trick.

5 RAY SMITH

An excerpt from the novel *Cape Breton is the Thought-Control Centre of Canada* (1969)

A Centennial Project

Why don't we go away?

Why?

Why not?

Because.

If we went away things would be different.

No. Things would be the same. Change starts inside.

No. Change can start outside.

Possibly.

Then, can we go away?

No. Perhaps. All right. It doesn't matter.

So you believe in Canada and you're worried about American economic domination? But you can't understand international finance? What you do know is that a landlord can give a tenant thirty days to get out, eh? And the tenant can stay longer if he has a lease, but you don't recall having signed a lease with the Americans?

So you're saying to yourself: 'What can I do? What can I do? I can't influence Bay Street... what can I do?...'

Well... uhhh... thought of blowing the Peace Bridge?

The Americans are loathe to fight without a divine cause. Assume we provide this by electing an N.D.P. Government, stirring ourselves up with Anti-American slogans like: 'Give me liberty or give me death!' or (the most divine of all) passing legislation that is prejudicial to American money.

With their divine cause, the Americans would destroy our Armed Forces in one week. (This makes a fine game; you can play it out on a map.) Canada will have ceased to exist as a free nation. Now: *Think of the fun you'd have in the Resistance!* It's a great subject for daydreaming: Be the first kid on your block to gun down a Yankee Imperialist.

A virgin named Judy, an attractive girl in her early twenties, is so curious about sexual intercourse that, despite certain misgivings, she goes to a party determined to find a man willing to do the deed. She wears an alluring but tasteful dress, has her hair done, and bescents herself with a flattering perfume.

At the party are certain men of her own age whom Judy knows and finds attractive; and certain men of her own age whom she doesn't know and finds attractive. All realize that Judy is a virgin and that she wishes to experience intercourse. Each feels he would like to help her. At the party are other girls, but they do not figure in the story, being all the same as Judy.

The party progresses pleasantly enough. The guests dance and sing and drink enough alcohol to feel light-headed, but not enough to become maudlin, violent, or unconscious. A good time is had by all.

The end of the party nears, and Judy has not yet been offered help. Desperate, she decides to make the proposal herself. In no time at all, the men are seated about her discussing the problem with her. This goes on for several hours until the men pass out and Judy walks home alone. On a dark and lonely street, she is pulled into an alleyway and raped by a stranger who leaves her

with her clothes torn, her body sore and bleeding, and her eyes streaming tears.

A week later, her virginity restored in a Venus-wise bath, she goes through the same events. Judy is a happy girl, for she leads a sane, healthy, and well-balanced life.

Consider the Poles. They have built a nation which, if not great and powerful, is at least distinct.

Of course, the Poles have their own language, and they have been around for a thousand years. But they have survived despite the attentions paid them by their neighbours, the Russians and the Germans.

Analogies are never perfect, but the Poles do have what we want. Consider the Poles; consider the price they have paid and paid and paid.

Wit: Did you hear about the Canadian Pacifist who became a Canadian Nationalist?

Self: No; why did he do that?

Wit: Because he wanted to take advantage of the economical Red, White, and Blue fares.

Recently a friend conned me into explaining my interest in compiled fiction, an example of which you are now reading.

‘Hey, that’s great,’ he said. ‘That really sounds interesting.’

‘I’m interested in it,’ I replied, razoring out the distinction.

‘But I hope you aren’t expecting to sell any of these compilations. The publishers won’t touch anything as new as that.’

‘Well, that’s their business, isn’t it? I mean, if they figure it’s not for their magazine or it’s lousy or something, they reject it. It’s a basic condition. If you want to demand they publish your stuff, the best and fastest way is to buy the magazine, fire the editor, and hire a yes-man.’

‘I didn’t mean...’

'I know what you meant; but, in fact, the technique isn't new at all. I got it from Ezra Pound and he got it from some French poets. Other precedents might be Francis Bacon's essays, the Book of Proverbs... the whole *Bible*...'

'But...'

My friend babbled on. He talks a lot about writing but, so far as I know, doesn't do any.

You can't see up through the mist (up through the high timber where the air is clean and good) but you know the dawn is already gleaming on the snow peaks; soon it will reach down here and burn away the mist and then it will be too late. Where the hell is that bloody supply column? You hunch forward between the rock and the tree and peer into the gloom. The armoured-car escort will appear... there: when it gets... there Mackie and Joe will heave the cocktails and when the flame breaks Campbell will open up with the Bren... Christ, you hope you get some arms out of this because if you don't you'll have to pack it up soon... Christ, it's cold, your joints can't take much more of... a growl from down around the bend... a diesel growl...

Do you love me?

Yes. I love you. You're my wife.

Why did you say, You're my wife?

Uhh...

You said it because you think just because I'm your wife you have to love me when really it has nothing to do with it.

Perhaps. It's more complicated than that.

It's always more complicated. Why can't it be simple? You always say things are too complicated when what you really mean is you don't want to talk to me. Why can't things be simple?

They are. I love you. As simple as that. So simple there's no point talking about it.

Complicated, too, I suppose.

So complicated that to talk about it would always oversimplify it. It's the same with everything.

Then what. . . . Oh! You're impossible to talk to.

You know that isn't true.

Yes.

So. . . .

Then what is important?

Doing.

Doing what?

Mmmmm. . . .

Ohhhh. . . .

Toronto is a truly despicable city.

6 MARIAN ENGEL

An excerpt from the novel *The Honeyman Festival* (1970)

Honeyman. The name if she let it still causing sharp shooting sparks in the abdomen. Honeyman.

The great lolling length; body, as though partially disjointed, a lay figure, beside her; “Broke up,” he said, from riding broncos, and scarred, certainly from the accident-prone days before she knew him, before she was born. The strange softness of the old-young drying skin, loose, a little loose, beginning to be liver-marked, but not pouchy. Exotic to her.

She sat, startled by waves of emotion. Years since she weakened last for him, though she had never stopped talking to him in her head, saying, “See, Honeyman?” when she did what she was proud of, or what he would like, or resisted him. And more often when she tried perversely to summon up his flesh it would be the firmer flesh of Norman burrowed into her that came to mind. And she loved Norman and the children, they were more to her, more hers, more real, more possible.

Only he was fifty-five to her twenty, and he knew a lot, and taught her some of it, it went in and stayed there and changed her in a direction she was thankful for. Friends murmured “father-figure” and she denied it, but he was, of course; a father chosen instead of imposed, who knew the things she wanted to know and taught her them.

What he gave me by knowing me. And I at twenty still wrapped in the cruel child’s integument of innocence, insisting,

demanding. Why didn't he throw me out or wring my sweet neck?

He was a kind man, he had patience, and children almost her age. When she lay beside him in bed and drew the heathen blanket of southern Ontario guilt around her, he turned to her, he comforted her, he talked to her, taught her what she was.

A strange man, long-headed, the grey hair curling high on the immense forehead, the nose falling straight to flared nostrils, the long upper lip, the wide, twisted thick-lipped mouth. Shooting sparks. A head on a grand scale, big-planed; and a body to match, bellyless, loose-jointed, Western and mythic in walk.

He was from Nebraska, the son of a wealthy cooper and a Christian Scientist. He had been sent to Princeton when he wanted to go further west. He left the university to take his kid's romanticism to California. Before he was twenty he arrived in Hollywood broken-backed. His father staked him to a second education in what he called "the pic-chahs."

Telling his story, leaving out the stress, the terrible passions of young-ness, lounging through it as if it were easy—he made everything look easy, even youth, Honeyman. He made it look easy to live, as if living were some road you strode along and not the puritan hurdle-course she had been taught to believe in.

And suddenly, because she knew him, it was easy: she had a flat in Paris when nobody had a flat in Paris, and jobs in films when nobody could break into films; when because of his terrifying American casualness and abruptness nobody could make contact with him, she could. People looked at her enviously and asked why she was special. Even she, for a while, wondered why she was special. "You're not, kid," he said, "but I like you." She wondered at that, too, until she grew old enough to realise that if love is an accident, liking is a kind of miracle.

He liked her, he tried to make something of her. He liked the way she looked, he said, the long legs, the big bosom, the way her lower lip stuck out. But he was not young anymore, he told