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# SIX TORONTO POETS

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

# SIX TORONTO POETS

SIX TORONTO POETSForeward

Toronto poetry is hardly an entity distinct from any other Canadian kind. Our outstanding figure, and incidentally Canada's, is E. J. Pratt, the Newfoundlander drawn here, like Robert Finch and like the two youngest of the six represented, by the presence of the University. It would be superfluous to point out that Dr. Pratt and Professor Finch are "Toronto poets" only in the sense that they live in Toronto; and the same might be said of our six recorded poets, with the important exception of Raymond Souster, the poet of downtown Toronto and its proliferating suburbs.

Toronto writers, accordingly, are not to be identified by interests, influences, platforms or publishing projects. Toronto magazines have tended to be national in scope, and Toronto poets have not rallied conspicuously around any one of them. Of the six represented here, two have published more work in the U.S. than in Canada, three published most of their early poems in Contemporary Verse (Vancouver), and at least three were regular contributors to Northern Review (Montreal). Nor have Toronto poets shown much interest in private publication, or in gathering together to discuss their work. Their common characteristic seems to be working in isolation and in detachment from the life of the city - again excepting Mr. Souster, who keeps in close touch with other writers both here and in the U.S.

The poets represented by our six constitute, not a particular sub-group or tradition within the area of Canadian poetry, but a kind of cross-section of it. Discernible influences are American, British, continental, and native, and not limited to modern authors; settings, themes and approaches could hardly show more variety.

The Toronto poet as composite is interested in most things, works hard, can read as well as write, has a clear sense of his own tradition, whether acquired, achieved, or thrust upon him, and in short resembles poets everywhere; further generalizations would be unwise.

J.M.

Recordings of Dr. Pratt reading from his work are available in the Harvard Vocarium series (78 rpm).



SIDE I, Band 1: W. W. EUSTACE ROSS (1894 --)

Mr. Ross was born at Peterborough, Ontario, and studied at the University of Toronto. He is a geophysicist by profession and is on the staff of Agincourt Magnetic Observatory. His poems have appeared in Northern Review, The Dial, and Poetry. He is the author of two privately printed volumes, Laconics (Ottawa, 1930) and Sonnets (Toronto, 1932), and of Experiment, a collection of early poems issued in 1956 by Contact Press in Toronto.

COTTON MATHER

I

"The devil lives in Mexico" he said "having guided to that land the Indians

now dwelling there, even as the Israelites were led to the promised land of old.

Sacrilegious imitation of Jehovah acting as leader to

his chosen people. The Mexican devil did even so, and thus and thus."

II

Whenever he heard the wind rushing in the forest he muttered "The devil is abroad !"

He trembled at thought of this strange land and its strange dwellers among

deep woods hiding from the white man's honesty. He longed to burn the forest and all within it

where, thinking, he saw, driven by the wind witches flying like dried leaves.

PLUNGING INTO

Plunging into the shining water one will feel a shock of coldness, sudden, striking his body's every part, with the coldness of northern water.

What does it matter if northern water is cold in the summer and colder in spring, or if the coldness strikes a chill that is very chill ?

As one plunges venturesome into, timorously into the beautiful water invitingly lying - the northern water - the water is chill, but what does it matter ?

THE WALK

He walked through the woods And saw the merging Of the tall trunks In the green distance, - The undergrowth Of mottled green With sunlight and shadow, And flowers starting

Here and there  
On the mottled ground;  
He looked along  
The green dulance  
And up towards  
The greenly-laden  
Curving boughs  
Of the tall trees;

And down a slope  
As he walked onward  
Down the sloping  
Ground, he saw  
In among  
The green, broken,  
The blue shimmering  
Of lake-water.

#### THE SAWS WERE SHRIEKING

The saws were shrieking  
and cutting into  
the clean white wood  
of the spruce logs  
or the tinted hemlock  
that smells as sweet -  
or stronger pine  
the white and the red.

A whirling saw  
received the logs;  
the sound was ominous  
and shrill,  
rising above  
the sullen roaring  
of the mill's  
machinery.

From the revolving  
of the saw  
came slices of clean wood  
newly-sawn,  
white pine and red,  
or spruce and hemlock,  
the sweet spruce,  
and the sweet hemlock.

#### THE SNAKE TRYING

The snake trying  
To escape the pursuing stick,  
With sudden curvings of thin  
Long body. How beautiful

And graceful are his shapes !  
He glides through the water away  
From the stroke. O let him go  
Over the water

Into the reeds to hide  
Without hurt. Small and green  
He is harmless even to children,  
Along the sand

He lay until observed  
And chased away, and now  
He vanishes in the ripples  
Among the green slim reeds.

#### NOX

"I am the daughter of Chaos, older far  
Than Earth or Heaven. In my chariot  
I ride, my face concealed by veil of stars,

"The constellations moving on before;  
Bearing under one arm a child all black,  
And this is death, and this same child is night;

"Under the other arm a child all white;  
This child is day, or sleep; and I am mother,  
Also, of dreams and of the very Fates,

"The one presiding over birth, who holds  
The spindle; and the spinner; and the one  
Who finally shall cut the thread of life."

#### THE SPRING

We hear the spring from far across the lake  
There, invisible, for when silence holds  
All - and the evening too -  
The ear extends its view

Deep into regions not attained by day  
Now opening to the searching heedful ear  
Which presently has found  
That source of spreading sound.

The ear is awakened to subtlest inner tones  
And the wideness of the world is opened too.  
It knows a flow begun  
Under an earlier sun,

And it is attuned to beauty in delicate sound  
As seldom in the noisier light of the day,  
Aware now of the spring  
As a more audible thing.

Stepping into a boat we may set out  
To find the spring, following by the murmur  
In darkness growing more  
Towards the farther shore.

As we draw near, over the evening lake,  
In the hush the sound is more audible than before  
But unintelligible,  
Not understood well

As of some creature held in a spell and striving  
To be free of that bondage, impotent however,  
And uttering a complaint  
Although its means are faint;

As if attempting to speak and not succeeding  
But strangled in utterance, making that utterance  
Yet only brief must be vain;  
This disability

Of words enchanted to meaninglessness, yet once  
Filled with meaning, and perhaps once again  
These syllables of fire  
To meaning may aspire,

Be understood. Ours is the lack of hearing.  
Our ear will hear again and there will be joy  
Among the dwellers round  
This source of secret sound,

That once again, after long interval, -  
Ours is the error; we cannot comprehend -  
We again may understand  
The springs beneath the land.

#### CATACOMBS

Dwelling in a cavern, deep  
Underneath the Roman soil,  
They painted pictures on the wall -  
The shepherd shepherding his sheep;

Lazarus risen from the dead;  
And, as to point their earthly fate,  
Daniel, - hearing in his stead  
The lions roaring at the gate.

#### GERARD DE NERVAL

Calypso held him in her cave  
Adorned with vines, beside the sea,  
Where four springs flowed and where she gave  
Promise of immortality.

Should he return, and speedily,  
From the enchantment of that cave ?  
He lingered on beside the sea  
And it became, in truth, his grave.

#### THE CREEK

The creek, shining,  
Out of the deep woods  
Comes with its rippling of  
Water over the pebbly bottom,

Moving between  
Banks crowded with raspberry  
Bushes, the ripe red  
Berries in their short season

To deepen slowly  
Among tall pines, athletes in  
The wind, then the swampy  
Ground low-lying and damp

Where sunlight strikes  
Glints on the gliding surface  
Of the clear cold  
Creek winding towards the shore

Of the lake, blue,  
Not far through reeds and rushes,  
Where with a plunge, a small  
Waterfall, it disappears

Among the waves  
Hastening from far to meet  
The stranger the stream issuing  
From depths of green unknown.

#### WHITE WATER-LILLY

The lily with its cup, intense,  
That might hold blood, although not red -  
But gathers rays of light instead -  
Sat flat-leaved on the water, smooth  
As glittering lies or polished truth,  
Seeing, with penetrating eye  
Gazing toward the burnished sky,  
Only the face of the sun, of all  
The visible world. The sun was all !

No burden felt, of grief or wrong. -  
The stem beneath was sinuous, strong,  
Curving down through the water to  
The mud-deep ground, obscured from view,  
Where fishes bred in silence went  
Held in their native element;  
Did not attempt to wander far,  
Not envying the evening star;  
Fixed in its wakeful somnolence  
It knew no wider world, immense,  
Extending out beyond the ken  
Of searching and inquisitive men.  
Birds went eagerly through the sky,  
Small creatures whirring wildly by,  
But the lily lingered serene, content,  
Secure in its native element,  
And drank the light that came from above  
With a thirsting, absorbing, compelling love,  
The captivating light of the sun. -  
The sun was all. All was the sun !

#### Bibliography.

"Plunging Into" and "The Walk" are from Laconics.



#### SIDE I, Band 2: ANNE WILKINSON (1910 --)

Anne Wilkinson was born in Toronto, where she now lives. Many of her poems were published in Contemporary Verse. Counterpoint to Sleep, her first collection, was no. 8 in the New Writers' Series (First Statement Press, Montreal, 1951); her second is The Hangman Ties the Holly, published by Macmillan, Toronto, in 1955. Poems of hers have been read on the CBC program "Anthology", and she has contributed recently to The Tamarack Review.

#### PENELOPE

The turf she strokes above his head  
She spins into his hair and beard;  
Her fingers sieve the soil and rush  
With quickening of their common flesh;  
Stone becomes (her hand on stone)  
Sweet and pact of marrow bone.

And thus the gay, grave-loving nun  
Whose lenient Lord has bidden her  
This fitting habit, husband, wear,  
Sits beneath the spreading sun  
And pays no heed, cuckoo, cuckoo,  
To bird or man, so she be true.

#### NATURE BE DAMNED

1

Pray where would lamb and lion be  
If they lay down in amity?  
Could lamb then nibble living grass?  
Lamb and lion both must starve,  
For none may live if all do love.

2

I go a new dry way, permit no weather  
Here, on undertaker's false green sod  
Where I sit down beneath my false tin tree.  
There's too much danger in a cloud,  
In wood or field, or close to moving water.  
With my black blood - who can tell?  
The dart of one mosquito might be fatal;

Or in the flitting dusk a bat  
Might carry away my destiny,  
Hang it upside down from a rafter  
In a barn unknown to me.

I hide my skin within the barren city  
Where artificial moons pull no man's tide,  
And so escape my green love till the day  
Vine breaks through the brick and strangles me.

3

I was witch and I could be  
Bird or leaf  
Or branch and bark of tree.

In rain and two by two my powers left me;  
Instead of curling down as root and worm  
My feet walked on the surface of the earth,  
And I remember a day of evil sun  
When forty green leaves withered on my arm.

And so I damn the font where I was blessed,  
Am unbeliever; was deluded lover; never  
Bird or leaf or branch and bark of tree.  
Each, separate as curds from whey,  
Has signature to prove identity.

And yet we're kin in appetite:  
Tree, bird in the tree and I.  
We feed on dung, a fly, a lamb  
And burst with seed  
Of tree, of bird, of man,  
Till tree is bare  
And bird and I are bone  
And feaster is reborn  
The feast, and feasted on.

4

I took my watch beside the rose;  
I saw the worm move in;  
And by the tail I yanked him out  
And stamped him dead, for who would chose  
To leave alive a sin?

The pale rose died of grief. My heel  
Had killed its darling foe,  
Worm that cuddles in the heart  
To ravish it. If worm not tell  
How should rose its fairness know?

3

Once a year in the smoking bush  
A little west of where I sit  
I burn my winter caul to a green ash.  
This is an annual festival,  
Nothing to stun or startle;  
A coming together - water and sun  
In summer's first communion.

Today again I burned my winter caul  
Though senses nodded, dulled by ritual.

One hundred singing orioles  
And five old angels wakened me;  
Morning sky rained butterflies  
And simple fish, bass and perch,  
Leapt from the lake in salutation.  
St. Francis, drunk among the daises  
Open his ecstatic eye.

Then roused from this reality I saw  
Nothing, anywhere, but snow.

#### IN PRAISE OF BURTON

1

#### DEVIL

Devil, being slender spirit,  
Enters by the nose or gullet;  
Couches, cunning, in the bowels,  
Or shakes and frights our shying souls.  
Devil of our fearful dreams  
Is, and is not what he seems.

2

#### PAUL

A pint of honey, a gallon of gall,  
A dram of pleasure, a pound of pain,  
An inch of mirth and an ell of moan -  
What more do you want, asked Paul.

A gallon of honey, a pint of gall,  
A pound of pleasure, a dram of pain,  
An ell of mirth and an inch of moan,  
And less of your preaching, Paul.

3

#### THE CHASTE AND THE UNCHASTE

Persons who from venery abstain  
Offend fair Venus - virgins who complain  
Of dullness, migraine and black melancholy,  
Chastity's reward, and virtue's folly.

Intemperance she deems an equal sin.  
Old man, young bride, hot summer - can he win?  
So parched and shrunk is he with chamber work  
He must go mad, or leave love for a book.

A gallon, better two, of moistening remedy  
May ease a ravaged rake of his extremity.

4

#### NUN

She did not sign it with the cross -  
That tender lettuce leaf.  
She nibbled without thought to grace,  
And devil is a hungry thief,  
And she? the devil's dish.

Mark you, those who have the wit:  
Ne daemon ingredi ausit.

#### WENCH

Not nun this time; it was a wench  
Who foolish ate a fruit for lunch,  
Unhallowed pomegranate.  
Delicious - O she granted that  
Though she by devils was possessed.  
And what the cure? A priest confessed.

6

#### FOOLS

Though fools have brains those brains are moist,  
And light hearts lead the tongue to jest;  
They shun ambition, envy, shame -  
Sages all, who wear fool's name.

7

#### SON OF JOVE, CHICK OF HEN

He was light, and sprung from Jove,  
She, the chick of a white dove.  
The moon from envy loosed her hair  
And caught these two in a silver snare.

She took them for an awful ride,  
Even showed her humped backside.  
Son of Jove, chick of hen -  
You fare no better than mortal man.

8

#### SOCRATES

Socrates was merry by fits,  
Sang and danced and shook his wits,  
And with his children he was known  
To ride-a-cock-horse in the Parthenon.

9

#### DEATH

Death himself, when he had stroken  
With his dart this sweet young virgin,  
Doted, yet his trade being murder  
He must be her cold clay's lover.

Day or night he could not leave her.  
Death is dead, said one believer.  
Rigor mortis flapped its arms  
And no mouse died, or beasts in barns,

Till Death of Love at length grew sick,  
Put on his cloak and went to work.

#### LENS

The poet's daily chore  
Is my long duty;  
To keep and cherish my good lens  
For love and war  
And wasps about the lilies  
And mutiny within.

My woman's eye is weak  
And veiled with milk;  
My working eye is muscled  
With a curious tension,  
Stretched and open  
As the eyes of children;  
Trusting in its vision  
Even should it see  
The holy holy spirit gambol  
Counterheadwise,  
Lithe and warm as any animal.

My woman's iris circles  
A blind pupil;  
The poet's eye is crystal,  
Polished to accept the negative,  
The contradictions in a proof  
And the accidental  
Candour of the shadows.

The shutter, oiled and smooth,  
Clicks on the grace of heroes

Or on some bestial act  
When lit with radiance  
The afterwords the actors speak  
Give depth to violence,

Or if the bull is great  
And the matador  
And the sword  
Itself the metaphor.

2

In my dark room the years  
Lie in solution,  
Develop film by film.  
Slow at first and dim  
Their shadows bite  
On the fine white pulp of paper.

An early snap of fire  
Licking the arms of air  
I hold against the light, compare  
The detail with a prehistoric view  
Of land and sea  
And cradles of mud that rocked  
The wet and sloth of infancy.

A stripe of tiger, curled  
And sleeping on the ribs of reason  
Prints as clear  
As Eve and Adam, pearled  
With sweet, staring at an apple core;

And death, in black and white  
Or politic in green and Easter film,  
Lands on steely points, a dancer  
Disciplined to the foolscap stage,  
The property of poets  
Who command his robes, expose  
His moving likeness on the page.

#### NOEL

She sought a blessing in the snow,  
Cool, of pity clean,  
In rose, and in a bed of straw  
Where the lamb had lain.

She hunted God by the light of the moon,  
She wore a hedge for shirt;  
The holy river ran off with her sin,  
And she ate a leper's dirt.

But leper died, and the hedge was torn,  
And homeward ran her sin.  
Frost and thorn, and mice in the barn,  
And God in a tiger skin.

A bright star led to a palace of gin  
Where all the queens were tarts,  
And kings were toads, and crowned each queen  
With coronet of warts.

The barman there was quick to tell -  
You'll here no grace discover,  
For toad and tart embrace one hell,  
The heaven in each other.

She entered, and she saw instead,  
Rose cuddle with the load,  
And lamb and tart in a bed of straw  
Asleep beneath the snow.

#### TIGERS KNOW FROM BIRTH

My bones predict the striking hour of thunder  
And water as I huddle under  
The tree the lightning renders

I'm hung with seaweed, winding in its caul  
The nightmare of a carp whose blood runs cold,  
A crab who apes my crawl

My lens is grafted from a jungle eye  
To focus on the substance of a shadow's  
Shadow on the sky

My forest filtered drum is pitched to hear  
The serpent split the grass before the swish  
Is feather in my ear

I've learned from land and sea of every death  
Save one, the easy rest, the little catnap  
Tigers know from birth

#### THE PRESSURE OF NIGHT

The pressure of night is on her.  
She lies stiff against her saviour sleep.  
Vicious as a scratch her cry  
'I love the light, I'll have no traffic  
With the nigger world of night'.  
And her white flesh creeps.

But night is, and blazed with eyes.  
Night has no shudder in  
Its whole dark hemisphere of skin,  
And night replies  
'I am your shepherd lover,  
Root of daisy and the seed of clover,  
I am the poet's pasture.'

But she lies dumb  
Ice and fire die tepid on her tongue  
Scorched with cold, the unbeliever  
Resists her saviour.

#### Bibliography.

"The Pressure of Night", "Lens" and "Tigers Know  
From Birth" are from The Hangman Ties the Holly.



SIDE I, Band 3: RAYMOND SOUSTER (1921 --)

Mr. Souster (first syllable as in "sou'wester") was born and educated in Toronto, and saw active service with the RCAF in England. He is an editor of Contact Press, and at present is producing a mimeographed poetry magazine, Combustion, and organizing public readings in Toronto. No-one has worked harder or more consistently than Mr. Souster to encourage young poets and widen the audience for Canadian poetry. His own volumes include When We Are Young (1946), Go to Sleep, World (1947), Cerberus (with Irving Layton and Louis Dudek, the other Contact Press editors) (1952), City Hall Street (1951), For What Time Slays (1955), and in 1956 The Selected Poems. The first two books were published by Ryerson, the rest by Contact Press.

#### THE URGE

Spring drives them eagerly out into the street,  
Propelled by a breathless urge they could never explain,  
But which we would probably guess is desire to meet  
New dreams, new faces, and of course new pain.

The poor, the rich, the crippled and the blind,  
Are one with the young girls and the mating boys;  
All groping for something lost they will never find  
In the drab of the street, in the dirt, in the  
smoke, in the noise.

#### THE SIX QUART BASKET

The six quart basket  
One side gone  
Half the handle torn off

Sits in the centre of the grass  
And slowly fills up  
With the white fruits of the snow.

### THE RAINBOW

Red blue green of it  
Swung over Bloor Street  
(Thought not in that order)

But it won't stay long  
In this vicinity

Not if there's a pot  
Of gold hooked on the end,  
And all those dirty,  
Filthy hands grabbing after it....

### DOWNTOWN CORNER NEWS-STAND

It will need all of death to take you from this corner.  
It has become your world, and you its unshaved  
Bleary-eyed, foot-stamping king.

In winter  
You curse the cold, huddled in your coat from the wind,  
You fry in summer like an egg hopping on a griddle,  
And always the whining voice, the nervous-flinging arms,  
The red face, the shifting eyes watching, waiting  
Under the grimy cap for God knows what  
To happen.

(But nothing ever does: downtown  
Toronto goes to sleep and wakes the next morning  
Always the same, except a little dirtier)  
And you stand with your armful of Stars and Telys,  
The peak of your cap well down against the sun,

And all the city's restless, seething river  
Surges beside you, but not once do you plunge  
Into its flood, or are carried or tossed away;  
But reappear always, beard longer than ever, nose running,  
To catch the night editions at King and Bay.

### REBIRTH

When your hair turns gray,  
When you put on fat,  
When your face has lost all  
It ever had at twenty-one--

What to do? Why  
Nothing but dip  
The hair in a wash  
So it comes out gold  
Except close to the roots,

Rouge the cheeks with the rosiest  
Of reds, paint the lips, cover  
The fat hips the runaway butt  
With the black coat and go  
Out proudly a young girl  
Born again and worth  
All the smiles the horse-laugh  
You may expect travelling  
This goon-faced city.

### THE AMUSEMENT PARK

What fascinated in childhood seems trivial or merely puzzling  
To us now grown man-size:

as I remember  
For me it was the small magic line of booths  
Under the old Hanlan's Point stadium (the home  
Of the Maple Leafs when they had real ball-clubs, and where, if  
I can believe him

My father hit a fence-buster into the bay): here  
I watched the pink candy-floss spun out, clutched my copper hotly  
As I carefully surveyed the attractions  
Of the penny arcade: admired the more daring  
Flatten the moving rabbits, the capricious ducks at the shooting-  
gallery's

Clang-clamour; wondered if the old lady in the palmistry booth  
Was a real gypsy, and what went on behind the pulled curtain; tried  
the fish-pond

Again and again but never caught anything  
But numbers for whistles, cent candy:

while the Ferris Wheel  
Continued up to the sky and the merry-go-round gave music and so much  
In the warm darkness around me tingled  
With the unknown, the adventurous.

### THE SLEEPER

Yes, she's quiet now,  
Motionless, curled  
Like a cat in the bag  
Over-awkward chair.

But watch her, see  
How one slit of the eye  
Seems almost to move,

While the body lies coiled,  
A taut stretched spring,  
Waiting for that moment  
To come alive, strike,  
At the unsuspecting one.

### THE CREEPER ALONG THE HOUSE WALL

Did I think it somehow sucked  
Its nourishment from the air?

Here's the point: I didn't think at all--  
I simply broke the vine branch in two  
And threw it down on the lawn.

Now the vine on one side is all dead,  
Leaves dead, curled sickly brown,

And we'll have to wait another year  
Before it can crawl again  
To the other half of the house.

A year for the earth to renew  
What I snapped in a moment's whim.

O the vast patience of the earth  
That it can endure us at all!

### THE TOP HAT

Whether it's just a gag or the old geezer's  
A bit queer in the head, it's still refreshing  
To see someone walking up Bay Street  
With toes out of shoes, patched trousers, frayed suit-coat,  
And on his head the biggest shiniest top-hat  
Since Abe Lincoln

and walking as if the whole  
Damn street belonged to him  
which at this moment for my money  
It does.

### THE QUARRY

The terrified look  
On the groundhog's face  
Looking from his hole  
One instant ahead  
Of the trap's deadly spring,

I saw today  
In the ferret stare  
Of the old lady lush  
Up Bay Street somewhere,  
Wandering like a child  
Bewildered, crushed,  
In and out of the crowds,

Waiting, waiting,  
For that blow to fall.



#### FLIGHT OF THE ROLLER-COASTER

Once more round should do it, the man confided...  
And sure enough, when the roller-coaster reached the peak  
Of the giant curve above me, screech of its wheels  
Almost drowned out by the shriller cries of the riders -

Instead of the dip and plunge with its landslide of screams  
It rose in the air like a movieland magic carpet, some  
wonderful bird,

And without fuss or fanfare swooped slowly across the  
amusement park,  
Over Spook's Castle, ice-cream booths, shooting-gallery;  
and losing no height

Made the last yards above the beach, where the cucumber-cool  
Brakeman in the last seat saluted  
A lady about to change from her bathing-suit.

Then, as many witnesses duly reported, headed leisurely  
over the water,  
Disappearing mysteriously all too soon behind a slow-lying  
flight of clouds.

#### BRIDGE OVER THE DON

Why does your loneliness surge up, why does that ugliness,  
despair,

Hit you between the eyes because you stand  
On a bridge late at night, because you look down,  
Down, at the dark water, because your eyes  
Move out into the darkness?

Haven't you seen  
The river before, don't you know it runs, smells like a sewer?  
Haven't you choked on the smoke from these factories  
Looking in the night like the tombs of many ghosts?

And why do you come to get cheered up here  
With three hotels on the block and a jitterbug dancehall?  
Don't you know people get melancholy, go queer,  
Standing like this, looking straight ahead into the dark,

Trying to find some truth, some beauty,  
Where beauty and truth have been burned out, slugged out,  
given the gate forever?

#### DARK ANGEL

Talk about the grace of your bullfighters-- look

At my dark angel Hector going  
Impossibly to his right, gloved hand reaching  
Up at the last second-- then somehow whirling  
Out of a spin to fire  
That improbable pellet to Mike waiting  
With disbelief on his face

second to first  
For the double-play, aficionados.

#### THE SELLER OF ROSES

Has a perpetual cold,  
His nose always like the taps  
Around the house, dripping one  
Transparent drop at a time  
After hanging an eternity  
In the act of falling.

Tonight he stands  
Outside the theatre  
With a box full of roses,  
Which, when he holds one  
Up for all to see,  
Is such at odds  
With rotting clothes,  
The shoes merely strips of leather  
Hanging to his feet now,  
And that peak cap pulled  
Well down on the head,  
(But not far enough to hide  
The crazy twitch of the eyes),

Is such at odds anyway  
With the whole of Yonge Street,  
Is as much out of place  
As this crazy derelict,

As the poem  
And the poet is.

#### THE FULL GOSPEL MISSION

A big old family Bible  
Open at I don't know what  
Sits in the middle of the window  
Of the Full Gospel Mission,  
Surrounded by pots of ferns  
Which have grown almost wild  
In their green delightful climb  
To escape from the wrath  
Of the prophet Isaiah  
And the over-zealous touch  
Of Matthew Mark Luke and John.

#### THE SWING

If you swing hard enough  
The houses, the streets,  
The park will move too,  
The world will pry loose  
From its flat-spinning ways.

If you swing high enough  
You may lose us forever,  
You may come to a place  
Only children know,  
Where the password is play.

Were the swing big enough  
I would ride with you there.

#### THE CHILD'S UMBRELLA

What's it like to be homeless,  
All alone in this world?

Perhaps the jagged  
Ripped-open mouth  
Of the child's umbrella  
Lying inside out  
On the winter pavement

Can give us the answer.

#### HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Thirty-seven today.

Only last week called  
"One of Canada's younger  
More promising poets."

Tell me, O Muses, when  
Do they figure you old  
In this racket?

#### Bibliography.

"Downtown Corner News-stand", "Bridge over the Don",  
and "Flight of the Roller-Coaster" are from The  
Selected Poems.



SIDE II, Band 1: MARGARET AVISON (1918 --)

Margaret Avison was born in Toronto and brought  
up on the prairies. She attended Victoria College  
and now lives in Toronto. In 1956 she was awarded  
a Guggenheim fellowship, and spent the next year  
in Chicago. Poems of hers have appeared recently  
in The Kenyon Review, Origin, and Poetry. One of  
the most remarkable of Canadian poets, she has  
never published her work in book form.

Excerpt from work in progress...

(a young woman talking to a young man, the night they become engaged)

In the glassed porch  
On the torn cotton swing  
Its rusty coils faintly complaining  
Auntie Jean sat out March, from her lie-down  
Till time for tea.  
Folded in her thin coat,  
Mute behind her mourning glasses,  
Deaf to the icewater day's mowing and mumming  
Beyond the paint-flaked window-frames,  
The porch she lived in then, like a court page  
His anteroom. When light was shrill  
The house beyond but deepened,  
Resounded with invisible chamberlains  
As though grandmother's inky sailcloth skirts  
Moved again, or her bell  
Tinkled some signal of wry consecration.  
The papers lay beside her on the swing.  
She faced the swing some days, from the wicker chair.  
She seldom read.

We always passed the house on our March ways.  
Though sidewalk ash stung in the wind  
We ignored all old shards, all floored, forgotten  
Chips, powdered shells, cornelian, sawdust, silt,  
and tacky garage canvas.  
We were all out-of-doors, all spherical.

The earth was green, mirroring with a difference  
The roiled blue deeps of day where sun in flood  
Celebrated our "million-trillion" wildness.  
The trees were wintry still? O not for us.  
They plunged and stroked like swimmers  
Spilling and drenching at cloud-top, burned  
In the glacial river-world of air.  
The crows called from a  
Summer sky above the river sky.  
We plumbed in spangled black  
The skies and skies and skies beyond, the terrible  
Layers of magnitude.  
Grandmother's dingy now frame house  
And Auntie Jean's glass porch  
We no more saw than our broad afternoons  
Remembered Auntie Jean, or grandmother...  
We had no weather-cock, no spire.  
The square brick tower of the church  
Waited, with the gothic clothier's  
the stone bank, firehall and its turret,  
vanilla darkness of the

sunken passageway to the children's cellar  
of the Public Library, waited for  
Red sunset, its creases and crenellations,  
its Moorish wars.  
The muffled shunting of the freights at dusk  
Was final sadness, though domestic.  
By June the out-of-doors was the whole world's  
Evenings. Grass was damp, night-blue.  
The sky tendered its ultimate clarity  
Past chimneys, crochet twigs, the cone-capped  
Toilet vents; the nighthawks screeched.

Families gathered on the dim verandahs.  
Sometimes a couple strolling past  
Would call out, sometimes stand and talk a while -  
A rocker creaked - the voices carried as though  
The dark were all one room -  
And drift on.

Some have died, others remember  
On other late spring evenings, a white bead collar,  
A mild inconsequential loitering,  
One gloved hand on a car-door - off-then on, for  
A quarter-hour before the conclusive slam,  
The last laugh from the summer-open window,  
Before the final stifling dark.

Strangers moved into grandmother's house  
And kept a stepladder in the porch. It broke  
One pane.

#### OUR WORKING DAY MAY BE MENACED

From this orange-pippery --  
Where without violation  
We force (the technique is of course secret)  
The jumbled fruit to disgorge, severally,  
Seed without juice,  
Where parakeets are on the p.a. system  
And all the walls are wattle  
(Ehyoe hae-dee) --

Madeleine, off the assembly line --  
which, in the glare and spindle of  
Hawaiian cottons, seelight, mountain dust,  
and shoals and Takkakas of oranges,  
is indeed form  
rather than fact --  
Since every cage is freighted  
With apron boys, coffee boys, the ladies  
Who feed and brush the evening shift of parakeets,  
Chooses the extension bridge  
(windy at sunset)  
Rather than waiting for tiled egress, where the  
Cars debouche, below,  
Weavy with green shadow and lamps burning.

...Madeleine's mamma knew,  
Her foreman grudgingly, and we  
With unrest, sensed, in her,  
A certain clarity, a caritas,  
But wood-wild...

A person has a nature.  
I note hers only that I may bear witness.  
Her silhouette high on the span  
Focused us then, for the quick --  
Occurrence? A hard designation. It was  
As if a spoke of the final sky  
Snagged her suddenly.

For what seemed only one  
Queer moment, she was swept  
In some sidereal swerve,  
Blotted sheer out of time; ten spurred  
Back to the pebbles of the path  
(After the footbridge), where  
Heartstain of sun  
Still blurred the air/floor dark.

An evening deflation called; concluded  
She is not schooled to cope.

It was our guess  
She feels perhaps she nourishes a  
Shameful little something of a bruise  
In at the fusion-point of those peculiar  
Burning-wires under the breastbone.  
Some of us, privately piqued, privately speculate.

...A calling from our calling?  
In the economy of the clairvoyant,  
Or some high pillared parliament  
We gave election, in an elated moment  
Too rare for conscious purpose,  
Can it have come to light that  
The thirst for perfect fruit abroad  
Has now been superseded, or subsumed  
Under a new, more radical, craving?  
Can they have appointed  
A locus elsewhere for us?  
Our mocha faces are too bland for trouble.  
Yet may we, when the morning steam-cocks open  
For our new day aloft  
Find there is come about a universal  
Swallowing-up  
(proceedings against Madeleine alone  
clearly being absurd?)  
with only the racks and vats,  
the lifts and cages left, uncrated and forgotten,  
and the pipes steaming thinly  
under a fading crescent?

#### TENNIS

Service is joy, to see or swing. Allow  
All tumult to subside. Then tensest winds  
Buffet, brace, viol and sweeping bow.  
Courts are for love and volley. No one minds  
The cruel ellipse of service and return,  
Dancing white galliades at tape or net  
Till point, on the wire's tip, or the long burn-  
ing arc to nethercourt marks game and set.  
Purpose apart, perched like an umpire, dozes,  
Dreams golden balls whirring through indigo.  
Clay blurs the whitewash but day still encloses  
The albinos, bonded in their flick and flow.  
Playing in musicked gravity, the pair  
Score liquid Euclids in foolscaps of air.

### KLAXON

All day cars moored and shrieked,  
Hollered and bellowed and wept  
Upon the road.  
They slid by with bits of fur attached,  
Fox-tails and rabbit-legs,  
The skulls and horns of deer,  
Cars with yellow spectacles  
Or motorcycle monocle,  
Cars whose gold eyes burnt  
With a too-rich battery,  
Murderous cars and manslaughter cars,  
Chariots from whose foreheads leapt  
Silver women of ardent bosom.  
Ownerless, passengerless, driverless,  
They came to anyone  
And with headlights full of tears  
Begged for a master,  
For someone to drive them  
For the familiar chauffeur.  
Limousines covered with pink slime  
Of children's blood  
Turned into the open fields  
And fell over into ditches,  
The wheels kicking helplessly.  
Taxis begged trees to step inside  
Automobiles begged of posts  
The whereabouts of their mother.  
But no one wished to own them any more,  
Everyone wished to walk.

### THE BEAUTY OF MISS BEATTY

The beauty of Miss Beatty,  
As everyone declared,  
Was the way her bosoms dared  
Though never really bared  
To seem so anyhow.  
Though some shrieked,  
How like a cow !  
And others uttered to their mother,  
Not a bosom but an udder !  
Oh, what a snake, what an adder she is !  
For see how all, ALL, the men  
Even those with a wen  
Or a hump  
Or a lump  
On the back of their necks  
Or with only one arm  
Like a pump  
Flock around her  
In a great clump  
Ever at her beck and call to flounder  
In the great glittering puddle of her charm !

Oh, look, said the Mother  
Oh, look ahead, said she,  
To her rather plain daughter.  
Look ahead  
To the beauty of Miss Beatty in her grave.  
Death is notoriously bored with bosoms  
And touches them and punctures them  
Without any compunction.  
He topples over the tent  
Sucks at it and withers it  
And as you know my dear  
And as everyone certainly ought to  
It has always been that lust  
Has always rhymed with dust.

### LAKE SUPERIOR

I am Lake Superior  
Cold and grey.  
I have no superior;  
All other lakes  
Haven't got what it takes;  
All are inferior.  
I am Lake Superior  
Cold and gray.  
I am so cold  
That because I chill them  
The girls of Fort William  
Can't swim in me.  
I am so deep  
That when people drown in me  
Their relatives weep  
For they'll never find them.  
In me swims the fearsome  
Great big sturgeon.  
My shores are made of iron  
Lined with tough, wizened trees.

No knife of a surgeon  
Is sharper than these  
Waves of mine  
That glitter and shine  
In the light of the Moon, my mother  
In the light of the Sun, my grandfather.

### THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS

With porcupine locks  
And faces which, when  
More closely examined,  
Are composed of measles-pink specks,  
These two dwarf imps,  
The Katzenjammer Kids,  
Flitter through their desert island world.  
Sometimes they get so out of hand  
That a blue Captain  
With stiff whiskers of black wicker  
And an orange Inspector  
With a black telescope  
Pursue them to spank them  
All through that land  
Where cannibals cut out of brown paper  
In cardboard jungles feast and caper  
Where the sea's sharp waves continually  
Waver against the shore faithfully  
And the yellow sun above is thin and flat  
With a collar of black spikes and spines  
To tell the innocent childish heart that  
It shines  
And warms (see where she stands and stammers)  
The dear fat mother of the Katzenjammers.  
Oh, for years and years she has stood  
At the window and kept fairly good  
Guard over the fat pies that she bakes  
For her two children, those dancing heartaches.  
Oh, the blue skies of that funny paper weather !  
The dustant birds like two eyebrows close together !  
And the rustling paper roar  
Of the waves  
Against the paper sands of the paper shore !

### THREE DEADLY SINS:

#### The Pig

Pink protrusion, pachyderm pork crystal,  
Crackling with conch sounds casual acorn;  
Mice muzzle and masticate your back  
Unbeknownst by unquick ununquiet mind;  
Hear nothing ears except earhasp twitch,  
Smell nothing snout except swine incense,  
Touch nothing trotters save tapioca styewallow:  
Eyes examine the excellent nose horizon,  
Headless of huntsmen horning your oak hall,  
Dreaming of the devoured peacock safe  
down in your belly.

#### The Hen

Hohum humble hiked herself to Sunday school,  
Never nudged neck up to sky,  
Looked late & soon longingly downward,  
Found foody scraps, fetched them to others  
Dug in the dunghill - her delight by the hour,  
Pecked not the pants of the puerile kicker,  
Rebuked not the ribald rooster's oppressions,  
Stood the steal-weasel's sucking all eggs of hers,  
Forgave the fox for chewing her wing,  
Fine eggs, fair feathers, fat carcass, old hen.

#### The Cow

Fanciful flighty fairy cow,  
Black & white bulging beautiful thing.  
Burdock bites she busily out of barn door,  
Slavers till sicked over salt block at gate.  
New grass assaulted at stone boat by her,  
Cagily corn she corrals over barbed wire,  
Tree leaves tassel out twitching mouth,  
New clover now navigates she through gate,  
Gorges down googols of juicy green fodder,  
Bloats her four bellies up balloonwise-zeppelin,  
Mooring for mercy meanders to keeper-help  
Who sticks her with sharp pen, soon rush out  
All vapours as velvety voluptuous tongue darts  
Out again.

### Bibliography.

The first seven poems are from The Red Heart, the remaining three from A Suit of Nettles.



SIDE II, Band 3: JAY MACPHERSON (1931 --)

Jay Macpherson was educated at Carleton College, Ottawa, and at the University of Toronto, and at present is teaching English at Victoria College. Since 1947 she has contributed to Contemporary Verse and other Canadian periodicals; her book The Boatman was published by Oxford University Press (Toronto) in 1957.

### THE FISHERMAN: a book of riddles

Go take the world my dearest wish  
And blessing, little book,  
And should one ask who's in the dish  
Or how the beast was took  
Say: Wisdom is a silver fish  
And Love a golden hook.

### STORM

That strong creature / from before the Flood,  
headless, sightless, / without bone or blood,  
a wandering voice, / a travelling spirit,  
butting to be born, / fierce to inherit  
acreage of pity, / the world of love,  
the Christian child's kingdom, / and remove  
the tall towered gates / where the proud sea lay  
crouched on its paws / in the first day -  
came chaos again, / that outsider  
would ride in, / blind steed, blind rider:  
till then wails at windows, / denies relief,  
batters the body / in speechless grief,  
thuds in the veins, / crumples in the bone,  
wrestles in darkness / and alone  
for kingdoms cold, / for salt, sand, stone,  
forever dispossessed.  
Who raised this beast,  
this faceless angel, / shall give him rest.

### SUN AND MOON

A strong man, a fair woman,  
Bound fast in love,  
Parted by ordered heaven,  
Punishment prove.

He suffers gnawing fires:  
She in her frost  
Beams in his sight, but dies  
When he seems lost.

Not till the poles are joined  
Shall the retreat  
Of fierce brother from lost sister  
End, and they meet.

### WHALE

"Art thou the first of creatures, that Leviathan,  
The Egyptian trickster that strives with man?"

My Maker saw his work and called me good.  
I am an ark to swim the perilous flood.  
With gold and spices, with candles burning sweet  
In wakeful silence at his head and feet,  
Vaulted in my sepulchre lies the first man,  
The burden I am given to bear as I can.  
I am God's creature, that Leviathan.

### CORAL

A living tree that harbours  
No singing-birds, no flowers,  
Offers no shady arbours,  
No comfortable bowers  
For man's inactive hours,

The sea's untended gardens  
And waving meadows bear  
- A tree of flesh that hardens  
In our destroying air  
And stands petrific there.

It shelters shiny fishes  
And leggy crustacee,  
Welcomes whatever wishes,  
And shines a perfect tree  
Of coral in the sea.

### MERMAID

The fish-tailed lady offering her breast  
Has nothing else to give.  
She'll render only brine, if pressed,  
That none can drink and live.

She has a magic glass, whose spell  
Makes bone look wondrous white.  
By day she sings, though, travellers like to tell,  
She weeps at night.

### LUNG-FISH

The seas where once I swam as slick as herring  
Are now dried up, and sunk below earth's rind.  
Who lays his nets to take me now shall find  
Not fish but flesh, no Friday faring.

### EGG

Reader, in your hand you hold  
A silver case, a box of gold.  
I have no door, however small,  
Unless you pierce my tender wall,  
And there's no skill in healing then  
Shall ever make me whole again.  
Show pity, Reader, for my plight:  
Let be, or else consume me quite.

### MANDRAKE

The fall from man engenders me,  
Rooted beneath the deadly tree.  
My certain origin I show,  
Single above and forked below.  
Man grubs me from my peaceful sink  
To aid his horrid loves, and link  
My fate more strongly with his own:  
Foreknowledge racks me, and I groan.

### PHOENIX

If I am that bird, then I am one alone.  
Father, mother, child, I am my own.  
Ashes and bone of a dead life I save  
And bear about with me to find a grave,  
Token that my renewed and lively breath  
Is kindled from a still-repeated death.  
That fire is my element, consumes and lights me,  
Heals and accuses and again requites me.  
I feed on the dew of heaven and live without desire:  
Reader, consider a life in the fire.

### ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

The guardian stalking his eternal snows  
With backward tread and never any sound  
Afflicts the mind with horror more profound  
Than caves and chasms among which he goes.

Below the snowline flourish greedy tribes  
Who run with dogs to hunt him as a beast,  
Then pass his pieces round in solemn feast  
Accompanied with triumph-song and gibes.

The unoffending flesh they take for meat,  
The hairless palms and cheeks, the white sad face,  
Are human, even found in such a place:  
Too like our own the still-reluctant feet.

## BOOK

Dear Reader, not your fellow flesh and blood  
- I cannot love like you, nor you like me -  
But like yourself launched out upon the flood,  
Poor vessel to endure so fierce a sea.

The water-beetle travelling dry and frail  
On the stream's face is not more slight than I;  
Nor more tremendous is the ancient whale  
Who scans the ocean floor with horny eye.

Although by my creator's will I span  
The air, the fire, the water and the land,  
My volume is no burden to your hand.

I flourish in your sight and for your sake.  
His servant, yet I grapple fast with man:  
Grasped and devoured, I bless him. Reader, take.

## RETINA

The struggler in the net  
His agon past  
Through a true gate  
Comes in at last,  
Leaving behind him  
In quite a fix  
An old man's skin and bones  
Cross as two sticks.

## READER

My old shape-changer, who will be  
Now wild, now calm, now bound, now free,  
Now like a sun, and now a storm,  
Now fish, now flesh, now cold, now warm,  
Mercurial, dull - but sly enough  
To slip my hand and wriggle off -,  
I have you fast and will not let you go:  
Your nature and your name I know.

## THE FISHERMAN

The world was first a private park  
Until the angel, after dark,  
Scattered afar to wests and easts  
The lovers and the friendly beasts.

And later still a home-made boat  
Contained Creation set afloat,  
No rift nor leak that might betray  
The creatures to a hostile day.

But now beside the midnight lake  
One single fisher sits awake  
And casts and fights and hauls to land  
A myriad forms upon the sand.

Old Adam on the naming-day  
Blessed each and let it slip away:  
The fisher of the fallen mind  
Sees no occasion to be kind,

But on his catch proceeds to sup;  
Then bends, and at one slurp sucks up  
The lake and all that therein is  
To slake that hungry gut of his,

Then whistling makes for home and bed  
As the last morning breaks in red;  
But God the Lord with patient grin  
Lets down his hook and hoicks him in.

## Bibliography.

The group "The Fisherman" is from The Boatman.

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## SIX MONTREAL POETS

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