

John Baxter

Review Article

Fugitive Reality: The Poetry of George Whalley

The Collected Poems of George Whalley. Edited by George Johnston. Kingston: Quarry Press, 1986. Paper, \$10.95.

Poetry is not escape but 'inscape'; it is at once a discovery and fashioning of some aspect of reality and of the self. The event of reality is not fully and clearly known until it has achieved the physical body of a poem. (George Whalley, *Poetic Process*, 1953)

"For many of us, he was first and last a poet." It is easy to sympathize with this remark by George Johnston in his introduction to *The Collected Poems of George Whalley*. There are a good many extraordinary poems in this volume. It is also easy to agree with Johnston and with David Lewis (*Queen's Quarterly*, Winter, 1987) when they regret that Whalley did not write more poems in the last part of his career. More than two-thirds of the poems in the collection were published in the forties. It's true too that Whalley himself used the term "poet," as well as "poem" and "poetry," in a generously inclusive sense—as in his essay "Jane Austen: Poet," for example—so that there may be an ultimate justice in claiming him as a poet, first and last. To begin with, however, it is useful to distinguish the poet from the critic, and the publication of *The Collected Poems* makes it easier to draw the distinction. The poems are an important contribution to Canadian literature that should be more widely known; they constitute a foundation or context for Whalley's wide-ranging work in prose; and it is only through an exploration of the symbiotic relation of the poet and the critic that any just estimate of the full significance of either may be reached.

Johnston has organized the collection in three sections: "No Man an Island," "Homer at Dawn," and "*Anima Poetae*." The last of these is a miscellaneous group of 27 poems, with at least two written as late as 1980. "No Man an Island" appeared in 1948 and included among its 41 poems nine which had been included in the earlier Ryerson chapbook, *Poems 1939-44*, published in 1946. The middle section, consisting of eight poems, is something of an anomaly. It is not clear why Whalley decided to leave them out of the 1948 volume since they have several affinities in both style and theme with the poems that were included. The section title, "Homer at Dawn," has presumably been provided by Johnston, perhaps because the chapbook began with a poem having that title, though Johnston now places it at the end of this middle section. In fact, the order of this section in *The Collected Poems* exactly reverses the order of the chapbook.

Anomalous as they are, these poems nevertheless provide a direct approach to some of Whalley's most distinctive gifts. Particularly charming is "A Smile and a Nod":

Death, at our first casual meeting,
smiled at me and turned away.
He had a very pleasing grace.
I was not glad to see him go.

Now, when we meet, we nod and take
our several ways without imposing
upon our chance acquaintanceship.
I am content it should be so.

This is written after the manner of Emily Dickinson: in the personification of Death, in the way that courtesy is used as a metaphor to explore a metaphysical attitude, and in the seemingly erratic but cunning use of rhyme. The distant rhyme at the end of the second stanza underlines the aloof connection between the speaker and Death—a poised attitude of resignation in which death, while recognized, is neither repelled nor desired.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the poem as merely charming or as only an exercise in imitation. The reality of a desire for death is rendered very convincingly in "Behind the Victory" as a "gentle warmth / and voluptuous emptiness." Even more bewitching is the poem "Sleep," in which sleep is figured as a jungle, animate but unconscious, more inscrutable than dreams:

the slow blind stealth of tendrils
swaying and feeling out and overpowering

one by one each outpost of sensation
 till, like an Inca temple swamped by the patient
 implacability of jungle vines,
 the inmost citadel is overwhelmed
 by the stillness and silence of oblivion.

Sleep now, my darling, dreamlessly, and deeper
 than the fathomless Pacific waters.
 You are weary beyond the comforting of tears;
 and there is in you great need of the charms
 of poppy and sandalwood and spikenard.

Sleep is here invoked as a release from suffering and sickness, from consciousness and dreams, even perhaps from life itself, and although the poem is addressed to another—the sufferer—the close imaginative identification implies similar feelings in the poet or speaker. Both “Sleep” and “Behind the Victory” help to show what sort of victory, what sort of personal encounter with reality, is represented by the “chance acquaintanceship” and the charm of “A Smile and a Nod.”

In “The Sound of Bare Feet” the problem is not the problem of facing death but of facing life in the context of war.

Each in his own way
 has sacrificed the clear
 immediate vision and hope
 to war's diffuse absorption.
 And the dawn sacrament
 no more sets our feet
 over Norman flagstones
 upon the ways of peace.

Especially noteworthy in this final stanza or verse paragraph is the oxymoron “diffuse absorption,” indicating the numbing intensities, the widespread preoccupations of war that usurp and absorb all energies. This perception is handled again with more intensity, amounting to fury, in “Homer at Dawn,” which is more powerful and more primitive, especially in the repetitions of its conclusion.

E'en like a sea-surge
 lashed by the Northwind
 lashed by the Northwind
 lashed by the Northwind

The equivalent of the “dawn sacrament” from “The Sound of Bare Feet,” though again more primitive and primal, almost subhuman, is presented in the second stanza of “Homer at Dawn”:

Four o'clock. The sun is rising
 with white mist and bird-song,
 the dawn breeze coldly stirring the leaves
 on dew-dripping trees.

The resilient delicacy of the images of dawn presents an effective contrast with, even while it is absorbed into, the wrath of the sea and wind. "Homer" I take here to be a metonymy for the possibility of exact and delicate perceptions, minute discriminations, registered within and alongside the blind and monumental forces of war, war being the missing term of the simile with which the poem begins and ends: "E'en like a sea-surge / lashed by the Northwind." The capricious and violent deities of Homer and the Mediterranean have spread northward.

"Homer at Dawn," then, is an appropriate title for the section, which is, after all, anomalous only in being separated from "No Man an Island," where the same preoccupations also figure largely. Before turning to that main first section, however, I will comment on "*Anima Poetae*," the truly miscellaneous group. As might be expected, the execution of these poems is uneven. Some of them appeared in magazines, some are published here for the first time. At least one, "Now That the Dark..." is merely a draft version of a poem that was published earlier, "English Winter." Some, such as "Admonishment" and "To Mr. W.H. All Happiness," are whimsical and amusing. Some, which seem intended in the first instance for a more restricted audience of family or friends, exhibit nevertheless a warm and homey hospitality. In this category belong "Pig" and "Dionysiac." Others, such as "A Minor Poet is Visited by the Muse" and "Calligrapher," are introspective and wry reflections on the art of writing.

Within the section, however, are sombre meditations on death that connect with the themes of the earlier volumes, and even more striking is a series of love poems that deepen and strengthen the earlier treatments of this subject. "Absence," "And This Befell..." and "After Santayana" are concise poetic statements; "Autumn Was Never So Late" is more expansive. The best of the group is "Flowering of an Ancient Reticence," dealing with the renewal of love, with lovers breaking free of some impediment, some prison of self-imposed isolation or seclusion or estrangement.

Take this for a song. Night drifting down
 With the bird-hush and murmur of ebbing voices:
 Here, at the turn of the stairs, the darkness
 Suddenly blazed, and all the silences that all these years

Had fallen between our lips and the heart's promptings	5
Gathered and scattered like wings at a single gesture	
Of dawn or gunshot. Or was it some small sound,	
Of beetle or owl, or the limpid laconic brook	
Too shallow for suicide that rippling tripped	
The avalanche of gentleness and crushed	10
The forests of delay, starting the shy	
Withholdings out of their wits, and all the plumed	
Birds of rejoicing mounted in a glory of wings,	
Jubilant, dainty as kestrels, psalming	
The unrequited sky of their desire.	15

Fallen into beatitude
 At this turn of the stair
 We'd best go on higher
 And seek peace there.

The conventional metaphor of love as a hunt underlies much of the poem but with some startling innovations: where conventionally the lady is the bird and the man the hunter, here both the man and the woman are figured as birds. The hunt is alluded to in the mention of "gunshot," but that is only one of several possible explanations for what might have aroused the lovers, and neither of them is in a position to have fired the shot. And though the second half of line 7 looks like the beginning of a question, the question of the motive for renewal is never answered definitively; it is left behind, or we might say, overwhelmed by the beauty and energy of the result, the "flowering," which contains within itself motive enough without need of appeal to any external cause (though without denying the possible existence of such cause either).

Particularly effective is the development of the bird metaphor, the dynamic realizing of the birds' identity: from the invisible and virtually inaudible "bird-hush" of line 2 and the bewildered "wings" gathered and then scattered in line 6 to "the plumed / Birds of rejoicing" in lines 12 and 13, finally named specifically as "kestrels" in line 14. The kestrels are both birds and hunters in their own right, though the emphasis is on the Hopkins-like exhilaration of their flight and song rather than on their falconry. The old distinction of hunter and hunted has been resolved into a new and finer equation in which both lovers are both. This fine control of the degree of realization as well as of the process of the realizing is characteristic of Whalley, the perfect fusion of the abstract and the concrete perhaps nowhere more evident than in the phrase, "starting the shy / Withholdings out of their wits."

The excitement of the flushed birds reaches its apex in the hyperbole of lines 14 and 15 in which the fulfilment of love is celebrated in a wonderful irony as the "unrequited sky of their desire," which suggests simultaneously a kind of infinity of desire and a kind of unrepayable gift. The requited love the lovers experience is itself an unrequitable gift, a sign of grace. This point is recognized in turn as the *ne plus ultra* by means of the quiet irony of the last four lines, the shorter lines and the rhyme placing the lovers' passion, retaining the spiritual hints (the "turn of the stair" an echo of "Ash Wednesday?"), but settling for the moment for a quieter and fully human delight, the peace of the bedroom. The measured ironies of the conclusion show clearly that ilove is not unfriendly to wit and intelligence, even though a self-protective wit may be at times the final impediment, an ancient reticence, that love must overcome.

The metre of the poem is interesting for its apparent casualness, loosely pentameter in the first 15 lines and trimeter in the last four, but in both places resisting or eschewing a firm iambic movement. Perhaps as the hunt metaphor avoids any blunt identification of the motive of desire, so the metre is designed to defeat any forcing of the feelings along predetermined lines. Such a strategy accords with what Whalley says in *Poetic Process*:

If the technical 'devices' of a poem grow directly out of the poem's inner need they will be so closely woven into the fabric of the poem that you could not say whether they comprised the poem or were ancillary to it. When that inner need is satisfied—sustained, nourished, contemplated until it has found its body—the tone, the tune is unmistakable.

The reliance here on the poem's "inner need" suggests Whalley's close affinity with Coleridge, and especially with the notion of organic form, innate, shaping and developing itself from within. And the influence of Coleridge on Whalley, generally, of course is undeniable. The title Johnston gives for the final section of *The Collected Poems* derives from a particular poem the full title of which is "*Anima Poetae* (after Coleridge)," declaring quite explicitly its debt to Whalley's mentor. The theme of the poem might be paraphrased by invoking Whalley's description of the importance of the imagination (the soul of the poet) in Coleridge's view as, "the supreme realizing function, a dynamic state of wholeness accessible to all men, and overflowing into things-made so that they may have a life of their own, not being the image of the person who made them."

But it is advisable at this point to proceed cautiously. Any overzealous assimilating of Whalley to Coleridge could easily distort or short-

change some of his central concerns as a poet and as a critic. For one thing, he was equally interested in Aristotle. The comment on Coleridge and imagination quoted above is, in fact, taken from his essay, "The Aristotle-Coleridge Axis" (*UTQ*, Winter, 1973), which argues that the Coleridgean view of the imagination is fundamentally congruent with Aristotle's view of mimesis. It is this surprising conjunction, the cross-fertilizing of these two seminal figures, that lies behind many of Whalley's unique insights as a scholar and critic. This essay is central, I think, for understanding his critical position generally, the ramifications of that position fully evident only in the light of that peculiar "axis." But the development of his criticism is, in any case, beyond the scope of this essay, and it is useful to recollect that the main first section of *The Collected Poems*, "No Man an Island," was published well before the criticism. One of the many opportunities provided by the reissuing of this poetry is the chance for a fresh, unencumbered look at Whalley's career, and if we find him to be ultimately Aristotelian or Coleridgean or some amazing combination, that may be seen not so much a product of scholarly spade-work (though there was unquestionably plenty of that) as an assiduous and essentially poetic cultivation of attitudes or inklings already present from early on.

It would be easy to regard the title "No Man an Island" as a cliché, an old chestnut lifted, as is the epigraph to the whole section, from John Donne, but to do so would miss the drama of the poems, the special fitness of Donne's famous meditation on death to Whalley's personal experience of the war. The separations of lovers and friends, the absolute cleavages between ally and enemy, the impersonality of modern warfare, these all present peculiar challenges to Donne's truism: "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind." And Donne's grand statement that "Europe is the less" when any piece of earth is "washed away by the Sea" acquires a peculiar resonance for a Canadian like Whalley, on loan to the British Royal Navy, fighting a war in which Europe is threatening not merely to lose a few clods but to tear itself (and more than itself) apart. In this situation Whalley turns to Donne, as to an older Europe, to find his bearings.

David Lewis claims that, "A judicious selection of the best writing of Keith Douglas, Randall Jarrell and George Whalley could provide a potent antidote to the prevalent cliché that in contrast to the first world war the second world war produced no memorable poetry." This, as regards Whalley at least, seems to me a reasonable claim, which could

be substantiated by pointing to the vividness of his accounts of particular actions or wartime predicaments and to the comprehensiveness of his vision, the humane breadth of feeling or sympathy that provides a context, explicit or implied, for specific events. Sympathy and vividness, however, to be poetically real must be more than picturesque, must not be facile. The preoccupation in many of the poems is with the dissociations and unrealities of war. In "Seascape 1940-41," for example, letters from home bring "distant unreal news from a former life"; word of the deaths of comrades evokes the response "remember not to write"; a sailor on duty speaks "to a lookout / And it isn't your voice that speaks"; a shore leave is too short "to ravel this thread / of quietness back through labyrinthine ways / to a yellow teapot jolly and round":

Here is no pattern, here no tissue of meaning:
but guttering candle-flames of memory
that leap, and steady a moment, and evanesce
in the dark rooms of unremembered time.

The form here, like the form of "Normandy Landing" and possibly also of "World's End: A London Incident," is that of a diary or journal. The verse paragraphs are the steady moments, not always fully coherent, and there are few transitions between verse paragraphs, only the first and last giving the barely minimal sense of form sufficient to register the experience of flux. There is no beginning or end in the Aristotelian sense, and certainly no imposed pattern of hypostatized coherence.

Several of the poems in this section, in fact, seem haunted by an anxious feeling that perhaps, after all, man *is* an island. "My head is filled with dark storm-wings, / and the beak and claws of the storm / have ripped away all sense of pity and gentleness." This feeling broods in particular over poems that might otherwise qualify unreservedly as love poems. "Homecoming," for example: "Two years have made this house my home. / But now, returning from unimagined distance and time, / I find a house familiar but empty." Or "The Way Back":

Somehow our delicate
sympathy of mind
no longer lights for us
the way to each other.
We look long and deeply
into each other's eyes
searching for something familiar,
something half-remembered

and see there only a question,
a stranger's half-question.

The feeling hovers over poems that show human experience truncated ("Sicilian Vignette") or stultified ("Covenant with Death") or random ("Aftermath, July 1943"). It rushes into the emptiness that inexorably follows the frenzy or "fierce joy of assault / and killing," as in "Dieppe":

The dull smack, dull
thud, dull dark
dropping down under wounds.
And now he sits in the cobbled
square above the seawall;
head in hands, alone,
shaken, cold, utterly
desolate: the ships
gone, the friends ebbed
homeward. Was it ever
fun to be young, to attack
(face blackened), to lead,
to kill? All ebbed out
to the cold trembling dread
of a small boy climbing
a dark stair.

Most portentously the feeling accompanies the implacable ignorance that is augmented, paradoxically, by the deployment of sophisticated weapons. There is a spiralling terror in "Prayer for the Living":

Destroying that we be not destroyed,
following darkness into darkness
we know not what we do. Unhating,
we work through the passionless precision
of instruments: and leave in our wake
the silence of the great cities, the broken
quiet of those who go down to lipless
silence. What wounds we leave we know not,
what self-inflicted wounds we know not,
following darkness into darkness,
destroying that we be not destroyed.

Forgive us. For we know not what we do.

This poem works by playing off the justification for participating in the war—"destroying that we be not destroyed"—against the ever more ominous meanings of "we know not what we do." The repetition of the key phrases is very telling, exposing their tendency to negate each other, while the ironic echo, in the last line, of Christ's words on

the cross reveals a fearsome process of alienation and isolation for the whole race, "the living": mankind is an island. This is not the innocent calling for forgiveness on behalf of the guilty; it is the guilty, like Claudius in *Hamlet*, half recognizing the crime, its cost to others and to the self, praying for forgiveness, but persisting in the process of wrongdoing and hence increasingly isolated, the isolation only intensified by the sophisticated half-knowledge commanded by the "passionless precision / of instruments."

A more complete knowledge demands a more complete recognition of suffering. For this, Whalley takes his bearings from the T. S. Eliot of "The Dry Salvages," which provides the epigraph to the second part of "No Man an Island."

...our own past is covered by the currents of action
 But the torment of others remains an experience
 Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition.
 People change, and smile: but the agony abides.

(It is interesting to note the influence of this poem, published in the forties, upon Whalley, also writing, and publishing, in the forties.) The theme expressed by the epigraph is taken up perhaps most explicitly in "Emergency Operation."

Under the anaesthetic
 the pupils of the child's eyes
 sharpened to needle-points, focusing
 the whole of his life and the struggle for his life.
 A Sister, a nurse and a sailor watched,
 feeling the swift intensity of the surgeon's work.
 But the shallow breathing quickened,
 the carotid pulse fluttering
 under the Sister's fingers.
 And slowly the irises relaxed
 spreading across the pupils
 with the sudden final darkness.

The nurse reached out her hand
 and closed the eyelids
 into the manner of sleep,
 and absently stroked
 the soiled soft cheek of the child
 and gazed at something beyond her sight.
 The sailor trembled and looked away,
 afraid to meet the mother in her eyes.

The poem is a complete miniature drama. The reality of the child as a sentient, suffering being is marvellously depicted in the imagery of the

eyes, and the wider implications of the drama are suggested by the status of the spectators, religious, medical, and military. The sailor at this point is more purely a spectator than the two women who, like the surgeon, are participants in the drama of the child's death. In the conclusion the tragic emotions are distributed revealingly between the sailor and the nurse, her wonder and pity—distant yet intimate—providing a frame and a reproach to the sailor's fear. In the earlier chapbook version of this poem the last sentence was three lines instead of two: "Afraid to meet the tenderness / and suffering of her eyes, / the sailor trembled and looked away." The revisions are slight but very important, keeping the emphasis focussed equally on nurse, sailor, and child, and in the metaphor of the "mother" reiterating the major theme, no man an island—or rather more specifically in this context, no woman an island; the man, the sailor, is aware of but unable here to participate fully in the primal connection of adult and child.

Similarly revealing is the way the body of the child at the very instant of death passes, as it were, from the hands of the surgeon into those of the Sister. Lightly but firmly, the shift implies a religious dimension to the event.

But the shallow breathing quickened,
the carotid pulse fluttering
under the Sister's fingers.

The arresting adjective "carotid" embodies a more-than-adjectival function. It refers, anatomically, to one of the two main arteries in the neck that carry blood to the head. But it also here implies, figuratively, a "heavy sleep," a sense that stems from the Greek root *karos*, suggesting the very threshold of life and death. Like the Nurse, the Sister maintains contact with the child—in touch literally as well as sympathetically, even in death. And this contact, more than the Sister's vocation, is what I mean by the poem's religious dimension.

"Emergency Operation" exhibits at least two of Whalley's characteristic habits as a poet. One is the principle of creative and sympathetic perception, perception that does more than simply describe, but enfolds or embodies its subject, that reaches for a comprehensive yet fugitive reality, difficult, as the example of the sailor suggests, to hold on to, but vitally necessary, substantial—even tactile—and at the same time visionary, in the manner suggested by the women in the poem. The other principle is properly called dramatic, an organizing principle that clarifies and thereby realizes the internal necessity, the inner dynamic, of an action. It is this process of recognition by means

of the poet's shaping that Whalley, following Hopkins, calls "inscape." And it is also in this sense that he calls poetry a fashioning of reality—the poet as maker, even of the actual.

There are several instances in *The Collected Poems* of poems that are clearly working from the actual. Johnston draws attention to the poetic sequence "Battle Pattern" that deals with the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* in the North Atlantic on May 27, 1941, and suggests that the poem invites comparison with Whalley's prose account of the same action published in *The Atlantic Monthly* (July, 1960). The main body of the prose account, Whalley says, derives from a "letter written on 11 June, 1941, by myself as a twenty-five-year-old sublieutenant of the Royal Canadian Volunteer Reserve, appointed ten weeks earlier to *Tartar*," a tribal-class destroyer of the 6th Flotilla. The magazine article adds to this letter a sort of prologue and an epilogue, written in 1960. The poetic sequence consists of seven poems, six of which are related to the material of the letter, reworking and rewording it in significant ways (not unlike the ways of the essentially poetic reworking of historical and biographical material in *The Legend of John Hornby* and *The Diary of Edgar Christian*).

The last poem in the sequence, "Finale," reveals most about the poet's special aims.

There is not elegy enough in all
 the winds and waves of the world to sing the ships,
 to sing the seamen to their rest, down
 through the slow shimmering drift of crepuscule,
 sinking through emerald green, through opal dimness
 to darkness. Not all laving of the world's
 oceans, loving moonwash of warm
 tropic seas can ever heal the hearts
 smashed to fragments of desolated darkness.
 Sink now, life ended, down through the haunts
 of trumpetfish and shark and spermwhale, down
 to the still siltless floor of the ocean where
 no light sifts or spills through the liquid driftings
 of darkness, where no eye sees the delicate
 dark-wrought flowers that open to no moon.

The incantatory, mesmerizing alliteration and the long trailing sentences set the tone of this poignant lament for the lost seamen and their ships, following their movements faithfully and recording the exotic undersea life and color, attending even where the eye cannot see, and prizing even that which is "dark-wrought." Part of the background of this elegy is suggested at the end of Whalley's 1960 epilogue in the

Atlantic Monthly, in which he comments on later news of other ships and men involved in the sinking of *Bismarck*:

The first lieutenant of *Tartar* in 1944 was given command of *Icarus*, one of the destroyers that hunted for *Hood's* survivors. I am told that on one of those restless, still summer nights off the Normandy coast, flank guarding and patrolling to the northward of the assault anchorage, *Icarus* was lost without a trace. It was at night, so nobody saw the breaking of the ship or the breaking of the bodies; and no man turned from his plow furrow to remark with placid wonder so meteoric and mundane a disaster.

The allusion in the last sentence to W. H. Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux Arts," prompted no doubt by the associations called up by the name *Icarus*, seizes on the oblivion into which the seamen fall, like the Icarus of Auden's poem (or Brueghel's painting). Whalley's poem, as distinct from his prose epilogue, recognizes this oblivion as not merely the nonchalant unconcern (or absence) of the plowman but as inherent in the limits of the human imagination.

No matter how energetically or empathetically the poet may pursue the seamen in their "slow drowsy agony of drowning," they pass beyond him.

No pity or memory ever ruffled the iron
implacable will of the ocean. Yet in its throat
is merciful secrecy, when hope is gone.
When life is a wafer dissolved on the lips of the sea
the desolation of waiting hearts may heal
in ignorance of the haunting dread of fear,
the numb hunger, and terror—dull tensions
that never uncoiled in the cool crystals of words.
In the vast silence of the tideless sea-floor,
fathoms deep, in the birthless womb of ocean,
let the jagged steel, and broken pitiful
beauty born of the smooth loins of women
sleep where the diatom and coral sleep.

The phrase "the cool crystals of words," referring on one level to the importance of radio transmissions during World War II, becomes a metonymy for all human speech, and the underwater environment, rendered so vividly in the poem, is seen as a medium fundamentally inhospitable to any human communication.

The possibility, too, of any religious consolation is made dubious by the equivocal image of life as "a wafer dissolved on the lips of the sea." Life may be sacred, but the wafer as a symbol of the resurrection is clearly in jeopardy when it encounters the dissolution of the sea. It is

interesting to note that the resurrection of the body is treated in a similarly equivocal way in an earlier poem in the sequence, "Sea Burial." The burial service included in this poem quotes St. Paul's rousing words, "*Behold I tell you a mystery: / we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed / in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*" (1 Cor 15.51-52). But whereas for Paul this assertion is climactic, the poem places it early in the service and follows it with another quotation from the Epistle to the Corinthians, "*Why do we also stand in jeopardy every hour?*" (1 Cor 15.30), which is repeated three times and allowed to conclude the service and the poem. The idea of the resurrection is not dismissed, but most of St. Paul's confidence is.

And yet the epic manner of "Finale" is undeniably powerful, especially in its conclusion:

let the jagged steel, and broken pitiful
 beauty born of the smooth loins of women
 sleep where the diatom and coral sleep.

Part of the appeal here is in the striking imagery of birth, even in the context of death, the reassertion of life (though in its most rudimentary forms) even on the ocean floor. And though the poem opens by claiming there is not elegy enough to sing the seamen to their rest, the repetition of "sleep" in the last line effectively leaves them at rest. This closing, however, is less a confident statement of fact than a form of prayer: let it be.

"Finale" is a fitting conclusion to the sequence, its generalized elegaic tone encompassing both the enemy and the allies (as Homer encompasses both Trojans and Greeks), those lost in the battle and those lost afterwards, those who "sleep" and those who wait. It concludes too the *pattern* of "Battle Pattern" by exploring the limits of the poetic imagination to realize the plight of those engaged in battle, and especially of those who are now forever outside the "pattern." The poem is in a sense haunted by the significances that go beyond the pattern of a completed action or that elude the grasp of the poetic imagination—the musical connotations of "finale" are relevant here. The coherence of the whole poetic sequence, like the coherence of "No Man an Island," is less an accomplished truth than an act of faith, an assumption that is repeatedly tested by the poems themselves, frequently challenged, glimpsed or intuited only in fugitive moments.

If *The Collected Poems* as a whole is valuable for showing us the early stages of Whalley's quest for reality, there may be reason to feel ambiguous or doubtful about the forms taken by the later stages.

George Johnston shows some of this ambiguity when, on the one hand, he regrets that Whalley did not write more poems later in his career, while on the other, he thinks that those he did write do not have the "assurance and freshness" of the wartime poems. This may be true generally, though I think that "Flowering of an Ancient Reticence," for example, will stand comparison with any of the earlier love poems (and there are other instances: compare the late "Lazarus" with the early "Wheat"). In addition, in Whalley's case it is probably worthwhile to broaden the definition of poetry and to look for continuity of themes and procedures in his prose work. He did not himself regard prose as the antithesis of poetry. An image from the last poem in the collection as he confronts his own death, "like a black spruce in the barren ground," is strikingly like the prose of *Death in the Barren Ground*. And his poetry, though finely organized and vigorous in its use of metaphor and image, is not noticeably metrical, is in many ways prose-like. Even the critical prose is as frequently evocative or intuitive as analytical, notable as much for the hares it starts as for the completed hunt. But not all of this material is readily available. The work on Coleridge is still coming out. The translation and commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* remains to be published. The fine selection of critical essays brought out by Brian Crick and John Ferns a few years ago needs to be supplemented, and as the relevance of the *Atlantic Monthly* article shows, there is need for ready access to at least some of the miscellaneous prose pieces and radio broadcasts. *Poetic Process* should be reprinted. Perhaps most helpful would be a good critical biography, clarifying the connections of the work and the life, the poetry and the prose. When this material is assembled, we will then be in a position to understand more completely George Whalley: Poet.