RHYTHM AND SOUND IN CONTEMPORARY
CANADIAN POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

Since World War II Canadian literary criticism has tended to be either historical or aesthetic in its emphasis. Little or no interest has been shown in the linguistic approach to criticism; no work has been done on Canadian poets comparable to the writing of Donald David and David Abercrombie on English poets, or of Chatman or Miles on American poets. It is the purpose of this thesis to make a preliminary survey of contemporary Canadian poets from Pratt to Newlove, with particular reference to their style and technique. Special attention will be given to rhythm and sound, relating Canadian poets' experience to contemporary trends elsewhere.

Central to this study is the concept of rhythm in poetry. For the older poets, Pratt and Klein, rhythm was contained in the traditional metres. Raymond Knister, influenced by the Chicago poets, directed attention to the imagist conception of free verse; and this led, among the poets of the forties, to an increasing interest in the experiments of Pound and Williams. In the fifties, Olson, Duncan, Creeley and Ginsberg began to emphasize the oral and linguistic side of poetry-making. Their influence, first felt in Eastern Canada, has recently gained recognition on the West Coast.

The Canadian poets dealt with in this study are those specifically concerned with new experiments in rhythm and sound, and for this reason such poets as Birney and Layton have been excluded. Their eclecticism and frequent changes in style would seem to deserve specialized
research. In this present work, Chapter I defines the terms used and summarizes various critical views on verse techniques, from the Russian Formalists up to the present.

Chapter II deals with the forerunners of experimentation, Pratt and Klein. Of the two, Klein was the greater technician, a poet who played with many metrical forms. Both men, however, were deeply concerned with language and its relation to poetry, and this linguistic interest undoubtedly influenced younger poets.

Chapter III examines the Imagist movement and in particular its effect on the poet of the thirties, Raymond Knister. Although he used metaphor and symbol, the emphasis which Knister put upon the object—"little things and great"—did great service to the growth of an indigenous, objective movement in Canadian poetry. This movement is the subject of chapters IV and V, in which the work of Souster and Dudek is examined.

Chapter VI considers the poetry of Milton Acorn as it relates to the imagism and social commentary already present in the poetry of Souster and Dudek. An unusual aspect of Acorn's verse is its didactic note, expressed in resonant rhythms.

Chapter VII examines the style of Alfred Purdy. Although he eschews rhyme, he uses the iambic stance whenever it suits his purpose. Purdy's own personal rhythm dominates the content and structure of all his poetry.

In conclusion Chapter VIII refers to the contemporary scene in British Columbia, attempting to show that the experimental trends from the western States and from eastern Canada have united in the work of
Phyllis Webb, James Reid and John Newlove. Each one, though markedly individual, is profoundly conscious of the spoken word, the linguistic collection of words, and the importance of syntax as a propeller of rhythm and sound. Newlove's poetry is especially singled out as being an 'oral' and 'aural' reflection of his place and time.

An Appendix is attached which described the Trager and Smith approach to stress, intonation and juncture, with some critical notes on its application to the art of poetry. Throughout this thesis, the emphasis is on an examination of a poet's style rather than an evaluation of his content. Nonetheless it should be borne in mind that "Sound and meter...must be studied as elements of the totality of a work of art, not in isolation from meaning."¹ An examination of Canadian poetry from Pratt to Purdy must recognize the intimate interplay that exists between thought and expression.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Linguistic research and experiment have had a profound influence not only on contemporary literary critics, but on poets. It is scarcely possible to find a piece of criticism in the American journals that does not reveal, at least by inference, the impact of linguistic thinking. Poets from Pound to Williams and on to Olson have explored the new findings in linguistic studies. Was it not Pound who first discovered Fenellosa? And is it not Olson who proclaims the 'organic' principle, the interrelationship between thought and projection? "If the beginning and the end is breath, voice in its largest sense, then the material of verse shifts."\(^1\) Likewise Whitman, it is now realized, was as great an innovator of rhythmic techniques as was Hopkins; and in England the search for new metres initiated in the last century by Hopkins' 'sprung rhythm' and Bridges' 'syllable-counting' verse has been re-affirmed by young poets such as Gunn and Tomlinson.

What about Canada? Our established critics, E. K. Brown and Desmond Pacey, have scarcely touched on the relationship between rhythm and content; only Northrop Frye in his Sound and Poetry and Anatomy of Criticism has emphasized the fundamental significance of rhythm in lyric poetry. For Frye, rhythm is "an aspect of recurrence" similar to a dance pattern; indeed it is "a structural principle of all art, whether temporal or spatial in its primary impact."\(^2\) Frye explains further that metre is an "aspect of rhythm".


Besides metre itself, quantity and accent (or stress) are elements in poetic recurrence, though quantity is not an element of regular recurrence in modern English, except in experiments in which the poet has to make up his own rules as he goes along.3

This is critical analysis of prosody enriched by linguistic findings. Regrettably, however, Frye has not analysed the work of Canadian poets in this light. It seems that now attention must be paid to Canadian poets from the point of view of their style; specifically, of the relationship of their rhythms to metre, sound texture and syntax. It is the purpose of this thesis to select the work of certain Canadian poets for such detailed analysis.

Pratt, Klein and Knister are the first poets of interest here, as they broke free from Victorian shackles. They established the new ground for manoeuvre upon which later experimenters could take up position: poets like Dudek, Layton and Souster. These again were the men who had a marked influence on the significant two poets of the present moment; Purdy and Acorn. Amongst the very youngest poets, particularly on the West Coast, the influence of Pound and Williams has been greater than that of our native poets: Lionel Kearns might be cited here as a young B. C. poet who turned to the Black Mountain group for his early direction. But the eastern Canadians, Souster and Layton, have set their mark on a man like Newlove, a prairie poet who has made his home in Vancouver and whose work is well worth attention. Off by herself, an Imagist influenced by Robert Duncan, is Phyllis Webb—a westerner now

3 Ibid., p.251.
in Toronto. With such cross-weaving in space and time, it is remarkable, perhaps, that there is no Canadian School of poetry as such. Each of the poets mentioned is an arrant individualist. Only in his choice of language, with its rhythmical arrangement, is there likely to be some similarity between one poet and another.

It may be noted that Earle Birney has not been included in this study. Birney is a special case. In years he stands between Pratt and Klein; but he did not begin to write or publish poetry until the Forties. He was an experimenter from the beginning: even the narrative poem David, which first brought him fame, was strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon strong-stress metre, kennings and assonances. The effect of such a background has been to make Birney unique, for after passing through the Anglo-Saxon phase he constantly changed his style. His very eclecticism has made him a poet unlikely to influence others. Certainly, Birney has young followers, appreciators, but he has never set up a 'school' of which he was master. In his critical capacity as editor of Canadian Poetry Magazine during the Forties, and as literary editor of The Canadian Forum and latterly as editor, from Vancouver, of Prism International, he has shown the widest possible taste. Birney then does not establish a trend: his work is a microcosm of one man's prosodic development and as such it deserves a study of its own.

Other early twentieth century poets not dealt with in this study are the traditionalist, A. J. M. Smith and the satirist, F. R. Scott. Like Birney, they are poets who have set their individual stamp on Canadian poetry. Only Scott might be said to have had an influence on younger poets, such as P. K. Page. And she again is in sui generis, a 'freudian' poet who has not
published since the early fifties. Reluctantly omitted from this study as well are the Jewish-Canadian poets who owe so much to Klein and yet who all write in a unique poetic pattern: Eli Mandel, Miriam Waddington, Phyllis Gottlieb and Leonard Cohen. They deserve a study in themselves. So likewise do the poets of the 'mythopoeic' group, centred in Ontario, who, strongly influenced by the critic Northrop Frye, are concerned with the relating of traditional techniques and classical archetypes to the contemporary 'search for the self'. James Reaney, Jay MacPherson and Margaret Avison, to name the outstanding members, are poets who have established an area of experimentation on carefully chosen ground. Each one works, nonetheless, quite separately in his own corner, producing poetry whose main appeal is intellectual. It tends to be parody (as in Reaney's Spenserian Eclogues) rather than experiment; and for this reason the group has been eliminated as a subject for this particular enquiry.

Such are the boundaries. It remains to define the approach more pointedly: what is meant by 'rhythm' and 'sound'? As T. S. Eliot once remarked, the poet as critic will inevitably approach poetry from his own hillock. A 'maker' himself, his creations are bound to affect the way he interprets the poetry of others. The point of view here discards the classical theory that technique is an embellishment, an embroidery. Rhythm and its helper-sister, sound and metre, are inextricably engaged with thought and syntax: all working together to make an organism, the poem.4

4 When I, as a poet, am moved to write a poem I find that the initiating impulse is a rhythmic line, sounding through the mind. I fully understand what Hopkins meant, when he wrote of The Wreck of the Deutschland, "I had long had haunting in my ear the echo of a new rhythm." Similarly, as the line forms in my mind I am not conscious of its concept, but of its compelling rhythm. Rhythm determines the ambiance out of which the idea uncoils.
As Harvey Gross so aptly writes:

Whether the patterns of rhythm and metre genetically precede conceptualization; whether they are formed after the idea has been formulated; or whether rhythmic form and conceptual meaning are conceived simultaneously seem matters of individual poetic genius. It is reported that Yeats first write his lines out as prose and counted the metres off on his fingers; it is also reported that he always had "a tune in his head" when he composed. Eliot remarks, "I know that a poem or a passage of a poem may tend to realize itself as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image."\(^5\)

Since rhythm is so fundamental to poetry, it must be defined more precisely. As long ago as the early twenties, the Russian Formalists led by men like Roman Jakobson (a linguist still very active, in the U.S.), analyzed poetry as "an integrated type of discourse—speech organized in its entire phonic structure".\(^6\) For these linguists and critics the "constructive factor" in verse was rhythmical pattern. Rhythm they defined as "the regular alteration in time of comparable phenomena".\(^7\) They felt that "the rhythm of a poem hinges not so much on actual distribution of rhythmical accents, as on our anticipation of their recurrence at certain intervals." To Jakobson, 'the time of verse is the time of expectation'.\(^8\)

Inherently similar ideas are accepted today by linguists and prosodists in Britain and the United States. In her book, The Structure of Modern English, Barbara Strang writes not of rhythm in poetry only, but of rhythm as the basic component of language:

Two main types of rhythm are found in languages, one having syllables as its basis, so that a given number or combination of types of syllable produces a rhythm.

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Ibid.
group; the other having stress as its basis, so that a rhythm group lasts from stress to stress. English rhythm uses the second type, stress-timed rhythm. Sentences are spoken with recurrent bursts of speed, each burst constituting a rhythm group, which is simple if it contains one primary intonation contour, and complex if it contains more than one.  

This analysis, applied by Strang to speech rhythm, has tremendous significance for poetry and prosody. Of this stress-timed rhythm, Northrop Frye writes as follows:

It is the prevailing rhythm of the earlier poetry, though it changes its scheme from alliteration to rhyme in Middle English, it is the common rhythm of popular poetry in all periods, of ballads and of most nursery rhymes. In the ballad, the eight-six-eight-six quatrain is a continuous four-beat line, with a "rest" at the end of every other line. This principle of the rest, or a beat coming at a point of actual silence, was already established in Old English. The iambic pentameter provides a field of syncopation in which stress and metre can to some extent neutralize each other. If we read many iambic pentameters "naturally", giving the important words the heavy accent that they do have in spoken English, the old four-stress line stands in clear relief against its metrical background. Thus:

To be, or not to be: that is the question
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or take up arms against a sea of troubles...

Trager and Smith, in America, in a work that has already become a classic, have analyzed the basic unit of rhythm in English as the phonemic clause.

This they define as a minimal complete utterance (or cluster of syllables) which must contain one syllable having heavy stress (called primary stress in a four-degree system) and which ends in a pause (juncture). As an example, we might use the line from Shakespeare quoted above by Frye, to illustrate the use of juncture related to stress:

To be or not to be // that/is the question

In addition it should be understood that the sustained utterance in English is isochronic; that is to say that the amount of time between two primary stresses, regardless of the number of syllables between them, is likely to be almost the same. By "pacing out" the above Shakespearian line, it will readily be seen that the phrase "or not to be" takes the same amount of time in the saying as the phrase "to be". A poet may change the timing only by rhetorical devices, or by a re-arrangement of line lengths. Nonetheless his basic unit is the phonemic clause, whether he is using strong-stress metre, syllable stress, or free verse.

Rhythm is produced when a group of syllables in which there is one strong stress is followed by a juncture before the next group of syllables. Unless the "sender" of these syllables or word-groups uses this formula, communication will break down. It is the arrangement of the stressed groups, therefore, in relation to juncture, which constitutes a poet's technique. He may create his own pattern of rhythms but they must fall within the accepted linguistic system.

12 It should be noted that just as in English there are four levels of stress and four levels of pitch, so also are there four levels of juncture. Of special interest in poetry there are: single bar juncture | where the pitch stays the same; double bar juncture || where the pitch rises slightly, and double cross // where the pitch goes down (as at the end of a statement). For further comments, see Appendix I.
What is the relationship of the techniques of poetry to this fundamental law of rhythm? Metre, for instance, imposes itself on the "natural" four-stress line already quoted; so that it can be scanned also as having five stresses:

To be/or not/to be/that is the question

Thus the Formalists' view that metre should be regarded "merely as a particular case of rhythm—or more exactly, as the tangible proof of its existence" is supported today by linguistic research into prosody. And historically, in twentieth century verse in English, the Imagists took up the same position. Indeed, they held even more firmly to the notion that rhythm is independent of metre. "Down with the pentameter!" became the battle-cry not only for its originators, Williams and Pound, but for many successive poets and critics. Today, in the fifties and sixties, the same proclamation has been made by Olson and Ginsberg. Their emphasis on the line rather than the foot as the rhythmic unit for a poem recalls the Russian Formalists' belief that the foot was 'imaginary' as compared with the verse-line, a distinct 'rhythmico-syntactical or intonational segment'. It recalls Whitman, who defined rhythm as 'a line of thought'. He wanted poems 'to break forth loosely as lilacs on a bush'. Doubtless he would have approved of Olson's contention that the line comes from the breath: "of the breathing of a man who writes as well as of his listen-
ings". And both poets would accept the view that a poet's rhythm is

13 Russian Formalism, p.184.
14 Russian Formalism, p.185
15 The New American Poetry, p.386
tied up with his own individual gait, his gestures, his breath control. Recent studies in the physiology of speech have led David Abercrombie, in England, to the conclusion that

All rhythm, it seems likely, is ultimately rhythm of bodily movement. Language rhythm is thus something which belongs permanently to the speaker, rather than the hearer; something which arises out of the speaker's movements and especially out of the muscular movements which produce the air-stream.

In order to communicate this rhythm to the hearer, the reader, the lines must be written down in such a way as to approximate the rhythmic speed and pauses. Typography matters; margins matter!

It will now be in order to indicate briefly what is meant by "sound" in poetry. Because sounds are embedded in language itself, they play an inevitable part in the rhythm and structure of a sentence or a poem. They accompany the rhythm, as it were, and intensify or diminish it. Such are the elements that we call alliteration, assonance, rhyme; the "texture" of vowels and consonants and their interrelationships. Here again Northrop Frye’s view is pertinent:

Recurrently in the history of rhetoric some theory of a "natural relation" between sound and sense turns up. It is unlikely that there is any such natural relation, but that there is an onomatopoeic element in language which is developed and exploited by the poet is obvious enough. It is simpler to think rather of imitative harmony as a special application of a rhetorical feature which is analogous to classical quantity, but would be better described as "quality"; the patterns of assonance made by vowels

16 David Abercrombie, "A phoneticians's View of Verse Structure", Linguistics No. 6, June, 1964, p.7
Earlier in the same essay he notes that "onomatopoeia is a linguistic as well as a poetic device, and that the poet takes advantage of whatever his language offers as a matter of course. The English language has many excellent sound-effects, though it has lost a few." Further Frye notes that:

Certain imitative devices become standar-dized in every language and most of them in English are too familiar to need re-capitulation here; beheaded lines increase speed, trochaic rhythms suggest falling movement, and so on. The native stock of English words consists largely of monosyllables, and a monosyllable always demands a separate accent, however slight. Hence long Latin words, if skilfully used, have the rhythmical function of lightening the metre, in contrast to the unrhythmical roar that results "when ten low words oft creep in one dull line." 18

The search for "sound effects" therefore will include how strong stresses are employed in relation to weak ones. Conventional nomenclature is also useful: the iamb with its accompanying anapaest to create a tonic or rising intonation; and the trochee or dactyl to indicate minor, falling intonation. These effects, an intricate inter-locking of rhythm and sound, can determine the entire tone of a poem, whether it is strictly metred or in vers libre. The controversy, indicated earlier by Frye, concerning the relative merits of strong-stress (Anglo-Saxon and ballad) metre and syllable-stress (Saintsbury's choice) metre is stimulating to consider but hardly relevant here. Rather what

will be looked for are the **isochronic** effects which poets may achieve, using juncture-timing with either of the stress systems. For unconsciously, poets absorb the aspects of contemporary rhythm which appeal to them.

The special problem of poets writing in 'free' verse will also be considered; for it should be self-evident that the poet using free verse as his medium has a harder task than the poet who accepts the traditional 'norm'--the devices of metre, rhyme and so on. The poet who discards these runs the risk of being unable to communicate his very particular rhythm to the listener, or of falling into monotony. He will have to find other 'props', as did Whitman with his parallelisms and Williams with his 'variable foot'; he will lean heavily, as did Eliot, on the rhythm of syntax. Without the traditional resources, the poet must swing out, as it were, on his own private orbit. He may find, perhaps, that he cannot syncopate the wind: *it bloweth where it listeth!*

Another factor affecting poetry today is that it has become, increasingly, an art that is 'rendered'--spoken aloud; and there are marked differences in pronunciation, stresses, junctures and intonations as between poet and poet, reader and reader. Here the rhetorical aspects of rhythm and sound will have their play. It is for this reason that the last chapter of this study will include examples of young British Columbia poets reading from their own works, as analysed on tape recordings. Some of these poets attempt a 'notation' so that the rhetorical effect desired may be closely interpreted by the reader. Thus, we may notice how the

19 When, as a beginning poet I was writing almost exclusively in free verse, Charles G. D. Roberts chided me for this, in a grandfatherly manner. "Free verse is much harder and more demanding", he said, "than is strictly metred verse."
poet-composer interprets his own rhythms on the printed page; and the
poetry may gain a new dimension. When Louis Dudek writes lines such
as these:

The sea retains such images
in her ever-unchanging waves;
for all her infinite variety, and the forms,
inexhaustible, of her loves,
she is constant always in beauty,
which to us need be nothing more
than a harmony with the wave on which we move

he means us, when reading silently to 'underspeak' it, articulating
each syllable as indicated and pausing as the line-shapes dictate.

A final objective in discussing Canadian poetry from the audi-
tory angle is the hope that in the schools and universities more atten-
tion will be paid to rhythm and sound in poetry. In the past, failure
to articulate a poem has resulted, all too often, in failure to under-
stand it. Unless we hear its rhythm, a poem is meaningless. Yet how
often have teachers failed to understand that lesson? It is like watching
a violinist play behind soundproof glass. The purpose of this thesis
is to hear, rather than to see, what Canadian poetry is saying.
CHAPTER TWO

THE POLISHED LENS

A Comparison of the Poetic Techniques of Pratt and Klein

"The style is the man." That familiar saying recalls what T. S. Eliot was stressing in his analysis of Ezra Pound's poetry:

People may think they like the form because they like the content, or think they like the content because they like the form. In the perfect poet they fit and are the same thing; and in another sense they are always the same thing."

A study, therefore, of the styles of two Canadian poets can only be useful if it delivers into our minds a clearer understanding of the poet's approach to his work, to his themes. The aim here is not an analysis of technique for its own sake, but technique for the sake of enlightenment.

In retrospect, the language of our Post-Confederation poets is singularly conventional and dull. Though often felicitous in its music and imagery it swings, supine, in a hammock, "golden and inappellable". Adjectives predominate over verbs; and even such a good imagist as Lampman pads out his lines with useless words, simply to fit the required metre. In these poets there is no sense of being "seized" by language, in the Joyceian way. By 1920 it was clear there was a crying need to liberate the language of poetry in Canada; and an equally urgent need to turn from the contemplation of nature to concern for the human condition.

The first sign of experimentation in both areas came with the publication of Newfoundland Verse by E. J. Pratt, in 1923, and more

markedly with *Titans* (1926). Pratt, a robust talker from our northeastern shore, set Toronto crackling with his "Cachelot" and his "Witches' Brew". The language was fresh, muscular, contemporary and often boisterously amusing. The metre was one that had rarely been practised by a Canadian poet: octosyllabic couplets with an anapaestic roll, "Perched on a dead volcanic pile", and the content was not too strenuous to tax the average man's ingenuity. It bore with it strong echoes of mock heroic epic and light satire. Like Pope or Dryden, Pratt did not distrust the world he mocked, nor did he wish to destroy it. He felt it was worth some fun. The style of these early extravaganzas, accordingly, was marked by punch and zest, the metre moving at a run or a gallop by means of strong, monosyllabic verbs; the rhyme staccato, to punctuate the humour.

They ate and drank and fought, it's true,  
And when the zest was on they slew;  
And yet their most tempestuous quarrels  
Were never prejudiced by morals.  

With his next poem, "The Great Feud", it would seem from the style alone that Pratt had begun to be aware of some conflict in his position. As Desmond Pacey has pointed out, "Passages of horrible conflict alternate with passages of rollicking humour." The theme is a more serious one than that of the "Cachelot" or "The Witches' Brew"; and yet the poet relies on the same octosyllabics, enjambment and witty rhyme to carry the rhythm of the fable. Agreed, the myth-making, story-telling elements are Pratt's own; but he does not support these with imagery, epithet, or colour. His chief structural weakness on the syntactic level (to be explored more fully later) is already evident. Pratt depends too fully on the prepositional

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3  *The Witches' Brew*.  
phase. On one page of twenty-eight lines, chosen at random, there are twenty-four phrases: endless lists of nouns. Variety is gained, notwithstanding, by means of ingenuity in the choice of vocabulary and end-rhymes.

If we now compare Abraham Klein's earliest work with Pratt's phase one, we find that his technical prowess, evident at the age of twenty, was amazingly versatile. Milton Wilson has remarked, justly, that at this period "Their diction often calls for the same critical adjectives: polysyllabic, technical, erudite, as well as colloquial or prosaic" and in metre and rhyme Klein might be thought to be echoing if not imitating the older poet. Yet already in his first book, Hath Not a Jew (1940), Klein appears to have at his command a dazzling variety of poetic forms. The verse (never 'free' and rarely unrhymed) ranges widely through octosyllabics, Heroic couplets, terza rima; and from short bursts of lyricism to the long sinuous biblical line with its caesura and parallelism:

If this be a Jew, indeed, where is the crook of his spine;
and the quiver of his lip, where?
Behold his knees are not callous, through kneeling; he is proud, he is erect.

The effect here is created by the use of caesura or juncture, as it is now commonly called by prosodists. Besides the normal juncture between words Klein indicates, in line one, by means of punctuation, a rising juncture in the middle of the line which serves to place added stress and interest on the second rhetorical sentence:

If this be a Jew—indeed / where is the crook of his spine?

In line two, the placing of the rising juncture stresses the word, "where":

5 Milton Wilson, "Klein's Drowned Poet". Canadian Literature No. 6, Autumn, 1960, p.22.

6 "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens"", poem viii.
and the quiver of his lip where

In the next line the choice of the rhetorical word "behold" in itself creates a dramatic juncture:

It is by means of such skilful techniques as this that Klein creates his powerful rhythms. Klein uses rhyme also to emphasize his metrical effects. He has an amazing facility with rhyme; and in his work it is difficult to find a rhyme that does not sound natural, at home. In the tetrameter stanzas he explores many variations in rhyme scheme and in the tricola rhymes he varies one-syllabed with two-syllabed rhymes so that the rhythm is constantly subject to a new charge.

Seek reasons; rifle your theology;
Philosophize; expand your dialectic;
Decipher and translate God's diary;
Discover causes, primal and eclectic;
I cannot; all I know is this:
That pain doth render flesh most sore and hectic;
That lance-points prick; that scorched bones hiss;
That thumb-screws agonize, and that a martyr
Is mad if he considers these things bliss.

In this book, Hath Not a Jew, Klein established himself as a master of the craft. For, added to the singular felicity of his metre and rhyme was the delight in vocabulary and the contrapuntal use of pause, or juncture, as evident in the poem quoted above (particularly effective in the last two verses and helpfully marked by semi-colons and colon).

On now, to phase two, where Pratt's development will again be paralleled with Klein's. Pratt's work of interest here is The Fabric (1935), a poem in which he extricates himself from the tetrametric clutch.

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It is by means of such skilful techniques as this that Klein creates his powerful rhythms. Klein uses rhyme also to emphasize his metrical effects. He has an amazing facility with rhyme; and in his work it is difficult to find a rhyme that does not sound natural, at home. In the tetrameter stanzas he explores many variations in rhyme scheme and in the tricola rhymes he varies one-syllabed with two-syllabed rhymes so that the rhythm is constantly subject to a new charge.

Seek reasons; rifle your theology;
Philosophize; expand your dialectic;
Decipher and translate God's diary;
Discover causes, primal and eclectic;
I cannot; all I know is this:
That pain doth render flesh most sore and hectic;
That lance-points prick; that scorched bones hiss;
That thumb-screws agonize, and that a martyr
Is mad if he considers these things bliss.
His line is extended now to Heroic couplets. These, at their lowest level, can be platitudinous and dull:

Her intercostal spaces ready to start  
The power pulsing through her lungs and heart  
An ocean lifeboat in herself, so ran  
The architectural comment on her plan.

At the highest level, where the rhymes are more freely arranged, the features of enjambment and juncture create an inner tension which is most pleasing:

Pressure and glacial time had stratified  
The berg to the consistency of flint,  
And kept inviolate, through clash of tide  
and gale, facade and columns with their hint  
Of inward alters and of steeple bells  
Ringing the passage of the parallels.

These images are common ones, more vividly played upon by Melville in "The Berg" and by Roberts in "The Iceberg"; but Pratt's vocabulary saves the day, with quite a brilliant display of tension between polysyllabic words of classical origin (consistency, inviolate, parallels) and a catalogue of single-syllabled nouns: gale, hint, bells, berg, flint, clash, tide.

It must be faced, however: Pratt's passion for nouns leads him into two serious difficulties. One is the absence of texture; for without adjectives and adverbs it is not easy to appeal to the senses. And where, in Pratt's poetry, is there any evocation of touch, taste, hearing, scent? True, the visual appeal is there: "sloping spur that tapered to a claw"; but this is an appeal in outline, in black and white. One senses that the poet is colour-blind. The adjectives which he does use, sparingly, call
no colours into view: lateral, casual, polar, eternal, southern, glacial.

But the monotony of Pratt's verse can be traced, I believe, to a deeper, structural cause. Because he is so concerned with "naming"—adding up nouns—he must catch hold of them by using two devices: by cataloguing; or by dangling them from the hooks of prepositions. It is rarely possible to find a line of Pratt's without a prepositional phrase; more often there are two or three bolstering it up. In the lines quoted above this pattern can be seen in five of the six. In the second line there are two prepositional phrases; in the third, two; in the fourth, two.

Now this pattern, in itself, is not deplorable: it is an essential in English syntax. Praise of the noun (sometimes amounting to adoration) can be found in much contemporary critical and creative writing. Gertrude Stein puts it one way:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing with losing and wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun...
Poetry is doing nothing but using re-using and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.

and here is Harry R. Warfel, a linguist:

But how do these nouns come to be used so much? They play as subjects of verbs, as complements of verbs and verbals, as objects of prepositions, as independent elements, as headwords. What is important is their mode of turning up everywhere. For example, nearly every noun can be the object of several prepositions. If the working vocabulary of English has 200,000 nouns and these unite with only an average of ten prepositions, the result is two million adjective and/or adverb phrases. If you have ever wondered why some writers clutter

their style with prepositional phrases, you can now see why.9

A skilful poet then, writing in English, will certainly use nouns to his advantage to vary the stress and juncture; but Pratt tends to use nouns to his disadvantage. For instance, the indiscriminate use of "of" followed by nouns (lines five and six) ends, from sheer repetition, in rhythmic paralysis.

As we have seen, Klein's metrical range was wider at the start than was Pratt's. In his phase two, Klein continued to employ polysyllabics as well as the Heroic couplet. Understandably, therefore, in the Hitleriad (1944), there are echoes of Pratt's style. The form is not narrative like "The Great Feud" but the intention is equally satiric:

And then there came,---blow, trumpets; drummers, drum
The apocalypse, the pandemonium
The war the Kaiser from his shrivelled hand
Let fall upon the European land

Noticeable even in this unremarkable stanza is the use of juncture for dramatic effect; of finite verbs; of inversion; and of clausal patterns which create rhythmic variation. Further on Klein writes:

Club-footed, rat-faced, halitotic, the
Brave Nordic ideal, a contrario!
A kept man; eloquent, a Ph.D.;
Carried no gun, forsooth; a radio
Lethal enough for him, shouting its lies
Exploding lebensraum and libido;
Subtle in puncturing all human-foibles
Saving his own, prolific in alibis---
Geebbels.

The *Hitleriad* is not a successful poem. It lacks an element which Pratt possessed in good measure: objectivity. Nonetheless, as a long poem it is interesting to compare with one of Pratt's because, technically, it rings many more changes. Thereby it achieves pace; and on another level, irony.

In the same year, 1944, Klein's real lyricism burst forth in his "psalms", thirty-six short poems in a great variety of forms (published in *Poems*). Several are closely patterned on the Psalms of David in their long lines, parallelism, Hebrew inversions and rhetoric. Others leap away from anything but a superficial resemblance to the English iambic pentameter and allow strong stress rhythm, reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon and of Hebrew, to take over. Here is a delightful example, from Psalm XXVII, "a psalm to teach humility":

O sign and wonder of the barnyard, more beautiful than the pheasant, more melodious than nightingale! O creature marvellous!

Prophet of sunrise, and foreteller of times! Vizier of the constellations! Sage, red-bearded, scarlet turbaned, in whose brain the stars lie scattered like well-scattered grain! Calligraphist upon the barnyard page! Five-noted balladist! Crower of rhymes!

But this is Klein in his gayest, tenderest mood. He can be more easily likened to Pratt in a poem called "In Re Solomon Warshawer". Pratt's "The Truant" is quite comparable because it represents Pratt at a high technical level, breaking away from the confines of rigid metre. The Heroic couplet still holds the thought in check, but in "The Truant" it is loosened, stretched or abbreviated to avoid monotony. The tone is vigorous, satiric; and the theme is man himself, pitted against a mechanical
universe.

'Sire
The stuff is not amenable to fire
There still remains that strange precipitate
Which has the quality to resist
Our oldest and most trusted catalyst.'

Lines such as these retain Pratt's robust, semi-scientific vocabulary; and his wit takes up the slack caused by the obsessive use of prepositional phrases. This is Pratt's most interesting poem, both for its technical virtuosity and for its provocative thought. Man is being judged: but he reverses the tables, himself condemning "God" for creating a purely mechanical universe. In Klein's "In Re Solomon Warshawer" there also occurs a judgment scene; in this case between the evil forces in man and the good. Man's plea before the court (a war time tribunal) is that of the underdog, of the one in process of being destroyed, the Jew. The abstract Jew however is so particularized that the reader is constrained to identify with him (as also is the case in "The Truant").

Here is a Nazi soldier reporting to his superior:

Asked for his papers, he made a great to-do
of going through the holes in his rags, whence he withdrew
a Hebrew pamphlet and a signet ring,
herewith produced, exhibits 1 and 2.

I said, No document in a civilized tongue?
He replied:

Produce, O Lord, my wretched fingerprint,
Bring forth, O angel in the heavenly court,
My dossier, full, detailed, both fact and hint,
Felony, misdemeanor, tort!
I refused to be impressed by talk of that sort.

But passionate identification with the rightness of man's cause
heightens the language to a degree not found in "The Truant". Consider
the lines which begin

They would have harried me extinct, these thrones.
Set me, archaic, in their heraldries,
Blazon antique! ....

Rhyme is forgotten. Iambic regularity is broken by strong stresses
aided by trochaic and dactylic rhythms. Added to these features are
those of inversion, juncture, and punctuation used for intonational
effect. In this respect, the entire poem is a forerunner of poems in
The Rocking Chair (1948), where Klein has adapted the Hebraic strong
stress pattern (noted in the rooster poem, above) to French-Canadian
rhythms:

It is tradition. Centuries have flicked
from its arcs, alternately flicked and pinned.
It rolls with the gait of St. Malo. It is act
and symbol, symbol of this static folk.

Here, most cunningly within the apparent framework of the iambic pen-
tameter, Klein has overlaid the four-stress beat of much Hebrew poetry
and caught at the same time the lilt of the French language. He
achieves this tour de force by emphasizing the four levels of stress
distinguishing between syllables that are nearly neutral and thus
'outriders' in Hopkins' sense (alternately) and those that bear tertii-
ary, secondary, or primary stress. His use of juncture aids in this
process also, as it is always well-timed (or isochronic).

By the time Klein's Rocking Chair appeared, Pratt was already
well established in his third phase, with Brébeuf and his Brethren, a
long documentary narrative based on Quebec's history and religious past.
The epic length and scope of this poem would indicate that Pratt conceived
it as a major production. But surely it could be criticized as a conventional piece rather than a creative one, for in form and intention it is eminently Victorian. Nor is it comparable with the later experimental poetry of Klein. On the technical level, both poets have thrown off their patterned style, have pushed rhyme into the background, have sought a free-flowing rhythm close to the rhythm of speech. But what speech? Pratt's speech here is prosaic, generalized; whereas Klein's has the vernacular lilt, and is particular.

In *Brebeuf*, Pratt offers us a steady but not a heady blank verse. Would not the opening lines, apparently attempting to create atmosphere, be equally effective if written as prose? And the second stanza is surely one long, wordy list, noun following upon noun?

The story of a frontier like a saga
Rang through the cells and cloisters of a nation.

This is not to say that *Brebeuf* is not without its moments of poetic intensity. In Stanza XII particularly, the iambic line is made undulant and ominous by means of dactylic and falling rhythms. Then the poem climbs again to the climax, a simple image of

In the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill...

These are the heights; but there are too many valleys where vocabulary, syntax, rhythm and imagery reveal only mediocrity.

How different has been the development of Abraham Klein! Behind him lies the shadow of three languages, three traditions. The Jewish
writer in Montreal can indeed be said to bridge the English and French cultures, and to inject into these languages the rhythms, inversions, pauses and parallelisms peculiar to Hebrew and Yiddish.

Then he will remember his travels over that body the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun, and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries. A first love it was, the recognition of his own. Dear limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective dimple and dip of conjugation!

("Portrait of the Artist as Landscape")

In those lines of Klein we find the contemporaneous sound of the "loosened" iambic employed by Spender, Auden, Day Lewis, where the strong stresses pull the lines up short and leave words like "auxiliaries", "recognition" and "conjugation" with only one really strong stress. We find also the emotional, rhetorical lilt of the Hebrew, created by inversion ("Dear limbs adverbial"), by dactyls, and by a counterpoint rhythm that surely echoes the French. This note sounds clearly in short poems such as "Political Meeting":

he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome, not snobbish, not of the grande allee. Un homme!

and also in that marvellous linguistic carnival: "Montreal". In his linguistic sensitivity Klein is a surpassing fine juggler, holding three globes in his hand and tossing them about with dazzling dexterity.

It is to be hoped that this examination of the style of two poets
has revealed something of their attitude as creators. Pratt emerges as a self-made poet; Klein, a natural one, possessing a Blakeian simplicity. Pratt remains a story-teller to the end, an "old artificer" collecting artifacts and arranging them cunningly, without committing his deeper self. The man, like the style, is easily identified. As W. E. Collin has noted, "his mind has undergone a scholar's discipline, it never runs beserk". Klein, a scholar also but in a narrower discipline, probes inward to the human soul; revealing its possibilities for creative joy as well as its predilections for darkness, madness.

Palsy the keeper of the house;
And of strongmen take Thy toll.
Break down the twigs; break down the boughs,
But touch not, Lord, the golden bowl!

(from Psalm XIII: "A prayer for Abraham, against madness").

Imagism and its first enthusiastic propagandist, Ezra Pound, do not appear to have taken hold on poetic theory and practice in Canada. Yet on close examination three poets there are who have been strongly attracted to the movement and its master. They have consistently followed the principles originally laid down in the Imagist 'manifesto' and have grown from there to find their own stature. Raymond Knister died young, at the age of thirty-two, before he had decided whether to be a poet or a novelist. He began to write in the Twenties, on the Imagist wave. The two other poets, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster, were born at the beginning of the Twenties and so benefitted from the greater perspective on Imagism presented by the later Pound. While they absorbed all they could from his ever-developing techniques, their profoundly different subject matter gave them individual scope.

Amidst the cultural mediocrity of the Twenties in Canada, the Group of Seven painters were quietly engaged in observations of exactitude: the doctrine of 'the eye on the object', in this case the northern Ontario landscape, preoccupied their minds. Canadian poetry, on the other hand, was still run ragged by the final flirtations of Carman, Roberts, and their romantic adherents; but Pratt burst into this field boisterously, as we have seen; and an Ontario farm boy at Morpeth began to record impressions of the countryside in clear, delicate pencil strokes. Instead of going to College
Raymond Knister set out for the midwest. In Chicago he got caught up in the poetic commotion that was still vigorous, proceeding from Carl Sandberg, Edgar Lee Masters, John Gould Fletcher, William Carlos Williams. Pound and Frost were by this time in Europe, and publishing there, but their work was sought out by editors like Harriet Monroe of Poetry and John Fredericks, of The Midland. Knister published many of his poems there, and sent others to the Canadian Forum. But he also aimed at Paris, and was indeed published in This Quarter, in 1925. Ezra Pound's poems must undoubtedly have entered his consciousness at that period, as well as the poetry of the Imagists.

What were the maxims behind the Imagist movement? Briefly, we should remind ourselves that Imagism insisted on 'plain talk', the language of everyday speech. A 'free verse' rhythm was to liberate itself from the traditional metre and rhyme and to present to the reader a poetry free from cliche, stripped even of simile and metaphor. By stressing simplicity and 'naturalness' in its manner of presentation, the movement aimed at drawing the reader closer to the poet. Its choice of subject matter, moreover, was wide open: anything could be a topic for poetry.

Imagism has been called "Symbolism without the magic" where "The symbols, naked and unexplained, trailing no clouds of glory, become the image." And for Ezra Pound:

An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.

The natural object is always the adequate symbol.

I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man uses 'symbols'

he must use them so that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand a symbol as such; to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.

In his *ABC of Reading*, Pound has stressed that "you use a word to throw a visual image on the reader's imagination". But he warned:

The defect of earlier imagist propaganda was not in misstatement but in incomplete statement. The diluters took the handiest and easiest meaning, and thought only of the STATIONARY image. If you can't think of imagism or phanopoeia as including the moving image, you will have to make a needless division of fixed image and praxis or action.

As we look at Knister's 'phanopoeia' it is important to ask to what degree he achieved this 'praxis or action'. It is also relevant to consider what use he made of another element which, Pound emphasizes, serves to charge language with meaning: 'melopoeia' or 'inducing emotional correlations by the sound of rhythm and speech'. In most of Knister's free verse poems the musical element is not immediately apparent; and his strictly metred verse is rare, often tentative. It is as if he were making a gesture, proving a point: "See, I can write your kind of poem". And sure enough, he can. He catches the traditional music:

*Reply to August*

What is the word that night is saying,  
Dark night, still?  
The curtains waver, but the unheard voice  
Makes no pause at the sill.

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3 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, New York: New Directions Paperback No. 89, p.52
4 Ibid., p.63.
5 For an interesting interpretation of these different types of structure in Raymond Knister's poetry, see Peter Stevens, "The Old Futility of Art", *Canadian Literature* No. 23, (Winter, 1965), pp.45-52.
The room does not know it has heard
But I know,
My heart listening, wild with the word
Murmured too low.

I shall hear what the nights have told,—
Another night
When this heart is the word it is speaking
In clouds' hugh or starlight...

This is symbolist, not an imagist poem. It evokes, reverberates. The music creates the rising tension towards the epiphany, "the moment of revelation". Graham Hough says of this kind of poetry:

For the Symbolist poet there is no question of describing an experience; the moment of illumination only occurs in its embodiment in some particular artistic form. There is no question of relating it to the experience of a lifetime, for it is unique, it exists in the poem alone.

Such moments of transcendental experience are rare in Knister's poetry. He sets them aside, almost deliberately, so as to concentrate on the object seen.

Birds and flowers and dreams are real as sweating men and swilling pigs. But the feeling about them is not always so real, any more, when it gets into words. Because of that, it would be good just to place them before the reader, just let the reader picture them with the utmost economy and clearness, and let him be moved in the measure that he is moved by little things and great. Let him snivel, or be uncaring, or make his own poems from undeniable glimpses of the world.

This is the imagist aesthetic. It might be the voice of any number of young West Coast poets today. The interesting thing, however, about Knister is that he cannot forget the music, the evocative mood. A painful, stabbing melancholy comes into his lyrical verses; and so even when he turns to the objective picture, melancholy creeps in, borne on the rhythm.

Quiet Snow

The quiet snow
Will splotch
Each in the row of cedars
With a fine
And patient hand;
Numb the harshness,
Tangle of that swamp.
It does not say, the sun
Does these things another way.

Even on the hats of walkers,
The air of noise
And street-car ledges
It does not know
There should be hurry.

What young poets of today are struggling hard to do—to get speech rhythms into the poem; to eliminate the iambic and anapaestic metric units by substituting trochees and dactyls, a la Pound; and to capture the bare movement of the syntax and use it for repetitive effects:

The wind moves above the wheat
With a silver crashing,
A thin war of metal.

as in those three lines (from Pound's "A Song of Degrees")—this is precisely the kind of "shape" that Knister developed, writing alone, in 1923! Listen to "Stable Talk".

We have sweat our share
The harrow is caught full of sod-pieces,
The bright disks are misted yellow in the wet.
Hear tardy hesitant drips from the eaves!
Let the rain work now.
We can rest today.
Let the dozy eye
The one raised hip
Give no hint to the hours.

We are not done with toil:
Let rain work in these hours,
Wind in night's hours,
We with the sun together
Tomorrow.

The first stanza is sheer imagism: three lines of statement, in the simplest structure of the English sentence: a declarative nominal, verbal, nominal. Then an imperative inversion creates tension: "Hear tardy hesitant drips" leading to final establishment of the underlying rhythm of the whole poem:

Let the rain work now/

The slight rise in the intonation pattern is emphasized by the juncture and balanced by the fall in the second half of the line. This rhythmic pattern is repeated almost exactly in the next three lines (Stanza 2):

We can rest today
Let the dozy eye
The one raised hip

and again in the last line:

Give no hint to the hours/

Then, the last stanza concludes the dialogue in a synthesis; image and idea fuse in quite different accentual rhythm:

Let rain work in these hours/

fortified by a rhythmic and semantic repetition, parallel:
Wind/in night's hours/

to the strong, confident conclusion. Whitman, we think, would have blessed such a poem. And in another, more philosophical sense, Frost would have felt at home with it. And even Charles Olson, who has pushed the ideas of Pound and Williams to a new degree of "openness" in his Composition by Field approach, could find much to admire in Knister's freedom with the line, the breath groups, that "inherited line, stanza, over-all form". In particular what Olson has to say about "objectivism" applies to Knister's verse:

Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man himself is an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at the moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use.\(^9\)

This doctrine was often expressed by Knister; he derived it from Rilke. It informs nearly all his poetry.

On the other hand, Knister was never concerned with saying his verse aloud, projecting it: the reason being, no doubt, that he was a stammerer, and a bad one. With Leo Kennedy's help he did, however, practise many a night reading Shakespeare aloud to himself; and there seems little

doubt that when he was alone, writing his poems, their sound was very important to him. He is able, also in his best work, as in "Stable Talk", to achieve a vowel harmony that is all his own (though sometimes his consonants seem roughly, carelessly chosen).

The harrow is caught full of sod-pieces
The bright disks are misted yellow in the wet.

From the full open vowels /a/, /o/ he moves to the lighter /i/ and /ε/ sounds in the next line. What he never seems to do, consciously at least, is to use alliteration. Internal rhyme also he eschews.

Further examples of Knister's method can be found in "White Cat" and in "Sam":

Sam was just horse.
Nothing happened to him
Except long furrows,
Pasture-romps,
And long days in the stall.

Yet, one night
Lord Lochinvar, Sire of Baron Balderston,
Whom a rival horseman poisoned later
Broke out of the box-stall
And tore his neck with clamping teeth.
The owner heard Sam's scream,
But he always carried the mark.

This is objective statement, 'eye on the object', at its most strict.
There is the same bareness, absence of adjectives, eschewing of metaphor as is advocated by the Olson-Creeley school of today. Below the imagism, however, and piercing through the 'objectism' of Knister's poems, melancholy persists in creeping in: a sense of alienation, loss. It is like a melody, a counterpoint, murmuring in the background of the lines. In the poem "Boy Remembers in a Field", this effect is accomplished through the counterpointing of lines which end in a long, fully stressed syllable,
as smeared, dark, cheeks, sweet, hear, before; and other lines which end in dissyllables of which only the first are strongly stressed, as candles, apple limbs, silence, shrieking, useless, creeping, planet, brightens. Moreover, the vowel texture is almost all in one key: the two 'notes' of /i/ and /a/. Again, the poem needs to be spoken aloud:

What if the sun comes out
And the new furrows do not look smeared?

This is April, and the sumach candles
Have guttered long ago.
The crows in the twisted apple limbs
Are as moveless and dark.

Drops on the wires, cold cheeks,
The mist, long snorts, silence...
The horses will steam when the sun comes;
Crows go, shrieking.

Another bird now; sweet...
Pitiful life, useless,
Innocently creeping
On a useless planet
Again.

If any voice called, I would hear?
It has been the same before.
Soil glistens, the furrow rolls, sleet lifts, brightens.

Compared to the work of the later explorers of Imagism, Souster and Dudek and Acorn, Raymond Knister’s output is small indeed. Yet there is an advantage to this. Good poems are not lost in a mass of indifferent ones. The work can be seen and sensed as a unity. In Pound’s words, the poems are literature "that STAYS news". Although so specific, they deal with eternals; therefore they have had an impact on Canadian poets of the fifties and sixties which would have made Knister deeply happy, had he known this was to be. He was an experimenter; and he had a message. It has been heard:

Poetry is to make things real—
those of the imagination, and those
of the tangible world.10

CHAPTER FOUR
THE WAVE ON WHICH WE MOVE: LOUIS DUDEK

Now that the feuds have died down it would no longer be appropriate for A. J. M. Smith to cry:

Layton shall tingle in Canadian air
And echo answer Dudek everywhere.

Rather, it is a good time to be concerned with the serious body of work which these two poets, now unlinked, have produced. Omitting the polemics and parodies, salutary as they may have been in stirring up the potage canadien, we shall look at the style and techniques which distinguish Louis Dudek from Irving Layton, or indeed from any contemporary poet.

Dudek's development is significant from the point of view of this study because he, of all the Montreal poets, has been most articulate about the poetic art and its relation to the spoken word. Recently he has written his own Art Poetique in a poem called "Functional Poetry: A Proposal". Here he envisages poetry as "having the shape of clouds"; and in a companion poem, "Europe", he stresses its relation to the sea:

The sea retains such images
in her ever-changing waves;
for all her infinite variety, and the forms,
inexhaustible, of her loves,
she is always constant in beauty,
which to us need be nothing more
than a harmony with the wave on which we move.

Images in motion are the keynote, creating a sculptural, visual approach that aligns Dudek with the Imagist movement of 1910 to 1920, as well as

with its extension under the guidance of the early Ezra Pound.

But I go back always to the first three moderns
- Lawrence, Aldington, Eliot (then), Pound (1915)
- Lee Masters, (yes! Sandburg too)
for the beginning of what we need: straight language
and relevance to our real concerns

i.e. some form of improvised rhythmed speech
which is divided and shaped
by the run-on and end-stop system of notation.

This "manifesto" establishes Dudek as the contemporary
Canadian poet most consciously concerned with shape, form and sound:
the origins of rhythm. He feels that the widening scope of prose
writing has set up an impasse for poetry which he would like to break through:

The problem, it seems to me, is simply
The loss of ground to prose over the centuries
in the subject matter of poetry,
and the loss of freshness in method
as the residue of "poetic" substance
became fossilized in decadent metre and form
---the coral reefs.

We want a renewal of substance, of technique
that goes to the origin and source:

Dudek's aim, it would seem, is to invade the fortress held by
prose and return it to its rightful owner, poetry:

to write it as they write prose
Lots of it, on all subjects that call
for communication

as poetry of exposition and discourse.

We shall see, later in this essay, to what eighteenth century
stand this doctrine leads Dudek. He will become a paradox: a romantic
poet dependent upon reason for his light! But before he reached this

position Louis Dudek as poet and man went through several phases. His earliest poetry in *East of the City* is lyrical and imagist: concerned not with sound effects so much as with pictures in rhythmic arrangement. Already the clouds and the sea he is so fond of observing represent his objective correlative for the world of poetry: a world where recurrent rhythms subject to wind and weather, subject to sun and moon, are expressed through language:

> The moon floated down  
> a river between two clouds  
> melted the stone banks and they were gone.

(from "Night Piece")

In many of these short lyrical pieces the poet's "eye" is on the object but in the background is a subjective, emotional "I" responding to these objects. So we get a "double take" as in a poem called "Revolving Door":

> Late, when near that waterwheel  
> the treaded doorway where  
> no man is, but momentary water  
> while outside the sun points  
> on hands, foreheads; and all fluid  
> sharp down spires and trees  
> skits the sun's lightning,  
> drawn and turned, I fall  
> loud down the sounding caves  
> of the watery wheel, out, and  
> the light blinds me,  
> cells burst in trillion and spill  
> my mind of its surprise and fear.

Dudek's search for "straight language and relevance" is certainly to be

4 Louis Dudek, *East of the City*, Toronto; Ryerson Press, 1946.
found in these early poems. Nonetheless he is not wholly free from the metrical bonds of the past. In the above lines, for instance, there is a movement outward, a loosening of the line:

while outside the sun points on hands, foreheads,

but he returns to a more iambic metre in lines such as

drawn and turned//I fall.//

Also, when social criticism dominates a poem, as in "East of the City" itself, the rhythm is reminiscent of English poets of the thirties: Auden or Day Lewis.

So that some day we may go, and see the sun rise Outside this world of rubble. Drive out Through factories, and brick walls of buildings To the east, to the fields sweet with clover Where over the heads of trees, in a cup of the sky, Laughing, the earth-warmer comes, making day warm for us.

There is a tentative groping here for an individual rhythm based on strong stresses,—the Anglo-Saxon line. But Dudek has not yet found his own voice.

In a later collection, Cerberus, produced jointly with Layton and Souster, he is beginning to explore theories:

The way to freedom and order in the future will be through art and poetry....

Language is the great saving first poem, always being written; all others are made of it. We must prize it, protect it against the destroyers and perverters of our time...Anyone who understands this is capable of assuming a responsibility, of becoming a citizen of the world. Anyone who reads a good poem with understanding---a poem that bites into the evil---or retrieves a truth---creates an order in himself."

But as yet the poems do not match the theory. Stanzas like "Re-visiting

Montreal" remind one of Whitman; poems on Greek themes recall the voice of Pound (as in "For E. P.", "For Christ's sake, you didn't invent sunlight"). Occasionally there are intimations that Dudek is experimenting with strong stress metre, caesura, and formal parallelism, as in "A Drunk on the Sidewalk":

He has a history older than England  
and no doubt has a future, this Falstaff  
He rolled on the floor of a mead-hall  
tottered through Piers' dreamland

Yet the poem ends, quite out of keeping with a reminiscence of Sweeney:

now let us scatter, having seen  
Christ escorted to his limousine

These overtones of the Thirties, ironic in intent, abound in the Cerberus collection:

you'll walk home to roses  
leaning on your trellis, open the lock of love  
with Liberty in your pocket, Life under your arm

It is unkindness to Auden! But one brief poem seems to achieve authenticity—

"Alba":

As you lay on the bed pale with  
the humid breath of kisses  
still moist on your cheek, openly,  
like a leaf your water-lily limbs,  
the river, past the bed, to the sea  
below, to the city, dragged down our two  
selves, slowly, down, to the sound of  
cataracts in the street below, in  
humming early morning light.

True, the very title of this poem is a favourite one of Ezra Pound (see Selected Poems); and both in manner and intention the poem heads in
Pound's direction. Nonetheless the rhythm is an individual one, peculiar to this poet. As in the case of much of Dudek's later work, every line carries three strong stresses, balanced by carefully controlled junctures:

As you lay on the bed pale with
the humid breath of kisses

Moreover the poet has emphasized his rhythms by a happy use of vowel and consonant repetition: cheek, leaf; water-lily limbs; below, slowly; and down, sound. Because these lines have simplicity, grace, and movement they are a preview of Dudek's later style.

"Alba" appeared in 1945. Already by that time the poet had established his points of departure. Like Pound he wanted poetry to reveal itself nakedly, where "The natural object is always the adequate symbol". In order to support the images created by the natural object Dudek relies wholly, for his rhythm, upon the syntax of the English sentence. He became adept at establishing a phrasal unit and relating it to others in a constantly expanding progression. The result is "the moving image"—praxis; and a beautifully modulated rhythm.

As for Dudek's sound effects, they in no wise resemble the "musicality" of Keats or Swinburne, those hypnotic effects so familiar in romantic poetry. Rather he was concerned with the actual relationship of syllable to phrase to line: in this sense, and this only, is his poetry an example of melopoeia. We might think of it as articulated music, as Susanne Langer uses the term: a poem being like a piece of music that articulates itself by building up structure at the same time as it elaborates feeling.
For, as in one of his own many metaphors about poetry Dudek writes:

yes, yes, imagination, if you like
but to steer the log boat, keep it level
plumb with the real thing
after all...

It is Suzanne Langer again who clarifies the means whereby Dudek the essayist and Dudek the poet are united. We have noted that he certainly makes use of the material of the essayist, and this is particularly obvious in his most recent collections, Europe and En Mexico; but in so doing he transmutes the material into an "illusory event". Mrs. Langer illustrates this development in her book, Feeling and Form:

...all poetry is creation of illusory events, even when it looks like a statement of opinions philosophical or political or aesthetic. The occurrence of a thought is an event in a thinker's personal history, and has as distinct a qualitative character as an adventure, a sight or a human contact; it is not a proposition, but the entertainment of one, which necessarily involves vital tensions, feelings, the imminence of other thoughts, and the echoes of past thinking. Poetic reflections, therefore, are not essentially trains of logical reasoning, though they may incorporate fragments, at least, of discursive argument. Essentially they create the semblance of reasoning... 7

In a recent critical work Graham Hough goes even further than this in a plea for rational and discursive argument in poetry:

I should like to commit myself to the view that for a poem to exist as a unity more than bibliographical, we need the sense of one voice speaking, as in lyric or elegiac verse; or of several voices intelligibly


related to each other, as in narrative
with dialogue or drama; that what these
voices say needs a principle of connection no
different from that which would be acceptable
in any other kind of discourse; that the
collocation of images is not a method at all,
but the negation of method. In fact, to
expose oneself completely, I want to say that
a poem, internally considered, ought to make
the same kind of sense as any other discourse. In
fact, to

Is not this precisely what Dudek has been saying in "Functional Poetry"?

Your Metaphysical Poets
were not merely composing conceits
in which reason and emotion mix
(some new science, some old faith)
but were "inspired by a philosophical conception
like that of the Divina Commedia, the De Rerum Natura,
perhaps Goethe's Faust,
and the role assigned to the human spirit
in the great drama of existence"
(Herbert Grierson)
i.e. capable of dealing with philosophical and metaphysical questions
in the form of poetry.

For Louis Dudek as for Graham Hough:

Eliot said they (the Metaphysicals) were able to think
in poetry—but he did not think.
Had (perhaps) thought: Wordsworth said
he also had thought: and he really thought
more than Eliot
in the poem—if only he had thought well!

As a result of his own thought Dudek took the plunge and determined
to do his thinking in poetry. The result may well seem didacticism, but it
is closer to being a consideration of possibilities—"not a proposition, but

10 Ibid., p. 4.
the entertainment of one."

In any case I mean to do it here, for some time, writing prose articles and items in this rhythm (or whatever I find) as poetry of exposition and discourse hoping to give a permanent shape to what is said in the lines.

How then does such a "prose approach transmute itself into poetry? Let us examine first an early poem from East of the City and then a later poem from Europe, to see how the method works. Here is "Basement Workers":

Let me give you reminders to keep the image clear, of roofs too near overhead, of air sharp with particles, like gravel in sand, boxes, and tables with torn fringes of metal, blocked doors, stacks of coffined cribs ready for crouching mummies, paper to wrap around our pale corpses: so, these dispersed, hang in the air between floor and ceiling, where we, darker than miners between the hours filter the dust in our collapsing lungs— and think how noon light up there is rocking buildings, and winds fling skirts about, cooling ankles.11

It would be a mistake to assume that this simple, straight-forward use of language, which never falls into obscurantism or ellipsis and which is always syntactically complete, is necessarily the language of prose. Dudek's poems are rhythmic wholes. One might be able to say what he is saying here, in a few paragraphs or even sentences; but one would then become aware of his stricter limitations. Order and control are the keynotes to this poet's work: as in sculpture, the whole must be visible at a glance, but the detail must be exact, and highlighted where essential. Moreover, none of Dudek's

11 Louis Dudek, East of the City, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946, p. 34.
poems can be accused of being too short or too long (for even his "epic" poems are a series of short apprehensions). Quite frequently the poems seem to lack drama and dramatic tension, but they are a true rhythmic mirror of the poet's intention. No word or phrase can be taken away; none can be added. There is, further, only the sparsest use of adjectives; instead there is strong reliance on nouns, verbs, clauses.

In the poem cited above the poet begins with a consideration:

Let me give you reminders

He goes on to fortify this line with a parallel list of "objects", much in the manner of Whitman; four lines first whose initial words are all prepositions or objects of prepositions: "reminders"

of roofs
of air
(of) boxes
(of) blocked doors,

and, with a sudden break in structure:

stacks
of coffined cribs

In other words, Dudek here demonstrates the use of the line as a rhythmic, poetic unit—replacing the normal sentence structure of prose which does not consider the line on the page at all. "Notation" has already set in; the means whereby the visual placement of the phrases, words between spaces, helps to fortify the rhythm desired.

On a larger scale "Poem 19", from Europe, uses the same techniques.

It is a pleasure to hear the poet reading this poem aloud because his grave
voice emphasizes the necessity for giving every word its due stress and duration, and every juncture and end-line its due timing (besides internal junctures, juncture at the end of each line is an essential part of Dudek's patterning). In "Poem 19" the frame has been widened to embrace the whole of the sea and the sky. The small movements of the waves are seen as lives tossing against the fixed eternal laws of "gravity" (or death) and "just measure":

The commotion of these waves/
however strong/
cannot disturb/
compass line of the horizon/
nor the plumbline of gravity/

It is not practicable to "scan" these lines into prosodic feet; they must be scanned as syntactic units with strong stresses between junctures. To aid the rhythmic pattern there is, in addition, a nice opposition in the imagery between the "compass line" and the "plumbline". Later in the poem, ironic parallelism creates the same effect again: "the dead scattered on the stage in the fifth act" who "show nature restored to order and just measure".

Although this poem has several ancestors, from Nashe's

Brightness falls from the air
Queens have died young and fair

to Yeats' Lapis Lazuli,

All perform their tragic play
that's Ophelia, that, Cordelia-
Yet they........
Do not break up their lines to weep...

nonetheless Dudek masters the past and creates something new as he concludes:
The horizon is perfect, 
and nothing can be stricter 
than gravity; in relation to these 
the stage is rocked and tossed, 
kings fall with their crowns, poets sink with their laurels.

It is a most satisfying poem because the rhythm is so completely 
wedded to the thought. Although "objective"—the poet simply names objects, 
elements and avoids figurative language as assiduously as he avoids musicality—
the poem cannot escape from the net of metaphor: symbols take the place of 
similes. It is, indeed, unusually for Dudek, a symbolist poem.

If the evidence already presented is not sufficient to prove that 
Dudek's rhythms are based on syntax, let us look at "Poem 46" from

En Mexico. Here he describes

a magnanimous mother with children
  dancing towards the store in a nightdress
her opulent ankles tapering
down to her toes
  behind her the children shrieking
poised supremely graceful gigantic
America the continent dancing

The rhythmic effect is achieved by the use of verbals—"ing" words:
dancing, tapering, shrieking, dancing—all of them trochaic in pattern
and therefore in falling rhythm. In between these metrical (and syntactic)
phrases are upward-rising anapaestic rhythms:

  towards the store //
in a nightdress //
to her toes //

12 Louis Dudek, En Mexico, Toronto; Contact Press, 1956, p. 46.
Throughout there is a judicious use of what used to be called the 'truncated' foot, but which may be more simply regarded as a strong stress with juncture on each side, placed initially in the line:

```
P Poised...
  d/own....
```

This type of stressed unit is balanced by its opposite, the 'outrider', where we find a series of unstressed syllables:

```
\ America the
```

The total impression is one of weight, balanced on light feet—Williams' 'variable foot', perhaps; but certainly not a 'foot' in the traditional metric sense. It is a phrasal foot, or unit, marked off by junctures; isochronic in its effect. The strong dancing movement arises from the syntactic incompleteness of the phrasal structures: they are all in a state of being, and make no use of the finite verb. The adjectives too, always sparsely used by Dudek, seem to be chosen because of their rhythmic pattern, as "magnanimous mother". Out of this unity of rhythm and syntax evolves the conceptual image of a "continent dancing". Symbolism once more!

"Poem 69" is a final example of the welding of rhythm (or 'beat') with syntax and concept:

```
Someday we shall come again to the poem
as mysterious as these trees, of various texture
leaves, bark, fruit
(the razor teeth so neatly arranged
so clean the weathered rent)
```

This is the art of formal repetition
and the art of singular form--lines, lines
like a wave-worn stone
This poem falls into three parts: first, three lines of three strong stresses each in a falling rhythm; followed by two lines of rising (or iambic) rhythm, also triple stressed; and ending with three lines which are dramatically broken up, divided so that line seven pulls a spondee unto itself, from line eight. This pattern maintains the nine strong stresses but gives added "rhetorical" juncture and emphasis. A chart will serve to demonstrate how the metrical elements are organized:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>line 1</td>
<td>_/</td>
<td>_/</td>
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<tr>
<td>line 2</td>
<td>_/</td>
<td>_/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>line 3</td>
<td>_/</td>
<td>_/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The over-all effect of the first two lines is that of a rocking rhythm, generally falling, with a nice balance of primary, tertiary and weak stresses—ending in line three with three strong spondees. On the conceptual level these lines state the theme. Next follows an elaboration of the idea (in brackets), where the strong stresses are situated at the end of each phrase:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>line 4</td>
<td>_/</td>
<td>_/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>line 5</td>
<td>_/</td>
<td>_/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next line repeats the falling rhythmic pattern of the beginning; then the pattern is reversed and breaks into long slow spondees, like waves crashing on a shore. The phrasal unit which strictly belongs initially on the last

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13 For details of the Trager and Smith stress, pitch and juncture system, see Appendix I.
line has been "lifted" or "shunted" to line seven, adding to the effect of long, drawn-out deliberation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>phrasal units</th>
<th>outrider phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>line 6</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>line 7</td>
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<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>line 8</td>
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<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the three spondees lines, lines, and stone repeat the earlier pattern of leaves, bark, fruit; and all of these monosyllables appear to be chosen for their sound harmonies. Such care is also evident in the central pivotal lines of the poem, where the poet achieves an interesting effect of vowel repetition held between strong fricatives: "the razor teeth so neatly arranged". And now a word in conclusion concerning Dudek's musical articulation. Sound harmony is achieved by him, not through onomatopoeia—music as 'cry'—but in the texture of his vocabulary. Although he maintains a harmony of vowel sounds, there is apparently no effort towards alliteration, assonance or half-rhyme (except perhaps in a few of the latest lyrics in En Mexico). It is as if the poet had an instinct for the right sounds, without consciously working to make them so. A short poem from Europe will illustrate:

The sea loves to move
but it is in no hurry
flops over languidly like an easy animal
waiting for storms
never still

The first two lines play on the vowel sounds /i/ and /u/, /ou/. This pattern continues into flops over and then, as the sea turns over, a new vowel sound is heard: the /æ/ in languidly and animal.
It is then followed through with reverberations and echoes of all the earlier vowels. The last line is weak and fading; so are its vowels. Note also that the poem comes to rest on the liquid sound of still which is an echo of animal --- and an echo of all the /l/ sounds in the poem.

Sound harmonies, then, together with a beautifully balanced phrasal pattern, enhance the conceptual conclusion which is the theme of all Louis Dudek's poetry: the harmony and order in nature towards which all mankind strives. His recent poetry of the fifties and sixties, with the exception of the satiric pieces in Laughing Stalks, repeats the same theme over and over:

Beauty is ordered in nature  
as the wind and the sea  
shape each other for pleasure; or the just  
know, who learn of happiness  
from the report of their own actions.

Had he lived in the eighteenth century, Louis Dudek might have been an essayist in rhyme. In this twentieth century he seeks to bring back into poetry the meditative, classical tradition. Thus he is not a social revolutionary at all. Paradoxically, however, he is in the lead of a technical revolution. He eschews all classical metrics and makes use of the speech rhythms of English to extend or shorten his sinuous lines. Yet for him indeed the poem is not the phrase, not the line, not the stanza: it is the whole, to be apprehended as a piece of sculpture, at a glance. When a sculptor takes a piece of clay and fashions it into varying shapes he "contains" the essential element that makes it art: rhythm. Likewise in his cool, grave, lucent poems Louis Dudek creates and magnifies his world.
CHAPTER FIVE

ORDINARY PEOPLE:
The Poetry of Raymond Souster

In The Dehumanization of Art Ortega Y Gasset has characterized modern art—painting as well as music and poetry—as an art that seeks to avoid living forms. This is in direct contrast to nineteenth century art, popular because "it is made for the masses inasmuch as it is not art, but an extract from life." The Spanish critic emphasizes that today, however, art is considered for its own sake, "as play and nothing else". It is "essentially ironical", seeking to be aware of sham. Raymond Souster's early poetry is a curious amalgam of this thesis. It is ironical, often presenting a virulent attack on sham: an expose of all the false values that engulf us. At the same time it places the human figure gently, tenderly with great compassion back into the centre of the focus. True, the human figure is not photographically displayed: intense selection is at work. Nonetheless the figure is very much human, as in "figurative" painting. Here is a fairly early poem which indicates how Souster takes an "every day" individual and "illuminates" him into becoming, in a way, "extraordinary".

**Roller Skate Man**

A freak of the city---
Little man with big head
Shrivelled body, and stumps of legs
Based on a block of wood
Moving by roller-skate wheels.

On his hand gloves
Because the Queen Street pavements
Are rough when the hands are paddles

---

And he speeds between
The silk-stockinged legs
And the extravagant pleats:

Steering through familiar waters
Heavy with spit, old butts, chewed gum
Plotsam among the jetsam of this world.

(1952)

And here is a poem recently published in Poetry: Chicago (January, 1965), written in much the same style, pointing out the irony and incongruity of passers-by whom most of us ignore:

Church Street Pawnshop

Booze-Breath waiting
for his pal to come out
up on his toes, squinting over
the dark glass to see
how he's making out inside.

And I knew it, I knew it
in my bones it wouldn't be enough,
as the other one stalks out,
purple look on his face, and both
go cursing, shoved by the wind,
down the next street to the wine-store
on the next friendless corner.

In Souster's Collected Poems (Ryerson, 1964), there are dozens of poems whose intention is to give an immediate impression and let it convey empathy. This method recalls Hogarth, Daumier; but perhaps it is even closer to Dickens because it runs dangerously close to the sentimental edge; and because the scene is not merely painted as an objective, imagist painting: it is also observed, felt by the "I", the poet, who somehow, by some magic, is not Raymond Souster but "I", the reader. Thus in his best work Souster has mastered the central problem of imagism: how to make the image move. When he is successful (and this is not always the case) the poet creates a dialectic inter-play between the object and the suffering, subjective observer. Raymond Knister attempted the same sort
of thing, but Knister's "I" is always himself: the reader does not identify in quite the same way. We sympathize with him, certainly; but we are not blood and bone "of" him. With Souster something miraculous takes place between poet and listener.

The question now to be asked is: to what extent is the effect achieved by technical means? Or can a form so tightly knotted to content be separately analyzed at all? Perhaps the task is formidable, but it is worth a try.

Here is a very early poem by Souster, published in Unit of Five (1944) when he was twenty-two. It begins as an imagist poem in rhythm and content, but a sudden thrust of 'raw' language, a sudden change in rhythm, wakes us up.

Night of Rain

Rain on the streets: make up your poem about wet boughs and gleaming asphalt
And silver sandals of rain: it is still a hell of a night
And the old men on Queen East will not bum any cigarettes tonight on the sidewalks,
The boys and girls with their young love will not bloom like spring flowers among dark rotted weeds,
And the tortuous stream of life that never ends, that never ends
Along the pus lines of this, my city
Will cage itself in the four walls of furnished and unfurnished rooms,
Waiting for this night to go
This night to go this darkness of our lives.

Clearly, part of the effect here is achieved by the use of the long line, a line reminiscent perhaps of the poetry of Kenneth Fearing, of the poetry of the Thirties, with its Whitmanesque parallelism and repetition. Souster puts the reader on a rhythmic wheel, then he sets it spinning. The ironic contrast, the dialectic, is established at the beginning. Instead of saying,

2 Ed. Ronald Hambleton, Unit of Five. Toronto; Ryerson, 1944, p. 53.
as an imagist might:

Rain on the streets
wet boughs and gleaming asphalt

Souster, in a hot gesture of anger, adds: "make up your poem". He answers the would-be imagist with a reversal of rhythm:

```
it is still/a hell/ of a night.//
```

And perhaps the clue to his method is really as simple as this: a careful placing of the expected "poetic" phrase and rhythm beside a phrase hot out of the mouth, wrested as it were from the boiling cauldron of the self.

The rhythm is dialectically opposite.

An example of this process is the poem "Request", also from Unit of Five, where the hypnotic rhythm is suddenly broken as by a hose of cold water:

```
The band must not stop now, even if it is one, the dance must not stop but go on, one two, three o'clock,
The beat just as even the sax low and sweet and soft, no low-down jive from the horns,
Keep turning the music, play the numbers over if you have to, change the stock to the other hand, send out for beer if you feel thirsty,
But keep on playing.

Give them a few more hours of pleasure, before the world outside, ugly, claims them and lines them up,
If only a dream a dream is something anyway, not much, but more Than the machine would grant, and the time-sheets allow, a dream of a little music
And peace their fathers bungled and lost and their grandfathers left unwritten in their wills.
Give these their little dream;
Beat even sax low and sweet and soft, horns muted.
```

This poem achieves a syncopated rhythm by means of six or more strong stresses in the long lines, alternating with three in the short lines and broken up by junctures (some expected, some unexpected, as no)---

```
The beat just as even, the sax low and sweet and soft, no low-down jive from the horns
```
But the peculiar hypnotic effect is achieved by eliminating weak stresses and insisting that the beat fall fast. It is a stabbing rhythm, for it stabs out nouns and verbs:

not much, but more
Than the machines would grant, and the time-sheets allow, a dream of a little music

Then, suddenly, beside the routine "expected" cliché expressions, the startling contrast is inserted, in one line only:

And peace their fathers bungled and lost and their grandfathers left unwritten in their wills.

Transcribed into its prosody, the lines look like this:

And peace/their fathers bungled/
and lost/and their
Grandfathers left/unwritten/in their wills/

The lines fall into three phrasal units each. The first line is dominantly iambic, with rising intonation and strongly marked junctures. At the end of the first line quoted two unstressed syllables act as an added "outrider" unit and lend greater force to the initial word in the next line, "grandfathers". This creates a reversal of the iambic "drive" into a falling dactylic pattern until the final anapaest: "in their wills". With what irony the poem then throws itself back to the rhythm and the words of:

Beat even sax low and sweet and soft, horns muted.

And instead of ending the poem on a strong stress, Souster has arranged a trochaic fall, following a spondee and juncture:

horns/muted/
—which somehow sets the music going on and on in the mind.

Over and over again, in these early poems of protest, of helpless rage, the rhythm carries the emotion; and by a long build-up of noun phrases (article, verbal, noun) followed immediately by the exact, most forceful verb, the sheer accumulation staggers. Notice that the line starts in a trochaic rhythm:

The dancing neon, the white necks, the glittering encore,  
the multiplying mirrors,  
And the buildings climb with a grandeur they do not possess, the winds blow with a freshness they do not keep  
When the dawn comes, when the sun breaks up, when the light blinds with its accusation.

(from "Night-Town", Unit of Five)

Particularly interesting here is the use of a "natural" juncture between the phrases, juxtaposed with an "unnatural" juncture which twice emphasizes the phrase "do not", and putting extra force on the first word in the following line: "possess" and "keep". By these means the rhythm reinforces the dialectic of the thought. Repetition of the structural pattern is also handled in a masterly way: the three "when"'s in the last line create steps mounting to the climax: "with its accusation"—and a violent change in rhythm.

Souster rarely bolsters a metrical structure with rhyme, but when he does so his "beat" is so insistent that it bursts through the iambics and takes over, lengthening or shortening itself as the emotion demands. Basically, for instance, the following poem is iambic in pattern, but this is violently distorted in line three: "what is real is the traffic's not loud". Formalists might cringe at the construction and call it ungainly; but it effectively wrenches the meaning, calls attention to the irony. The poem, "Reality" follows:
The glow of the restaurant is faked, the dream
of the movie is blown like an unsubstantial cloud
In the street again, and what is real is the traffic's not loud
But more a muffled insinuating scream,
The raw wind whips and clutches at papers and bites
The old grey flanks of buildings, and a man who stands
Mind blank to perfumed amours, cabarets, week­
ends, all our carefully-planned civilized delights,
Holding a box of shoe-laces in unendingly shaking hands.

By 1952 Souster, who had learned his craft by way of the poets
of the thirties (both English and American), had come under the influence
of those poets stemming from William Carlos Williams, Pound, and Charles
Olson. He writes, in his preface to the poems in Cerberus (1952):

S. has always believed that the primary function of
poetry is to communicate something to somebody else.
It is not too important what that something is, the big
thing is to get it across, "make contact". If you fail
here all that follows, everything else thrown in, is
wasted.

He then goes on to speak of the structure of the lines of communication:

S. has been dissatisfied for a long time with existing
forms, feeling bruised by them, mummified. But now he
has been shown the signs of an opening, of a possible
right road for the future. It starts somewhere in the
Cantos of Ezra Pound and goes on to Charles Olson...His
basic idea, Composition by Field as opposed to inherited
line, may well start a fresh revolution in English
poetry.3

In spite of this 'manifesto' it is somewhat difficult to determine
whether Souster has ever changed his style or his 'message' very drastically.

In 1957, for instance, in the Penguin Book of Canadian Verse, the poem
"Ersatz" appeared, with its compulsive

3 Cerberus, ed. by Dudek, Layton, Souster. Toronto: Contact Press,
1952, p.75.
Kiss her, kiss her, kiss her a thousand times
Over and over rub your cheek to her cheek, feel it burn
you, hot as the lips of flame,
Finger her breasts almost savagely till they seem to grow
in your hands

followed by its three centre or "core" lines written in iambic pentameter,
and its brutal conclusion:

Wonder why it's not the same, why it's no good, no good at all
No good at all, and how long, you, can you go on fooling yourself
about the others,
How long before the emptiness will go, or will it always
Go on killing and aching and crying here in the darkness.

This later poem employs the same long line, the same repetitive type of
phrase as before; though with added finesse and with a greater economy of
descriptive words. However, in the delightful "Flight of the Roller-Coaster"
we find Souster in a light, gay mordant mood with a new rhythm to suit. It
is based on a "loose" iambic pattern and calls to mind the tone and movement
of Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts".

Once more around 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 by the shriller cries of the riders---

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

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

This is the Souster of the middle period, where rage has given way to
irony and where the rhythm is much more "controlled" in the sense that
it is patterned more on the iambic unit than on strong stresses. In his
latest period it would seem that Souster has turned back even further—
back through Pound to Imagism and Williams, as in "The First Thin Ice":

Tonight
our love-making
ducks
walking warily
the first thin ice
of winter. 4

There is more subtlety, perhaps, in these short-lined Haiku-type poems,
but in another sense it appears as if the poet of the "long line" has
just got too tired to carry on. Some of the intensity has gone. Here,
for instance, is "The Six Quart Basket":

The six quart basket
One side gone
Half the handle torn off
Sits in the centre of the lawn
And slowly fills up
With the white fruits of snow.

It is a charming image, but how reminiscent of Williams' "Red Wheel-
barrow"! It is no longer the voice of Souster, that angry young man who
forced Canadians to look at each other; and to see how the faces were
slowly being forced to a standstill. Instead, we hear Souster admitting
to himself:

St. Nicholas
Like the blind
leading the blind
me here
at the end of the table
trying to tell these young faces
about poetry
when I don't know myself

4 As quoted in Poetry Mid-Century, ed. Milton Wilson. Toronto:
which way to turn
which way to go
and at forty
the sound of my own voice
is no assurance
is no guarantee
I am even still alive. 5

Souster, today, seems to be caught in his own trap: having found
his own rhythmic pattern, his "voice", all he says he can do is to repeal
himself. Yet he knows full well that this is not good enough. This is
the real trap, the ominous pit, into which free verse rhythms can lead;
and at the moment Souster seems to have fallen into it. Is he a good
enough poet to struggle out and find a new direction; and if so, what
direction is it likely to be?

In a penetrating analysis of Souster's poetry, Hayden Caruth,
writing for Tamarack Review (Winter, 1956) suggests that three latent
weaknesses in Souster's early work have come to the fore and now mar much
of what he is attempting. These are: slovenly diction; slack metric;
imitative sentimentality. About Souster's Collected Poems (1964) Caruth
says that it is
crowded with much larger defects that really do
destroy the vigour of the poems in which they
occur. And these larger defects, I believe,
are of the same order as the smaller ones: the
result of carelessness and a refusal to give
thought.

Here is a characteristic short poem, called
'Just in from the Cold':

Just in from the cold
my hands touch your breasts
and your nipples shiver
like the petals of a flower
from which a butterfly
has just spring-boarded.

5 Raymond P. Souster, A Local Pride. Toronto: Contact Press, 1962,
p.43.
Garuth justly points out that "the metaphor...does possess freshness and immediacy, the 'life' that Souster is looking for. One can imagine easily enough that the poet really saw this metaphor, and wrote it down not long afterward. The language is direct, simple, concrete". But this critic goes on to quote the second stanza of Souster's poem and to find it "piling cliché on cliché"; and, "When the second half is added you might just as well put galoshes on a ballerina."

What is the problem here? Garuth demands:

is it that Souster's sensibility, responding freely, too often only gives back a spate of puerile nonsense? Sometimes that seems to be the case. In other cases the poems or parts of poems that are cast in worn-out diction appear to have been manufactured by the poet as a matter of duty. His sensibility has responded vaguely, in no language at all, or has only given him a fragment of a metaphor, a hint, a titillation. He is loath to let the occasion pass, and in consequence he grinds out, as best he can, in a kind of autosuggestive aesthetic euphoria, anything that sounds 'poetic'.

This is harsh criticism even though, admittedly, it applies only to Souster's recent work. The problem is a major one facing not only Souster, but Milton Acorn (today) and Alfred Purdy (perhaps tomorrow). How, having once found a style, a voice, a rhythm of one's own—how to keep it from becoming stale? Yeats found the solution in perpetually renewing himself, perpetually finding new techniques, exploring ancient metrics; and this has been the source also of Ezra Pound's continuing virility. Since poets no longer die young, the challenge is unmistakable: they must either stop writing, or be re-born, again and again!
Nonetheless, within the compass of ten years' work written between 1944 and 1954, Souster's contribution to Canadian poetry has been unmistakable. He has proved that the tempo of urban life (as caught in downtown Toronto) is exciting material for the poet and that its compelling rhythms can add vigour and meaning to the world of poetry.
"Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race." These lines of Blake still retain their freshness, their significance, as a source from which twentieth century poetry may draw its vigour. For a time it seemed that lyricism such as that of Blake or Shelley had gone out of fashion: passionate song seemed out of key with the tone of *The Wasteland*. Yet Pound valued "music" above all else; Williams established the importance of rhythm as opposed to metre, with his "Down with the iambic pentameter!" On the ideological side there were many echoes of Shelley's revolutionary, utopian vision in the poetry of the nineteen thirties. Now in the sixties we seem to be becoming somewhat fatigued by cerebral and mythopoeic poetry. There is a return to Imagism; and with that return lyricism inevitably canters alongside. "The consciousness of necessity" is not far behind.

Of all contemporary Canadian poets, Milton Acorn is most at home as a part of this development. A small town boy on Prince Edward Island, a building trades worker in the industrial east, a recruit for the Second World War, he is now, in his early forties, living in Vancouver and devoting all his time to poetry and politics. His interest in writing began early, but he had no access to modern poetic directions. As he describes it, he grew into poetry the hard, unschooled way:

I started to write in iambic patterns,
taught by my brother who went to college.
Iambic was theoretically based on the
'natural' rhythm of the English language, and I guess in the district where I lived this was more or less true. But among the great majority of people living on the North American continent the speech patterns (stress and rhythm) have changed. Iambic no longer fits.

Acorn first began to break with the iambic pattern from listening to seamen talk:

The way they used word, the way they condensed sentences, the way they dropped conjunctions, the way they used 'will' and 'should' in their elliptic form....When I started writing I used the iambic metre because I thought it was popular, it would reach people; but I became uninterested in reaching people if I had to present my work in terms such as they didn't use themselves, in their own speech.  

His aim was "a line that flowed more in terms of their own natural idiom". In the light of that aim, it would seem worthwhile to examine in detail poems by Milton Acorn that reveal how he began to grow away from the iambic pattern, while yet maintaining a unity of structure based essentially on strong-stress (ballad) rhythms.

Linguists like Trager and Smith have described the English accentual system of speech as being based on four degrees of stress; but the average person's ear probably detects only three levels of syllable stress. In analysing the poetic line, it is the position of the strong stress that counts; secondary or 'weak' stresses do not give the line its beat. This is because there is always (in speech as well as in poetry) one strong stress between pauses (or junctures, as they are now

1 From a tape recording made by the author, Vancouver, 1964.
2 Ibid.
called. Bearing this in mind, it will be convenient to look at one of Milton Acorn's poems on the basis of a three-level stress pattern. Here is a sample, from an early collection:

CHARLOTTETOWN HARBOUR

An old docker with gutted cheeks,
Time arrested in the used-up knuckled hands
Crossed in his lap, sits
In a spell of the glinting water.
He dreams of times in the cider sunlight
When masts stood up like stubble;
But now a gull cries, lights,
Flounces its wings ornately, folds them,
And the waves slop among the weed-grown piles.

In this poem of nine lines we can reckon that each contains two strong stresses per line. These stresses occur isochronically; that is, the intervening syllables, whether secondary or weak, occur within the same time-beat, emphasized by juncture. Sometimes there is an 'outrider', as Hopkins called it: an extra syllable or group of syllables, as in line two. Further variation is achieved in this line by the use of internal juncture (Time arrested/). In stanza one, the most effective juncture occurs in the line:

Crossed in his lap, sits //
and in the second stanza we have a parallel third line:

\[ \text{But now a gull cries / lights} \]

A long rounded effect is achieved in the last two lines with a juncture on each side of "folds them"; followed by onomatopoeic rhythm as, "the waves slop among the weed-grown piles".

What other elements besides rhythmic stress and juncture are characteristic of this early poem? It is not a poem of action, loaded with verbs, but a 'picture' poem; therefore the nominals (modifiers and nouns) are dominant. Notice how almost every noun has a qualifier: old docker; gutted cheeks; glinting water; cider sunlight; weed-grown piles; and that rhythmically these follow a trochaic 'falling' pattern which emphasizes the depressed, ironic mood. The few finite verbs, on the contrary, are single-syllabled, forceful, progressing from transitive to intransitive; from "sits", "dreams" and "stood" to the more active verbs "cries", "lights", "flounces"; with a sudden transitive descent, "folds them". As that action is completed the continuity of nature is insisted on: the waves "slop".

Notable in this poem is the lack of overt emotion and the absence of metaphor or symbol. We are presented with a still-life painting in the Imagist tradition. Generally Acorn's early work seems to follow this Imagist pattern of minute detail, enclosing an internal movement which is created by the use of phrasal rather than clausal utterances. Yet Acorn is a poet unable to sit still for long: man interacting on scene is what really interests him. In a recent unpublished poem, for instance, he states:
Description isn't for poets:
Poetry demands an exactitude that defies description,
liken the soul to an electron.
When you say 'like' that implies 'not quite'.
Or drop that word! But then
you're speaking of something else entirely
going on in the nucleus.

Even in his first book it is apparent that Acorn's poetry is
beginning to eschew description, or even simile and metaphor, in favour
of a more dramatic presentation. The landscape is now acted upon, as
in the poem, "Old Property":

    past that frost-cracked rock step
    twist yourself thru
    skew-je trunk and old coat-hook branches;
    ground once dug and thought of and
    never intended for those toadstools.

    in the shade past the cracked robin's nest,
    past that spilt sunlight, see
    his grainy grip on
    a hatchet keened to a leaf,
    a man in murky denims
    whispering curses at the weeds.

The sentence structure here is still phrasal but the arrangement of the
two finite verbs—"twist" and "see" emphasises their imperative nature,
stresses action. There is no internal juncture and even end-juncture
is disguised by run-on lines:

    twist yourself thru
    skew-je trunk

    or

    his grainy grip on
    a hatchet

The effect is to emphasize word or phrase at the beginning of the line.
From now on, this will be one of Acorn's chief technical devices. With
"whispering curses" he extends himself farther than imagism, into symbolism.
And from there on he questions, questions. An example in the early volume of this leap from the declarative statement (Charlottetown Harbour) to the imperative (Old Property) and on into the interrogative, is found in the poem Islanders.

Would you guess from their broad greeting witty tuck of eyelids, how they putt-putt out with lunch cans on seas liable to tangle and dim out the land between two glances? Tho their dads toed the decks of schooners, dodging the blustery rush of capes, and rum-runner uncles used wit-grease against the shoot-first Yankee cutters, they couldn't be the kind to sail their lobster boats around the world for anything less than a dollar-ninety an hour.

This poem shows a significant development from the two previous ones (and whether it antedated them or postdated them is not the point) because of its dialectic. The utterance pattern is no longer dominantly phrasal. There is a balance now between nominals and verbals, with strong, vivid verbs taking over: putt-putt, dim out, toed, used, sail. After the first five lines, in a rhythmic pattern of three strong stresses to the line (all ending in a trochee), the rhythm suddenly gets stronger and tighter with four beats to the line, for four lines. The last two lines, however, open out into an expanded iambic speech rhythm, long and sinuous and hard-hitting. The exciting element in this poem is the fact that the developing rhythmic pattern corresponds to the developing content pattern. The first five lines carry straight description (though couched in a laconic question); the next four lines are dramatic narrative, a reference to the
past behing the present; and the final break-through is more than ironic comment, it is the dialectic 'jump' to a new synthesis. Acorn's mind works in lightning flashes!

Several deductions can be made from the above analysis. The first one is that there are three aspects to Acorn's style, evident in both his early and his late poems. These are: vivid imagery, rhythmic progression, and the ability to create a synthesis of what has gone before.

But similarly I liken a soul to an electron:
give it a charge and it jumps to a new orbit. Therefore I praise the jump before it happens— which makes the kids say I tell lies and so I do but my lies make things happen.

Said another way, the poet works on his material, activates it and re-creates it into a new synthesis. He successfully integrates form and content.

What he himself has to say about this process is worth noting. I quote here from a conversation:

My work since 1960 has been greatly influenced by Olson—not his 'formal' theories, but theories on voice. I do not agree with him that form must always be nothing but an extension of content. I think there is a continuous dialectic interplay between form and content; that anything is conceived as a form in the first place.3

Again, he says

My favorite painter is Picasso. I love him because he is conscious of form, of the approach. Like him I am very deeply interested in various methods of presenting the content of my poetry— I find myself almost incapable of writing two poems with the same formal idea. I'm always looking for new forms. Each new poem is an experiment in form to me.

3 From a tape-recording made by the author; Vancouver, 1964.
It is as an experimentation with form that Milton Acorn's poems are particularly satisfying. In his great variety of presentation (well over one hundred poems already published) there is no repetition; neither is there an amateur dilettantism. Rather, soaring through a variety of approaches a human search is evident: the search for enduring life. "The Fights" is a good example:

What an elusive target
the brain is! Set up
like a coconut on a flexible stem
it has 101 evasions.
A twisted nod slues a punch
a thin gillette's width
past a brain, or
a rude brush-cut to the chin
tucks one brain safe under another.
Two of these targets are set up to be knocked down for 25 dollars or a million.

In that TV picture in the parlor the men who linked to move in a chancy dance are abstractions only. Come to ringside, with two experts in there! See each step or blow pivoted balanced and sudden as gunfire. See muscles wriggle, shine in sweat like windshield rain.

In stinking dancehalls, in the forums of small towns, punches are cheaper but still pieces of death. For the brain's the target with its hungers and code of honor. See in those stinking little towns, with long counts, swindling judges,

how fury ends with the last gong.
No matter who's the cheated one
they hug like girl and man.

It's craft and
the body rhythmic and terrible,
the game of struggle.
We need something of its nature
but not this:
for the brain's the target
and round by round it's whittled
till nothing's left of a man
but a jerky bum, humming
with a gentleness less than human.

This poem depends more than most in its rhythm, to create unity
and strength. The natural speech units, the breath groups, have been
'distorted' so as to lay strong stress beats on each line. This creates
the over-all rhythmic pattern. To illustrate how it works, we have only
to arrange the same poem in its normal phrasal pattern on the page. Here,
as in all straightforward prose, the phonological elements (breath
groups) coincide with the syntactical arrangement. Let us look at the
first paragraph:

What an elusive target the brain is! Set up like
a coconut on a flexible stem, it has 101 evasions.
A twisted nod slues a punch a thin gillette's width
past a brain, or a rude brush-cut to the chin tucks
the brain safe under another. Two of these targets
are set up to be knocked down for twenty-five dollars
or a million.

In this version it will be felt at once that the impression is prosaic,
communicative rather than expressive. It lacks the excitement created when
the poet distorts the natural utterance to obtain rhythmic effects. In
the original version, strong stresses occur in every line of the first and
second stanzas. The rhythmic pattern is compulsively (almost convulsively)
established. In the third stanza there is some variation. The first five lines have two strong stresses each, but in line six we have a shortened line with one strong beat, "with its hungers", thereby heightening the tension. Similarly there is dramatic effect in the delayed juncture between "honor" and "see", followed by a contrived juncture at the end of the line (it is contrived because it goes against the syntax). The last two lines have an odd effect because they revert to iambic:

No matter who's the cheated one
they hug like girl and man.

The last stanza of "The Fights" reverts to strong-stress isochronic beat. The imposed junctures effected by end-stopping, must together with the intonation pattern, set up a counterpoint to the normal stress pattern. This again heightens the effect, intensifies the meaning of the poem, which is more metaphorical and symbolical than the other poems we have been considering.

There are further elements in "The Fights" which create tension. True, the paucity of verbals as opposed to nominals (nineteen verbs to forty adjectives) would be a weakness, but the nature of these noun modifiers is worth attention. Eleven of these modifiers are past participles. Thus, although the poem lacks clausal balance, its phrasal proportions are heavily weighted and they are rooted in action. The tone of the poem is not 'sublime' (as so often in Shelley), but classical, balanced, vigorously ironic. It could be a commentary upon our whole way of life in the twentieth century. About man's aggressiveness it says little
explicitly; yet it says all.

More Blakeian in style is the poem "For a Singer". Here is a poem that carries to completion the process begun in "The Fights" and developed in "I Shout Love". Although far from being the end of Acorn's development, "For a Singer" seems to mark a phase complete in itself: the phase of the conscious, social revolutionary poet defying the sickness of capitalist society. Of its shape—that of four-line stanzas in a four-beat, strong-stress measure, Acorn has remarked:

Tonally it is a unique experience for me in that it is a chant, an invocation. It depends not upon the natural flow of the voice, but upon the distortion of the stresses and intonation. And you'll notice the distortion in my voice as I read it.

The poem sets a strong rhythm going at the outset:

Let me be the mane that swings
(clouds tossing, lightning shot)
about the singer's muscled face,
caressing and letting it go wild

Or let me be the oar's pulse
throb­bing through that figurehead
to the heroic Argo, that woman alive
who sang against the crash of spray

over her nipples, her chin,
and every love-wrought pore of her,
against the flattening calm, visions
washing up and down her spine.

From these images, startling in their unexpectedness, yet objectively viewed, the poet turns the camera inward to reveal his own feelings: the

effect the singer is having on him. Then he moves, more strongly, to show the effect she has on the audience:

She sings in a crowded coffee shop
smoke curling amongst tenuous ghosts
of the living. "Love!" she cries.
They scratch at love with palsied hands.

But at each emotional cry (almost a beseeching prayer) for "Sorrow!" "Courage!", the audience fails to respond; for they are the people who feeling nothing but death for themselves desire the death of the entire world, because even the imagination of life is forbidden by all their teachers.

The vision of what she is saying passes back then from audience to poet. "Let me be the song!" he cries. "Take me....like/ a firebird above the last cloud/ of the last/ dark planet". Finally the vision ends with his complete identification of himself with the singer "with her guitar/ crossed like a shield over her heart/, perched on this bomb of a world, every instant/ ticking...ticking..." His final identification is with "the men and women of her song" who stood up against oppression. The last stanza, a synthesis, is one of passionate personal conviction:

....This heart is necessary; even in the shadow of Mount Death, it's necessary

:for the standing up brave and hopeful way, the way of asserting the truth of our lives, we ought to die is the only way we might live.

Although the syntax here might be criticized as being too elliptical, the lines pound their way home. Indeed, the most interesting
aspect of this poem is the fact that its dialectical development, moving from a sense of post-Hiroshima despair towards a Utopian revolutionary optimism, is bound together structurally by unrhymed tetrameters, a free-flowing ballad rhythm. It is a poem built up, not on finite verbs and clausal structures, but on phrases; therefore we expect neither metaphysical intricacy nor classical balance, but fervour, incantation, excitement. What verbs there are are not verbs of action but of being, feeling, seeming, existing. Yet movement is created by the rock-a-bye effect of participles used as descriptive modifiers. Even to itemize them is interesting: clouds tossing; lightning shot; caressing; throbbing through. These and many other "ing" verbs rock out the rhythm of the poem. They are ongoing and lend themselves to chant, declamation, prophecy. Whilst they give an impression of motion, they do not move except as the ocean's floor may be said to move. The singer does not act, she seems to be caught up in the poet's vision, singing eternally on the brink of destruction. She is not a metaphor, but a symbol, proclaiming life.

This poem, "The Singer", a poem of affirmation and belief in humanity's struggle, is in the tradition of Blake and Whitman. Its metaphors of the Moloch worshippers "teetering on the last rung" in juxtaposition with the "firebird on the last cloud" emphasize the prophetic tone. That tone, though Marxist by implication, avoids didacticism and sentimentality. As the poet himself warns, in a recorded conversation:

Don't congratulate yourself on detecting the naivete of this poem, because the naivete is deliberate.
Acorn's aim is to bring objects, life itself, back into perspective so that we may look on them freshly, not cynically. Obscurity and mystification are not a part of this method.

From the foregoing examination of Milton Acorn's work, however arbitrary have been the selections, it should be clear that he is a poet who never stands still. Perilously near as he seems to come, sometimes, to a precipice of emotion too dizzying to be borne, miraculously he swings around. He marches on, laughing and crying, turning his back on clouds of glory to consider the internal, mental life of the dreaming man. His latest poetry is strongly ethical, even "promethean" in tone: sonorous and heavy in its formations. Here, for example, are some lines from a long poem called "Beast's Plaint" (unpublished)—a poem concerned with alienation and identity. Moments of high lyricism like the following:

In the song, in the ripple of your touched soul...consider the birds, the birds, how they play love in the patterns of the wind, swans moving as if in a gestured white thought of eternity maybe (consider the abrupt strength in the one one-legged kick that glides one across yards of water).

These alternate with the poet as "fast talker":

Imagine if you can one of those brainwave machines with the tips of the wires fitted to little screws for driving into the brain...Imagine the machine getting the message plainer than ever it was intended and imagine its devastating rebuttals: that's what this poem is to him. He cringes, writes a letter about all the phases of commitment, goes for a walk, argues about orgasm and metaphor: nothing saves him, every engine explosion he hears bursts into him, his friends talk right into the poem. Has he by his most perverse image forked the bronco of all tarnation?
This is a poem, free moving, flowing like wind and water, yet always returning to the four-beat cadence: it is a poem about poetry and the poet, in the Romantic tradition. It is a fitting close to this commentary:

Poet, my creator, gap-toothed biter
on the biscuit of the world, why try to measure infinitude
by the notes of a birdsong? Why measure yourself
against the moment when you were one thrilling being
a rider whose hair tossed into heaven
and who surged up, surged up
and was never really lost? Why me? Why this small refuge?
These claws stirring small grains of the earth?
On a rolling barrel, a light-footed child
knows something reckless about the wind, like a stranger
she's challenged, matched
and become friend to...so does this poet
want to walk easy-shouldered and
wry hands in his pockets. Loving man
like a brother he's putting through college, he wouldn't
believe in himself
if he didn't believe in mystery, the storms
about the peak his head is, the lightning in them.

It is with that kind of lightning that the poet warns the critic:

...he who nurtures the souls of poets
like rare man-biting flowers, resents the touch
of another's finger
on his vital spots, the eyes in the dusty potato
of a man, the places where growth waits for its moment.
Alfred Purdy's poetry has been forged, slowly, purposefully, over the years since the war; yet it has burst upon us in 1965 with something of a conflagration. He "dabbled" in poetry from his high school days, turning out sentimental lyrics which are now well forgotten; yet all the time he had an intense curiosity about poetry. He stayed far outside the academic circles, thinking of himself as a "working stiff", but he was drawn to seek out other poets such as Layton, Souster, and Dudek. In his reading he was most attracted to the poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Although Purdy spent a year hitch-hiking in Europe, the European tradition seems to have left him untouched: he is wholly North American in outlook and sensitivity. More particularly, in the context of this study, he is wholly "native"--a Canadian who has tasted every corner of the country, from its underprivileged side. In 1960 he held a Canada Council grant to live amongst the Indians of the Cariboo country of British Columbia; at present he is the recipient of another grant wherewith to study the poetry and life of the Eskimo in the North West Territories.

Purdy's subject is man: more vividly even than Souster he conjures up character, place. His style has become increasingly colloquial, so that more than most of our poets he needs to be heard in his own delivery. Yet, ironically, he is shy about reading and needs an enthusiastic audience to get into his stride, to overcome diffidence and haste. Whereas in the beginning he seems to have worked in a formal metric, he quickly outstripped this convention to find his own rambling gait. He obtains rhythmic variety by
swinging from iambic phrasal units to trochaic-dactylic ones, with swift changes in pace and arrangement. It is with this in mind that analysis of his poetry can be most fruitful.

"What It Was" is an interesting poem to analyze. Although not particularly typical of Purdy's approach or subject matter, it is controlled and even: a poem about childhood. As a result it has a quiet, contemplative measure.

What It Was

It was not exactly the inequalities of schoolboy against bullying teacher or later the fear of fitting into a strange conformity at a boarding school or how cruelly alien the boys were

---for at that time I searched out chinks of reality in the high walls around me and found perilous escape in books with night flights west and sky causeways---

Later still I tore the loose membrane from a third ear sharpening steadily now I could never account for and listening

It was never either exactly when things fell into place with a plop audible in ordinary ears

---so that at least I knew what others thought about the general purpose of condoms and women ham and eggs religion and the institution of marriage et cetera and all the adjustments began of deciding whether I really agreed with them plus the dark intangibles like death and why why---

Even where bewilderment lifted a little there was always the problem of how others acted as against the way they said was the right way as against the way I felt and thought was good and making decisions by not making them and the failure personally often and the shame sometimes the shame and again the listening---
Of course other problems exist here now the necessity for patterns and pattern-makers deciding which are certainties and which variables (and very few of the former and mostly latter) and always the occasional mistake and sometimes the brain and heart's failure to know say this is the moment you'll always remember this is the wind-blown instant of time that swings you into the future of heavy as the heavy cellar-stones of the world but hammering at the gates of the sun or merely a little older and bewildered about things you didn't understand that perhaps meant nothing and fumbling to stay alive and always the listening—

As the poet reads this poem the strong stresses appear in phrasal units separated by internal juncture, in a pattern of two to a line, for the first three lines. Then they expand to three to a line, up to line nine, where there are suddenly five strong stresses:

\[ \text{night / flights / west / and sky / causeways} \]

and followed by a line of three stresses and a line of five:

\[ \text{later still / I tore / the loose membrane from a third / ear / sharpening / steadily / now} \]

At the end the stressed units dwindle to "ones":

\[ \text{I could never account for / and listening} \]

Perhaps the average reader would make of those five-unit lines a four-stress line using "plus juncture" only: as,

\[ \text{night flights} / \]

But as the poet reads the line there is no mistaking the four internal junctures which create the five-stress phrasal units.

Another interesting technique used in this first stanza to create rhythmic variety (or to do violence to natural speech) is the use of enjambment, where the "double cross" juncture is omitted from the end of the line, though the sense runs on:

\[ \text{into a strange conformity//} \]

and

\[ \text{in books // with night/flights} \]

Indeed, in this instance it is the very fact that where there occurs a juncture followed by a non-stressed word (or 'outrider', as like with) the initial word in the next line must be stressed; then a juncture must follow. This explains why it is impossible to say, here: /night flights/ Instead, with the poet, we must say: // with night/flights/

Another significant factor in Purdy's rhythmic style is the use of duration; yet this element is not evident at all in the written notation. Unless Purdy is heard reading, who would know to what an extent he depends on length to intensify strong stress? A closer look at "What It Was" may clarify this problem. Here is the last stanza, prosodically analysed (pitch levels moving from '2' to '4'):

\[ \text{This is the moment / you'll always / remember //} \]

\[ \text{This is the wind-blown / instant / of time //} \]

\[ \text{that swings you / into the future #} \]

\[ \text{oh heavy / as the heavy / cellar stones / of the world //} \]

\[ \text{but hammering / at the gates / of the sum //} \]
or merely / a little older / and bewildered about things /
you didn't / understand / that perhaps / meant nothing //
and fumbling / to stay alive /
and always / listening #

The three elements most stressed by Purdy as he reads these lines are:
juncture, pitch, and duration. He leans long and heavily, for instance,
on the word in line one, always, and on the musical changes of the phrase,
its pitch levels:

\[ \text{always remember} \]

Indeed his voice, as he dwells on each line, patterns it into a near sing-song. But because the line is sinuous and non-iambic, the intonational sing-song creates a counterpoint. This element is "micro-linguistic" or rhetorical; it is not evident in the 'notation' on the page, and depends on oral reading. The reader needs to hear the poet's voice pressing down on line four:

the heavy cellar stones of the world
and carrying the long reverberations of "world" to appreciate the tone created.

Similarly in line eight, the word "alive" vibrates like a prism as the poet rings it out and extends its duration.

Generally speaking, Purdy reads his poems fast; but his breath intake is placed precisely where he wants it. Though he moves quickly in enjambment, as in the transition

bewildered about things
you didn't understand

he pauses long and meaningfully on the final line:

and always / listening //
Alfred Purdy's poetry is never static, never content with repeating a formal pattern. Yet this leads to a problem: how is the reader to guess the pattern, to catch the speed or slowness? For the notation does not often help. Sometimes the lines are so laconic, the understatement so pervasive, the irony so subtle that the reader of the lines on the page may well fail to pick up the significance of a Purdy poem; only his intonation reveals it. An example of this paradox can be found in "Kispiox Indian Village".

The mountains intersecting shadows are like dark fish scales on the valley floor. I wonder if two of them, two horizontal plates of shadow make darkness more. The village is quiet, blue morning and blue evening, the girls on the road in brown, red and blue dresses complete as history closing on the last Plantagenet. I am able to see them only a moment in passing as mothers and children and very old women on the roads of the world.

Leaning totems by the river: most of them will all be gone in twenty or thirty years of that direction.

a boat out there, moving with the current, a brown man fishing. It's getting darker now: I can't see his face.

The tone of this poem is so undramatic, so marked with implications and understatements, in the imagist sense, that its presence on the printed page would perhaps go unnoticed. As Purdy reads it aloud, however, juncture

and intonation create a tension; and the skilful shift between a dactylic-trochaic metre and an iambic one keeps the poem constantly moving. In the first seventeen lines the following pattern emerges:

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In this passage one of Purdy's most interesting phrasal patterns is evident: the strong stress flanked on either side by a weak stress, and often occurring at the beginning of a line:

```
the mountains
I wonder
the village
the girls on
complete as
as mothers
```

This pattern seems to establish, for him, a musical lilt most natural to his own articulation. The pattern recurs throughout all his work; and so does the tendency to return to the iambic-anapaestic phrasal unit at the conclusion of a section or of a poem. For example:

```
I can't see his face; / on the roads of the world. 
```
Purdy's *melopoeia* is not strongly developed in any of his poetry to date. He depends on rhythm for his effects; almost never on rhyme. Sound harmonies there are, inevitably, as in:

```
  a boat out there, moving with the current,
    a brown man fishing
```

but even these /o/, /u/, and /au/ sounds are secondary to the rhythmic pull between iamb and trochee. His power to create overall music is especially striking in the poems "In Sickness" and "Necropsy of Love". This latter poem is typical of Purdy's free and easy unconcern with finding a particularly new or consistent rhythm. He is interested only in using what comes to hand---whether it be a trochaic or an iambic rhythm. In this he differs markedly from poets like Dudek and Souster who, as has been noted, shun the pentameter.

"Necropsy of Love"³ begins with a stanza in two-beat strong stress rhythm. Each line splits fairly evenly into two:

```
  If it came about you died
  It might be said I loved you
  love is an absolute as death is
  but neither bears false witness to the other
```

But the next stanza jumps swiftly from this rhythm to a free-flowing iambic pentameter (except for the middle line---"your freedom's yours and not my own"); and the entire last stanza might be part of a blank verse sonnet, so close it is to iambic pentameter patterning. All the lines end in single syllables, strongly accented:

```
  but bones
    -en sweet
    -ar light
```

and so on. The remarkable thing is that Purdy can use this old metre and make it sound new. He achieves this effect by a cunning use of repetition, both of words and phrases:

strip our bones of all but bones
...  
here's the flesh that's flesh and drunken-sweet
...  
never there at all
never promise
...  
reach up your hand
reach across the darkness with your hand
reach across the distance of tonight

Purdy can and does lie in slothful ease, making an easy music; but he is also a man of action: he has a giant stride. As he lumbers over the country, whether it be in Northern Ontario or in the B. C. Cariboo, his body moves with energy and purpose. So do the poems. "The Country North of Belleville" is a long poem to quote here in full, but the beginning sets the pace:

Bush and scrub land—- Cashel Township and Wollastin Elevizir McClure and Dungannon Green lands of Westlemkoon Lake where a man might have some opinion of what beauty is and none deny him for miles—-

This is the easy rhythm of speech, of walking; it moves into a closer knit two-beat strong-stress:

Yet this is the country of defeat where Sisyphus rolls a big stone year after year up the ancient hills picnicking glaciers have left strewn with centuries' rubble days in the sun

followed by a jerky, jabbing movement as if the speaker had paused to point out items with his thumb:

a lean land
not fat
with inches of black soil on
earth's round belly---
And where the farms are it's
as if a man stuck
both thumbs into the stony earth and pulled
it apart to make room
enough between the trees
for a wife
and maybe some cows and
room for some
of the more easily kept illusions---

The theme of "This is the country of our defeat" returns again and adds the counterpoint "And this is the country where the young leave quickly". But perhaps what makes this poem the most beautifully rounded, aesthetically satisfying poem by Purdy is the return of the main theme; and the main rhythm in the closing stanza:

sometime
we may go back there
to the country of our defeat
Wollaston Elevizir Duncannon
And Weslemkoon Lake land
where the high townships of Cashel
McClure and Marmora once were---
But it's been a long time since
and we must enquire the way
of strangers---

In this poem Purdy has captured what the Black Mountain group are so insistent be done: the essence of 'locus', place. Although it makes use of Whitman's techniques, it is a wholly Canadian poem, in its imagery and in its rhythm. It should be in every school book.
Perhaps Alfred Purdy's most unique contribution to contemporary Canadian poetry is his laconic, gentle irony, his use of the colloquial to stress the everydayness of things. His tone may be irate at times, even resentful; but there is always more pity than hate in his underlying attitude. No better example can be found than in the title poem of his last collection "Cariboo Horses", where

At 100 Mile House the cowboys ride in rolling stagey cigarettes with one hand reining restive equine rebels on a morning grey as stone
---so much like riding dangerous women with whiskey-coloured eyes---

From this "riding rhythm", reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon strong stress metre—"cowboys ride in rolling / with one hand reining" and its romantic connotations, the poet moves to the drab fact, in right short phrases:

But only horses

pastured outside the town with
jeeps and fords and chevys and
busy muttering stake trucks

Then the lyrical movement mounts towards the end of the poem, with its evocation of the history of horses:

the last Quagga screaming in African highlands
lost relatives of these
whose hooves were thunder
the ghosts of horses battering in the wind
whose names were the wind's common usage
whose life was the sun's.

Finally, there is a sudden drop to harsh everyday reality, where the rhythm emphasizes the contrast:
arriving here at chilly noon
in the gasoline smell of the
dust and waiting 15 minutes
at the grocer's---

It is this ability to link mood with rhythm, to emphasize the everyday, the colloquial, and make it stand out significantly: this is Alfred Purdy's special gift. And whereas the imagism of Knister and of Souster is inclined to be focussed on a 'still life' image, Purdy has a moving, cinemagraphic eye: he forces the images to jump, to flash by, to tear off at a gallop. The poem becomes surrealist:

But he's parked waiting for me
at the Presbyterian steeple
that got struck by lightning like
a blue cop-angel who's a
dead ringer for the prophet Isaiah

From here on, where? there is no knowing what direction Purdy will find: but the impression one has about him, gained from hearing his rhythms, is that he is a man walking and talking fast who will take the listener with him, willy-nilly. The fact that his intonations and his emphases do not always come through onto the printed page would indicate that he ought to pay more attention to notation. His rhythms, however, are unmistakable. Like his ideas, they are eclectic, yet original, wryly felt. Thus, by means of subtle juxtaposition and combination of rhythm against rhythm and image against image, Purdy creates that tension that makes him a poet.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE INHERITORS: NEW VOICES, NEW RHYTHMS

Poets in the imagist-realist tradition in Canada, before Purdy, have used new techniques in oral presentation and in notation; but (except for Dudek) they seem to have done so unconsciously. They are quite unlike their American counterparts, Olson, Duncan and Creeley, who have theorized, polemicized, and even pontificated. Today, the younger Canadian poets have taken a leaf from the Black Mountain book. Most of them come from British Columbia, which has been especially sensitive to developments in the United States, and has been invaded more than once by American poets such as Creeley, Olson, Duncan, Ginsberg, Levertov, Snyder and Spicer. The mimeographed student magazine Tish, first edited by George Bowering, Frank Davey and Jamie Reid (circa 1962) was a direct outgrowth of these contacts. Tish has continued the policy of keeping up a constant interchange with California and other parts of the United States.

The background of the new American voices is best illustrated by Donald M. Allen's anthology The New American Poetry. The problem may be centred, however, by presenting the traditionalist view on the nature of poetry. Ivor Winters, as far back as the thirties, asked a searching question: "For what, after all, is a poem?" He explained it as:

a statement about an experience, real or imagined.
The statement must follow the experience in time:
Donne, for example, could not have written The

Ectasy while engaged in the experience described. The poem is a commentary on something that has happened. It is an act of meditation. The poem is more valuable than the event by virtue of its being an act of meditation: it is an event plus the understanding of the event. Why then should the poet be required to produce the illusion of immediate experience without intervention of the understanding?2

Today this question requires no answer: "immediate experience" has become an acceptable aesthetic concept. Many contemporary poets work from the theory of spontaneity, of FIELD, to reach awareness. It was first voiced by Archibald Macleish when he wrote in "Ars Poetica"

a poem must not mean
but be.

To the present generation the poem is not "an understanding of an event"; it is the event itself. This concept leads to the view that the language in which the poem is clothed is also event, object, 'ding an sich'. These poets are first concerned with language, the revolution in linguistics has struck them, and often it has involved them so deeply that they fail to see that what was said by Olson in the fifties was said by Pound and Williams in the twenties; and, on the critical level, by René Wellek's summary on "Euphony, Rhythm, and Metre" in 1949.3 It is not hard to fit Lionel Kearns into this tradition even though he calls free verse "stacked verse". "STACKED VERSE is a system of notation designed to accommodate poetry whose rhythmic form depends upon accentual

stress. Its basic unit is the STACK-FOOT, a group of syllables containing one primary stress and ending in a terminal juncture." As Kearns writes:

Poetry is a voice art. A poem does not exist on the page any more than a song exists on a piece of sheet music. The poem and the song exist in TIME as sound, and the marks on the page are merely space transcriptions of the original forms... Similarly, the poet works from the transcription when he is composing. Although he thinks of the poem as sound, he keeps track of the sound on the page.

One of the chief aims of the recent Pacific Coast poetry is to bring back the relevance of sound to the art. In a poem called Cadence Bowering has expressed it:

rhythm; measured movement, esp. of sound; fall of voices; esp. at the end of a period; intonation; close of musical phrase.

So that it is the walking of the voice
the opening of doors and the walking on floors
and the closing of doors
the swinging of arms
and the talking of the voice
the cadet marching of the legs all straight and bending in the sun

4 Lionel Kearns, Notes on the Stack, mimeographed.

Phyllis Webb also has been deeply interested in the new directions towards experimentation in form. Although of a different generation from the British Columbia poets, she is close in time and in orientation to Olson, Creeley and especially Robert Duncan. Of his influence she has said:

He is a great explorer in the realm of form. I am trying to move into larger forms and since he handles these with great skill I have been studying him quite carefully. And because he is interested in sound, especially the vowel sounds, the melodic tone that he can acquire through a skillful manipulation of vowels, I am especially attracted. He is very insistent on music, unlike Ginsberg who achieves his effects from a kind of wild leaping into the poem, which emerges as a much more rhetorical line. On the surface (it is) a seemingly less formal poem, but a poem that is sustained by a tremendous energy and by a kind of intuitive sense of form.6

Webb is interested in Creeley also because

his music is very subtle and again it is related to song. The poems are short and oblique often. I have in the past year been working on poems that are short; and I find that I have run into all kinds of difficulties, one of which is sentence structure. Because the sentence is based on an opposition of ideas you get 'buts' and 'althoughs' and 'ifs' which complicate the problem of writing a short poem...I had to break through the basic oppositions that are presented to us in everyday thought, and get to a more refined synthesis.7

To do this Phyllis Webb had to get away from what she terms "a dramatic rhythm!!" and "the dramatic structure" of a poem, and away from

7 Ibid.
metaphor. The result was *The Naked Poems* (Vancouver, 1965)—bare, simple statements close to the Japanese or Imagist tradition.

Near the white Tanabe narcissus near Layton's *Love* daffodils, outside, falling on the pavement, the plum blossoms of Cypress Street.

In the following poem, each line conforms to Kearns' pattern for "Stacked Verse". There is only one strong stress between junctures; each line (except one) is "stacked" to have one strong stress only.

```
My white skin
is not the moonlight
If it is/
tell me who reads/
by that light
```

This brief poem fascinates not only because of its rhythmic pattern but because of its "tone leading". There is a very marked play on the vowel sounds /a/ and /i/ or /i/ as in my white, moonlight, light, by; contrasted with skin, if it is, me reads. One "tone" is reinforced by a similar one throughout the poem. The result is not rhyming but assonance. Thus the exploration of music, rhythm and sound fused with bare "objectism" makes Phyllis Webb the Canadian poet who most closely interprets imagism.

Jamie Reid, another West Coast poet still at University, is
occupying himself with the "new" theories. He likes to experiment with
the short line—a simple and direct statement of personal data.

One says I am.
The sound of a man shouting in a barrel.
That is, I am that.
Object. Movement. Bird. Boat with sails,
the hidden violence of all things.

But Reid, like Webb, is not content merely with one type of rhythm. He
is searching for music and cadence, as in "The Shape of the Falling Light":

The birds approach, sad geese
& gentle ducks,
Crossing the visible boundaries,
alternate shadow and light—

A gentleness.
The light falls,
Softly falls, softly, a voice of its own.
The air is curved to its shape.

This longer line has a flow determined by the alternating iambics and
dactylys (lines one and two), ending gravely with firm iambics:

The air is curved to its shape #

Reid is deeply concerned, like Webb, with the need for bare
statement as against the pull of metaphor, which seems to rise to the
surface however strongly the poet suppresses it. When he first began
to write poetry, he "sedulously avoided" metaphor because "when you use
metaphor you are transferring the energy from the place that you got it
onto another object...you take away the particularity of the thing you
are talking about, where each thing has a right to its own identity".

Jamie Reid's poems have been published in magazines but not in a
book.
However, he recognizes that

There are senses in which things do become one...Peter Auxier's "tent" that becomes "a flower", for instance...So when the feelings will not be contained in any other possibility, when the image isn't what you thought it was anyway, you might as well use metaphor.

Reid analyzes his own poem "Dream" to show how metaphor creeps into bare statement. But since this poem is also rhythmically provocative and since the rhythm becomes the structural expression of that metaphor, its first stanzas are presented here:

There was something precise he had started and now continued. The way was confused, the clues obscure.

There was talk awhile of honesty. There were doorways without walls, bleeding light. They were mirrors, welling from his face, and there was a distant sense of peace. Shapes led him. Flesh fell from them. He stood less revealed. The idea of a path was in his mind.

Reid explicates:

'there were/doorways' -- that's to describe a psychic state. There was a sense of a doorway without a wall. But then 'bleeding light'--

9 Jamie Reid. From a tape recorded by the author. Vancouver, 1964.
that begins to be a metaphor; light doesn't bleed out of anywhere. But the term 'bleeding' does hold the sense of the feeling.  

This is a clear example of how a poet tends to theorize after he has written a poem. It also points to how closely the rhythm and the feeling are united; the metaphor 'bleeding' unites them. The rhythmic structure of this word is functional, it is trochaic, and gives a 'falling' sensation. Also the long /i/ sound followed by the /I/ definitely aids in evoking the emotion felt. The notation on the page is important; the poet is following Creeley's 'beat' where his tendency is to do violence to speech patterns and make stress and juncture fall where new emphases may be created:

```
There was talk
awhile of honesty / There were/
doorsays / without walls / bleeding /
/ light // They were/
mirrors /
```

This process is the opposite of "stacked verse". The poet sets up a more varied, more interesting and less monotonous pattern by distorting the rhythms of normal speech. But this rhythm too, carried to excess, can also become sleep-inducing. The poet must always be on his guard lest the 'norm' he sets up become a drug.

John Newlove, another young Vancouver poet, appreciates the problems being tackled by Webb and Reid. He stands aside from cults

10 Ibid.
and movements—perhaps because his roots are on the prairie—yet he is deeply committed to a new direction in contemporary poetry. He is aware of the tension that must be created between form and content, between the spoken line and the written line, between the interplay of vowels and consonants. Above all, the possibilities of ambiguity in the use of language fascinate this poet.

When I first began writing poetry I did not seem to know what I was doing. The only thing, theoretically, that I have retained from Ezra Pound was his statement about rhythm, 'I mean to compose in sequence of a melody—not a metronome.' So I want to use the line simultaneously as a breath unit; or to stop when I want to make a special emphasis—distorting the breath unit by changing it around a bit, or putting a little bit of roughness in the melody, or working variations on the melody: not only for their own sakes, though they may be pleasing, but for meaning too. Because I don't think I'm a lyric poet. I write poems to say something. The verse is not free for me.11

Notwithstanding, poetry comes to him freely, as rhythm.

Most of the time a poem starts with about a line and a half, or two and a half lines,... They give me the sound, the music and the rhythm which I can follow or work variations on. Then I sit down to write it until I think I've come to the end. Then I have to adjust and 'form' it, because the lines are very rough. (At the same time) I have to decide if I am telling the truth: if I believe it or if I'm just writing a poem—'today I shall write a poem'.12


12 Ibid.
As an example of this approach Newlove cites the poem "The Arrival", which records his first visit to Vancouver after hitchhiking from the prairies. This is the rhythm that began it:

Having come slowly, hesitantly
at first, as a poem comes

He explains that he was walking down a Vancouver street thinking of his slow, hesitant progress across the country as a "wild, unwanted" hitchhiker. As the first line came into his mind he saw the connection between his journey and the journey of a poem into consciousness.

"I ran into the house and wrote it down—end then the darn poem hesitated... And then I remembered that once I got to Cranbrook, I got a couple of very long rides; and then it seemed I got to the Coast very quickly. I was continually going down hill. And so, remembering, I got the line which said this: 'going steadily down!'" In this way the poet arrived at the third line of his poem:

going steadily down to the marshy seaboard

The next five lines crowded in fast after that, in an exuberant rhythm, running fast:

that day I ran along a stone sea-break,
plunging into the Pacific, the sun
just setting, clothed, exuberant, hot,
so happy—

O sing

The latter half of the poem took longer to work out, and was more
cerebrally induced through conscious associations—until the incongruity of his own position struck him. He was swimming, fully clothed and noting the trees whitely flowering

I took off my clothes and calmly bathed.  

What makes Newlove's poetic line so striking is its notation, adapted to the cadence of his own voice. The lines are scrupulously arranged in breath-groups, but distorted, where necessary, for special effects. An example is the poem "Four Small Scars", where, though each line of the poem is a unit in itself, there are breaks in syntax and juncture which lead on to a new line, or a new stanza.

This scar underneath my lip
is symbol of a friend's rough love
though some would call it anger,
mistakenly. This scar

crescent on my wrist
is symbol of a woman's delicate anger
though some would call it love,
mistakenly. My belly's scar

is symbol of a surgical precision:
no anger, no love. The small
fading mark on my hand

is token of my imprecision,
of my own carving, my anger and my love.  

This poem, as "resolved" as a sonnet, reflects Newlove's linguistic concerns. He discovered that because there was a brief pause


at the end of each line of the poem on the page, it meant that each line was separate in itself, "so that the way they told me at school, that when you read a poem you should read it straight through like prose--was not true any more for me. And leaving the space at the end of the line meant something else, that the first word in each line became clearly emphasized, because in a small way you were starting again each time." He also found that the rhythms of each line did not have to be the same, but could be variations on each other.

In "Four Scars" the variations are skilfully played upon. The initial "This scar" is repeated at the end of the stanza. The added comma at the end of line three emphasizes a longer juncture and lays increased stress on that important word, "mistakenly". The same pattern is repeated in the third and fourth lines of stanza two. A variation on the phrase "this scar" comes in forcefully at the end of stanza two: "my belly's scar". And stronger than the original "some would call it" is the initial heavily stressed "no anger, no love". There follows a dimuendo in rhythm and feeling as the poet reveals the keynote, the most revealing statement in the poem:

the small
fading scar on my hand

To press the point home he extends the last line, long and forceful and sinuous:

of my own carving my anger and my love
The well-nigh perfect fusion of content and structural form in "Four Small Scars" reminds us of Creeley's dictum: "form is an extension of content". The poem becomes an entity in itself, Suzanne Langer's "illusion of life" and "virtual world".

Although ideas dominate in Newlove's approach to poetry, he is fascinated by the way technique, the skilled use of rhythm and sound, can cast different lights upon meaning. For instance, he will play with a phrase like

```
This is what happens//
```

where the main stress is laid on the happening; but he will then repeat the line, laying the stress on what:

```
This is what/
```
```
happens //
```

Newlove has written two poems entitled "While You Were Out". At first sight they seem to be identical. Then a variation appears in the shape of the line, in the re-arrangement of junctures. In poem I, the poet wants his wife to return. He cannot imagine her not doing so.

```
While You Were Out

I

While you were out I
had difficulties imagining
in my stupidity that
you might not come back
and difficulties in my misery
imagining that you might.
```
In the second poem the poet is "almost paranoidal": he had difficulties because he found he was free of her:

II

While you were out I had difficulties imagining, in my stupidity, that you might not come back and difficulties imagining, in my misery, that you might.

By re-arrangement of the position of the word "imagining" and by subtle changes in juncture (the poet reads the lines aloud as they have been notated above), the two poems say opposite things. This use of rhythm to control meaning and the dependence of the written poem upon notation, if it is to be communicated neatly, challenge Newlove's ingenuity. He likes to experiment also with sound patterning. By working with alliteration for instance, he has done away with notation altogether in the poem "The Film of Lhosa". Here he has tried to make the rhythm take its beat not from "the lift and drop of the language" but from consonantal emphasis. He uses /m/ throughout, to create a monotonous, timeless effect against a buzz, a tension of /s/ and /z/ sounds.

Originally, these following lines were written as prose:

The monks move with ease across an overexposed landscape.
Dalai Llama is going to three monasteries to pass his exams.
It is the first time I have seen a man almost a god, moving.

The poem bristles with /m/’s, /s/’s and /sk/ and /ks/ sounds. Here
the poet admits that the rhythm of these lines might scarcely be
distinguished from prose rhythms (though in prose it would get
"pretty boring"). What makes it a poem is the music created by
recurring sounds and by hidden rhymes, as in

light green on white soil
....
an emperor made a joke,
sardonically, of his impending divinity.

John Newlove's mastery of technique has grown rather than
diminished with the publication of his first solid collection of
poems, Moving In Alone(1965). A poem of great power and beauty in
that book, first printed in Poetry '64, is "The Flowers", a memory
of his brother. He says of it:

The poem took me two years to write and 15
or 20 thousand words of notes--prose notes
about the whole situation: remembrances,
enlargements of phrases to make sure I wasn't
lying too much. In this one I had trouble,
especially in the last part, in keeping it
from being too hysterical. Does this refute
the statement that I write for meaning? It is
obvious that you do not always come out
straight-forwardly and state your meaning.
Sometimes it can be done, but perhaps you are
not able to do it because of your own involve-
ment: you have to go about it in a roundabout
way.15

In this poem Newlove makes frequent use of "breaking the lines"--
distorting, that is, the natural breath group or syntactic unit,

15 John Newlove. From a tape recording made by the author.
Vancouver, 1964.
in order to make the poem "drive fairly quickly, fairly consistently; but also to let me use fewer words to get more meaning into the line". The method works. Note the tension, drive, and excitement in

The sign crackles
and swings on its bar,
iron bar; the cars go by
all the night. They cut
a momentary trail and mark,
disappearing on the wet
black pavement. The cars go by
the police in their cars
prowl restlessly
up and down the rain avenue
looking for interlopers, anyone
afoot at night in the rain,
the blue and dangerous
gun-hipped cops.

The monosyllabled words at the end of the lines, with their iambic finality, the harsh dental consonants against the mournful /ai/
vowels: cut, wet, as against bar, by, mark, by, cars---these build up the tragic mood of the poem; the inevitability of violence.

Newlove enjoys the game of forcing one word to do the work of two. In the following lines the adjective bloated is meant to refer back to angel and forward to flowers. A metaphoric fusion results:

the bulging flowers that grew
in his head, plants
of evil or of god, some
holy epileptic angel, bloated
inhuman flowers shining.

But above all his control of rhythm gives this poet the power to drive out the energy and emotion from the words:
And the cars
pass up and down
the streets, disappearing
trails, the blue police
pass, coughing delicately
behind their leathery fists,
guns dangling
from their hips, eyes
watching. My flowery clock
buzzes and mutters,
typewriter taps
like the rain. I breathe
as harshly as the wind.

Newlove has gained from all that has gone before in contemporary
Canadian poetry and has achieved a greater command over his vehicle
as well as a greater sense of direction than have poets like Bowering,
Davey, and Kearns. Beside his, their statements seem tentative, some-
times querulous, and their rhythms slight or "chopped". Like Alfred
Purdy, his most obvious 'ancestor', Newlove expresses in his poetry a
breadth and grasp of the country where he was born. He interprets one
aspect of a generation of young Canadians: paranoic, fearful, Oedipic
characters who are willing to break themselves against rock to become
individuals. That flint is in the rhythm and sound of the poetry.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this work has not been to evaluate contemporary Canadian poets but to examine their interest in techniques, particularly those of rhythm and sound. From its beginnings in Canada in the thirties with Pratt and Klein, the modernist movement has shown itself to be varied, virile, and experimental. Within the framework of accepted metrics, Pratt and Klein made a vigorous effort to be original. There is no doubt of their success, subject to their temperamental limitations. Knister broke wholly free from traditional verse patterns and like his Montreal contemporary, Arthur S. Bourinot, essayed to capture the elusive rhythms of free verse. His influence has stirred the poets of the forties who have continued writing up to the present: Dudek, Souster, and Webb. But added to the new interest in rhythm and sound engendered by Dudek in particular, there has developed a strong Indigenous strain of poetry whose purpose is ironic and directive: the social criticism of Acorn, Purdy, and Newlove. These poets make their impact precisely because they combine a sensitivity to the problems of the individual in society with a delight in movement, muscular rhythms, muted musical effects. They are at once 'concrete and universal' poets and men delving at the country's hard core, seeking to relate its nature to the dominant art in Canada, the art of poetry. By using their own voices to record new rhythms and music, they have expressed the voice of the country itself: urgent, vibrating, and wholly original.
Most of the linguists now working in North American on poetics use as their starting-point the work of Trager and Smith: *An Outline of English Structure*—from *Studies in Linguistics*, Occasional Papers Number 3 (SIL 9, 1951), Norman, Oklahoma.

The Trager-Smith concept of four basic stresses in English speech (and therefore in English poetry), namely: primary, secondary, tertiary, and weak is now generally accepted. But there are critics. William Wavy, in an article on *Stress In English* (*Language Learning*, Vol. xii, No.1, 1962), points out that a definition of stress is difficult: it involves not merely force or loudness but

(a) frequency of voicing  
(b) relative duration of syllables  
(c) intensity of syllables  
(d) phonetic quality of vowels.

Voice frequency, he suggests, overrides all; it is high with high vowels and low with low vowels. Of a representative gathering of linguists, he points out, few were able to distinguish four stresses in a given passage. Most only distinguished two. Yet it is on these very tentative findings that Epstein and Hawkes, Chatman, Halpern and Whitehall base their analyses of iambic accentual verse. It would be better, as Rene Wellek and Austin Warren point out (in *Theory of Literature*, N. Y., 1949) to put poetry on a broader base.
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