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Loopholes and Catacombs:
Elements of Bakhtinian Dialogue in the Poetry of Al Purdy

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at

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Dedicated to April, Matthew, and Beth --

one who supported

one who waited

one whose entrance was late but much applauded

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Abstract
Loopholes and Catacombs: Elements of Bakhtinian Dialogue
in the Poetry of Al Purdy

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) offers in his expansive and diverse writings a theory of language, literature, and life. According to his "dialogism," we inhabit a "heteroglot" world, one based on a plurality of meanings each of which results from a constant interaction between meanings in actual events of communication, meanings inherently ideological in the sense that used language expresses idea systems and world views. Bakhtin's theories, then, are diachronic, for he examines language and literature as discourse, as part of cultural history. Indeed, Bakhtin's dialogism is a theory of selfhood as loophole existence. Al Purdy's poems express a similar dialogic attitude to life. Both a profound and comic poet, Purdy (born 1918) gives voice to loophole being and idea systems at play. Filled with traces of the carnivalesque, moreover, the Purdy poem articulates a polemical philosophy, one based on a struggle between opposite ideas, emotions, and values. For these reasons, Purdy's poetry is amenable to being examined within the framework of Bakhtin's theories. This dissertation, then, examines these poems as discourse, as dialogic events rather than monologic things, and attempts to understand them in the total complexity of author, text, and reader. While the first chapter places Purdy within a socio-historic context, the context of debates on culture, literature, and criticism in Canada and specifically on him, chapter two focuses on the poet's authorial stance, on his attempts to dialogically subvert authorial authority in preference to authenticity. Chapter three examines polyphony and dialogue in this seemingly lyrical poetry as they are embodied in Purdy's use of voice, and chapter four turns to Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to explain the flux of time and space in the poems, the ontological dialogue the poet carries on with cosmos, earth, country, and home. Finally, the fifth chapter examines the ideological dialogue of this marketplace poet, his participation in the dynamic of culture and society. This dissertation, in summary, engages dialogically a poet concerned ultimately with language as discourse and poetry as being alive.

Abbreviations and Symbols Used

For ease of reference within the text, the following abbreviations of volume titles have been used.

<u>The Enchanted Echo</u> (1944)	<u>EE</u>
<u>Pressed on Sand</u> (1955)	<u>POS</u>
<u>Emu, Remember!</u> (1956)	<u>EM</u>
<u>The Crafte So Long To Lerne</u> (1959)	<u>TL</u>
<u>The Blur in Between: Poems 1960-61</u> (1962)	<u>BB</u>
<u>Poems for all the Annettes</u> (1962)	<u>PAA</u>
Revised Edition (1968)	<u>PAA68</u>
Third Edition (1973)	<u>PAA73</u>
<u>The Cariboo Horses</u> (1965)	<u>CH</u>
<u>North of Summer</u> (1967)	<u>NOS</u>
<u>Wild Grape Wine</u> (1968)	<u>WGW</u>
<u>Love in a Burning Building</u> (1970)	<u>LBB</u>
<u>Sex and Death</u> (1973)	<u>SAD</u>
<u>Sundance at Dusk</u> (1976)	<u>SUN</u>
<u>A Handful of Earth</u> (1977)	<u>HOE</u>
<u>Moths in the Iron Curtain</u> (1977)	<u>MIC</u>
<u>The Stone Bird</u> (1981)	<u>SB</u>
<u>Piling Blood</u> (1984)	<u>PB</u>
<u>The Collected Poems of Al Purdy</u> (1986)	<u>CP</u>

Volumes without pagination such as The Quest for Ouzo (1971) and In Search of Owen Roblin (1974) are footnoted in the text.

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David McNeil, who showed me how redundant a thesis could be.

Fourth, to the Canada Council, for putting bread and butter on the table for four years.

Finally, to Al Purdy, for his gift.

The fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings.

Heraclitus.

the winemaker comes to Toronto
disguised as a dervish to chase himself
back and forth across the urgent purple city, a living query
of his own movement--like those poems of his that go
round and round and where they stop nobody
guesses--

Gwendolyn MacEwen, "The Winemaker"

In the same realm are those who are authors of books. All of them are highly indebted to me, especially those who blacken their pages with sheer triviality. For those who write learnedly to be criticized by a few scholars, not even ruling out a Persius or a Laelius as a judge, seem to be more pitiable than happy to me, simply because they are continuously torturing themselves. They add, they alter, they cross something out, they reinsert it, they recopy their work, they rearrange it, they show it to friends, and they keep it for nine years; yet they are still not satisfied with it. At such a price, they buy an empty reward, namely praise--and the praise of only a handful, at that. They buy this at the great expense of long hours, no sleep, so much sweat, and so many vexations. Add also the loss of health, the deterioration of their physical appearance, the possibility of blindness or partial loss of their sight, poverty, malice, premature old age, and early death, and if you can think of more, add them to the list. The scholar feels that he has been compensated for such ills when he wins the sanction of one or two other weak-eyed scholars.

Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly"

Introduction
Purdy and Bakhtin: Text and Context

Although the account is shared, most men live as though
their thinking were a private possession. Heraclitus

the winemaker comes to Toronto
(can't stand the place just passing through)
and leaves a pile of urgent
poems in his wake and leaves again
for the little rural cottage
back to the deep magenta twilight of Ameliasburg
to write those poems that turn and keep turning

(there is the man he returns,
he is always returning) Gwendolyn MacEwen

In his notes for the revised edition of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Mikhail Bakhtin claims that "the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue."¹ Both Bakhtin's writings and Al Purdy's poetry have participated in and continue to participate in this living dialogue. Both sets of works inhabit a Heraclitean world of shared words, of the communal logos. Indeed, when we approach both men dialogically, when we bring their words into living contact, we discover that they share the same views concerning life and literature: they value dialogic becoming and open-ended process, unofficial culture and the heteroglot communal imagination, and unofficial and dialogized literature. In order to understand these connections, we must first enter a dialogue ourselves with Bakhtin's words in and on dialogue, a dialogue with his theories, theories that provide an entrance into Purdy's poetry. Bakhtin's dialogism is a theory of language and living, as well as of culture and

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, Theory and History of Literature 8 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1984) 293. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

literature, for dialogue is the basis of artistic, cultural, critical, and indeed all human activities.

At first glance, Mikhail Bakhtin and Al Purdy appear to be very different men. On the one hand, Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian thinker steeped in European and classical learning, in German philosophy, and in the world of post-revolution Russia. On the other hand, Al Purdy (born 1918) is a rural Ontario bard and a seemingly anti-intellectual new world man. Yet if we understand Bakhtin's words and Purdy's poems at all, we realize that appearances are often deceptive: hidden relation and similarity underlie surface difference. We cannot, in Bakhtin's term, "monologize" either of these writers, Russian thinker or Canadian poet. Both are enigmatic; they do not stand still in their texts. In their biographical-critical study entitled Mikhail Bakhtin, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist suggest that "different Bakhtins emerge in the texts themselves,"² and they go on to argue that "to claim that any version of him is somehow the correct one would be to straightjacket the philosopher of variety, to 'monologize' the singer of 'polyphony.'"³ Bakhtin, they emphasize, is constantly in dialogue with himself. Similarly, Purdy's poems display (and conceal) a man impossible to pin down, a poet impossible to canonize, somehow remaining continually unofficial, and Purdy, like Bakhtin, is constantly in dialogue with himself.

Moreover, both are men of vast and unorthodox learning, learning which emphasizes again the unofficial and uncanonical. Bakhtin's

² Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard U Press, 1984) 1.

³ Clark and Holquist 4.

thought moves between linguistics and theology, psychoanalysis and historical poetics, social theory and Vitalism, Dostoevsky and Rabelais, and Plato and the lower bodily stratum.⁴ His own writing tends to be exhaustive and diffuse rather than concentrated, and his knowledge is unusual. As Holquist emphasizes in his introduction to The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin's mind is "preoccupied by centuries usually ignored by others; and within these, he has great affection for figures who are even more obscure."⁵ Bakhtin's thinking is not of the centre, just as he was isolated for most of his life from the seats of power in the Soviet Union. Indeed, he continually backs the obscure underdog and questions the centre; he reclaims the unofficial, heteroglot world. As Clark and Holquist suggest, "in a time of increasing regimentation, Bakhtin wrote of freedom. In a time of authoritarianism, dogmatism, and official heroes, he wrote of the masses as ebullient, variegated, and irreverent. At a time when literature was composed of mandated canons, he wrote of smashing all norms and canons and ridiculed the pundits who upheld them."⁶ Bakhtin, we learn, is thoroughly and profoundly uncanonical. Similarly, we find Purdy writing out of his down-to-earth heteroglot world; we find Purdy leading an unusual life and reading unusual books, whether that be in his now (in)famous Ameliasburg A-frame, in a Greek hotel room, or in a tent on the Kikistan Islands. In

⁴ The phrase "lower bodily stratum," used most extensively by Bakhtin in Rabelais and His World, refers to the organs and orifices of the lower abdomen, namely stomach, liver, intestines, anus, and the sexual organs. In terms of folk culture, they function to remind humanity of its material existence.

⁵ Michael Holquist, introduction, The Dialogic Imagination, by Mikhail Bakhtin, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: U of Texas Press, 1981) xvi.

⁶ Clark and Holquist 312.

"On the Poetry of Al Purdy," George Woodcock describes Purdy as, among other things, an autodidact, an omnivorous reader, a furious generalist, a maverick radical, a glutton for a variety of experience, an amateur historian and backyard philosopher "interested in the assemblage of every kind of apparent irrelevancy."⁷ Woodcock then goes on to claim that Purdy is at one and the same time a man who sends postcards from decayed Indian villages and a man "of vast and miscellaneous knowledge which constantly flows in and out of the open ends of his poetry."⁸ Like Bakhtin, Purdy exhibits a vast and unusual learning, a gathering together of apparent irrelevancies, a resistance to official words, and a deep sense of the heteroglot world he inhabits.

Indeed, one could further argue that Purdy and Bakhtin write out of similar worlds, out of similar historical situations. Not only do they write out of the ethos of northern nations, significant in itself, but more importantly they also lived and live in times threatened by political and cultural monologism. Bakhtin lived under the centralizing government and official culture of Soviet Russia, under tangible persecution. While Purdy has never felt the constraints of such a totalitarian system, he has felt the force of a subtle and powerful monologism: Purdy lived and lives in a Canadian nation and culture washed over by an American political and cultural ethos. Internally as well, Canada's culture has seen repeated efforts on the part of critics to establish a definitive Canadian ethos, a Canadian tradition, and a

⁷ George Woodcock, "On the Poetry of Al Purdy," The World of Canadian Writing: Critiques and Recollections (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980) 261. Reprint of Woodcock's introduction to Purdy's Selected Poems (1972).

⁸ Woodcock, Canadian Writing 262.

Canadian canon, partly as a defensive measure. And at the same time, both Bakhtin and Purdy inhabit radically centrifugal periods, times of upheaval, of questioning and undermining, but also of renewal, of the mixing of high and low as borders break down. In Canada, we find a polyphonic culture, and writers and critics within that culture debating its outlines, disputing its nature and influences, exploring and questioning its limits. Both Bakhtin and Purdy lived and live in ages when novelization clearly counters authority, when centripetal and centrifugal forces can be seen at work, particularly in literary texts. As Clark and Holquist explain of Bakhtin, these are rare ages, ages in which "the concept of the text is both problematicized and expanded--problematicized because the usual idea of the text as a closed, hermetic structure that is always adequate to itself is brought into question."⁹ In this context, another curious parallel offers an historical connection between these two writers: while recent decades have seen Bakhtin's works translated into English, recent years have seen a selection of Purdy's poetry translated into Russian.

In the light of these contextual connections between Bakhtin and Purdy, the Russian thinker's terminology takes on significance for the Canadian poet's works, and this terminology and the accompanying philosophy provide the framework for our discussion of Purdy's poems. Briefly, then, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism offers a metalinguistics of the word which posits a new understanding of language based not on the synchronic model of linguistics but on a diachronic understanding of language's actual participation in history, that is, its function as

⁹ Clark and Holquist 297.

discourse. The word "dialogue" comes from the Greek dialogos, meaning through the word, through an account, through speech or talk. Clearly, the word itself suggests the process of discourse, the exchange between differences and the movement across a gap. Bakhtin has more in mind when he speaks of dialogue than the 1960s phenomenon that popularized this word. Words, he suggests, are actually alive; they are internally dialogic, open and interactive as they function in discourse, as the following passage from Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics suggests:

For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation.¹⁰

Not a thing but a medium of dialogic meaning, dynamic and living, contextual, social and historical, the metalinguistic word functions wherever people participate in discourse, whether that be in thought, at the bus stop, in Al Purdy's poems, or on this page itself. Bakhtin's emphasis is on the historical reality of discourse and its dynamic quality, on the complete interrelationship of the words and the specific contexts surrounding them and penetrating them.

At heart, Bakhtin upsets our ingrained belief that discourse is owned by a speaker. Both speaker and listener participate in and determine the utterance, whether the dialogue is internal or communal. Social discourse, language used in life, is directed outwards; the utterance openly orients itself around a listener, an audience, a reader. Indeed, discourse lives on the boundary between speaker and

¹⁰ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 202.

listener. The solitary voice without its responsive component is essentially dead, monologic in Bakhtin's terms; even internal dialogue involves struggle and polemic according to Bakhtin. His essential point about responsive understanding's activity in dialogue thus becomes that our words participate in the words of others. Our discourse constructs itself out of and in response to words from the past and at the same time in anticipation of future, responsive words. Our words are made up of what Bakhtin calls addresses and sideways glances. The boundaries we place around our own words become illusory: they are not our own words. They gain their living quality from their shared aspect.

The manner in which and the conditions under which words are shared have immense implications for the social individual in his or her living, as well as for the poet and the critic in their reading and writing. Bakhtin's point, as stated at the beginning of "Discourse in the Novel," is that "we must deal with the life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-linguaged world."¹¹ The use of language is a social, and indeed a political act, for languages are the embodiments of world views, of idea systems, not abstract grammars nor individual private codes. Moreover, national languages express no single ideological view; rather, they are internally dialogic through and through, in Bakhtin's terms 'heteroglot' from top to bottom, that is, filled with a vast variety of world views in historically and socially real situations. No national language is homogeneous,

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: U of Texas Press, 1981) 275.

monologic, or ideologically unified, as the following passage points out:

Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form.¹²

Languages participate in the dynamic of time and place: they are historical, spatial, stratified, ideological, human. Moreover, the life of a national language is determined by the dialogue of all these languages of heteroglossia. For Bakhtin, the dialogue of languages is polemical; it involves controversial interaction. Indeed, "polemic," deriving from the Greek polemos meaning "war," suggests that discourse, here at the level of whole languages as world views, is an involved battle in a merry war.

This metalinguistics of the word, with its emphasis on dialogue, responsiveness, and the diachronic activity of discourse, posits, moreover, a new understanding of the self and thought. The dialogic self becomes the new image of humanity, and relational thinking offers an answering word to logic and dialectic. Bakhtin de-reifies people; he changes them from material, monologically-understood things into developing people, into boundary individuals continually becoming and open-ended. For Bakhtin, dialogue is not a means but an end, for "to be means to communicate dialogically."¹³ Bakhtin's relational thinking

¹² Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 291.

¹³ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 252.

emphasizes the richness of difference and the value of the play of difference, as Clark and Holquist suggest:

He emphasizes performance, history, actuality, and the openness of dialogue, as opposed to the closed dialectic of Structuralism's binary oppositions. Bakhtin makes the enormous leap from dialectical, or partitive, thinking, which is still presumed to be the universal norm, to dialogic or relational thinking.¹⁴

Where others see abstract rules and synchronic evaluations, Bakhtin sees temporally, spatially, and socially complex interactions, relation and dialogue rather than system and monologue.

In this context, Bakhtin's philosophy, his relational thinking, is a philosophy of the loophole. In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin defines the loophole as "the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words."¹⁵ Dialogue is an activity of openness, of continual change and becoming, of motion and vitality. The world of the loophole is a dynamic, complex, joyful world, a world both of uncertainty and of potential. Essentially, Bakhtin's dialogism is a philosophy of freedom. Speaking of Bakhtin's metaphysics of the loophole, Clark and Holquist affirm that "although the loophole is the source of the frustration, pain, and danger we must confront in a world so dominated by the unknowable, it is also the necessary precondition for any freedom we may know."¹⁶ Inhabiting the dialogic present, the site of the loophole into the future, both Bakhtin and Purdy face the joy and the uncertainty of this world of flux.

¹⁴ Clark and Holquist 7.

¹⁵ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 233.

¹⁶ Clark and Holquist 347.

While operating thus on the levels of selfhood and thought, dialogue operates more largely according to Bakhtin's metalinguistics within cultural structures. Discourse's participation in a society's heteroglot foundation is characterized by the play of large forces determining a culture's becoming, by a dialogue of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, of the official and the unofficial, of centripetal and centrifugal forces, to use terms frequently used by Bakhtin. The play of these larger forces constitutes the life of language in society, and Bakhtin's emphases clearly lie with those forces that decentralize, de-monologize, and de-mystify, with those forces that dialogize monologic or unified systems. Bakhtin maintains that "every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear,"¹⁷ and he proceeds to define the forces thus: "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward."¹⁸ The predominance of one of these forces over the other has enormous implications for the constitution of a society, as Bakhtin well knew from his own experience. Language carries the potential for freedom (or chaos from a different perspective) on the one hand and the potential for slavery (or order from another perspective) on the other hand. Discourse plays a fundamental role in the formulation and

¹⁷ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 272.

¹⁸ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 272.

reformulation, as well as the formation and reformation, of societies and cultures.

For Bakhtin, centripetal and centrifugal forces equate in terms of language with authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse, as the term suggests, relies for its power upon the authority behind it; it is monologic, closed discourse, generally distanced from the listener and assumed to be above the heteroglot world, unquestionable. Such discourse is the discourse of political systems and tyrannies, of faceless institutions and corporations, of heroes and personalities. Opposed to authoritative discourse is internally persuasive discourse, dialogized language out of heteroglossia rather than institutions. The political and economic institutions of a society press for conformity; they offer monologic directives. True freedom comes with the ability to enter into dialogue, to respond productively to the words surrounding oneself. Thus, Bakhtin's emphasis is on the unofficial, on that which is undervalued, on that which is neither central nor centralized, for a unitary language is at heart illusory. Bakhtin posits a dynamic diachronic culture in which individuals share, dispute, and reformulate meaning in a continual communal activity.

A central feature of this emphasis on the unofficial is Bakhtin's extensive exploration of folk culture, the manifestation of centrifugal, heteroglot language consciousness. Such unofficial culture punctures and overturns the monologism of the official; it makes familiar the unfamiliar and brings low what was considered high; it carnivalizes the world. For Bakhtin, this unofficial culture counters the dominant

ideological monologism of the idealistic philosophy that is the basis of Western culture, a philosophy which argues for the unity of existence and the individual consciousness, for the autonomy of the individual, with the consequent faith in the pursuit of happiness and the domination of the environment. Folk culture strikes a blow for freedom from such monologism: it stresses humanity's communal, bodily, dialogic nature. Bakhtin insists in Rabelais and His World, his most extensive treatment of folk culture and carnival, that "we cannot understand cultural and literary life and the struggle of mankind's historic past if we ignore that peculiar folk humor that always existed and was never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes."¹⁹ Long disparaged and neglected, folk culture as unofficial culture in all its aspects creates a new image of the world, allows for a new outlook on the world, an outlook of dialogic freedom. Carnival celebrates the open-ended present, a polyphonic world of becoming; it counters official dictates and canons with its own Janus-faced ambivalence; it essentially manifests itself as a communal drama in which the boundary between life and art is erased, a great play in which all play, in which one is both actor and audience; it emphasizes the human body and other manifestations of material being; and laughter rings out as its central voice. One cannot stress enough Bakhtin's stress on the renewing capacity of this unofficial culture. Such also, I would suggest, is the culture that Al Purdy inhabits in his own way. At this point, we must simply accept with all seriousness Bakhtin's judgement of cultural

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968) 474.

history: "All the acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of the laughing people. Without hearing this chorus we cannot understand the drama as a whole."²⁰

Bakhtin's explorations of dialogism in language, living, and cultural development, his emphasis on the dialogic word and self-participating in societal becoming, his favouring of culture's centrifugal forces (particularly as they manifest themselves in unofficial folk culture), necessarily spill over into his specific discussions of literature. Indeed, literature and these other concerns are inseparable for Bakhtin, and the life of the literary work in many ways provides a model of how discourse operates in all areas of human endeavour. Bakhtin's poetics is a theory of life and literature, just as the carnival world is one in which the boundary between life and art, living and performance, is overcome. All his writings stress the historicity of the artistic, the historical and social forces at work in shaping culture, literature, genres and canons, as well as individual texts. For Bakhtin, the context of the text is central to its understanding. Rather than judging texts by their adherence to a series of synchronically determined rules and conventions, Bakhtin places weight on the work's living participation in a social and historical heteroglot medium. Indeed, literature's uniqueness lies in the fact that while it is part of the ideological ocean constituting society, it reflects that ideology in its content at the same time. As Bakhtin puts it, "in its `content' literature reflects the whole of the ideological

²⁰ Bakhtin, Rabelais 474.

horizon of which it is itself a part."²¹ Since literary discourse is social through and through, Bakhtin's sociological poetics calls for a knowledge of ideological structures along with a constant interaction with literary history.

Bakhtin's poetics, moreover, reveals itself as a vision of art in its wholeness. His sociological poetics seeks to comprehend the author, the work, and the audience in all their dynamic complexity, for essential to artistic discourse is the speaking voice and its position, the ideological background of the text, and the responsive listener and his or her position. Central to Bakhtin's investigations into artistic discourse is the dialogic process of textual exchange; the artistic work is a communal effort. In The Dialogic Imagination, he says of the text that "all its aspects--the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text--participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text."²² Each player in the dynamic constitution of the work, him/her/itself part of an ideologically concrete world, participates in the process of exchange which constitutes artistic meaning, and new meanings are continually possible in this dynamic wholeness. As Clark and Holquist affirm, "Bakhtin seeks the aesthetic where it was traditionally avoided, in the totality of the author/text/reader relationship."²³ Born out of dialogue and reflecting the dialogic, the

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin and P.N. Medvedev, The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics, trans. Albert J. Wehrle, The Gouche College Series (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins U Press, 1978) 17.

²² Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 253.

²³ Clark and Holquist 208.

artistic word continues the dialogue. Bakhtin's poetics of the whole work of art (author/text/reader) is profoundly diachronic, and it is this total relationship that needs to be investigated in Purdy's poetry.

This socio-historical poetics outlined in Bakhtin's various texts with its emphasis on the dynamic life of the literary work explains his overwhelming emphasis on the centrifugal forces at work in whole cultures and in literature itself, for these forces express a living and open as opposed to a closed and official consciousness. Bakhtin underscores the renewing work of heteroglossia, of folk culture and carnival, of the unofficial in the literary world. He maintains that a monologic literature is an illusory one, one separated from the heteroglot world it pretends to explain, and as a result he emphasizes unofficial cultures, canons, genres, and unofficial texts as dialogizing forces in literature, and he stresses the historical activity of carnival, the grotesque canon, comic genres, and novelistic prose. In his historical explorations of literature's development, Bakhtin turns to the "low" genres, the Menippean satire, Socratic dialogue, diatribe, soliloquy, and symposium among others. These genres, he suggests, "are all akin to one another in the external and internal dialogicality of their approach to human life and human thought."²⁴ A living literature, like a living text, is both dynamic and open. Genres themselves are social through and through. He suggests that poetics should begin its investigation of the text with genre rather than tacking such consideration on as a footnote, "for genre is the typical

²⁴ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 119-120. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

form of the the whole work, the whole utterance."²⁵ Moreover, pointing to the stratification of genres into serious and comic, high and low, official and unofficial, Bakhtin suggests that a continual interplay occurs between these various elements in their actual historical development. Genres sanctified by authority and tradition must be dialogized for their own continued growth. Bakhtin's historical poetics emphasizes the dynamic life of genres and canons through time.²⁶ Genres and canons, he suggests, are involved in large scale dialogue, a dialogue often overlooked because of the more immediate and present play of individual and school stylistics, of specific writers and movements. The individual writer is him or herself in dialogue with the tradition

²⁵ Bakhtin, Formal Method 129.

²⁶ A central feature of Bakhtin's discussion of dialogue within literature is his opposition of poetic and novelistic discourses, an opposition which repeatedly takes the form of a criticism of poetry as monologic. However, Bakhtin's criticism is no simple condemnation of one form of writing but an exploration of the nature of literary discourse itself. First, he criticizes poetry, poetic style, and poetic genres in the narrow sense of the word. He repeatedly uses this phrase to qualify his use of the term "poetry." Essentially, Bakhtin is critical of poetry in its traditional sense, that is, its status as an elevated and special discourse. Poetry in this narrow sense severs itself from heteroglossia, closes itself off from dialogue and becoming, and sets itself up as an official and whole language. According to Bakhtin, poetry is a construction rather than a special, unitary language, and poetic discourse is determined by the constructive rules we designate as being inherently poetic, and of course such definitions have varied over the centuries, and indeed over the decades and years. The history of poetry is not the history of the use of a special poetic language; rather, movements and schools, their dialogue, polemic, and defeat have determined the definitions and history of poetic constructions and genres. Second, when he criticizes poetry in the narrow sense, Bakhtin does not have in mind the traditional dichotomy of poems and novels so much as the opposition of poetic and novelistic discourse, the opposition of two tendencies present in any artistic discourse. Poetic discourse and novelistic discourse are poles of possibility; in between these poles the centripetal and centrifugal forces active in language play themselves out in actual texts. Third, if we follow Bakhtin's criticism of poetry in the narrow sense to its final destination, we discover that this criticism is largely a criticism of traditional stylistics, that is, of the interpretation of literature. Such stylistics cuts itself off from the historical and social forces active in the literary text, and such a position is intimately linked with a conception of a special literary or poetic language separated from other forms of speech, a conception which Bakhtin does not hold.

out of which he or she writes. The life of individual works within the literary canon is a dynamic process over historical time of the construction, destruction, and reconstruction of interpretations and meanings. Each work adds to and reformulates the canon, adding a new dimension to works from the past and anticipating and enriching texts still to be written.

A careful reading of Bakhtin's works, his own dialogic texts outlining a socio-historical poetics and a theory of language's and life's dialogism, convinces us that this Russian thinker had a profoundly Renaissance view of the world, Renaissance in an untraditional and uncanonical sense. Bakhtin's world is a decentered, Copernican world of polyphonic language consciousness, of the living and open present. For him, the Renaissance embodies all these tendencies, for this period presents itself as a period of ideological dialogue, struggle, and renewal, of heteroglossia invading official thought and culture. The Renaissance was a period of overcoming "dogmatism buried in the depths of linguistic consciousness,"²⁷ a period when "intense interorientation and mutual clarification of languages . . . took place."²⁸ Renaissance culture was culture at the cross-roads: on the one hand was the communal man of the folk culture of humour, an unofficial man, and on the other hand was the bourgeois concept of the atomized being, the image of man which became the official image of Western individualism. And, as we would expect, Bakhtin's emphasis lies on the unofficial folk culture, on a culture countering official

²⁷ Bakhtin, Rabelais 471.

²⁸ Bakhtin, Rabelais 473.

monologism with the parodying-travesty word, false seriousness with belly laughter, an orientation towards a sealed off and higher past with a participation in the present and a feel for the future. Bakhtin's most complete picture of the Renaissance world is painted in Rabelais and His World, where he describes the French writer's world view as "neither pure negation nor pure affirmation."²⁹ Rabelais' world and the world of the Renaissance are worlds of ambivalence, and this is the world characterized by Bakhtin's dialogism.

This Renaissance world view of Rabelais, shared and explored by the Russian thinker Bakhtin, is essentially akin to that of the Canadian poet Al Purdy. In his own unorthodox manner, Purdy is a Renaissance man, a carnival clown, a folk poet in the tradition not only of Rabelais but also of Shakespeare. Purdy, in fact, embodies dialogism. As a character of excess, the poet can be alternately humble, folksy, conversational and egotistical, elevated, formal. What we hear in the Purdy poem is this complex voice--diachronic discourse--a voice playfully dramatic, combining comedy and tragedy, pathos and irony. Purdy hints at this role-playing in a 1969 article, when he reveals that "it's to be understood by the reader that I'm not to be taken seriously anyway."³⁰ This denial of seriousness paradoxically suggests seriousness. Moreover, in his embodiment of dialogism Purdy gives expression to life in time, the complexity of change, revision, influence, and experience--of being alive. In a 1965 letter to Charles Bukowski, Purdy explains this process in his own life:

²⁹ Bakhtin, Rabelais 132.

³⁰ Al Purdy, "After a Hundred Years Canadian Poetry (Certainly Is . . .)," Rev. article, Queen's Quarterly 76 (1969): 710.

All my life, or most of it, I've thought one thing but done another. To try and explain that last,--any system I ever figured out that would explain my own life to me or govern my own conduct--why, it failed in the lightning calculations you always have to make when something happens, the reassessment of your feelings against reason--³¹

Purdy's words to Bukowski reveal an understanding of temporal existence, of the failure of monologic synchronic systems and theories in the face of diachronic existence, in the presence of dialogue.

Essentially, Purdy brings his poetry back to the heteroglot world. He is a poet, then, of the marketplace, interested in the collective unconscious and his immediate chronotopic world. And he is polemical, crafting poems that are dialogic arguments with himself and others, poems with an aggressive reader orientation. Being a poet is a dialogic activity, and he explains this in a 1969 letter to George Woodcock:

My own thoughts are to the effect that while writing the mind will inexplicably take sideways darts and tangents that seem much more interesting than the main theme of what is being written, and that these tangents must be followed and fully explored. Much of the time they will oddly be relevant to the main theme, or even take over from the main theme.³²

Purdy's poetry explores continually such tangents, tangents part of dialogic thought processes participating in heteroglossia. The very workings of the poet's mind reflect the heteroglot basis of thought, society, and life.

So a thinking about life and poetry makes Purdy akin to Bakhtin. In fact, the Purdy poem gives voice to loophole being, as the poet

³¹ Al Purdy, To Charles Bukowski, 15 July 1965, The Bukowski/Purdy Letters: A Decade of Dialogue, ed. Seamus Cooney (Sutton West, Ont. and Santa Barbara, Calif.: Paget Press, 1983) 91.

³² Al Purdy, To George Woodcock, 6 April 1969, The Purdy-Woodcock Letters: Selected Correspondence 1964-1984, ed. George Galt (Toronto: ECW Press, 1988) 47.

suggests in his introduction to the Collected Poems, where he argues that "one lives many lives, all condensed like a compacted millenium, waiting to spring outward at the trigger-moment in your mind."³³ For Purdy, this loophole living embraces the process of writing poems, for these many lives spring outward in poems. The following words of Purdy's in an interview with Gary Geddes, which echo the words in the letter to Woodcock above, describe the stretching of the poet's mind that makes a poem work:

The language itself is part of that, also the various methods used to write a poem. But somehow saying that is not enough. There ought to be a quality in a good poet beyond any analysis, the part of his mind that leaps from one point to another, sideways, backwards, ass-over-the-electric-kettle. This quality is not logic. . . .³⁴

What Purdy describes here is Bakhtin's relational thinking, the ability of the mind to move in various directions, to relate disparate things dialogically. For both Purdy and Bakhtin, such thinking is creative thinking. In the same interview, Purdy insists that "unless one is a stone one doesn't sit still,"³⁵ and he goes on to add, "I don't think that a man is consistent; he contradicts himself at every turn."³⁶ Purdy's poetic and his ontology involve continual change and productive contradiction. His poetry enacts loophole being, connecting him again with Bakhtin's metalinguistics.

Closer examination of Purdy's relationship with two fellow poets, one older and male and the other younger and female, aptly demonstrates

³³ Al Purdy, "To See the Shore: A Preface," The Collected Poems of Al Purdy, by Purdy, ed. Russell Brown (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) xv.

³⁴ Al Purdy, "A.W. Purdy: An Interview," with Gary Geddes, Canadian Literature 41 (1969): 69.

³⁵ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 66.

³⁶ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 68.

this loophole dialogue constituting his poetic. Close, at least at one point, to both Irving Layton and Margaret Atwood, Purdy reveals his Bakhtinian poetic in reviews of Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, The Collected Poems of Irving Layton (1965), and The Journals of Susanna Moodie. As readers of his criticism, we hear this Bakhtinian quality already in the texture of his prose and thought: Purdy is conversational, apologetic, and personal; he works through second thought, qualification, and revision; he enacts dialogue on the page. For example, Purdy's criticism of Layton is tempered, turning the criticism back on the critic: "For perhaps I'm wrong about this god-idea, and the anger of some of Layton's critics is the only indication they are alive,"³⁷ and, "I hope I haven't seemed entirely too one-sided in my criticism, as Layton sometimes is in his poems."³⁸ Purdy's method involves a dialogic engagement with not only these poets and their poems but also with his own thoughts on them.

If we turn specifically to why Purdy criticizes Layton, we read the history of a monologic admiration replaced by a dialogic understanding: Purdy's 1950s adulation of Layton dissipates in the wake of the older poet's self-apotheosis. Essentially, the Purdy of the 1960s criticizes Layton for being monologic--unchanged through time, writing poetry with "a most curious homogenized texture from first to last."³⁹ In the review of Layton's Collected Poems, Purdy warns the reader of the prophetic bard's rhetoric, personality, and dogmatism.

³⁷ Al Purdy, "Message from Olympus," Rev. of Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, by Irving Layton, Canadian Literature 16 (Spring 1963): 82.

³⁸ Al Purdy, Rev. of The Collected Poems of Irving Layton, Quarry 15, no. 3 (March 1966): 44.

³⁹ Purdy, Rev. of Collected Poems of Layton 41.

"With Layton," he says, "a soliloquy generally amounts to a harangue"⁴⁰; all things are "one-sided, simple, and transparent to this angry all-wise sage."⁴¹ The Layton Purdy knows in person and through the poems is uninterested in dialogue, willing instead to sacrifice genuine diachronic discourse and loophole being at the altar of powerful personal ideology. Purdy makes this limitation clear when he comments on a group of poems in the volume dealing with marital infidelity:

I'm amused to note that in these poems Layton condemns the woman as vociferously as he does modern culture in general. The woman is "evil"; the man, it is taken for granted, is virtuous and blameless. Apart from ye olde double standard, such judgments are predictable, and after a while very monotonous.⁴²

Not only has Layton not changed at all, but his original perspectives are themselves monologic--monotonous, predictable, single-voiced, sexist. The poet in Purdy chafes at the closed structure and ideology of the Layton poem.

In the earlier review, written when Purdy was just coming into his own as a poet, he contemplates Layton as his own mythology, and suggests that this poet's poems are "frozen anger, solidified passion--set rigidly into forms which do not allow this anger to dissipate away into sleep or lessen into human anti-climax."⁴³ The metaphoric language used by Purdy clearly reflects his Bakhtinian frame of reference, his support of dialogic being and poetry as opposed to the monologic, and the following passage reinforces this critical difference:

⁴⁰ Purdy, Rev. of Collected Poems of Layton 43.

⁴¹ Purdy, Rev. of Collected Poems of Layton 44.

⁴² Purdy, Rev. of Collected Poems of Layton 43-44.

⁴³ Purdy, "Message from Olympus" 81.

I don't think I've ever met a human being with such impressive qualities of being right all the time as Irving Layton. And in this regard man and poems are inseparable. In a sense that's admirable. I admire the passion and bluster and candour it gives to the poems. In another sense I don't like anybody to be so right all the time. For it is not a very human quality; it withdraws its possessor from participation in the storms and passions of the actual world, makes him a mere angry supreme court spectator. It turns a man into a megalomaniac god. I think some readers share this dislike of the absolute, and certainly the tendency of a few is to rebel against it.⁴⁴

Purdy articulates his double response to Layton, his admiration for the older poet's open-faced energy and simultaneous distaste for his monologic certainties: while the first quality makes him human, the second removes Layton from the heteroglot world of the living, the messy marketplace, to Olympus.

If we turn to Purdy's review of Atwood's The Journals of Susanna Moodie, we hear enacted this same dialogic attitude to a fellow poet. Here, however, the polemic is not only with Atwood but with himself in a pronounced way. Indeed, Purdy remarks to George Woodcock in a 1970 letter concerning this review, "I've been chatty, inconsequential and may even have veered off the subject sometimes, and above all, very personal. In fact so personal, this review may partly consist of the article on poetry I'll probably never write."⁴⁵ What this review says about his own poetic is as important as what he says about Atwood: criticizing Atwood exposes and partly revises his own understanding. More specifically, Purdy adopts a polemical role from beginning to end

⁴⁴ Purdy, "Message from Olympus" 82.

⁴⁵ Al Purdy, To George Woodcock, 3 July 1970, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 61.

as he debates the merits of Atwood's dual voice in the volume. Early in the review, he makes the following judgement:

. . . there is a sub-basic quality in the poet's voice that cannot be conveyed by speaking in another person's voice. Because, in its finest expression, the poet's voice is for everyman, not just a single person. And I think it's a very debatable point whether a poet can occupy another body and mind and still retain the subbasic qualities of himself or herself.⁴⁶

In this seemingly unBakhtinian statement, Purdy wonders whether the poet can successfully speak in another's voice, can retain the quality of every(woman) within him or herself. Similarly, he ends the review polemically:

I disagree with most of Atwood's viewpoints wholeheartedly, and the circumstances will never arrive when I can say the rest of this review to her personally (besides, she's a woman, even though very intelligent), because she wouldn't listen to such confused and partly intuitive arguments.⁴⁷

At the end, Purdy returns to his polemic, placing it within a lighthearted and apologetic context, joking about his friendship with Atwood, her status as a female writer, and the illogic of his own arguments (because they are dialogical).

Nevertheless, the middle of the review reveals a Purdy struggling with issues crucial to his own world view and poetic. For example, he tells us of his search for humour and joy in human life and his disinterest in subjective navel-gazing and self-analysis; joy, drunkenness of the spirit (suggesting Purdy's carnivalesque imagination), is not unnatural according to Purdy but is a healthy

⁴⁶ Al Purdy, "Atwood's Moodie," Rev. of The Journals of Susanna Moodie, by Margaret Atwood, Canadian Literature 47 (winter 1971): 81.

⁴⁷ Purdy, "Atwood's Moodie" 84.

counterpoint to life's terror and depression. Moreover, in the following lengthy passage, he reveals his dialogic attitude to poetry:

Well, I've held certain opinions about writing poems for a long time, but these opinions have changed recently. For instance: consistency of tone and metre. I've thought previously that inconsistency was the best way to write poems, in fact the only for myself. Part of the reason for that opinion has been that critics seemed to demand consistency. Well--well, I still hold to the view that consistency of tone and metre would be a bad thing for me, for me--but not necessarily for others In fact, I think Atwood's book has caused me to change my mind on this point I believe that my personal outlook in life is markedly inconsistent: I may be temperamentally up one hour and down the next; I may be happy, I may be sad; I may be in love with life and all women, I may not. I want to convey these human inconsistencies in poems, and I try. But of course, I say all this after I look at my own poems and know (think) that they do reflect these attitudes.⁴⁸

Here, Purdy reveals the qualities of his dialogic life and poetic: the conversational voice, the polemic, the doubt, change and inconsistency as virtue. Indeed, he acts out the very inconsistency, the dialogic openness, of which he is speaking. His thoughts on Atwood and Layton, his dialogic addresses to them and their poems, hint at his dwelling in the Bakhtinian loophole.

Thus, Bakhtin's metalinguistics of the dialogic word, of historically concrete discourse, of the dialogic self and relational thinking, and of the loophole applies particularly well to Purdy's poetry. Rooted in the polyphonic discourses of heteroglossia, in folk culture, his poems participate in the centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in literary history and individual poetic discourse. Clark and Holquist relate of Bakhtin's metalinguistics that "language always partakes of the messiness of history and the vagaries of individual

⁴⁸ Purdy, "Atwood's Moodie" 82.

performance."⁴⁹ Reading Purdy's sideways leaps and glances, the vagaries of his individual performance in poetic texts, in the context of literary and cultural history's diachronic messiness will take us into a Bakhtinian world, a world of productive ambivalence, a dynamic carnivalized world in which man becomes aware of "the cosmos within himself."⁵⁰ In this context, Bakhtin's exploration of author, text, and audience provides a model for our own exploration of Purdy's poems.

⁴⁹ Clark and Holquist 221.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, Rabelais 336.

Chapter 1
Tavern Draughts:
Can(ned) Culture, Can(ned) Lit, Can(ned) Crits, and A.W. Purdy

Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent,
consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing
all. Heraclitus.

the winemaker invades Toronto
and the city ignites under his heels
and in a few hours he has accomplished
everything and condenses all possible
appointments into urgent minutes wherein
the entire history of Canadian poetry
is brought up to date over tavern draught
or that purple homemade stuff
that dyes the guts a deep magenta-- Gwendolyn MacEwen

Bakhtin's metalinguistics posits the importance of the field that surrounds the literary work, the importance of context to text. The larger cultural framework positions texts within time, space, and social structures, each a component in the continual dialogic processes governing societal becoming, the same processes we find at work in and subjected to scrutiny by creative texts. For the purpose of this discussion of Al Purdy's poetry, therefore, an exploration of the larger context surrounding his poems establishes their participation in the various cultural and critical dialogues predominant for the past century and continuing in the present. Indeed, such an exploration discovers the particularly Bakhtinian Canadian context of the Purdy poem, for Canadian culture is one resonant with polyphonic possibilities and opportunities, and Canadian literature has grown out of a heteroglot base, a dialogic netherworld countering official and monologic structures. Moreover, critics have continually debated these cultural and literary structures, engaging in a constant critical dialogue of

ideological positions, here noting the centrifugal and centripetal forces at work on texts and there outlining distinct canons and arguing Canadian identities and ethoi. Similarly, critics of Purdy have, on the one hand, noted and explored the dialogic components of his poetic but, on the other hand, have through traditional categories, terminology, and stylistics monologized Purdy, providing a canonical version of the lyric poet and rural bard, the serious man behind the comic. This critical context provides the dialogic cultural framework for our discussion of Purdy's poetry.

We do not need to search far to discover the implications of Bakhtin's theories as they apply to the Canadian historical, political, social, and cultural realities. In our own peculiar way, we are inheritors of the Renaissance world Bakhtin describes. We inhabit our own dialogic world of becoming. Canada's is a dramatically and dynamically polyphonic culture which has allowed for a plurality of peoples, a continual dialogue of national cultures in the broadest sense of that term, not in the narrow sense of political boundaries but of world views.¹ The Canadian experience is that of experiencing languages that are other. Beginning with an awareness of British, American, and French national languages, the typical Canadian forges his or her own national idiom among these languages, displaying a whole range of interactive possibilities, both healthy and harmful. In Bakhtin's terms, Canadian culture is an actively heteroglot culture, one

¹ In Lament for a Nation, George Grant maintains that "one distinction between Canada and the United States has been the belief that Canada was predicated on the rights of nations as well as on the rights of individuals." George Grant, Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism, The Carleton Library No. 50 (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1965) 21-22.

deprived of "its naive absence of conflict."² Moreover, Canada does not have a monologically sealed off past. From the many Indian nations to the many European explorers and the early settlers to the many immigrant groups, the Canadian chronotope has been embodied by many languages in dialogic conflict, by European idioms failing to fit the land and struggling with each other for dominance. As Tom Marshall claims in Harsh and Lovely Land, "in a sense all Canadians live between two worlds and two cultures, one partly lost and one partly apprehended."³

Critics of Canadian culture, in all their various definitions, have long noted the polyphonic nature of Canadian culture. Desmond Pacey writes in Canadian Writing in English that "Canada is a vast country of marked regional variations and with two major cultural traditions and many minor ones: the result is that Canadian society, for all its immaturity, is a difficult one for the artist to reduce to order."⁴ Canada's young culture is dynamic, living, growing, polyphonic. Pacey also suggests that "it is arguable whether there is any such thing as a national literature apart from its regional components."⁵ A national culture cannot be based on a monologic and authoritarian cultural consciousness. W.J. Keith in Canadian Literature in English, more than thirty years after Pacey, repeats this emphasis on Canadian culture's variegation, on its many diverse regions, and he goes

² Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 368.

³ Tom Marshall, Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition (Vancouver: U of British Columbia Press, 1979) 32.

⁴ Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961) 270.

⁵ Pacey 103.

on to conclude that "every Canadian may be said to possess at least two loyalties that are not always reconcilable: one to the country, one to the local region (which is not necessarily a province)."⁶ Canadian culture grows out of a dynamic interplay of region and nation, at times destructive but most often productive when truly dialogic (with perhaps Al Purdy as the best example). In Northern Spring, George Woodcock parallels Pacey and Keith in his noting of the contributions of diverse regions to a national culture, but he goes further in distinguishing between political concepts and cultural realities. The political categories of provinces, territories, and nation not only do not equate with Canada's seven cultural regions and one intercultural community (Montreal), but they are in fact hostile to cultural growth. Woodcock states that "region making and nation making are aspects of the same process, since the special character of Canada as a nation is that of a symbiotic union of nations, as organic as a coral reef, rather than a centralized state constructed according to abstract political concepts."⁷ Canada is an organic, interconnected, growing cultural entity; it stands opposed to the centripetal forces, the official forces of political nationalism.⁸

⁶ W.J. Keith, Canadian Literature in English, Longman Literature in English Series (London and New York: Longman, 1985) 8.

⁷ George Woodcock, Northern Spring: The Flowering of Canadian Literature (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987) 31.

⁸ Perhaps Malcolm Ross has been the most consistent and persistent supporter of the polyphonic Canadian cultural consciousness. In The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), many of the essays collected from the early 1950s to the 1980s portray Canada in all its rich and fruitful variations, its regions and nations in dialogue with each other. Ross denies even the possibility of a monologic Canadian culture. As he says, "in a country so vast in physical reach as Canada, and so diverse in cultural origins, the prospect of a simple monolithic 'national' or 'nationalist' culture does not exist" (178). Ross parallels Woodcock in suggesting that any centralized and official nationalism would be contrary to any true cultural becoming. Instead,

Canadian culture finds itself in a new, overwhelmingly large world that cannot be contained. The vastness of the country resists any monologic summary. Moreover, through time we go through a continual process revising our past and anticipating our future. Canadian culture is one living on the boundary. Thus, Dennis Lee describes our basic frame of mind as "half spooked and half at home,"⁹ and Mike Doyle pictures Canada as a puzzle, "innocent, yet canny, straightforward yet oblique, open and yet shut in, eclectic and yet groping for a single image of itself."¹⁰ More recent comments by the postmodern writer and critic Robert Kroetsch articulate the ambivalence of Canada's time and place, its geography and history:

We are a nation made of the waste of the narrative of empire, a nation made of wars won and lost, of peace treaties and their humiliations and their prophecies, of retreating people tempted to glorify their retreat, of the acquisitions of land and resources under the guise of pastoral utopias.

To resist, to aspire toward a condition now described as post-colonial, asks for a radical act of imagination.¹¹

Kroetsch's words, while dialogizing several cherished myths, underline the complexity of the Canadian cultural situation, the story that we have lived and continue to live, with its heteroglot scandal and

Ross suggests in these essays that our Canadian North Americanism is profoundly bifocal, is the result of two nations or many nations in dialogue with each other or at the very least giving each other sideways glances, acknowledging the presence of the other (23). Ross defines not only our cultural geography, but also our cultural consciousness, the state of mind produced by this bifocalism. In Ross's thinking, no unconditional discourse exists in Canadian cultural thought.

⁹ Dennis Lee, "Running and Dwelling: Homage to Al Purdy," Saturday Night, July 1972: 14.

¹⁰ Mike Doyle, "Proteus at Roblin Lake," Canadian Literature 61 (1974): 10.

¹¹ Robert Kroetsch, The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New (Toronto: Oxford U Press, 1989) 159.

promise. Canada, say the critics, is essentially a paradox when one attempts to look at it in its totality, a culture being created.

In this culture, centrifugal forces actively battle centripetal forces. Tom Marshall, himself a poet and novelist as well as a critic, suggests in Harsh and Lovely Land that Canadians "have cultivated a shifting multiple perspective,"¹² and he summarizes the Canadian cultural situation by claiming that "the variety and the meeting of many traditions gives the country somewhat variable cultural possibilities and thus a soul capable of growth, rather than a rigidly defined role-playing social or national ego."¹³ The Canadian shifting and flexible way of looking at the world is neither fixed nor homogeneous. Moreover, Canadian culture has continually been aware of the larger international world. A point of intersection for many national cultures, Canadian culture participates in the English language that is the basic medium of many national cultures. Our cultural borders, in the sense of productive exchange, are open and flexible, and we are not sealed off from other national cultures. In Bakhtin's terms, we participate in alien cultures and languages, an activity which leads us to "an awareness of the disassociation between language and intentions, language and thought, language and expression."¹⁴ Because Canadian culture is a dialogized culture and its language is a dialogized language, it is an open and growing one, participating in the history of all cultures, in their dialogic process of exchange and renewal, and death and birth. As Desmond Pacey suggests in Creative Writing in

¹² Marshall 179.

¹³ Marshall 145.

¹⁴ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 369.

Canada, "the whole history of Western civilization is a record of the constant interaction of national cultures."¹⁵ Canada's role in this development has been short but dynamic.

If such pictures of a vibrant polyphonic Canadian culture seem a trifle optimistic or even exaggerated, we should note that these same critics have themselves responded with various pessimistic notes of warning. The sound image of a polyphonic culture has in some ways been a projection of possibilities, and has constantly faced numerous threats, of which perhaps the largest and most often dealt with has been colonialism. From E.K. Brown to A.J.M. Smith to Pacey to Northrop Frye to D.G. Jones, Canadian critics have repeatedly pointed to colonialism as a form of cultural monologism, a monologism which accepts completely the ethos, critical standards, and judgements of an alien but related culture. Such an alien colonial cultural world is a whole and distant world, one governed by authoritarian discourse rather than internally persuasive discourse; this world lacks dialogue, does not question boundaries, and refuses to parody or travesty the officially accepted. As E.K. Brown puts it in On Canadian Poetry, the colony "applies to what it has standards which are imported, and therefore artificial and distorting. It sets the great good place not in its present, nor in its past nor in its future, but somewhere outside its own borders, somewhere beyond its own possibilities."¹⁶ A.J.M. Smith echoes Brown when he suggests that "colonialism is a spirit that gratefully accepts a place of subordination, that looks elsewhere for its standards of excellence

¹⁵ Pacey 1.

¹⁶ E.K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943) 14.

and is content to imitate with a modest and timid conservatism the products of a parent tradition."¹⁷ A colonial culture is an enslaved culture, a conservative culture which idolizes of necessity the past of a presently living culture. Its centre is foreign both in time and place, and its art is monologically imitative. Colonial culture takes the form at times of Northrop Frye's garrison, "a closely knit and beleaguered society" with "its moral and social values . . . unquestionable."¹⁸

Such a culture at its absolute pole of possibility presents us with a deeply monologic, official, authoritarian language consciousness. Indeed, as D.G. Jones argues in Butterfly on Rock, such a language consciousness and such a colonial cultural consciousness are central to Western thought, not just the Canadian scene:

The weakness of the colonial mentality is that it regards as a threat what it should regard as its salvation; it walls out or exploits what it should welcome and cultivate. The same weakness is inherent in the assumptions of western culture that lead man to view the universe as an enemy.¹⁹

The colonial mentality, not isolated to Canadian culture but prevalent in all Western thinking, refuses to enter into dialogue with the world around itself; rather, such a consciousness seeks to break that world, to confine it and dominate it, indeed to monologize it. Clearly, such a cultural consciousness threatens much more than the development of healthy national cultures. Jones, himself a poet as well as critic, points to a dire need for dialogue.

¹⁷ A.J.M. Smith, Towards a View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays 1928-1971 (Vancouver: U of British Columbia Press, 1973) 34.

¹⁸ Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971) 226.

¹⁹ D.G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1970) 7.

A second threat to an authentic polyphonic Canadian culture, related to the first, comes from provincialism. In provincialism we find regionalism or even nationalism lacking authentic dialogue with an alien culture. Such a provincial culture is a sealed-off culture, one of closed borders and static wholeness. In Canada, even in this age of instantaneous communication (or perhaps because of it), we face the danger of regions not participating in a true cultural dialogue, of the two solitudes of French and English, and of central prominence and power overwhelming the periphery, what is not at the centre. Moreover, we face the closed border of empty cultural nationalism. A living culture participates in living dialogue with other cultures, and such a culture is indeed internally dialogic as well. A provincially minded culture, like a colonial culture, is a culture of alienation and separation, because it is essentially and profoundly without communication, without opportunity for dialogue. Such alienation is particularly relevant to Canada with its recent colonial past. As Tom Marshall suggests, alienation has been central to the Canadian experience, "the alienation of races and cultures from one another, of old world and new, of culture from nature, and, either partly or wholly as a consequence of these, of man from his larger, or grander, self."²⁰ A culture of alienation is a culture with no opportunity for dialogue, a culture of solitude, a culture where the speaking voice has no audience.

A third, and perhaps more present threat to polyphonic cultural development in Canada, lies in the basic ethos of Western civilization. Such an ethos emphasizes the monologically whole individual being; it

²⁰ Marshall 23.

values the serious, the scientific, and the technological as means of controlling self and environment; and its internationalism seeks to level all national boundaries and promote the sanctity of the individual's right to speak monologically. In Butterfly on Rock, D.G. Jones summarizes this ethos thus:

Rather than accept the world as it is, western man has sought to transform it, to refashion the world in the image of his ideal. Certainly he has enlarged his understanding of nature to an astonishing degree, but more often than not he has used this understanding to consolidate his power over nature rather than to extend his communion with her. He has persisted in opposing to nature the world of ideas, the world of his ideal, and in his idealism he has tended to become exclusive rather than inclusive, arrogant rather than humble, aggressively masculine rather than passively feminine. In extremes he has declared total war on the wilderness, woman, and the world of spontaneous impulse and irrational desire. At the least he has sought to subjugate these unruly elements within himself by force of will. More largely, he has sought to bind them in the body politic by force of law. And more ambitious still, with the increased confidence in his power, he has sought to control them in the world around him and even to eradicate them from the earth.²¹

Canadian culture, suggests Jones, has been infected with this dominant ideological world view. George Grant in Lament for a Nation rounds out this picture of monologic Western culture. Here he tells us that "where modern science has achieved its mastery, there is no place for local culture,"²² and he goes on to insist that "at the heart of modern liberal education lies the desire to homogenize the world. Today's natural and social sciences were consciously produced as instruments to this end."²³ Science and education (particularly when wedded to economic power) become instruments for the homogenization of

²¹ Jones 57.

²² Grant 54.

²³ Grant 79.

individuals, groups, and nations, for the monologization of living heteroglot consciousness. Such thought is official, institutional thought.

George Grant also warns against, or rather laments as an accomplished fact, the influence on polyphonic Canadian culture of "the homogenized culture of the American Empire."²⁴ Of course, such a threat is closely linked with the threat of Western cultural monologization, for the United States, both a large and near neighbour, embodies in strong form the ethos of Western individualism. Already in Creative Writing in Canada, Pacey speaks of Canada's new post-war nationalism, now not opposed to the British connection as in the past, but to "the economic and cultural domination of the United States."²⁵ Again Canadian culture is faced with those forces seeking consciously or unconsciously to monologize it. Again this culture is faced with the prospect of colonization. In The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, published in 1967, Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski suggest that the new challenge to poetry is the organization society exemplified by America, a military, efficient, regulated and standardized world of mass communication and manipulation, a society whose ethos is dominated by advertising, industry, machines, and the threat of annihilating war.²⁶ Malcolm Ross, too, in The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions, warns that we must deal with the "monsters of technology" if "we in Canada are not to become utterly subservient to the micro-electronic overlords to the

²⁴ Grant 5.

²⁵ Pacey 231.

²⁶ Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada: Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967) 283.

south of us, who would rule and reign under the heraldic sign of the robot and the silicon chip."²⁷ Each of these critics warns against the monologizing influence of mass communication, industry, and technology, particularly as they are embodied by the American ethos. These centripetal forces facing Canadian polyphonic culture are, of course, also reinforced by centripetal forces within in terms of official institutions. As George Woodcock notes, "the relation of centralized organizations like the HBC [Hudson Bay Company], the Ottawa government or the CPR to the regions has always been an exploitative one, causing resentment and conflict."²⁸ All institutions embodying centripetal forces, whether American or Canadian, seek to monologize the dialogic, to homogenize what is heteroglot, and to silence polyphony; the centre continually exploits the periphery, either by neglect or by design.

George Grant's lament stems from the belief that such centripetal forces have already accomplished their work. These forces as they are embodied in political liberalism, a philosophy of progress, and a social structure based on consumption have led to the monologization of Canadian polyphony. Grant maintains that it is virtually impossible for the majority of people to resist such forces. As he says, "in no society is it possible for many men to live outside the dominant assumptions of their world for very long."²⁹ We may argue with Grant concerning the extent of such monologism, but we must accept it as a definite tendency in twentieth-century societies. Moreover, given such a pattern, freedom within such societies comes from resisting such

²⁷ Ross 183.

²⁸ Woodcock, Northern Spring 32.

²⁹ Grant 42.

forces, from a dialogic attitude to centralizing institutions. Such a culture manifests itself in controlling bureaucracies at the service of the universal and homogenous state, a state created by and equally at the service of a scientific and economic ethos seeking the conquest and domination of the natural and human worlds. According to Grant, "today scientists master not only non-human nature, but human nature itself. Particularly in America, scientists concern themselves with the control of heredity, the human mind and society."³⁰ Grant's vociferous diatribe, monologic itself in the sense that it sets up 'the American ethos of modernity' as a monologic bogey-man, tells us that modern humanity, monologized by the utopian philosopheme³¹ of progress, seems intent, almost psychotically so, on domination of the natural world and human biology and psychology.

This ethos, in its most extreme form, seeks to standardize, to eliminate difference and dialogue, to rob human life of its basic vitality, and it manifests itself as a threat to Canadian polyphony in controlling economic and political bureaucracies that turn individuals into numbers, statistics, and codes. As Grant suggests, "in the mass era, all human beings are defined in terms of their capacity to consume."³² Such an ethos refuses to see individuals as dialogic selves, as open and becoming members of a socio-historical world; rather, they are judged by their ability to accept whatever product the economic, political, and mass cultural powers choose to produce. It is

³⁰ Grant 54.

³¹ "Philosopheme" is a term used by Bakhtin to denote a unit of thought structure, a system of thought, particularly in the context of the construction of such through language and discourse. See, for example, Dialogic Imagination 288.

³² Grant 90.

because of the effects of such centripetal forces that Grant laments the disappearance of Canada's polyphonic culture:

Our culture floundered on the aspirations of the age of progress. The argument that Canada, a local culture, must disappear can, therefore, be stated in three steps. First, men everywhere move ineluctably toward membership in the universal and homogenous state. Second, Canadians live next to a society that is the heart of modernity. Third, nearly all Canadians think that modernity is good, so nothing essential distinguishes Canadians from Americans.³³

However arguable it may be that these steps have been completed and Canada has disappeared, it must be agreed that such centripetal forces as those embodied by American homogenizing culture pose a major threat to Canadian polyphonic cultural consciousness.

Nevertheless, Grant himself speaks monologically. This condition of his discourse is revealed in the assumptions embedded in the three steps towards Canada's cultural disappearance: men everywhere move ineluctably; nearly all Canadians; nothing essential distinguishes. Grant takes in his lament a deterministic view of the future, one born out of a particular view of the past: utopian British colonial. Interestingly, Purdy is situated precisely in this cultural world, in the Loyalist country of southeastern Ontario. But Purdy's view of this ethos of modernity and of the United States is a double one. His editing of a volume such as The New Romans positions him squarely in the anti-American camp of the 1960s, yet comments elsewhere reveal his ambivalence. In a 1964 letter to George Woodcock and in reference to the disappearance of Eskimo culture at the hands of European culture, Purdy laments that "all pockets and isolated minorities are being

³³ Grant 54.

eventually swept into the human mainstream, which tends to homogenize and wipe out all traces of the past."³⁴ Purdy remarks, in rather Bakhtinian terms, that modern culture is centripetal and ahistorical. With respect to American influence precisely, Purdy comments in a 1967 survey of Canadian literature that "Canadian life and, to a lesser degree, culture, is dominated by U.S. influence." In this ambivalent statement, Purdy both gives the nod to American influence and qualifies that nod. However, Purdy is not a cultural warmonger. In the same article, Purdy criticizes the search for an identity simply based on a rejection of the American world view: "For reasons of either basic insecurity or downright inferiority, Canadian writers are required by critics and culture-nationalists to supply a body of ready-made literature which will support and bolster our supposedly nebulous identity."³⁵ Purdy finds such demands ridiculous, unnecessary, and indeed insulting. Furthermore, his comments in a 1975 interview reveal the complexity of his attitude towards the United States:

Well, they are both honourable and dishonourable at the same time, there's no simplistic answer to that sort of thing. They have a great tradition. The revolution was for both honourable and dishonourable reasons, and for both valid and invalid ones. And they've gone on with all sorts of contradictions, just as almost any country has.

Purdy goes on to add, "Of course, the U.S. is a sick nation, psychologically diseased. But it has elements of health, nothing is that simple."³⁶ Clearly, such comments suggest that Purdy, while

³⁴ Purdy to Woodcock, 13 November 1964, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 3.

³⁵ Al Purdy, "Canadian Poetry in English Since 1867," The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 3 (July 1967): 32-33.

³⁶ Al Purdy, "Perspective: Selection from an interview with Al Purdy," with S.G. Buri and Robert Enright, CV/II 2,1 (Jan. 1976): 51-52.

opposed to world views embodied by the United States, understands the heteroglot complexity of the culture to the south of Canada, its both dialogic possibilities and monologic horrors.

Canadian culture, in general, provides an answering word to such an ethos, a dialogic word of opposition to such rational and utopian culture embodied in established political, religious, educational, and economic institutions. Among the many Canadians who have not accepted the American ethos of modernity are (to their credit) Canadian artists, who have been on the whole consistently opposed to the homogenizing influence of this mass culture of economic power. Moreover, since the writing of Lament for a Nation, Canadian polyphony has proven somewhat more resilient than Grant's argument would suggest as artists, including writers, have continued to offer an unofficial voice countering economic and cultural monologisms, to resist the centripetal forces drawing the Canadian plankton into the American whale, and to broaden their audience within their own culture. They have consistently stood on the fringe of their own culture in order to dialogize its assumptions. Specifically, recent decades have seen regional cultures flourish in Canada, constituting a vibrant localism the opposite of provincialism; the Prairies and Quebec provide perhaps the strongest examples. Moreover, ethnic groups, minorities, and immigrants continue to gain and give voice to the variety of Canadian experiences: these centrifugal voices question the centre.

More dramatic, however, in their questioning of the central tenets of Western thought and philosophy have been the growth of feminist theories. Feminism(s), occupying the boundaries of culture, undermine

the male assumptions and power structures that have long ruled Western societies. In the following passage, Barbara Godard summarizes this centrifugal work of feminism:

Feminist criticism has been particularly searching in its exposure of the meaning system of male-dominated society. In this, woman as sign is what is not man, what he has expelled or repressed beyond himself. Yet she is an essential reminder of what he is, and the undermining of binary systems of opposition. Feminist deconstruction has been concerned to point out the way in which binary oppositions are a way of seeing typical of ideology. Their various subversive strategies have been designed to unravel these oppositions by showing how they collapse in on themselves in the name of a difference which is relational, labyrinthine, web-like, rather than hierarchical.³⁷

Godard points out the radical ideological raison d'être of feminism, its aims of disrupting not only political and social structures but also ways of thinking. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon argues that feminism calls for a rethinking of Western philosophy, since "subjectivity in the Western liberal humanist tradition has been defined in terms of rationality, individuality, and power; in other words, it is defined in terms of those domains traditionally denied women, who are relegated instead to the realms of intuition, familial collectivity, and submission."³⁸ Feminisms seek to challenge from their peripheral position the stasis of these polar oppositions, the monologic quality of much of Western society and thinking.

Recent postmodern theory also suggests that forces within Canadian culture work to dialogically undo the centripetal impetus of Western

³⁷ Barbara Godard, "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism: Language, Reality and Canadian Literature," in Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature, ed. John Moss (Ottawa: U of Ottawa Press, 1987) 44.

³⁸ Linda Hutcheon, The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction (Toronto: Oxford U Press, 1988) 5.

thinking. Postmodern critics in Canada have been quick to note that while feminism and postmodernism are different they are related, kissing cousins as it were. Both ideological activities act as destabilizing centrifugal forces in culture. In her study of the fiction of Canadian women writers, Private and Fictional Words, Coral Ann Howells makes the connection explicit:

There are close parallels between the historical situation of women and of Canada as a nation, for women's experience of the power politics of gender and their problematic relation to patriarchal traditions of authority have affinities with Canada's attitude to the cultural imperialism of the United States as well as its ambivalence towards its European inheritance. Canada's colonial inheritance of English and French language and culture is complicated by the multiple origins of the Canadian population as a result of multi-ethnic patterns of immigration and settlement. While Canadians have strong loyalties to racial and cultural origins outside Canada, they also have a strong sense of marginality in relation to those cultures which have disinherited them as emigrants.³⁹

Both Canada in general and women in particular occupy a marginal position, an ambivalence or difference in Howells' terms, and as she proceeds to suggest in the explication of this thesis, this is a creative position, a dialogic and centrifugal one.

In The Canadian Postmodern, Linda Hutcheon makes much the same point about postmodern theory and Canadian culture. Indeed, the essays collected here continually underscore the privileged position of this culture, not its vulnerability to the threat of Western thought, particularly that embodied by the United States. "The ex-centric," she writes, "those on the margins of history--be they women, workers,

³⁹ Coral Ann Howells, Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s (London and New York: Methuen, 1987) 2-3. See also 4, 10, 21, 26, 183-184.

immigrants (or writers?)--have the power to change the perspective of the centre,"⁴⁰ and she proceeds to the following affirmation: "The ex-centric is a mirror of Canadian marginalization--but as more a privileged than a denigrated position. It both challenges the general notion of centre and, at the same time, undoes that particular idea of the possibility of a centred, coherent subjectivity."⁴¹ According to Hutcheon, Canada is filled with ex-centrics and defined by its ex-centricity. She repeatedly points out how this peripheral status allows definition against centres, resistance to centripetal forces in politics, social structures, and thought itself.

Both Howells and Hutcheon point to the influence of Robert Kroetsch on postmodern thinking and writing in Canada, and when we turn to the essays of The Lovely Treachery of Words we hear a similar emphasis on the privileged position of the ex-centric. In such essays as "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," "No Name Is My Name," and "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue," Mr. Canadian Postmodern, as Hutcheon calls him, completely reverses questions of national identity and cultural meta-narrative. While previous writers stressed the need to define ourselves, to speak ourselves into existence as it were, Kroetsch speaks of the resistance to definition as a creative strategy for Canadian culture. Kroetsch acknowledges the monologic pull of the American and Soviet empires, yet that pull forces other cultures to become 'other,' to adopt a creative marginal position. "Canada is supremely a country of margins," he writes, adding 'the centre does not

⁴⁰ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 103.

⁴¹ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 175.

hold. The margin, the periphery, the edge, now, is the exciting and dangerous boundary where silence and sound meet."⁴² Indeed, Kroetsch explicitly draws on Bakhtin to suggest the paradoxical creativity of an unfixed identity:

The willingness to refuse privilege to a restricted or restrictive cluster of meta-narratives becomes a Canadian strategy for survival. We must, in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, remain polyphonic, and the great Russian theorist was in his carnivalesque way a great master of survival. We are under pressure from the many versions of the meta-narrative, ranging from Star Wars to programs like 'Dynasty' and 'Dallas'--and again we hear the shorthand of the meta-narrative in the naming. The trick is, I suppose, to resist the meta-narrative and still to avoid Riel's fate.⁴³

The existence of Canadian culture, indeed its vibrancy, depends upon a centrifugal resistance to monologue, a polyphonic answering word to meta-narratives that attempt to fix and define identity. "We survive," concludes Kroetsch, "by working with a low level of self-definition and national definition. We insist on staying multiple, and by that strategy we accommodate to our climate, our economic situation, and our neighbours."⁴⁴ We survive by saying, "ambiguously, proudly, tauntingly, no name is my name."⁴⁵ Postmodern theory, here in the words of Kroetsch, Hutcheon, and Howells, turns upside down Grant's fear of the American ethos of modernity, demonstrating how a resistance to that meta-narrative allows cultural freedom and creativity.

If we turn specifically to the development of literature in Canada, we find evidence of this development of a polyphonic cultural consciousness throughout. Its literary and socio-historical development

⁴² Kroetsch, Treachery 22-23.

⁴³ Kroetsch, Treachery 23.

⁴⁴ Kroetsch, Treachery 28.

⁴⁵ Kroetsch, Treachery 52.

have been inextricably linked, as several critics have noted, among them Wilfred Eggleston and E.K. Brown. In The Frontier and Canadian Letters, Eggleston insists that "no account of the birth and growth of native letters in British North America can be more than a segment of a much larger story, namely, its social and cultural history."⁴⁶ Similarly, Brown suggests that "literature develops in close association with society," and indeed that "a great literature is the flowering of a great society, a mature and adequate society."⁴⁷ Although phrased somewhat vaguely, Brown's essential point, made in On Canadian Poetry, is well taken: a living literature is produced by and helps to produce a living society, that is, a society pervaded by an active heteroglot language consciousness rather than a monologic language consciousness. In Canada, many of the necessary elements have been present, although Brown could still maintain in 1951, shortly before his death, that "Canadians do not care what other Canadians think."⁴⁸ To the last, Brown lamented the lack of dialogue in Canadian literature, the lack of an audience to hear Canadian voices. Similarly, the Canadian Writers' Conference of 1955 sought to establish an audience for Canadian literature and the viability of society supporting its artists by adopting several resolutions aimed at increasing dialogue, such as the teaching of Canadian literature at all levels of education, the establishment and support of libraries, the printing and reprinting of books, and the establishment and extension of fellowships, scholarships,

⁴⁶ Wilfred Eggleston, The Frontier and Canadian Letters, Carleton Library 102 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 28.

⁴⁷ Brown, On Canadian Poetry 25-26.

⁴⁸ E.K. Brown, Responses and Evaluations: Essays on Canada, ed. David Staines, New Canadian Library 137 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 314.

and cash value for awards.⁴⁹ Other such official and institutional remedies have included the Canada Council, which while funded by the federal government is relatively free to dispense funds promoting cultural development over a broad spectrum.

If we examine more closely the socio-historical development of literature in Canada, we do find evidence of centripetal and centrifugal forces at play. We find a dynamic literature developing through time. What we witness is the struggle to create a native idiom, a continuing struggle, because the world of early Canadian literature was not one in which a genuine epic consciousness was possible. The only available 'poetic' world was that of the European tradition, and this tradition was colonially adopted: monologically accepted forms and norms were monologically applied to the Canadian chronotope. Desmond Pacey characterizes this disjunction by maintaining that "the language and metrical forms evolved over centuries to suit the needs of European life and literature were ill-equipped to convey the very different North American experience."⁵⁰ The literary language imported from Europe needed to be dialogized, to have its boundaries questioned, broken, and re-established. In "Bakhtin Reads DeMille: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism, and the Theory of Dialogism," Richard Cavell argues that Canadian literature has defined itself by this dialogic response to European origins. He writes, "the monologism of the established literary tradition would be contested by the literature of the New

⁴⁹ F.R. Scott, introduction, Writing in Canada: Proceedings of the Canadian Writers' Conference Held at Queen's University, July 1955, ed. George Whalley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956) 1-10.

⁵⁰ Pacey 26. Tom Marshall puts it another way, saying that "Canadian poetry had to find its own way out of the English confinement of those hedge-rows, rhyme and metre" (Marshall 5).

World, or of the colony, if you will, in a dialogical encounter which subverts the temporal, authoritative elements of that traditional literature."⁵¹ Cavell posits a model of Canadian literary history based on a dialogue of centripetal Old World literary force with New World centrifugal voices.

This process became relatively vigorous with the Confederation poets, as several critics have noted. W.J. Keith maintains of them that "though influenced by both British and American models, they gradually evolved styles and attitudes that could be recognized, at home and abroad, as characteristic of the new Dominion."⁵² Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and Scott began the process of dialogizing Canadian poetry, of modifying a tradition to a native use. The Modern poets of the 1920s and 30s, by reacting against the preceding poetry, paradoxically continued the process of opening up Canadian poetry, of dialogizing language consciousness. Indeed the reaction was the dialogic response of an opposing ideological world view, not a simple disagreement over forms and diction. Moreover, the 1940s and 1950s saw an increased internal dialogue of world views. As Keith maintains, "the pattern of Canadian literary development consists of a long slow growth followed by a sudden creative burgeoning."⁵³ The 1940s saw a vigorous critical debate between proponents of native and cosmopolitan world views, between John Sutherland's First Statement and Patrick Anderson's Preview, and the 1950s saw the emergence of three groups categorized by

⁵¹ Richard Cavell, "Bakhtin Reads DeMille: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism, and the Theory of Dialogism," Future Indicative 206.

⁵² Keith 33.

⁵³ Keith x.

Pacey as the mythopoeic poets, the social realists of Montreal, and the school of regionalist verse.⁵⁴

The years after 1960, the period with which we are most concerned, have been years of even greater activity. These years have shown that Canadian literature is a literature in formation, an open literature of the historical present, an internally dynamic and externally open literature whose boundaries are neither fixed nor limiting. But as Tom Marshall maintains in Harsh and Lovely Land, "Canadian poets are quite different from contemporary American or English poets in that they are engaged in the creation of their country."⁵⁵ However accurate we consider Marshall's estimation of American and British literature, his statement concerning poets and the becoming of Canada must be accepted as correct. Canadian poets are intimately involved in Canada's socio-historical development. And these poets reflect the increasing sense of complex heteroglossia and polyphony in Canada. In Northern Spring, George Woodcock suggests that "with maturity has come--as in all literatures--variegation, the rejection of orthodoxies of style and theme, and a growing assurance among writers in following their own unclassifiable paths."⁵⁶ Centrifugal forces have clearly been at work in Canadian writing. A dialogic language consciousness has continued to create a dynamic and flexible tradition. As Woodcock goes on to suggest, the network necessary for creative dialogic exchange has been established, and he stresses its importance in the literature's life:

⁵⁴ Pacey 236.

⁵⁵ Marshall 177.

⁵⁶ Woodcock, Northern Spring 9.

And any national literature depends for its survival on the development of the type of infra-structure which we often call a `literary world,' meaning the kind of ambiance in which writers are in touch with each other, in which responsible criticism develops, and in which there is a reasonable certainty of publication through a network of publishers, periodicals and media willing to use literary material. That a fair number of writers should earn enough to work without having to depend on academic appointments or journalistic chores is also one of the signs of a real literary world.⁵⁷

In the past, given Canada's size and small population, such an open and dialogic literary world was virtually impossible to maintain. Of course, such a world does not guarantee good writing, but good writing is difficult to produce without it.

Canadian literature since 1960 reveals itself as vigorous, as a polyphonic world where centripetal and centrifugal forces are played out. Malcolm Ross insists that "art in Canada is not and never can be, if it is art, an imaginative celebration of the state."⁵⁸ Canadian literature does not wave the flag in any obvious sense; rather, its borders are opened in a positive sense. Frye echoes Ross when he suggests that "to distinguish what is creative in a minority from what attempts to dominate, we have to distinguish between cultural issues, which are inherently decentralizing ones, and political and economic issues, which tend to centralization and hierarchy."⁵⁹ Frye praises the decentralizing role, the centrifugal forces of culture opposed to the centripetal tendencies of power and money. He goes on to describe the struggle for cultural distinctiveness as "a fight for human dignity

⁵⁷ Woodcock, Northern Spring 12.

⁵⁸ Ross 153.

⁵⁹ Northrop Frye, Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture, ed. James Polk (Toronto: Anansi, 1982) 43.

itself, for the variety in life that nothing but genuine culture can ever produce, for the unity that is the opposite pole of uniformity."⁶⁰ Canadian literature itself participates in this battle for a centrifugal richness as opposed to centripetal homogeneity, a homogeneity characterized by what Frye calls an international style hostile to regional developments, a style "not a bag of rhetorical tricks but a way of seeing and thinking in a world controlled by uniform patterns of technology."⁶¹ Tom Marshall and D.G. Jones, both poets and critics, suggest that poets of the past thirty years have done well in this struggle. In Harsh and Lovely Land, Marshall explains that "this explosion or deluge or confusion of tongues--in both prose and poetry--is itself, whatever the problems it poses for critics and readers, an evidence of growth in the collective consciousness."⁶² Canadian writers have challenged readers and critics with a polyphonic language consciousness, with a sense of the world in its continual becoming. As Jones suggests in Butterfly on Rock, these poets have given voice to the unofficial cultural consciousness:

They have set out to take an inventory of the world but scarcely uttered, the world of the excluded or ignored. It would comprehend whatever is crude, whatever is lonely, whatever has failed, whatever inhabits the silence of the deserted streets, the open highways, the abandoned farms. It is the wilderness of experience that does not conform to the cultural maps of the history books, sermons, political speeches, slick magazines and ads. And it is the wilderness of language in which the official voices of the culture fail to articulate the meaning or the actual sensation of living and tend to become gibberish.⁶³

⁶⁰ Frye, Divisions 43.

⁶¹ Frye, Divisions 31.

⁶² Marshall 119.

⁶³ Jones 166.

Both Marshall and Jones describe a profoundly Bakhtinian, dialogic, dynamic, and unofficial literature, a literature with a healthy lack of respect for accepted forms, canons, and boundaries, for all that the powers that be would elevate to the status of official culture for an official audience.

Frye further suggests that "what was an inarticulate space on a map is now responding to the world with the tongues and eyes of a matured and disciplined imagination."⁶⁴ Not only has Canadian literature participated in the socio-historical development of Canada, but it has also reflected that socio-historical world in its content. Canadian literature has sought to define its various artistic chronotopes. In Dennis Lee's words, such literature has sought to characterize "our way of being here."⁶⁵ Indeed, critics from Pacey to Keith have long been in agreement in emphasizing the Canadian writer's particular response to his or her space and time. As Pacey says, "at every stage of its development, Canadian culture has responded to the social, political and physical environment of Canada."⁶⁶ Writers have read the chronotopes around themselves and have themselves written the artistic chronotopes expressing a Canadian socio-historical consciousness. As Keith explains, a language has been moulded over time into "a medium through which . . . solitude can be explored, articulated, recognized as one's own," with the result that "Canadian literature gradually, obstinately, impressively forms itself as the

⁶⁴ Frye, Divisions 70.

⁶⁵ Lee, "Running and Dwelling" 14-16.

⁶⁶ Pacey 1-2.

embodiment of a scattered and elusive people's communal vision."⁶⁷

This communal vision becomes embodied in literature as a characteristic series of chronotopes, as a series of word images of our time-space.

These chronotopes manifest themselves not as expressions of nationalism but as imaginative stances, as D.G. Jones puts it, as part of our feeling at home, our responsive understanding of where we are.⁶⁸

Recent postmodern and feminist literature and theory paradoxically continue and diverge from these modernist concerns. While the largely modernist critics above focus on identity, postmodernists and feminists focus on difference as the key issue within Canadian literature(s).

Difference, in fact, is both the content and form of the postmodern, and this difference connects well with Bakhtin's theory of dialogue.

Kroetsch announces this difference from modernism when he writes, "We write books, not in search of our identity, but against the notion of identity. The paradox is, however, that the Canadian identity states itself in, by, its acts of concealment. What we insist isn't there is exactly what is."⁶⁹ Canadian literature, suggests Kroetsch, writes against identity in order to announce difference, to conceal similarity.

He puts it thus elsewhere:

Canadian writing takes place between the vastness of (closed) cosmologies and the fragments found in the (open) field of the archaeological site. It is a literature of dangerous middles. It is a literature that, compulsively seeking its own story (and to be prophetic after all: this will still be the case a century from now) comes compulsively to a genealogy that refuses origin, to a genealogy that speaks instead, and anxiously, and with a

⁶⁷ Keith 8-9.

⁶⁸ Jones 5.

⁶⁹ Kroetsch, Treachery 188.

generous reticence, the nightmare and the welcome dream of Babel.⁷⁰

Canadian literature is one based on Babel, on language difference and polyphony, not on a meta-narrative of origins; this literature is a literature of the loophole. In this context, I would suggest that Purdy, in his simultaneous concern for both identity and difference, being and becoming, uneasily occupies the boundary between the modern and the postmodern. He offers us, in fact, a transitional poetry.

Like Kroetsch, Hutcheon signals the transition from the modern to the postmodern. Her writings clearly indicate that postmodern Canadian literature is both continuous and discontinuous with modern literature. In her introduction to The Canadian Postmodern, she speaks of this connection:

The continuity between the modernist and the postmodernist is a very real one, but what distinguishes them, I would argue, is that in the postmodern this self-consciousness of art as art is paradoxically made the means to a new engagement with the social and the historical world, and that this is done in such a way as to challenge (though not destroy) our traditional humanist beliefs about the function of art in society.⁷¹

While modernism and postmodernism both provide self-conscious writing, the more recent texts are intensely ideological in a Bakhtinian way, concerned with the word's socio-historic context rather than its separation from this context. As Hutcheon says elsewhere, "Postmodern literature situates itself squarely in the context of its own reading and writing as social and ideological actualities."⁷² Furthermore, she explicitly makes the connection between postmodern and feminist writing

⁷⁰ Kroetsch, Treachery 71.

⁷¹ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 1-2.

⁷² Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 10.

and the valuing of difference. The Canadian ex-centric writer, male or female, simultaneously establishes and undercuts "prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning,"⁷³ Hutcheon writes, challenging the givens, the monologisms, "the 'master' narratives of liberal humanist culture."⁷⁴ Such challenging, such insistence on difference, is central to both postmodern and feminist texts:

Thanks to the work of feminist writers, we are facing a new situation: exit Man, enter Humankind, including Woman. The universal (but somehow male) concept of humanist Man is giving way to a more diversified concept of experience based on difference. In postmodern literature this has meant a turning to those forms that can accentuate difference, especially in the face of a mass culture that tends to homogenize or obliterate anything that does not seem to fit. In Canadian writing the two major (but by no means only) new forms to appear have been those that embody ethnicity and the female.⁷⁵

Recent Canadian literature, suggests Hutcheon, particularly the centrifugal texts of ethnic and feminist writers, has given voice to the philosophy and techniques, the ideology and forms of difference.

Postmodern writers are expressing in new ways the centrifugal energy, the polyphonic and heteroglot basis of Canadian culture. "To render the particular concrete," writes Hutcheon, "to glory in a (defining) ex-centricity--this is the Canadian postmodern."⁷⁶

In an interview with Alan Twigg, Al Purdy replies to a request for a description of Canadian literature that "the most prominent characteristic of Canadian literature is that it's the only literature

⁷³ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 3.

⁷⁴ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 23.

⁷⁵ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 18.

⁷⁶ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 19. See also Howells (10, 13, 26-27) and Future Indicative (109-110).

about which the interviewer would ask what the characteristics are."⁷⁷ As we turn from Canadian literature to the characteristics of Canadian criticism, such a comment underlines the national critical passion for defining, exploring, and characterizing our literature and its ethos. Indeed, the last several paragraphs of our discussion have demonstrated this point, for all of the critics quoted have been engaging in this critical dialogue. Yet more than this, this chapter itself has participated with its own ideological world view in this definition of the Canadian ethos and canon. Such is the dialogic nature of criticism. With the broader perspective afforded by Bakhtin's socio-historical poetics, criticism of Canadian literature itself is seen to involve a dialogue of ideological positions as embodied in critical points of view and standards of judgement. As Eli Mandel notes in his introduction to Frank Davey's Surviving the Paraphrase, "from its earliest beginnings, Canadian criticism has been a surprisingly aggressive art, its practitioners calling on their skills of polemic and contention."⁷⁸ Criticism, in all its variety of sketches, histories of the tradition, and individual and thematic studies, engages both writer and reader in dialogue from its own perspective, and such a dialogue contributes to the historical becoming of literature as well as to an ordering of the past. The critical dialogue remains strong in Canadian literature. As George Woodcock says of the recent past, "some of the best of these critics are themselves fine poets, and this has meant that criticism in

⁷⁷ Al Purdy, "Al Purdy: One of a Kind," with Alan Twigg, For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Writers, ed. Alan Twigg (Madiera Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1981) 9.

⁷⁸ Eli Mandel, The Family Romance (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1986) 163.

Canada has become a genuine dialogue within the world of writers."⁷⁹ Writers and critics have practised if not always agreed upon the dialogic function of criticism--its function as mediator and interpreter. As Bakhtin says, criticism mediates "between the social and general ideological demands of the epoch, on the one hand, and literature, on the other."⁸⁰

In their evaluations, critics have organized discourse to a considerable extent. Sherrill Grace, in "'Listen to the Voice': Dialogism and the Canadian Novel," notes that "at first glance, it would seem that politically, geographically, and linguistically Canada, unlike the United States, constitutes the perfect dialogistic space."⁸¹ Wondering why in this context the literary canon is then comprised primarily of monologic works, Grace answers her question with a question: "is it our readings that are monologic . . . ?"⁸² Grace posits a tendency to critical monologisms and argues for dialogic readings. In their evaluation, defining, and mapping, critics have created hierarchies, canons, and metafictional orderings of a national literature. The results have at times been monologic: a pattern has been traced, a canon established, and a hierarchy defended. The formation of such a canon calls for and has often received an answering word. In his introduction to the second volume of The Canadian Novel, John Moss explains that "every age reinvents its own cultural antecedents to make itself appear inevitable," and he adds that

⁷⁹ Woodcock, Northern Spring 15.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, Formal Method 173.

⁸¹ Sherrill Grace, "'Listen to the Voice': Dialogism and the Canadian Novel," in Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature, ed. John Moss (Ottawa: U of Ottawa Press, 1987) 131.

⁸² Grace 132.

"nothing reflects the unstable condition of the literary past so much as literary criticism The past in Canadian literature is sufficiently unstable that critical myths which provide illusions of development and continuity abound."⁸³ Criticism shapes the fluid Canadian past into sometimes static patterns, patterns which provide at best a partial understanding of literature's life, patterns argued from points of view.

One such pattern outlined by critics has been writers' emphasis on the land. Lee, another critic who is also a poet, discusses mysterium tremendum, "the encounter with holy otherness, most commonly approached here through encounter with the land--to which an appropriate response is awe and terror."⁸⁴ Frye speaks of the "sense of meditative shock produced by the intrusion of the natural world into the imagination."⁸⁵ In a similar context, Pacey makes the statement that "man is dwarfed by an immensely powerful physical environment which is at once forbidding and fascinating."⁸⁶ The point here is not that these statements are inaccurate (for each of them is true of several Canadian writers) but that they participate in the socio-historical becoming of Canadian literature by providing touchstones for judging past writers and determining future writing. Such statements tend to set canons almost unconsciously if they are not dialogized by writers and critics.

A similar debate in criticism has taken place concerning the high and the low, the serious and the comic, the select audience and the

⁸³ John Moss, introduction, The Canadian Novel, Volume II: Beginnings, ed. John Moss (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1980) 7.

⁸⁴ Dennis Lee, "Response to Robin Mathews," Satur. , Night Sept. 1972: 33.

⁸⁵ Frye, Divisions 49.

⁸⁶ Pacey 2.

larger audience. Critics have tended to value what passes for official culture, the high and serious genres of poetry appealing to an almost private audience. Perhaps A.J.M. Smith has been the strongest advocate of such a position. At the 1955 Canadian Writers' Conference, Smith maintained that "a restricted, knowledgeable, exacting audience is more valuable to the poet than a large and indiscriminating one."⁸⁷ However true we feel this statement to be, it is also undeniable that such a statement has definite socio-historical consequences for the nature of Canadian poetry. Such a statement values a certain type of poetry, or leads to such an (e)valuation. Smith says elsewhere of a group of symbolist poets, "these are the poets in Canada who write not for the immediate moment alone. They are the poets who will live when the urbanized hitch-hiking social realists or the lung-born egoists of instant experience have been long forgotten."⁸⁸ Smith, in this statement, canonizes one line of poetry and discredits others. All critics judge individuals, schools, and groups from distinct ideological positions; clearly, in a Bakhtinian sense, all critical judgements are ideological. Here Smith argues from the position of seeing poetry as a special language for the few, a language separated from everyday language. Other critics, however, and John Sutherland is a good example, argue from equally distinct if opposed positions. Again, our point is not to criticize these positions but to bring them to light, to

⁸⁷ A.J.M. Smith, address, Writing in Canada 22.

⁸⁸ Smith, Canadian Letters 155. The symbolist poets to whom Smith refers are P.K. Page, Anne Wilkinson, Anne Hebert, Jay Macpherson, Daryl Hine, and Gwendolyn MacEwen. As for the social realists et al, Smith leaves it to the reader's imagination as to whom they might be.

dialogize them, for all these positions participate in critical dialogue.

Critics order literature and, in a larger sense, discourse itself by defining branches and lines and by positing evolutions, progress, and continuities. Critics as various as Brown, Smith, Pacey, Frye, Atwood, Jones, Marshall, Keith, Mandel, Bowering, and Kroetsch have sought and continue to seek to define the Canadian ethos and its literary tradition, specifically by reading the past and prophesying the future. In Northern Spring, Woodcock suggests that Smith the anthologist "was discovering and charting the lines of a new tradition, establishing a canon, and in the process developing insights into the kind of poetry the Canadian environment and Canadian history have encouraged."⁸⁹ In one sense, all critics are engaged in this process of definition, charting, and canonizing, and they are equally engaged in the socio-historical processes of re-accentuation of past texts. Thus, critics such as Frank Davey, Paul Stuewe, and Eli Mandel have in recent years countered the arguments of earlier and contemporary critics. Stuewe, in Clearing the Ground,⁹⁰ criticizes thematic critics such as Atwood and Jones, followers of Frye's theories, for turning literary works into purely social, cultural, and thematic documents. Stuewe then posits alternatives to writers canonized by these critics. Davey undertakes a similar critical deconstruction in "Surviving the Paraphrase,"⁹¹ and Eli Mandel in various essays collected in Another Time and The Family

⁸⁹ Woodcock, Northern Spring 182.

⁹⁰ Paul Stuewe, Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature after Survival (Toronto: Proper Tales Press, 1984). See especially 10-19.

⁹¹ Frank Davey, Surviving the Paraphrase (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983) 1-12.

Romance counters Grant's Loyalism and centralist cultural hegemonies with arguments for the vitality of centrifugal regionalisms. These critics participate in a larger critical dialogue determining the life of specific literary texts. Indeed, such critical dialogue is evident in the re-accentuation of texts, in new readings. For example, such re-accentuation can be read in critical readings of the texts of such Confederation poets as Isabella Valancy Crawford and Duncan Campbell Scott. Critics participate in the historical development of literature, in its continual becoming, sometimes monologically but at the best of times dialogically.

More recent postmodern criticism has demonstrated this participation in literature's development. Indeed, recent years have seen an intensification of critical awareness as the debate over replacing thematic criticism continues. Two recent collections of critical essays suggest the increased theoretical dialogue taking place in Canadian literature. Driving Home: A Dialogue Between Writers and Readers, the proceedings of the August 1982 Calgary Institute for the Humanities Conference, shows clearly the influence of reader response theory, a renewed sense that the literary text is a process rather than an object, a collaboration rather than an imprimatur. The conference itself, in its conscious attempt to increase the dialogue between authors and audiences, indicates a renewed sense of the ideological and social bases of the literary experience. Similarly, Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature, the proceedings of a 1986 conference at the University of Ottawa on the theoretical ferment in Canada, equally demonstrates the increased critical dialogue in the wake

of thematic criticism. In fact, this collection demonstrates from first to last the influence of Bakhtin in the Canadian theoretical arena. Papers delivered by Barbara Godard on post-structuralism and feminism, Linda Hutcheon on historiographic metafiction, John Thurston on Susanna Moodie, Sherrill Grace on dialogism in the Canadian novel, and Richard Cavell on dialogue, carnival, James De Mille, and postmodernism all point to an increased awareness of dialogue, heteroglossia, carnival, and ideology in connection with Canadian literature. While in the opening panel, Robert Kroetsch advises readers and writers to "Go to Bakhtin"⁹² to learn dialogue, George Bowering remarks in the closing panel, "When this conference on theory and Canadian literature was announced I hoped I was coming to a conference on Shklovsky and Ricoeur. Instead, I discovered I'd come to a conference on Bakhtin and Lacan."⁹³ These book-end comments point to the increasing dialogue of the Canadian critical scene.

Postmodernism in general and feminism in particular have intensified recent criticism, making criticism (self)-conscious of its own ideological complicity and complexity as well as that of the literary text. As Hutcheon puts it, postmodernism is "aware of its inevitable ideological complicity with the dominant forms of culture that it wishes to challenge."⁹⁴ She goes on in her introduction to The Canadian Postmodern to underline postmodernism's concern with the author-text-audience totality:

⁹² Robert Kroetsch, "Writer Writing, Ongoing Verb," opening panel in Future Indicative 10.

⁹³ George Bowering, "Present Tense: The Closing Panel," in Future Indicative 241.

⁹⁴ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 12.

The issue of complicity that postmodernism raises is one that depends upon a recognition of the complex 'discursive' situation of literature. By this I mean that the 'discourse' of literature consists of a situation wherein the writer, the reader, and the text meet within an entire historical, social, and political, as well as literary, context.⁹⁵

Hutcheon's comments clearly indicate criticism's increasing sense that writing and reading texts are ideological activities, diachronic in all respects. Speaking of the feminist theoretical agenda, Barbara Godard relates that "the impact of feminist scholarship has been to show that gender is a fundamental organizing category of human experience and of the creation of knowledge."⁹⁶ Feminist criticism too has grown to examine the ideological bases of experience, relations, and knowledge within a specific gender framework. Feminist critics have set out to dialogically question and redefine the largely male assumptions underlying not only the Canadian canon but also the critical apparatus that creates that canon. Godard goes on in the same article to speak of Bakhtin's centrifugal role in Canadian criticism: "the appropriation of Bakhtin focuses critical debate on questions of authority and tradition whose established limits and logic are undermined by the marginal carnival rabble, in this case Canadians resisting imperial power in the Anglo-American axis."⁹⁷ Godard and Hutcheon clearly implicate feminism and postmodernism in canon making and breaking, in the dynamic critical debate that is Canadian criticism. Postmodernist theories are themselves implicated in the ideological critical dialogue. As

⁹⁵ Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 16.

⁹⁶ Barbara Godard, "Structuralism/Post-Structuralism: Language, Reality and Canadian Literature," in Future Indicative 32.

⁹⁷ Godard 46.

Francesco Loriggio relates, "Criticism in Canada has always been a plural operation with a double or triple birth as its goal. It has ratified theories or methods, helped establish the literature of the nation and, in intent at any rate, the nation itself."⁹⁸ Criticism as a player in the concrete socio-historic world demonstrates both monologic and dialogic impulses in processes of canonization and re-accentuation.⁹⁹

The issues central to critical dialogue in Canada, therefore, respond well to analysis in the light of Bakhtin's theories. Louis Dudek's essay, "Poetry in English", for example, originally delivered as

⁹⁸ Francesco Loriggio, "The Question of the Corpus: Ethnicity and Canadian Literature," in Future Indicative 57.

⁹⁹ Canon formation, the critical participation in the historical development of Canadian literature, can be seen in two examples from current critical works. Tom Marshall's Harsh and Lovely Land makes no effort to hide its critical assumptions and its basic purposes. Marshall is completely open about what he is attempting: "it is the purpose of the present book to examine the major Canadian poets and the making of a 'distinguished and distinguishable' poetic tradition in English"(xi). Marshall sets out to give shape to the Canadian tradition, but naturally his position is not purely objective. Instead, he orients his canon around a certain understanding of Canada, and this ideological perspective causes Marshall to organize the socio-historical literary past into a series of stages leading to a defining point, to categorize poets into various lines of continuity and progression, to value certain poets as more Canadian than others. Marshall defines the open world of flux as canonical for Canadian literature. He organizes the canon around a picture of the Canadian land and people pervaded by ambivalence and irony, and he characterizes our poetic idiom (with Al Purdy and Margaret Avison at the centre) as serious and ultimately religious (xi-xii). Moreover, Marshall makes this organization of the canon seem inevitable. Defining a poetic idiom as distinctive, Marshall proceeds to argue its inevitability both in the past and in the future (48 and 172). A similar exercise of canon formation is conducted in W. J. Keith's Canadian Literature in English. In this book, a volume in the Longman Literature in English series, Keith sets out to define the Canadian tradition, emphasizing literary forms and their historical development and the growing canon of the main stream in our literature (x). Keith gives value to those writers working within a defined tradition, and his criticism uses as its framework a sense of development through time as progress (74). As with Marshall, this pattern becomes canonical, sanctified by history, and prophetic of the future (117). The literary tradition, suggests Keith, lies embedded in our historical patterns of development, and the canonical, the accurate, and the inevitable pattern of the tradition lies in the quintessentially Canadian stance.

a paper at the symposium in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of Canadian Literature, apparently seeks to summarize the poetic developments of the 1960s, but in fact constitutes a defense of Canadian modernism and an attack on Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, and Al Purdy. The tone of the article is angry, the criticism personal and scathing. It participates vigorously in the debate of ideological positions in Canadian literature and criticism: cosmopolitan versus native, the elitism of poetry versus poetry's folk base, and the modern versus postmodern schools. Essentially, Dudek opposes modernism to what he calls primitivism. Modernism, according to him, views poetic discourse as a special language directed at a special audience; it emphasizes the seriousness of official culture and the human intellect, and it writes primarily out of literature's tradition. Primitivism, as Dudek opposes it to modernism, views poetry as a common or even coarse language aimed at a broad audience; it emphasizes the comedy of our culture (and therefore what is low, unintellectual, and unimportant), often dealing vulgarly with sex; it writes out of instant experience which disparages or disregards literary tradition. Dudek claims that integrity has been the great virtue of modernism. According to his analysis, "the entire modern movement was a retreat from the idols of the marketplace to the private household gods of art and knowledge,"¹⁰⁰ and he goes on to prophesy that "good poetry will return to its minority audience, perhaps a smaller audience than ever before . . .

¹⁰⁰ Louis Dudek, "Poetry in English," The Sixties: Writers and Writing of the Decade, a symposium to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Canadian Literature (Vancouver: U of British Columbia Press, 1969) 114.

the retreat will be to a more esoteric refinement."¹⁰¹ Dudek's argument promotes a poetry of the ivory tower as opposed to a primitive poetry. Throughout his argument, his categories and terms are ideologically charged: they elevate or denigrate, praise or disparage. For him, the crucial question is, "are we advancing in the live modern direction?"¹⁰²

Dudek's harsh criticism of Purdy, Layton, and Cohen is directed against them as primitives. Failing to see them whole or individually, Dudek sees them partially and collectively as anti-tradition, anti-intellect, and anti-technique, and as "popular comedians," belonging to "the school of direct speech, direct relation to life, and reductive realism," for whom "sex . . . is the summum bonum and the source of all positive feeling . . . a very odd conclusion to reach in the history of poetry and of human thought."¹⁰³ In describing them thus, Dudek places them in categories ideologically charged with negative connotations and in so doing monologizes them.

Ironically, however, the qualities for which he as a modernist condemns them, make them, in Bakhtin's terms, praiseworthy. They are not part of the canon of serious, official, high poetry written for the elite audience of the private household, but, in Bakhtinian terms, true poets of the vulgar public marketplace. Their "nostalgia for the mud mixed with a hankering for lost divinity" (a phrase Dudek borrows from Frye)¹⁰⁴ is typical of a Bakhtinian poet's unofficial and folk view of

¹⁰¹ Dudek, "Poetry in English" 116.

¹⁰² Dudek, "Poetry in English" 119.

¹⁰³ Dudek, "Poetry in English" 113.

¹⁰⁴ Dudek, "Poetry in English" 114.

the world. What Dudek calls "their barbarization" is from Bakhtin's perspective a carnivalization of official culture. This last element betrays the reason for Dudek's vituperation, for at stake are ideological positions determining the nature of poetry; his modernism is threatened by a dialogic world view. At the heart of Dudek's article, the centripetal and centrifugal forces acting on poetry in its socio-historical reality are played out.

Criticism of Al Purdy's poetry has itself participated in this dialogue of ideological positions and in the dynamic life of critical discourse itself. While most critics of Purdy have been much more generous than Dudek, still these critics have tended, as may be natural, to monologize Purdy. They have provided official and canonical Purdys in an attempt to understand his polyphonic poetry. There has been on the part of critics an awareness of the fact that neither Purdy nor his poetry can be critically contained. In 15 Canadian Poets, Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce remind us of Purdy's "inexhaustible capacity to surprise and delight, to upset whatever critical expectations his own poems might encourage,"¹⁰⁵ and George Woodcock affirms in Northern Spring that "Purdy stands, in his own idiosyncratic way, quite outside categorization."¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, critics have tended to categorize Purdy.

George Bowering is one of them. In Al Purdy, he reminds us that "any single tack we take on a writer is going to be at least somewhat superficial, and we should especially remember such a thing in Purdy's

¹⁰⁵ Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, note on Purdy, 15 Canadian Poets (Toronto: Oxford U Press, 1970) 290.

¹⁰⁶ Woodcock, Northern Spring 192.

case, because he makes a habit of surprising a reader or critic with unexpected resources or interests."¹⁰⁷ Bowering then goes on to pursue his thesis that "Al Purdy is the world's most Canadian poet."¹⁰⁸ The split-level Purdy, "neither academic nor primitive,"¹⁰⁹ is quintessentially Canadian in his stance: "Canadians are taught to disguise their learning and their sensitivity in order not to appear pushy or pretentious."¹¹⁰ Moreover, Purdy treats Canada as a broad topic, says Bowering, "sardonically, or with antic deprecation, thus proving himself again the quintessential Canadian."¹¹¹ Bowering moulds Purdy into the image of the typical Canadian and the typical Canadian into the image of Purdy. Essentially, Bowering mythologizes Purdy. The first chapter of Bowering's study involves a great deal of his personal reminiscence concerning Purdy, his first meeting with 'the bard,' his first taste of Prince Edward County wine. Bowering takes us on a trip to Purdy's A-frame house, enchanting us with the mood of Ameliasburg and Roblin Lake. This picture becomes a canonical picture of Al Purdy, rural poet, rough around the edges. As Bowering says of Purdy's house and poetry, he "taught himself to build as he taught himself to make poems, and the effects are similar--lots of inexpert finishings made up for by the sense of talent and energy, and honest usefulness."¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ George Bowering, Al Purdy, Studies in Canadian Literature (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970) 1.

¹⁰⁸ Bowering 1.

¹⁰⁹ Bowering 52.

¹¹⁰ Bowering 51.

¹¹¹ Bowering 54.

¹¹² Bowering 15.

Other critics emphasize Purdy's serious side, his dark world-vision. In Major Canadian Authors, David Stouk maintains that "the vision which permeates all of Purdy's poetry is that human life is tragically short and, within the general cosmic framework, without significance."¹¹³ Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu sees Purdy's "attempt to order his consciousness of human reality, and put himself in harmony with the patterns he discerns in the universe"¹¹⁴ as central to his poetry. Still other critics emphasize one of Purdy's many voices over the others. They seek to make one voice canonical. In "The Road to Ameliasburg," John Lye claims that "despite the vivacity, the bluster, and the ironic mask, Purdy's essential stance is sentimental and conservative,"¹¹⁵ and he adds that "the sensitive rather than the tough voice is the one that predominates."¹¹⁶ Lye takes Purdy's many voices in dialogue and his ambivalent stance and orders them; he monologizes Purdy's polyphony.

Related to this canonizing of Purdy, in fact, is the fact that most critics approach Purdy's poetry through traditional stylistics. As Bakhtin reminds us in The Dialogic Imagination, "more often than not, stylistics defines itself as a stylistics of 'private craftsmanship' and ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and

¹¹³ David Stouk, Major Canadian Authors: A Critical Introduction (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1984) 235.

¹¹⁴ Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu, "The Privilege of Finding an Opening in the Past: Al Purdy and the Tree of Experience," Queen's Quarterly 83 (1976): 262.

¹¹⁵ John Lye, "The Road to Ameliasburg," Dalhousie Review 57 (1977): 242.

¹¹⁶ Lye 243.

villages, of social groups, generations and epochs."¹¹⁷ By and large, Purdy's critics have adhered to this stylistics; applying traditional categories, oppositions, and terminology to his poetry, they have tended to talk around the essential Purdy. Although showing a great deal of critical insight into Purdy's poetics, the critics have nonetheless cloaked their discussions in such terminology as romance and realism, objective and subjective. Moreover, such stylistics emphasizes the whole individual, the transcendent, and the serious. Peter Stevens' article "In the Raw: The Poetry of A.W. Purdy" has set the tone, maintaining as he does that "it is the balancing of these opposing forces of romanticism and realism that govern Purdy's development as a poet."¹¹⁸ Such terms as romance and realism, purely literary terms confined to the world of literary language, fail to suggest the socio-historical bases of Purdy's poetry and the ideological positions embodied by his voices.

In addition, traditional stylistics has often blurred the line between Purdy the poet and the voices present in the poem. They have been seen as one and the same; thought and speech are directly connected. In "The Privilege of Finding an Opening in the Past: Al Purdy and the Tree of Experience," Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu claims that "in Purdy's case, moments of self-awareness represent at once burdens that put his spirit in peril, and points of departure towards a mode of existence more authentic than the merely biological one."¹¹⁹ Cohn-

¹¹⁷ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 259.

¹¹⁸ Peter Stevens, "In the Raw: The Poetry of A.W. Purdy," Canadian Literature 28 (1966): 23.

¹¹⁹ Cohn-Sfetcu 262.

Sfetcu pictures the poems as a direct relation of the poet's personal transcendent experience. For many of these critics, the poet speaks directly in his poems. Peter Stevens suggests that "the poet's oscillation comes across not as a wavering indecisive attitude but as a consistent though varied voice, illustrating his personal concerns and his individuality."¹²⁰ The poet's voice reveals itself to be personal, individual, consistent. Similarly, in Al Purdy George Bowering speaks of "the process whereby the poet comes to avail himself of ways to get the individualities of his speech habits into prosody,"¹²¹ and he goes on to maintain that "when Purdy tells a story, one of its major features is the person-and-voice of Al Purdy, hence lyric."¹²² All these critics sense Purdy as a lyric poet of individual voice speaking directly in his poems. Such application of traditional stylistics to the forms of Purdy's poems, the speaking voices, and the poet himself stress a serious, monologic Purdy. His poems become an individual poetic monologue.

Such traditional stylistics also provides a traditional view of the self. This self is a whole, unified, monologic inner being, a soul seeking fulfillment and transcendence, the self of Western individualism. This person is the whole person of the classic canon, as Bakhtin describes him or her with her or his "entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual."¹²³ Critics have in fact long hinted that

¹²⁰ Stevens 27.

¹²¹ Bowering 28.

¹²² Bowering 77.

¹²³ Bakhtin, Rabelais 370.

someone larger than Al Purdy inhabits the poems. George Bowering admits, "but sometimes among the poems there is room for suspicion that the self is a reflection, a reflection of all the images of Al Purdy."¹²⁴ And Margaret Atwood suggests that "there are many overlapping self-created versions of Purdy."¹²⁵ Nevertheless, critics have tended to see these versions of the self as aspects of an individual's personality, of Purdy's self. Atwood speaks of the play of voices as "a display of psychological fancy footwork."¹²⁶ Other critics see the voices as psychological moods of a whole individual, and in these discussions, moreover, Purdy's individual voice is central as the manifestation of an individual. Such a Purdy is a transparent Purdy, clear in every respect to the reader. Perhaps the following comments by David Stouk best represent this particular critical understanding of Purdy:

Purdy's popularity with a general readership has much to do with the engaging speaking voice in his poetry--a familiar, self-deprecating voice that combines sober, ecclesiastical truths with a great lust for living. The poet's easy-going personality is always on display in his work--in the colloquial language and broken sentences, and particularly in the openly subjective viewpoint.¹²⁷

A speaking voice as the manifestation of an openly displayed personality in openly subjective poems--these are the terms and categories applied to Purdy's poetry repeatedly. It is not so much that the insights of these critics are flawed but that the critical tools are inadequate for

¹²⁴ Bowering 101.

¹²⁵ Margaret Atwood, Second Words (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) 60. The Purdy selves as given voice in the poems are larger, are shifting, open, and becoming rather than fixed or whole.

¹²⁶ Atwood 60.

¹²⁷ Stouk 230.

comprehending the socio-historical complexity of Purdy's poetry in its totality of author, text, and reader.

One final way in which traditional stylistics monologizes Purdy is through emphasizing the serious Purdy over the comic. Critics have long recognized the humour in Purdy's poems. Some have seen it as secondary or peripheral; few have seen it as essential; none have comprehended it in its truly carnivalesque and dialogic character. As early as Creative Writing in Canada (1961), Desmond Pacey notes of Purdy that "his forte seems to be humour, especially satire, and it is probably on his willingness to explore this medium more fully that his future reputation will depend."¹²⁸ Critics writing since Pacey have often followed his lead in at least noting the comic in Purdy. W.J. Keith writes that Purdy has "reminded us (and it is something about which we need to be continually reminded) that poetry does not have to be solemn."¹²⁹ And Tom Marshall claims that Purdy "wants to present a vision which is 'comic' in the largest sense, since it expresses great faith in life and the continuance of life."¹³⁰ Perhaps the most perceptive comments, however, come from Mike Doyle and Margaret Atwood. Doyle warns us that "in entering Purdy's world it is hazardous to forget the necessary existence of either the shit-house or the sky,"¹³¹ and Atwood maintains that "as always, one has to swallow Purdy whole, taking the horsing around and the hyperbole along with the transcendently good poetry."¹³² Both of them point to the whole Purdy, although Atwood

¹²⁸ Pacey 246.

¹²⁹ Keith 98.

¹³⁰ Marshall 97.

¹³¹ Doyle 18.

¹³² Atwood 97-98.

clearly tolerates the comic only in order to deal with the serious. Nevertheless, all of these critics fail to pursue these points in detail: the comic is noted without being explored. The carnival in Purdy, the dialogic blending of high and low, is missed.¹³³

Instead, critics of Purdy for the most part participate in the official culture of seriousness, for traditional stylistics envisions poetry as a serious business. Criticism becomes a form of praising the high and serious, while poetry itself becomes equated with knowledge, power, and cultural status, that is with official culture, a culture of hierarchies and canons. Such is the world of official culture. Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, for example, claim that "Purdy's best verse is predominantly elegaic,"¹³⁴ and Cohn-Sfetcu sees Purdy's moments of self-awareness as "points of departure towards a mode of existence more authentic than the merely biological."¹³⁵ This criticism praises the solemn and the transcendent as opposed to the comic and physical. Still other critics criticize Purdy's humour and folk consciousness for detracting from the poem's value. Peter Stevens suggests that "humour and words for shock effect too often become a double-headed sledgehammer destroying some of the delicacy of the observation,"¹³⁶ and Ants Reigo laments the fact that "at the moments in Purdy's poems when we feel he is most open to the spiritual or mystical dimension, to any kind of transcendental or mystical experience, he turns away, denying

¹³³ Bakhtin tells us that "laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man" (Rabelais 66). Traditional stylistics misses this point.

¹³⁴ Geddes and Bruce 291.

¹³⁵ Cohn-Sfetcu 262.

¹³⁶ Stevens 26.

his poetry the kind of depth it most lacks."¹³⁷ Such critics as readers are trained through traditional stylistics for a serious poetry. The carnival of Purdy's poetry is largely foreign to them: it is simply the joking of an individual. Perhaps these words spoken by Purdy in his interview with Alan Twigg should provide the last (or beginning) word: "There's so much to read, so much to enjoy. That's the reason to read poetry, to enjoy it."¹³⁸

This critical dialogue provides background voices for our discussion of Purdy's own poems. Critics of Purdy and more largely of Canadian literature and culture thus participate individually in a literary dialogism: they repeatedly accentuate the polyphonic possibilities of Canadian culture itself, its potential for literary dialogue and continual becoming, and it is this larger literary history out of which writers create their texts, texts which in turn create this culture. In his preface to Poetry 62, Eli Mandel relates that "a lively poetry shatters limitations. It refuses to be contained by officialdom (even by the most insidious officialdom of all: the orthodoxies of selection, reputation, respectability and success) for the simple reason that its life is change."¹³⁹ In critical and cultural terms, Purdy's poetry demonstrates this life of change, the ability to break out of cultural monologisms, stereotypes, and canons, to bring the history of Canadian poetry up to date over tavern draught or wild grape wine. Bakhtin's historical poetics, his emphasis on literature's reflection of and participation in the world of ideological becoming, provides an

¹³⁷ Ants Reigo, "The Purdy Poem," Canadian Literature 79 (1978): 131.

¹³⁸ Purdy, "One of a Kind," with Twigg 9.

¹³⁹ Mandel, "Preface to Poetry 62," Making of Modern Poetry 199.

angle of entry into the Purdy poem as it lives its life in this socio-historic world. As the tangential author, the polyphonic text, the organizing chronotopes, the ideological world views at play, and the responsive participation of the reader are explored, Bakhtin's aesthetics of the dynamic interplay of author, text, and reader will suggest the life found in the Purdy poem. In Bakhtin's notes for a revised edition of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, he insists on "the impermissibility of second-hand resolution" and asserts that "my word remains in the continuing dialogue, where it will be heard, answered and interpreted."¹⁴⁰ Here we have listened and continued the dialogue. We have entered the polyphonic fray. Let the reading begin (again).

¹⁴⁰ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 300.

Chapter 2

In Search of Plain Purdy: The Jewelled Hunchback in the Cyclops' Cave

One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs. Heraclitus

The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth. The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real. Michel Foucault

Tucked away on the back flap of the dust jacket for North of Summer is a small square photograph of 'Alfred Purdy' at work. Purdy sits shirtless on an old sofa, shoelaces untied, cigarette dangling from mouth, while he hovers over a typewriter perched on a small table, index finger of right hand about to press a key. All that is missing is the subtitle, "author at work." Of course, what we see simultaneously is and is not the author. The snapshot provides an image of a living man in the act of creation, at the point of intersection between living and writing. And for us as readers, this may be only one of many versions of Al Purdy that we encounter. Indeed, we soon discover that the author's position in relation to his writing is one based on paradox and filled with ambivalence. In all his writings, Purdy dialogizes in a Bakhtinian sense his own status as author: he carnivalizes his own authority. Purdy's prose writings and his poems themselves create an anti-myth of poetry and creativity. What we as readers come to hear is the careful craftsman behind all the images of the slapdash poet, the author

tangential to the poems he has written, poems seeking to establish authenticity rather than authority.

Al Purdy's prose writings offer us the most direct glimpse of the man as author and provide us with clues concerning his author position and poetics. In introductions, notes, and prefaces to volumes, in essays and reviews, and in memoirs, interviews, and letters, we find Al Purdy ostensibly as author. What we get is not a monologically whole author but a complex carnival figure revising himself and traditional poetics. We soon learn that Purdy considers himself to be more a craftsman than a divinely inspired singer: poetry is craft as well as calling. In a 1976 interview, Purdy rejects the understanding of the poet as unacknowledged legislator of humankind, "as if we were somehow priests, or privileged," and later in the same interview he explicitly aligns the poet with other craftsmen and women.¹ In another interview with Alan Twigg, Purdy repeats this point in the context of his own development. Asked whether the talent for writing is something with which we are born, Purdy answers both no and yes, that is, he answers dialogically: "It's a craft and I changed myself. Mind you, there are qualities of mind which you have to have. I don't know what they are."² In this simple statement, Purdy reveals his emphasis both on craft and on a gift he is too limited to understand (he dialogizes his own ability), and he suggests that the author as craftsman or woman is open, continually changing and becoming.³

¹ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright 56.

² Purdy, "One of a Kind," with Twigg 7.

³ As a craftsman, moreover, Purdy is serious about his craft. In the "Postscript" found in North of Summer (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), Purdy makes the following comment:

Purdy's motivation for writing the poems equally dialogizes his author position. In the "Autobiographical Introduction" to the New Canadian Library selection of his poems, Purdy relates that he started writing 'poems' for two reasons, first because he was not receiving enough attention from playing football, and second because the school newspaper paid him one dollar for a poem.⁴ This anti-myth of the poet's origins and his motives for writing poetry, this suggestion of sheer ego and material greed, undercuts the standard myth of poetic inspiration and well-earned poverty. Moreover, this serio-comical myth is one of Purdy's truthful lies. Personal ego and supporting himself through writing are important to him, but his attitude is ambivalent. Getting beyond these initial motives, Purdy goes on to suggest that he writes in order to learn. The poet is not the all-knowing creator imparting his knowledge to the reader; rather, he is a person re-creating and sharing discovery. In "A Sort of Intro" from Bursting into Song, Purdy admits, "I write because I do not know, or know very little."⁵ The poem's creation is an act of discovery. As Purdy says in a letter to George Woodcock, "I discovered what was important thru

I've worked on the poems for more than a year. Every time they seemed finished and done with, another thought would come. I hope this book is the final exorcism--or do I? There are about fifteen Arctic poems not included here, either because they were bad, or didn't fit into what now seems to me a pattern and integrated whole (84).

This passage emphasizes among other things Purdy's concern for the quality of the poems. We find here Purdy's relentless working over of a poem, his commitment to revision, his openness to new insights, and his desire for wholeness in openness. Such a passage in fact dispels the image of the careless poet created by the poems themselves, the image of the poet dashing off his poems of instant experience.

⁴ Al Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," The Poems of Al Purdy, NCL Original 10 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 6.

⁵ Al Purdy, "A Sort of Intro," Bursting into Song: An Al Purdy Omnibus (Windsor, Ont.: Black Moss Press, 1982) 11.

poems."⁶ This act of discovery underlies the pure joy Purdy feels in writing poems. Again and again in these prose writings, Purdy as author underlines the fact that writing poems has simply been a joy for him; poems have been lived.

Beneath this joy in discovery, this pleasure in finding meaning in daily living and other people, lies Purdy's desire for continued living in the future. Discussing his concept of great time, Bakhtin reflects that "the author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present," but he goes on to add that "subsequent times liberate him from this captivity."⁷ The openness of the text's discourse (and by necessity of the author's position) to the future determines the continued life of the text and the nature of that life. Purdy as author is acutely aware of the poem's life in time. In his introduction to A Handful of Earth, Purdy strikes to the paradoxical heart of the matter, suggesting that sheer ego has been replaced:

. . . that original reason for writing has been succeeded by others, among them a raging desire for some kind of personal excellence, whose validity would endure against time. And yet that is a paradox, since I think a poem's validity belongs, principally, to its own particular moment of creation. Therefore, all are a series of moments emerging from their own time. At least they emerge as their own kind of truth, if the impulses that created them were valid in the first place.⁸

Purdy points to the paradox of the poem's creation, its participation in the moment and its openness to the future. Such poems defeat time's

⁶ Purdy to Woodcock, 24 May 1971, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 76. The emphasis is Purdy's.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: U of Texas Press, 1986) 5.

⁸ Purdy, introduction, A Handful of Earth (Coatsworth, Ont.: Black Moss Press, 1977) 8.

work on the flesh and blood author and his own living. As Purdy states in an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, he wishes to be remembered for the poems themselves: "They replace me in my absence."⁹ Purdy's motivations for writing poems are clearly serio-comical.

Purdy's attitude towards readers in these prose writings demonstrates a similar openness. Speaking one moment of the pure selfish joy involved in the poem's creation, the next moment Purdy affirms the independent life of the poem. For Purdy, poems are essentially gifts to readers. The poems in North of Summer, he tells us, are like a set of binoculars for viewing the Arctic from our southern world, and he adds, "I'd prefer that the reader felt them to be an extension of his or her own eyes and mind."¹⁰ Purdy as author reveals himself to be acutely aware of his readers, and not so much in an official sense as in a carnival sense. Purdy speaks to a folk audience, in the broadest sense of the word. In the introduction to Bursting into Song, he suggests that a good poem has a life of its own, and makes friends and enemies (meaning that the poem is involved in a polemic with readers), and he goes on to outline his understanding of the author-reader relationship:

To my mind, what a poem ought to do is cause the reader to feel and think, balanced on nearly the same moment as myself when I wrote it. And I'd prefer to be understood with a minimum of mental strain by people as intelligent or more so than myself. I'd like them to hear the poem aloud when they read it on the page, which some people can do with poems they like.

⁹ Al Purdy, "Al Purdy: The Phony, the Realistic and the Genuine," with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, In Their Own Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers (Toronto: Anansi, 1984) 145.

¹⁰ Purdy, postscript, North of Summer 83-84.

Ideally, I'd like to say a thing so well that if the reader encounters a passage in a poem of mine which has much the same rhythm and ordinariness of this prose passage he or she is reading now: that that passage would suddenly glow like coloured glass in a black and white world. Which is probably a hopeless ambition.¹¹

In this lengthy passage, Purdy reveals several key elements in his author position. The poem for him re-creates for the reader a particular moment, a moment to be contemplated and felt without unnecessary strain from deliberate confusion that shuts out readers. For Purdy, the poem is an oral phenomenon, heard speech at its best, that bursts into life, and for Purdy, this hope is also a matter of defeat.

This ambivalent sense of the poem's life and death also appears in Purdy's tropes for the creative process and for poems themselves, tropes repeated throughout the prose texts. These tropes are carnival tropes, metaphors and similes filled with ambivalence. The creative act involves balancing: the author walks a tightrope or performs a juggling act. In the introduction to A Handful of Earth, Purdy discusses the poem "Starlings," explaining that "it illustrates a philosophical balancing act, the mental juggling we all perform with good and bad, the bearable and unbearable we must come to terms with in order to survive a short time longer."¹² Living, writing poems, and poems themselves follow the same carnival pattern, the same active coming to grips with life's ambivalence. This ambivalence is further deepened by Purdy's dialogization of the creative authorial act through tropes of the grotesque body. In his preface to the Collected Poems, Purdy speaks of

¹¹ Purdy, introduction, Bursting into Song 11-12.

¹² Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 7.

his connection with other poets, saying that "the same bug that bit those others also took a chunk out of me, infecting all of us with this habit, craft, art, or whatever it is."¹³ The creative impulse is a bodily virus, an illness, a joyful and communal disease shared by poets. In his correspondence with Charles Bukowski, Purdy becomes highly excremental in his descriptions of creativity. These letters are filled with scatological imagery, partly one feels as a self-conscious reaction to the discourse of his listener. Purdy compliments Bukowski on his "lovely lovely line of shit."¹⁴ In a 1965 letter, he asks, "Shall I just meander and shit with my face or really say something? Sometimes I can't tell the difference."¹⁵ Three years later, Purdy expresses his carnival sensibility even more graphically with diction both sexual and expletive, saying to Bukowski, "I'm gettin so fuckin literary I can hardly stand myself--words comin outa my cock at night and the wine nearly done."¹⁶ Such cussing and carnival images are highly ambivalent. We sense an element of posturing on the part of the author; he determinedly plays with the boundary between life and words, introducing an element of ham acting. Furthermore, creativity comes to be associated with the human orifices and grotesque bodily functions, mouth with anus and penis, with ingesting wine and excreting dung, and poems become excrement, urine, or sperm. All these tropes for writing and words are carnivalizations of our accepted tropes for poems, for expression becomes connected with lower, unofficial consciousness.

¹³ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xv.

¹⁴ Purdy to Bukowski, late 1964, Bukowski/Purdy Letters 16.

¹⁵ Purdy to Bukowski, 15 July 1965, Bukowski/Purdy Letters 90.

¹⁶ Purdy to Bukowski, May 1968, Bukowski/Purdy Letters 107.

If we return momentarily to the introduction to A Handful of Earth, we see another twist to this carnival sense of creativity. Poems, says Purdy, "are my umbilical cord with the world and with other people, a two-way cord."¹⁷ In the dynamic of this trope, the author becomes both foetus and mother and womb, as do the world and other people with whom the poet comes in contact. Author, poem, and world interact, suggests Purdy, in one of the most fundamentally biological and most mysterious processes. Immediately after the umbilical cord trope, Purdy paraphrases Yeats's definition of the poem as a quarrel with oneself, agreeing, and he adds, "with inner arguments resolved or not in poems."¹⁸ Creativity, suggests Purdy, is rooted in polemic and internal dialogue. He hints at this obliquely in an interview with Gary Geddes, where he maintains that "there ought to be a quality in a good poet beyond any analysis, the part of his mind that leaps from one point to another, sideways, backwards, ass-over-the-electric-kettle."¹⁹ The tangential author creates through tangents, through sideways jumps that are not logical but dialogical. With all these various tropes, Purdy dialogizes his own author position.

In these prose writings, Purdy also displays a dialogic attitude towards literary history and influence. As author, he neither seals himself off from this past nor does he worship it. Still in the introduction to A Handful of Earth, Purdy extends the carnival balancing trope to all of literature's realm. Speaking of Frye's dictum that poems are created from other poems (suggesting interesting connections

¹⁷ Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 8.

¹⁸ Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 8.

¹⁹ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 69.

with Harold Bloom), Purdy agrees in part, "in the sense that if other people's poems hadn't been written you couldn't have written your own," and he goes on to maintain that "what each of us writes balances and juggles the whole history of literature, and we are for that moment the 'midland navel-stone' of earth."²⁰ Purdy acknowledges a partial debt to other poets and to literary history, but then proceeds to carnivalize that debt, picturing the writer first as the clown prince of literature and then as the earth's central point. The author becomes again an umbilical cord, with the earth itself as womb and grotesque body. But Purdy does not rest with this analysis of the poet's possession of the past; he proceeds to open the authorial vista into the future, claiming that "large as the field of created literature is, it scarcely touches upon the expanding human consciousness."²¹ Such is the author position of a poet fully conscious of the literary past and the possibilities of the future. Such is a carnival position.

With this position in mind, we can understand Purdy's attitude to form and his criticism of Layton, Black Mountain, and the Tish group of poets. In the Geddes interview, Purdy repeatedly rejects writing by predetermined rules. He tells Geddes (concerning the use of contemporary idiom) that it all depends on the poem,²² and he gives much the same answer concerning open-ended form. He answers, "the open-endedness is both device and philosophy, but it doesn't bar formalism if I feel like it: i.e., I reject nothing. No form, that is, if I feel

²⁰ Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 8.

²¹ Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 8.

²² Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 68.

like it and the poem agrees."²³ Purdy's forms are open and he is open to form; the author in some sense carries on a dialogue with the poem regarding its form. In the same interview, Purdy criticizes Layton for his monologic attitudes, Creeley for limiting himself to one voice and style, and a group of other Canadian poets for adopting one way of writing. Undoubtedly, Purdy has in mind here the Tish group, poets he has criticized repeatedly. In a CV/II interview, Purdy insists that "any limited school that says this is the best or only way of writing, is absolutely dead wrong,"²⁴ and in another interview he tells Alan Twigg that these poets feel "they can ignore a thousand years of writing poems, not read what comes before."²⁵ Purdy clearly displays his openness to literary history and to the possibilities it presents to the author, and rejects any narrow, elitist, or authoritarian interpretation of that history.

Indeed, his prose comments place literary influence itself within the parentheses of renewing laughter. Speaking of the author's position on the boundary, Bakhtin suggests in The Dialogic Imagination that "the realm of literature and more broadly of culture (from which literature cannot be separated) constitutes the indispensable context of the literary work and of the author's position within it, outside of which it is impossible to understand either the work or the author's intentions reflected in it."²⁶ In the introduction to Being Alive, Purdy gives a lengthy list of other poets who inhabit his poems and ends

²³ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 70.

²⁴ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright 55.

²⁵ Purdy, "One of a Kind," with Twigg 9.

²⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 256.

by admitting that everyone influences him.²⁷ And in his "Autobiographical Introduction" to the NCL selection of his poems, he tells the anecdote of attempting to change his literary tastes out of a sense of inferiority to the fifteen-year-old genius Curt Lang: "Working in a Vancouver mattress factory I read Dylan Thomas on the interurban going to and from work, T.S. Eliot at the bootleggers, and Irving Layton while drinking home brew."²⁸ Such comments, and others, reveal an author position free from anxiety. In an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, for instance, Purdy relates, "writers begin to bore me after a short time, all those egos jostling together."²⁹ Indeed, Purdy sees influence as creative. In the Geddes interview, Purdy relates that "most of the time, when you read someone else's poem, it gives you your own thoughts on the same subject, which is more valid, I think."³⁰ In other words, the poet's relationship to other poems is dialogic. Purdy pictures his relationship to literary history itself as dialogic. As Dennis Lee suggests in his afterword to the Collected Poems, "it is hard to resist the conclusion that he was trying, however obscurely, to reinvent modern poetry on his own terms."³¹

Purdy's open and ambivalent author position is further deepened in these prose writings by his own attitude to himself, particularly as he discusses origins, whether of himself, poems, or poetry. His attitude ranges from tongue-in-cheek to serio-comical hyperbole to subtle

²⁷ Al Purdy, introduction, Being Alive: Poems 1958-78 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978) 11.

²⁸ Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 7.

²⁹ Purdy, "Phony, Realistic, Genuine," with Meyer and O'Riordan 144.

³⁰ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 72.

³¹ Dennis Lee, afterword, The Collected Poems of Al Purdy, by Al Purdy, ed. Russell Brown (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) 372.

carnivalization. In his "Autobiographical Introduction" we find an anti-myth of a poet's development. Purdy speaks of his poetic origins, his beginning as an "egotistical show-off" suffering from "messy puppy-love of Carman."³² He then speaks of writing "absolute Crap" during the Depression and the War.³³ Later in Vancouver, he says, he changed his reading habits "on the advice of a drunken Vancouver bookseller."³⁴ After outlining these extensive changes in reading, Purdy concludes, "as a result of all this self-improvement, the style of crap I was writing began to change."³⁵ The excremental imagery and Bacchanalian overtones lie at the heart of this dialogization of origins and development. We find here the discourse of self-help, the language (tongue-in-cheek) of how-to books. Purdy turns himself essentially into a folk figure. Highly conscious of his own literary past, he seeks to undercut himself at almost every turn. In his introduction to Milton Acorn's I've Tasted My Blood, for instance, Purdy relates that he was in Montreal in the 1950s having decided he was a genius. As he says, 'all I had to do was turn out the stuff like sausage, Montreal being a good place to make sausages and drink beer.'³⁶ In the introduction to Being Alive, Purdy carries on a dialogue with this earlier self, saying, "Look, if I didn't write well then it's your fault now; on the other hand, if I write well now, it isn't your fault then; I guess we're both irresponsible. See what I mean?"³⁷ The twists and turns of the poet's (il)logic, his

³² Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 6.

³³ Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 6.

³⁴ Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 6.

³⁵ Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 7.

³⁶ Al Purdy, introduction, I've Tasted My Blood, by Milton Acorn (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1969) vii.

³⁷ Purdy, introduction, Being Alive 11.

carnival self-deprecation, and his serio-comical claims for irresponsibility all underline Purdy's dialogic attitude to his own origins and becoming as a poet.

Purdy's understanding of the origins of poetry itself further dialogizes the author's authority. The poem's origin, Purdy's prose suggests, is in carnival. Thus, we remember the trope of poem as umbilical cord connecting with unknown sources. The poem connects the poet with the grotesque body, the large womb and source. He feeds through the poem, feeds on ambivalent life and death. In the "Postscript" to North of Summer, Purdy in another carnival trope connects his poems with the howling dogs of the Arctic. These dogs, whom he first sees on islands running and howling in packs, become an emblem for the poet, for the impetus for the poem connects with the origin of the husky howls, howls that reflect the human condition. In the following passage, he relates their carnival lives:

Outside the tent forty or fifty dogs congregated, howling and fighting and crapping. I'd wake from sleep to see their bodies silhouetted against the canvas outside, a few inches away, and think they were trying to get into the tent. In fact, all they did was piss over it. But sometimes, as if at a signal, they'd all howl together, beginning with a small bark or whine, and swelling into such vibrating lunacy you had to clap hands over your ears.³⁶

These dogs are carnival brutes imposing themselves on the poet's imagination. The emphasis again is on howling and defecating, on the body's orifices, as they shower the poet's tent with a parodic and ambivalent blessing; their song is a vibrating lunacy perhaps not unlike the poet's, "Tom O'Bedlam's song of an arctic madhouse" as he calls it

³⁶ Purdy, postscript, North of Summer 82.

elsewhere³⁹. Towards the end of the postscript, Purdy remarks that of so much he will remember of this trip, these dogs will certainly stand out, "the hungry howling crapping huskies of Kikistan," and he adds, "I shall think of them occasionally while having long long thoughts in a small cubicle on Roblin Lake."⁴⁰ Purdy connects the poems and these dogs, inspiration and defecation, the imagination and the human orifices. Indeed, we learn, Purdy's original plan was to entitle the volume Dogsong, so strong is the connection felt by the poet. In typical polemical fashion, however, he would not give the dogs this satisfaction.

At the other end of Purdy's becoming life as an author, two decades later, we find a continued portrayal of poetry's origins in the carnivalesque. In the preface to the Collected Poems, Purdy locates the poem's source in the collective unconscious, in the elves in the unconscious, and these elves are carnival rogues and clowns. Purdy muses that "perhaps there are small elves in the head, privileged guests living there and continually busy with their own affairs." He goes on to suggest that "the only connection the conscious mind has with them is when they permit a collaboration, which perhaps neither the conscious nor the unconscious was capable of alone."⁴¹ The poem originates not in 'divine inspiration' but in an internal collaboration, a genuine internal dialogue between consciousness and unconsciousness. And these mischievous elves of the mind cannot be programmed and determined;

³⁹ Al Purdy, "North of Summer: Arctic Poems and Prose by A.W. Purdy," Beaver (summer 1966): 25.

⁴⁰ Purdy, postscript, North of Summer 83.

⁴¹ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xvi.

instead, they often force themselves upon the poet in ways he had not expected, in ways he did not desire. These elves are polemical, and though their appearance can only be imagined, Purdy is sure that they dress in odd costumes and look in the mirror at themselves. They are clowns, ham actors, rogues and fools whose origins trace their way back to the beginning of humankind. Finally, Purdy admits, their attitude to himself, to this "human with the ludicrous pretensions in whose head they reside," is both gentle and sardonic.⁴² Their attitude is ambivalent, filled with both love and mocking laughter. Such is Purdy's understanding of poetry's origins, and such is the understanding that both dialogizes and determines his own author position in relation to his poems.

Purdy's sense of himself as ludicrous continually shines through in his prose writings. He repeatedly pictures himself as an unofficial carnival author who desires not authorial power and stature but carnival dialogue. Moreover, Purdy the author is not one self but many selves-- amateur poet, eternal fool, lecherous or drunken husband. He is the man who as a child read the Bible from cover to cover for the begats and their carnival connotations,⁴³ and he is also the author who in the preface to his Collected Poems can say that he still feels like the "eternal amateur."⁴⁴ The same author who hides a bottle of liquor up his sleeve (along with an arm) in case of prohibition in the Arctic⁴⁵ also relates a decade later his adventures in Russia, getting drunk at

⁴² Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xvii.

⁴³ Al Purdy, Morning and It's Summer: A Memoir (Dunvegan, Ont.: Quadrant Editions, 1983) 20.

⁴⁴ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xviii.

⁴⁵ Purdy, postscript, North of Summer 81.

one writer's reception after another, the country bumpkin from Ameliasburg.⁴⁶ In fact, we already hear this carnival attitude towards the self at work in Emu, Remember!. At the end of this chapbook, we find a note on the author, an anti-myth of his authority:

Born, once upon a time, in a mythological village called Wooler; mythological because the same village could not now be found. Height and weight, tall and heavy, but unlikely to cause the collapse of athletic stadiums. Education from institutions, nil; from approx. 10,000 books, considerably more; from living, a great deal more. Military career, checkered. Religion, show me. Marital status, almost. Disposition, cloudy and variable. Present occupation, scribbling. Hope for the future, to write one novel.⁴⁷

The poet pictures himself as a scribbler, not a poet at all. Indeed, the note suggests he would rather write a novel, and it clearly places the author in the realm of unofficial writing.

He turns himself into a folk poet, and he becomes the wise fool. In his "Autobiographical Introduction," he insists precisely on these carnival roots, saying, "I had always been afflicted with stupidity, although not consciously aware of the root cause of all this inexplicable happiness."⁴⁸ Al Purdy makes himself into the author as happy fool, as clown prince of poetry. Such is the author position he occupies with regards to his poems. He is the author who continually dialogizes himself, and we hear such a process in the following passage which ends his preface to the Collected Poems:

I have enjoyed being alive and writing a great deal, being ashamed and prideful, making mistakes and stumbling on answers before I knew the questions existed. In a world so

⁴⁶ Al Purdy, introduction, Moths in the Iron Curtain, (Sutton West, Ont.: Paget Press, 1979) xxi.

⁴⁷ Al Purdy, note, Emu, Remember!, Fiddlehead Poetry Books (Fredericton, N.B.: U of New Brunswick, 1956) 17.

⁴⁸ Purdy, "Autobiographical Introduction," Poems of Purdy 7.

abundant with good and bad things, in which my own unique lighted space of human consciousness burns and flickers, at this moment when the past and future converge to pinpoint now, at an age when the body says, 'Slow down, you silly bugger,' there are still important things in my life, and still poems I want to write.

Which is a very long sentence: it makes me thirsty for a beer or two. And it occurs to me that if I were aboard a rowboat floating in the middle of all the beer I've drunk in a lifetime, I'd never be able to see the shore.

At which point the high gods of serious things throw up their hands in horror.⁴⁹

In the flow of this prose passage, Purdy demonstrates the serio-comical nature of being alive and writing poems, of being a flesh and blood author with successes and failures in the vast stretches of time. He dialogizes his own seriousness with a carnival shower of beer-urine, and he counters the high gods of seriousness with the low carnival gods of folk foolishness.⁵⁰

Such prose writings also indicate Purdy's consciousness of being an author writing in time, writing and revising himself. Already in

⁴⁹ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xviii.

⁵⁰ This unofficial attitude also becomes apparent in remarks Purdy makes about the content and nature of his poems. In a 1969 letter to George Woodcock, Purdy speaks about the philosophy he has "regurgitated ass-backwards into poems" (13 Jan. 1969, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 36). His poems, this statement suggests, are filled with carnivalized philosophy. Similarly, in an essay entitled "Some Opinions on Canadian Poetry," Purdy defines the human being who writes poetry and is in poetry as "a 24-hour person, characterized by his best and worst activities, sex that includes love, life that includes death" (Creative Literature in Canada Symposium, Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 1974: 13). In the context of this perception of our humanity and the author's relationship to it, we can understand Purdy's statements in the introduction to Love in a Burning Building and in the note to Sex and Death. In the note, he claims that "sex and death must always include love and life" (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973: 4). As author, Purdy seeks to incorporate into his poems the ambivalent fullness of being human. Similarly, in "On Being Romantic" Purdy explains that "it isn't just the euphoric dreams of lovers I want to evoke, it's the ridiculousness inherent in the whole comic disease. And the mordant happiness of despair as well" (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970: 10). Love and lost love are serio-comical; they are carnival diseases of living and dying.

1966 Purdy speaks of change, process, and becoming in relation to the self. Speaking with Gary Geddes, Purdy notes "in my own case I think of a continual becoming and a changing and a moving."⁵¹ As a person and an author, Purdy occupies a world of flux; he occupies time in a dynamic fashion, changing, moving into the future through an open-ended present. Purdy expands this thought, suggesting that at any point in time, a person is not fixed: "I don't think that a man is consistent; he contradicts himself at every turn."⁵² Purdy, as such a person and such an author, betrays continual change and continual inconsistency in the sense of a temporal and internal dialogue. The author lives the paradox of simultaneously being and not being himself. And such complex being opens into the future; for Purdy as author, the exploration continues.⁵³

Perhaps Purdy best expresses the connection between this continual becoming and the poems in the introduction to Being Alive. The poems in this selection, he tells us, written over a twenty year period, involve his many selves. These twenty years have been ones of change, of becoming, so radical that Purdy feels he would not recognize "that former self who wrote such reams of doggerel for a self-published book in 1944."⁵⁴ Purdy carnivalizes the earlier versions of himself, and in

⁵¹ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 66-67.

⁵² Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 68.

⁵³ Indeed, the exploration is reflected in the form of these prose writings themselves. In his "Autobiographical Introduction," Purdy repeatedly turns back on his own parodic discourse, dialogizing his own wholeness. At one point he remarks, "I suppose the above is facetious, but not entirely so," and elsewhere he admits, "I know all this sounds like making jokes, but it isn't, not entirely" (Poems of Purdy 6-7). Purdy revises his own comic exaggerations, his authorial hyperboles, suggesting instead the complexity of being and discourse, suggesting the serio-comical borderland occupied by himself as author.

⁵⁴ Purdy, introduction, Being Alive 11.

his scorn for this earlier self, he expresses a polemical and dialogic attitude to his own position as author. Paradoxically, his blame of that past self becomes praise of his present self. Purdy then goes on to examine the troublesome boundary between those many authors and those many poems:

I've enjoyed writing these poems (and the earlier ones too);
I've lived some of them, inhabited them like a dwelling
place. Many are autobiographical, although I think that
even these are neither truth nor lies: they are either
authentic or not as poems. They reflect, and sometimes
distort, many moods and aspects of myself, and the world I
live in.

But they are a different reality from life, having
assumed an independence from me, and I look at the rather
absurd and fictional man who wrote them with amazement and
curiosity. He was passionate and impulsive; whereas, I seem
to myself calm and reasoning. He is a young man, full of
dreams, fantasies, idealism and cynicism; whereas, I am
middle-aged, seem to myself fairly stupid at times, and will
not pass this way again.⁵⁵

Poems are vessels or homes for Purdy's many selves, yet not the self in any simple autobiographical sense. Poems are re-creations of those selves, and as such involve reflection, distortion, exaggeration and hyperbole. The original creating author is both absent from and present in the poems, and he hides behind carnival masks while performing his balancing and juggling acts; the many Al Purdys are both revealed by and concealed in the poems. We must remember, as well, that the Al Purdy we meet as author in these prose writings is partially masked, is both revealed and concealed. Here Purdy is still a construction of words; here he is refracted through genre, through ostensibly 'authorial' genres. Whether speaking through the introduction, the note, the

⁵⁵ Purdy, introduction, Being Alive 11.

memoir, the interview, or the letter, Purdy remains tangential to the text, speaking through the genre's form.

ii.

The Tangential Discourse of the Dramatic Lyric

This complex author position is made manifest in the poems themselves. While Purdy is tangential to his poems, he functions as their creator, and we can 'read' this creativity in a variety of ways. In Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, Bakhtin explains that "to see and comprehend the author of a work means to see and comprehend another, alien consciousness and its world, another subject."⁵⁶ Our meeting of the author in his or her utterance is a dialogic meeting. Moreover, adds Bakhtin, the text is an author's speech act, "but he creates it from heterogeneous, as it were, alien utterances."⁵⁷ Poems themselves are authorial utterances made of indirect speech, and because he or she masks him or herself behind others' words, the author becomes difficult to locate in words. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin relates that the author is tangential to the text, as a flesh and blood person beyond his or her text but also present as creator of the text, and "although he is located outside the chronotopes represented in his work, he is as it were tangential to them."⁵⁸ The author as creator does not inhabit the world re-created in the text; rather, he or she stands on the border between the world of the text and the everyday world beyond it. The 'I' of the text can never be in any simple sense the author. Nevertheless, the relationship between the author on the boundary and the text itself

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 111.

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 115.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 254.

occupies a central position in terms of understanding the aesthetics and dynamics of the work, and in The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, Bakhtin maintains that we must deal with the creating consciousness "in its objective manifestations."⁵⁹ The author refracts meaning through his or her created texts, and one such objective manifestation is found in Purdy's organization of individual volumes. In volume titles, poem arrangement, and dominant tropes we come to know obliquely Purdy as author. We come to see how his emphases have changed from volume to volume.

Purdy's decisions concerning volume titles provide immediately discernible indications of his author position, of his development as a writer, for we sense his changing and growing concerns and emphases as a poet from The Enchanted Echo (1944) through to Piling Blood (1984). The connotations of these two titles themselves suggest the fundamental change in Purdy from poetry as Romantic enchantment and echo of the divine to poetry as involvement in flesh and blood. If we look at other volume titles, we can discern similar suggestions of change, similar indications from Purdy as author how he views his own poems and poetics. With Pressed on Sand (1955), we sense a fundamental turning away from the essentially atemporal world of his first volume to the world of time. The image presented in this title suggests that the poet's words and more largely all human activities are washed away by time's waves; we find here an emphasis on passing, on what once was becoming absent. Purdy's next volume, Emu, Remember! (1957), suggests a double emphasis. The emu, a large, flightless, swift, rather comical Australian bird,

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, Formal Method 145.

perhaps suggests a parallel with the poet himself, and Purdy also emphasizes the centrality of memory to poetry and living. The Crafted So Longe to Lerne (1958) clearly suggests Purdy's sense of his own poetic growth in an art form which is a craft above all. Similarly, the archaic spellings emphasize poetry as a history and tradition. These 1950s titles thus signal Purdy's growing concern with time, memory, his own position as poet and craftsman, and his concern with literature's roots. The 1950s volumes demonstrate continued growth: Purdy explores the poet as lover in Poems for all the Annettes (1962), domestic and national chronotopes in The Cariboo Horses (1965) and North of Summer (1967), and the Bacchanalian roots of poetry in Wild Grape Wine (1968).

The titles of many of the 1970s volumes, however, suggest a darker side of Purdy's poetics. In Love in a Burning Building (1970) and Sex and Death (1973), we find love in the context of violence, apocalypse, passion, and flux. Hiroshima Poems (1972) suggests again Purdy's growing sense of apocalypse. In Search of Owen Roblin (1974) indicates the quest trope so central to Purdy's thinking, along with his concern for place, while Sundance at Dusk (1976) suggests earth's lengthening day and the poet's search for joy in the face of impending darkness. Purdy dedicates this volume to Jacko Onalik and Martin Senigak, two Inuit hunters lost at sea in broken up ice, further suggesting his concern with death and disappearance. A Handful of Earth (1977) carries with it many connotations, suggesting planetary concerns, chronotopic concerns, and definitions of being human; also present may be a reference to Evelyn Waugh's A Handful of Dust, a novel read by Purdy and mentioned in his introduction to the Collected Poems. Finally, the

1980s volume titles emphasize paradox and return to the poet's role in life and death. The Stone Bird (1981) yokes the ideas of life and death, stasis and flight, and the idea of craftsmanship giving life. Piling Blood (1984) suggests a paradox, the poet's carnival roots, and apocalypse. Through all these titles, Purdy as author puts a stamp on his poems.

Purdy also puts his authorial stamp on volumes through organization, and perhaps the clearest sense of Purdy as organizing author comes through in North of Summer, his first travel volume and model for several others. Here we see most strongly his shaping hand. We have already noted his comment on the volume's wholeness, but perhaps we can deepen our sense of this organization by noting his words in a 1965 letter to George Woodcock describing his Beaver article as "an 'Arctic Diary' sort of thing."⁶⁰ The volume itself, we discover, is organized around this trope. Each poem is followed by the place of its origin. The poems become letters or postcards from the Arctic as Purdy plays with the idea of a travel journal or diary. Purdy further emphasizes this concept by following the poems with a four-page prose postscript, a postscript of the author's afterthoughts attached to the poems as an extended letter. Both the prelude poem and this postscript, it should be noted, originate in Ameliasburg, clearly giving the volume the shape of a return journey. Indeed, the titles further indicate that Purdy wishes to put this volume forward with the deeper trope of an

⁶⁰ Purdy to Woodcock, 21 Aug. 1965, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 6.

Odyssean journey into the underworld. In this manner, Purdy the author gives imaginative shape to his poems.⁶¹

Purdy's authorial hand acts equally clearly in the revisions he repeatedly undertakes. In his interview with Alan Twigg, Purdy comments that "a poem is a continual revision, even if you've written it down without changing a single word."⁶² Central to his poetics, Purdy incorporates continual revision into his authorial stance. His revisions of so many poems serve to emphasize that poems exist in time, both in terms of socio-historical time and of literary history. Furthermore, these revisions emphasize continual becoming in the author. Purdy continually changes; he revises his world views and poetics, for these poems represent a continual rethinking and returning, whether through memory or through parallel and juxtaposed world views. Through revision, Purdy models the actual living we as people do, our own continual becoming.

The examples of this process at work in his oeuvre are plentiful, and while several poems stand out as central to this concern, poems

⁶¹ See also the organizational markers of Moths in the Iron Curtain and The Quest for Ouzo, two other travel volumes. Other organizational techniques are also present in other volumes. Certain poems are given extra weight by placing or repetition. The poem "Transient," first published in The Cariboo Horses, is placed as the final poem in the 1972 Selected Poems and the 1976 NCL selected poems, and it becomes the very first poem in the 1978 selected poems Being Alive. Clearly Purdy sees this poem as central to his oeuvre. Similarly, "The Dead Poet" which appears as the first poem in The Stone Bird becomes the last poem in the Collected Poems. This volume itself carries Purdy's special stamp. The title becomes playful, even ambivalent, when we learn that this is not a full collection but a selection, suggesting Purdy's shaping of his own canon. Similarly, his Collected Poems is given a special shape with framing devices. "Homer's Poem" and "The Dead Poet" surround the poems arranged by decade and volume, and around these two poems we find an authorial preface and a critical afterword, the words of writer and reader. The shape deliberately creates a sense of birth and death, not necessarily in the sense of a simple progression but in a carnival sense of the two intertwined.

⁶² Purdy, "One of a Kind," with Twigg 11.

indicating the poet's changing and growing poetic as well as his rethinking, none does so more than "Elegy for a Grandfather," which appears first in Emu, Remember! but which Purdy continued to revise dramatically for decades. In the 1956 version, we hear Purdy developing his sense of carnival yet standing outside of this heteroglot world as an author. His quasi-traditional author position is betrayed by two things: the poem's form and the speaker's relative absence. First, the form involves three regular stanzas with the rhyme scheme abababc:

Well, he died, didn't he? They said he did.
 His wide whalebone hips will make a prehistoric barrow,
 A kitchen midden for mice under the rough scj,
 Where relatives stood in real and pretended sorrow
 For the dearly beloved gone at last to God,
 After a bad century--a tough, turbulent Pharaoh
 With a deck of cards in his pocket and a Presbyterian grin. (ER 2)

The regularity of the form, moreover, is aided by the repetition of the last line of this first stanza as the last line of the poem. Second, the poet, while clearly present in the poem, does not seem to be crucial to it. The poem in fact progresses fairly calmly from doubt to possibility to certainty concerning the grandfather's death. Purdy's author position, in spite of the subject matter, is fairly stable here: the form and voice we hear betray his sense of control.

The 1985 version of this same elegy, however, suggests Purdy's radical shift from poetic authority to authenticity. This version is more than twice as long as the original, with four irregular verse paragraphs working against the traditional sense of poetic form. Furthermore, the increased presence of the poet in the poem introduces ambivalence concerning authorial authority, for the poet expresses continued doubt and second thinking concerning his grandfather:

There is little doubt that I am the sole
 repository of his remains: which consist of
 these flashing pictures in my mind,
 which I can't bequeath to anyone,
 which stop here: juice and flavour
 of the old ones, whose blood runs thin
 in us: mustard, cayenne, ammonia,
 brimstone (trace only above his grave)
 --a dying soup-stained giant
 I will never let go of--not yet.
 He scared hell out of me sometimes,
 but sometimes I caught myself, fascinated,
 overhearing him curse God in my own arteries:
 even after death I would never dare
 admit to loving him, which he'd despise,
 and his ghost haunt the poem forever
 (which is an exaggeration of course,
 but he liked those)-- (CP 361-363)

These lines, completely absent from the early version of the poem, implicate the poet in his grandfather's ambivalent life and death. The poet becomes part of the poem's and the grandfather's process, the world of remains, traces, common blood, flashing pictures, ghosts, and exaggerations. The little doubt about his grandfather's death is expanded into a consideration of the poet's own role in the world of transience and his own complicity in this world of affirmation and denial. As this poem suggests, revising authority out of his author position in favour of authenticity is central to Purdy's author position, to his poetic of revision.⁶³

⁶³ "Elegy for a Grandfather," we discover, Purdy considers so central that he quotes himself in "Lament for Robert Kennedy" and then revises his initial conclusions. This intertextuality of his poems emphasizes both their life in time and their openness to revision. Purdy demonstrates this philosophy of revision in many other ways. With some poems Purdy accomplishes this revision by simply changing titles, whereas other poems involve not revision but complete juxtaposition when two poems have the same title (the two "Roblin's Mills," one from The Cariboo Horses and the other from Wild Grape Wine, the two poems "The North West Passage," the first from North of Summer and the second from Wild Grape Wine, and "Dogsong," first appearing in North of Summer and subsequently in Piling Blood). These three instances and many others emphasize Purdy's insistence on second thinking over time. Still other poems cluster around people, places, and particular concerns, each poem representing a

As this poem suggests, Purdy's carnival authorship, his playful authorial stance, is also evident in the titles he chooses for his poems. If we examine the titles themselves, we hear a Purdy delighting in the pedestrian phrase and folk image, an author who yokes opposites in strange ways, bringing elements into juxtaposition. Titles such as "Transient," "At the Quinte Hotel," "Hockey Players," and "At the Athenian Market" suggest the poet's pedestrian concerns, concerns with daily life and daily institutions; these titles hint at the world of the marketplace and the pub, of life's underside. Other titles insist on a chronotopic specificity which creates an everyday world of common time and common place for the reader. Still other titles emphasize jarring juxtapositions, whether comic, serious, or both. These titles themselves stand as dialogic utterances giving context to the poem utterances. Several examples come to mind immediately: "Uncle John on Côte Des Neiges" or "The Winemaker's Beat-Étude," "Music on a Tombstone" and "Mind Process re a Faucet," "Gilgamesh and Friend," "Olympic Room [Toronto Hotel]," and "Cronos at the Quinte Hotel." All of these titles bring foreign discourses into dialogic contact, whether those discourses and world views be high or low, French or English, carnival or religious, mythic or pedestrian. Purdy performs the same operation in other poems with subtitles. In "Johnston's on St. Germain (Or: comfort me with bagels)," he yokes English, French, Jewish, and biblical discourses together in a carnival dialogue. Other examples abound, such

different aspect or a changed perspective. Such poems become variations on a theme, dialogic responses to former poems. The most obvious and largest of these clusters involves poems centered around Roblin Lake, Ameliasburg, and other landmarks of Purdy's landscape.

as "Still Life in a Tent (Or: 'Tenting tonight in the old camp ground)" and "Collecting the Square Root of Minus One (Or: Stone blood makes thirsty vampires)," both of which see the high or elevated dialogized by the low and comical. In still other titles, Purdy delights in paradox, ambivalence, and playfulness. "Evergreen Cemetery" yokes eternal life with death; "Astronot" becomes a hybrid of both affirmation and negation; "Archaeology of Snow" suggests the impossible; and "Trees at the Arctic Circle," whose subtitle combines scientific and folk discourses, implies the impossible (trees living above the tree line) and is playfully followed by "Postscript to 'Trees at the Arctic Circle'," moving us as readers into a series of Chinese boxes.

Even more revealing of Purdy's authorial activity is the relationship constructed between the titles and the poems. This dynamic relationship places the author outside the poem itself, both separates him from and connects him to the poem, turning the poem into an artistic drama. Purdy's titles serve to put his poems in quotation marks as it were;⁶⁴ they turn the poems into indirect, artistic discourse. Purdy demonstrates his authorial ability to speak indirectly, reveals his language consciousness, as titles dialogize poems, and conversely poems dialogize titles. Many of Purdy's titles turn the poems into poems, so to speak; they emphasize the fact that the poems are separate creations, not the author speaking. These titles 'place' the poems and position the author. Such titles are "From the Chin P'ing Mei" and "At Roblin

⁶⁴ Bakhtin frequently uses the phrase "in quotation marks" to suggest how discourse is set off contextually, objectified, or turned into an object of representation through a speaker's or author's dialogic attitude to language, speech, and discourse.

Lake," "On Being a Love-Object," "Poem for one of the Annettes," and "For Norma in Lieu of an Orgasm." Purdy as author locates these poems, turns them into objects of authorial intention, gifts for others. Other titles deliberately juxtapose the authorial voice of the title with the voice or voices of the poem, essentially dialogizing the poems by turning them into dramatic monologues (in the traditional sense of Browning's dialogic monologues) and dialogues, such titles as "One of His Mistresses is Found Missing," "The Widower," "Song of the Impermanent Husband," and "Complaint Lodged with L.C.B.O. by a Citizen in Upper Rumbelow." In each of these poems, the character named by the author in the title becomes the speaking voice of the poem. The author does not speak directly in the poem but indirectly through poetic discourse. In the dynamic relationship between title and poem, we clearly hear the tangential author, and clearly sense the author's dialogic activity.

When we turn from titles to specific formal considerations (remembering Bakhtin's locating the author between form and content), we again discover the becoming carnival author. Speaking of the boundary author, Bakhtin relates that "he is located in that inseparable aspect of the work where content and form merge inseparably, and we feel his presence most of all in form."⁶⁵ Purdy's growth with respect to this authorial matter should be noted in the context of the other indications of growth. The Enchanted Echo, crap according to Purdy himself, reveals an entirely monologic attitude to poetry. Purdy here is mired in 'poesy,' in what he deemed traditional poetic constructions of a

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 160.

privileged poetic language, a language above daily life. Meter is regular and rhyme full and predictable; the lines are end-stopped and mechanical. Such verse is verse without freedom or surprise, wholly regular, and the diction and idiom are archaic and unnatural. In other words, Purdy attempts to create monologic 'poesy,' separate from daily life and discourse.

In the volumes which follow, we witness a gradual growth towards living poetry. Poems begin to explore rather than conclude, enact or dramatize rather than describe or state. Purdy moves from full-rhyme to off-rhyme to no rhyme, from end-stopping to heavy enjambment to scattering lines over the page, from stanzas to verse paragraphs to poems as extended utterances, from heavy punctuation to dashes and questions and colons to no punctuation. Essentially, Purdy opens his forms to process and becoming; as author, he dialogizes poetic form. By the time he writes Poems for all the Annettes, he has achieved a dynamic verse form. Diction and idiom are natural, style both colloquial and learned. Rhythms are those of speech, creating a rich sense of oral speaking voices. The poems push forward and relax through a rhythm of hyperbole and understatement, inflation and deflation, seriousness and humour, the pedestrian and the universal all continually juxtaposed without dialectical conclusion. The poems are filled with exclamations, questions, words in quotation marks, and parenthetical asides. With The Cariboo Horses, Purdy has become comfortable with this open, vocal verse form. He is fully able to express his dialogic world view; he is fully capable of utilizing traditional forms when needed; he is a craftsman with his tools clearly under his command. The poems become dramas,

serio-comical, philosophical, domestic and universal; they are processes, living dialogues filled with self-revision. Purdy also taps into a special carnival idiom of forms and symbols. Dennis Lee notes of Purdy's form that "there is an offhandedness, even a slapdash quality, which is clearly an intrinsic part of the way he wants a poem to be when it is fully achieved."⁶⁶ Clearly, Purdy as author-craftsman grew into this open form, this re-creation of the moment's living quality. And here it is at the interface of form and content that we find Al Purdy.

A poem such as "The Cariboo Horses" demonstrates Purdy's poetic of process, his location at the intersection of form and content. The poem's shape and meaning are filled with tension, with a play between affirmation and denial, motion and stasis, past and present. The title, for example, is purely descriptive; nevertheless, it hints at a paradox, namely that these horses are simultaneously wild and tame. The poem's form embodies these tensions:

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--
such women as once fell dead with their lovers
with fire in their heads and slippery froth on thighs
--Beaver and Carrier women maybe or
 Blackfoot squaws far past the edge of this valley
on the other side of those two toy mountain ranges
 from the sunfierce plains beyond (CH 7-8)

The verse form effectively evokes a sense of tension, with its play of energy and control, its indentations, dashes, alliteration, and enjambment, with its conjoining of Hollywood cliché and carnival energy. Moreover, the poet denies and yet affirms by denying. Each of the

⁶⁶ Lee, afterword, Collected Poems 386.

second and third verse paragraphs begins by denying that these horses are anything but horses ("But only horses," "Only horses"), yet the remainder of each proceeds to suggest that they are in fact more than horses. The poet, through imagination, sees their disjunction with the human world of jeeps and fords and chevys and hears their history in Asia, Africa, and Europe:

lost relatives of these
 whose hooves were thunder
 the ghosts of horses battering thru the wind
 whose names were the wind's common usage
 whose life was the sun's
 arriving here at chilly noon
 in the gasoline smell of the
 dust and waiting 15 minutes
 at the grocer's--

These final lines of the poem give voice to the tension underlying its content, the tension between imaginative freedom and containment, between life and death, machine and flesh, openness and closure, affirmation and denial that do not cancel each other out.

An important component (indeed determinant) of form is genre, and Purdy's authorial play with genre is central to his dialogizing work. Bakhtin maintains that "the author's quests for his own word are basically quests for genre and style, quests for an authorial position,"⁶⁷ and he suggests elsewhere that "the life of a genre consists in its constant rebirths and renewals in original works."⁶⁸ Purdy clearly participates in this quest for a position and this process of renewal. From either perspective, that of the individual author looking for form or that of the author working within a dynamic literary

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 149.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 141. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

history, Purdy seeks to dialogize genre, to open up closed forms. Thus, he expresses himself through low poetic genres, or he infects high poetic genres with carnival becoming. Dialogized genres have their authority dialogized. Such renewed genres are infected with heteroglot reality, with contemporary flow and flux, with the becoming present: such genres are open to experience and mix high and low, serious and comic, one discourse with another; they are infected with laughter; they are unofficial.

Many of Purdy's poems ostensibly take shape within the framework of traditional genres. He writes laments and elegies, love lyrics and songs. But his stance within these genres can hardly be considered traditional. What Purdy accomplishes is a dialogization of the lyric; he infects the lyric with carnival. In his study of Purdy, George Bowering maintains that "when Purdy tells a story, one of its major features is the person-and-voice of Al Purdy, hence lyric"⁶⁹ Such a statement, however, glosses over the fundamental complexity of Purdy's verse, the indirectness he injects into the lyric, the play with voice and form. Since the elegy is a song of lamentation, a mournful poem (in its Greek root), one would therefore expect from any of Purdy's many elegies a formal poem with a serious tone, a poem in which the poet wrestles with grief and the pain of loss. Purdy both rewards and frustrates this expectation in "Elegy for a Grandfather," which is a meditation on death and loss, for it is an intensely carnival meditation, filled with ribald imagery, parody, hyperbole, and laughter.

⁶⁹ Bowering, Purdy 77.

Purdy elegizes "a happy lumberjack who lived on rotten whiskey,/ and died of sin and Quaker oats age 90 or so," a man

. . . decidedly unbeautiful,
 260 pounds of scarred slag,
 barnraiser and backwoods farmer:
 become an old man in a one-room apartment
 over a drygoods store,
 become anonymous as a dead animal
 whose chemicals may not be reconstituted. (CP 361-363)

The poet celebrates through the elegy genre a common man, a folk carnival figure related to the poet himself, and this elegy laments the movement of this grandfather, like more beautiful things, into earth. Purdy domesticates the elegy, incorporates it into family history, and infects it with the tall tale genre.

Purdy carries out a similar opening up of the lament genre. Traditionally, the lament (which goes back historically to the Anglo-Saxon form exemplified in "Deor's Lament") expresses an intense and personal grief resulting from a drastic change in one's status. Purdy takes the personal lament and extends it in poems dealing more generally with the human condition. "Lament for the Dorsets" grieves for the disappearance of an entire distant race, an extinction with which the modern poet of a nuclear age identifies. This archeological poem meditates on the erasing work of time on the extinct Dorset people of the Arctic. "Animal bones and some mossy tent rings/ scrapers and spearheads carved ivory swans/ all that remains of the Dorset giants," laments the poet in the first lines of the poem. The poet goes on to connect this vanished past with the present, with us, "Twentieth century people/ apartment dwellers/ executives of neon death/ warmakers with things that explode." Future extinction connects these people to the

Dorsets, and to drive this point home the poet shifts from third person plural to first person plural, from "they" to "we" and "us," in the lines immediately following those above. The intensely personal lament comes to encompass the vastness of time and space and the fate of whole nations and peoples. Similarly, "Lament for Robert Kennedy" becomes a lament not simply for an individual political figure, but for a nation and the general human condition, the mixture of evil and good in life. Here, the poet's lament for his own lot is actually hidden in his lament for the assassination of a public figure: his sorrow takes the shape of a condemnation of legislators at the helm of a sick nation and the general quest of humanity for the answer to the riddle of being human:

one travels light
 years across our heavy sorrow
 to find the one man one man
 and then another yet another
 in the alchemy that changes
 men but keeps them changeless
 and solves the insoluble enigma
 of blackjack death and the day's brief tenure
 or fails
 and becomes a genetic awareness
 an added detail floating outward
 inside the collective mind of humanity (OO no pag.)

Purdy's lament expands out of personal grief into larger questions of living and dying, into the world of history, genetics, generations, and the collective unconscious.

If we turn to Purdy's love poems as well, we find unconventional, unofficial, carnival, and folk love lyrics. Purdy takes the genre and dialogizes it with argument and polemic, with sex and lust and the body, and with age and life's impermanence. Many of these love poems, ostensibly songs, actually take the form of arguments. "Song of the Impermanent Husband," far from being a song, is the speech of a middle-

fermenting bubble-talk" "transformed and glinting with coloured lights in/ a GREAT JEROBOAM/ that booms inside from the land beyond the world." When surrounded by cows, the poet becomes "the whole damn feminine principle," sister bovine who gives purple milk. Similarly, in "Hymie's Hymn" the poet yokes high and low, religious and secular through genre. Typically, the hymn is a lyric poem expressing religious emotion, that is, it is elevated, but in this poem Purdy joins Christian and Greek traditions in praise of a twentieth century Jewish upholsterer: "Hymie, of thee I sing,/ t.hou journeyman upholsterer/ spitting tacks at anti-Semites"(PAA 60). The poet becomes a singer parodically and comically joining elevated and colloquial discourse; indeed, he goes on to bless Hymie, wishing him a foremanship of a greater factory than Johnston's on St. Germain, cursing his enemies, and hoping "that the Elohim may finally remember/ HYMIE SLOAN--/ For thine is the kingdom of Man."

In still other poems, Purdy simply dialogizes poetic discourse through use of low poetic genres and indeed through nonpoetic and speech genres. "Gilgamesh and Friend" pulls us into a world of heroes and sidekicks, of myth made pedestrian and contemporary. In "On Realizing He Has Written Some Bad Poems" we encounter a fullblown diatribe, a paradoxical cursing of oneself put in authorial quotation marks. Many poems play with folk consciousness in folk genres. Examples are "Complaint Lodged with L.C.B.O. by a Citizen in Upper Rumbelow," "Bums and Brakies," and "Home-Made Beer." The first plays with the genre of the customer complaint, the second with society's underside during the depression, and the last suggests a play with the idea of the recipe. These poems root themselves in carnival, and then expand from this soil.

In each, the official world is dialogized by this heteroglot underside. Similar processes occur in "Short History of X County," "News Reports at Ameliasburg," and "Method For Calling Up Ghosts." Semi-official genres, the 'short history,' the news report, and the how-to article, are turned into dialogic genres; they become filled with the author's carnival intentions; they become hybrid utterances. And finally, Purdy lowers poetic discourse by turning poems into letters. Poems become everyday discourse, become letters to readers (that is, personal discourse); poems become postscripts, afterwords, attachments. Through such play with genres, Purdy turns poetic discourse on its head, opens it to heteroglot imagination and insight.

This repeated play with general and formal boundaries, this dialogization of poetic discourse, points to the central authorial problem of Purdy's poetry, the ambivalent boundary between Purdy as author and Purdy as character and voice in the poems. Essentially, he participates in what Bakhtin calls the prosification of the lyric. With Purdy, we do not hear direct discourse; rather, his poetic discourse becomes indirect. The poems become utterances in authorial quotation marks, and the poet in the poems becomes an image, a function of discourse. The 'I' of the poem can never simply be equated with Al Purdy. As Bakhtin suggests, "words are distributed on various planes and at various distances from the plane of the authorial word,"⁷¹ and he defines the author as "a person who is able to work in a language while standing outside language, who has the gift of indirect

⁷¹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 22.

speaking."⁷² The author, who speaks indirectly, is himself or herself a construction of the indirect speech of the text. Interestingly, Purdy's continual play with the boundary between the authorial words and the words of the various planes of the poems (or perhaps the perception that no boundary exists, or perhaps the assumption of identity between author and poet) has led critics to label Purdy as a poet of direct experience and speech in personal lyrics. George Bowering maintains that when Purdy reaches his strength, "the 'I' of the poem is joyfully and relentlessly Al Purdy."⁷³ In Canadian Literature in English, W.J. Keith examines Purdy's "plain talk" about past and present and speaks of his "chirpy, no-nonsense directness"⁷⁴ and his "style so personal it does not seem like a style at all."⁷⁵ And finally, David Stouk relates that "the poet's easy going personality is always on display in his work--in the colloquial language and broken sentences, and particularly in the openly subjective viewpoint."⁷⁶ These and many other critical comments suggest the authorial play with the self as a subject of poetry. These critics underline Purdy's personality in the poems, his directness of speech, the identity of author and poetic image of poet Purdy.

The fact remains, however, that the poetic image, the poet as creation of author, never coincides with the author, even when the poem is perceived as autobiography. For example, the poems "On Realizing He Has Written Some Bad Poems" and "One of His Mistresses is Found Missing"

⁷² Bakhtin, Speech Genres 110.

⁷³ Bowering, Purdy 27.

⁷⁴ Keith 78.

⁷⁵ Keith 99.

⁷⁶ Stouk 230.

clearly indicate the ambivalent boundary between author and poet. The 'he' of the titles becomes the 'I' of the poems, and yet the 'I' poet in the poems is not the author but a character, a construction of the author's imagination put into words. Moreover, many poems construct voices not even ostensibly Al Purdy; indeed, many poems are quite simply and obviously dramatic monologues or dialogues, such as "The Runners." Clearly, the voices in the poems, even that of the poet, exist along a spectrum all at varying distances from the author but none identical with him. Like the colours of the spectrum, the voices we hear are distinct wave lengths, distinct vibrations, of the same substance. In this context, the following comments by Purdy to George Woodcock in a 1971 letter make sense: requesting that Woodcock write the introduction to the 1972 selection of poems, Purdy writes, "tendency has been to over-emphasize the person who wrote the poems," and he adds that "since we all die so soon, actual merit and content of the writing seems to me more important."⁷⁷ Already in 1971, Purdy points to the connection made by critics between personality and the poems, and the tendency to emphasize the personality at the expense of the poems.

What we find in the poems, then, is not Al Purdy the author but the many created versions of the poet. In his childhood memoir Morning and It's Summer, Purdy asks himself what he was good at as a child and answers, "perhaps a rather good disappearing act when work or bedtime was mentioned."⁷⁸ This disappearing act provides an analogue for Purdy as author: he is absent from the poems, yet paradoxically present,

⁷⁷ Purdy to Woodcock, 24 May 1971, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 73.

⁷⁸ Purdy, Morning and It's Summer 18.

concealed by and yet revealed through the many versions of himself. Some critics have seen this situation as negative. Mike Doyle in "Proteus at Roblin Lake" remarks that "many poems display too much Al and Co., but reveal too little Purdy,"⁷⁹ and George Bowering complains that "sometimes among the poems there is room for suspicion that the self is a reflection, a reflection of all the images of Al Purdy."⁸⁰ Both Bowering and Doyle look for the poems to reveal Al Purdy, poet. What Purdy does, however, is construct an ambivalent play between presence and absence, and this carnival play is a means of becoming, of remaining open and unfinished, of breaking down the boundary between life and art.

Critics like Bowering and Doyle are essentially looking for the face of Al Purdy; in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, Bakhtin comments that "it is customary to speak about the authorial mask. But in which utterances (speech acts) is there a face and not a mask, that is, no authorship?"⁸¹ Purdy's poems reveal no face but are filled with the many masks of himself, and these masks reveal and conceal his authorial function. Bakhtin elaborates on the carnival roots of the mask image in Rabelais and His World:

The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles. Of course it would be impossible to

⁷⁹ Doyle 22.

⁸⁰ Bowering, Purdy 101.

⁸¹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 152.

exhaust the intricate multiform symbolism of the mask. Let us point out that such manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures per se derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque.⁸²

An obvious parallel exists between Bakhtin's theory of the mask and the many images of Purdy in the poems. Moreover, the grotesque, hyperbolic poet with his serio-comical gesturing and odd posturing, his face-making as it were, lives through these carnival masks. More precisely, the author makes himself alive, present, and becoming through these carnival exaggerations of the self, these grotesque masks.

Purdy as author is a coryphaeus, a leader of the chorus of his many selves. He sings as the rogue, the fool, and the clown, as the braggadocio, as the lecherous husband and the old drunk, and as the failed, foolish poet, sometimes separately but other times together. In "At the Quinte Hotel," we find the poet in the marketplace, the local establishment, as the sensitive man, the drunk, the brawler, the writer of poems. We inhabit with him in the poem an oxymoronic world, a carnival world of beer, urine, blood, and poems. The poem begins with affirmations ambivalently undercut:

I am drinking
 I am drinking beer with yellow flowers
 in underground sunlight
 and you can see that I am a sensitive man
 And I notice that the bartender is a sensitive man too
 so I tell him about his beer
 I tell him the beer he draws
 is half fart and half horse piss
 and all wonderful yellow flowers
 But the bartender is not quite
 so sensitive as I supposed he was
 the way he looks at me now

⁸² Bakhtin, Rabelais 39-40. In the next chapter, the mask is discussed more fully with respect to voice and polyphony in Purdy's poems.

and does not appreciate my exquisite analogy (PAA68 95-97)

The poem proceeds along its bawdy and comical merry way, relating a brawl producing "ugly red flowers" of blood, the poet going to the washroom and getting involved in the brawl by sitting on a patron and lecturing him on non-violence and sensitivity, until the poet tells the other patrons "this poem" and seeks remuneration for his efforts, and in this process the poem takes a strange loop back into life: the poet in the poem bulges outside the poem's boundary. This carnival loop frequently happens in the Purdy poem, with the result that the barrier between life and art is momentarily erased in a carnival turnabout. Failing to receive payment for the poem read in the tavern, the poet concludes "that poems will not really buy beer or flowers/ or a goddam thing/ and I was sad/ for I am a sensitive man." Purdy's face-making, his donning the masks of fool and clown, motivates shape changes, loophole escapes, and parodic undercuttings of the poet's authority.

Perhaps Purdy's play with the poet's mask can best be seen in "On Realizing He Has Written Some Bad Poems," one of Purdy's many poems on poetry. Here the author clearly stands tangential to the poem, yet he becomes present through the mask of the poet as character inhabiting the poem, as the voice of the poem: the speaker both is and is not Purdy. Through his serio-comical poetic mask Purdy makes explicit the relationship between himself as author and the poems:

my poems
 your obligation is to cause people
 to look at you and glimpse between your lines
 indistinct and ambiguous my own face
 enigmatic almost majestic certainly wise
 my poems
 your responsibility is to lie about me and exaggerate me
 allow me to bask in the esteem of a million readers

or a million in one
 and so to shine under their focused intense regard
 that my fossilized flesh will precede my dying
 preclude my loving replace my actual living (MIC 25-26)

This complex carnival passage is filled with ambivalence concerning the line between author and poet. First, these words are essentially in authorial quotation marks and thus contain an element of parody (of the self). The poem's duty, we learn, is both to hide and reveal the author-poet by distorting him, by constructing him out of falsity and hyperbole. Second, the results of this coming to life through the poem are equally ambivalent. The poet basks in the glow of admiring readers (his ego is satisfied) and is immortalized in verse, but is also fossilized and killed before he actually dies: the poems replace him, make him dispensible. In this paradigmatic poem, Purdy clearly carnivalizes his authorial self.

What we come to realize is that the poems re-create the author's experience, and as such they involve a complex dialogue between the author and himself and his experiences. The poet's experiences do not translate into poems in any simple way: poems become processes, active dramas with their own internal temporal and spatial dynamics.⁸³ Purdy explores this ambivalent relationship between poems and experience in

⁸³ Critics of Purdy have often noted this relationship between the author and his experience. Ants Reigo claims that Purdy is essentially self-conscious: "Purdy's poems, then, are artificial; they are verbal creations, products of wit, and our interest in them is the same as our interest in metaphysical poetry. We keep reading to see how he will justify the flight of fancy, the outrageous imagery, the historical and mythological allusions" ("The Purdy Poem," Canadian Literature 75 (1978): 130). Margaret Atwood notes in the same vein that Purdy is "inherently dramatic; assumed by all his poems are a human speaking voice or voices and a responding audience" (Second Words 98).

his interview with Gary Geddes. He relates how poems are cut out parts of life, coloured by the mind, filled with uncertainty:

One thinks of poems as little bits of life cut out, except that they are as one sees life with one's mind. You have the odd feeling that you can reach back and pick a poem that will take the place of that experience in the past. It does in one's life, of course, but there are so many ifs and buts that when I say a thing I'm never sure if I'm right.⁸⁴

Poems are life's experience cut out, but they are life refracted through the mind; poems take the place of experiences, but as experiences refracted through words they are filled with ambivalent dialogic overtones, with ifs and buts. Such statements by Purdy clearly underline his dialogic relationship with his own experiences enacted in poems.

The key to understanding Purdy's dramatic lyrics, lyrics in which he as author stands outside himself in order to enter a dialogue with himself, lies in Bakhtin's theory of objectification of the author's self. In Speech Genres, he writes that "by objectifying myself (i.e., by placing myself outside) I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relation with myself."⁸⁵ Yes, Purdy writes from his life, but both he and his experience are transformed in the poem into 'other' rather than 'self.' The poems provide an alternate reality, a re-creation (at times highly distorted, at other times imitative) of the author's world. Many poems contain the poet as speaker and a specific posited addressee: both author and reader remain tangential to the poem. Within the poem, too, we find internal temporal and spatial signposts: time passes in the poem, and place changes;

⁸⁴ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 70.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 122.

within the poem we encounter continual revision, statement and restatement. Poems become anecdotes, tales, and stories with an emphasis on the process of telling and its temporal component. Poems such as "Archaeology of Snow" with its sense of anecdote, with its continual revision in terms of the speaker's thoughts, its internal passing of time, become dramatically oral. At the end of "Collecting the Square Root of Minus One," the poet asks, "Who's that come knocking at my door?" (PAA 9-10). Such a question points specifically to the poem as a life drama: the speaking poet is interrupted in his harangue by a knock at the door. Time operates within the poem, and the poem becomes speech, process, exploration rather than completion, language out of life rather than artificial poetic language. The poem "Home-Made Beer" provides another example of this dramatization in Purdy's poems, this refraction of personal experience. This poem provides the reader with an anecdote cut out from life, a comic domestic tale, and as such it provides a strong sense of time passing within the poem, of internal dialogue and activity. Moreover, the poem as drama revises itself when the poet adds in a postscript, "Sept. 22, 1964. P.S. I was wrong--" (CH 64-65). Such an addition clearly implicates the poem in passing time; the poem protrudes back into life.

Elsewhere, poems become speech implicated in life, in the heteroglot life of present experience. "Spring Song" creates this sense of living speech. The poet lies beneath his old car, observing and contemplating, speaking rather than writing a poem. Daily events and experience are incorporated into the poem as time passes. The final line simply emphasizes the poem's life in time, as the poet remarks,

"and migawd I'll never get to change the oil--"(PAA 27-28). Through Purdy's dramatization of experience, poems become anecdotes, letters; they become discourse in time, living discourse. His dialogic relationship with his personal experience, made manifest through these authorial habits, opens that experience up in poems to new meanings, meanings possible through the objectification or dramatization of the authorial 'I.'

iii.

Poems on Poetry

Such formal considerations must be kept in mind when we turn to the author's position with regards to content in the poems. Many of Purdy's poems are specifically about poetry, and they reveal Purdy's dialogic author position. In their content, these poems expose the poet's origins. The poet, Purdy suggests, inhabits time, for his creativity taps into the collective unconscious, into his ancestors, into the cave, the womb, and the earth with the result that the poem itself originates in a dialogic listening to those origins. In "A Power," Purdy demythologizes the poet's authority, suggesting that poems come from "dim cloudlands" where elvish adventurers decide to shove him out of bed at night to take down "their weird shorthand"(CH 53-54). These creatures swear idiot oaths, mouth obscenities "whipping/ unbitten umbilical cords for/ lassos round your throat." These elvish figures, connected to the poet by some umbilical cord, are liars, mischievous carnival rogues. Creativity is riddled with ambivalence, and Purdy also suggests this in "On Realizing He Has Written Some Bad Poems." Here Purdy suggests that the poem's origins lie in something both malformed and beautiful, in a parenthetical being inhabiting his bone cave head,

in "the jewelled hunchback in my head/ seated brooding in a dark bone corner"(MIC 25-26). This carnival figure, suggests the poem, lies behind the author's blustering ego. Still other poems suggest in their content Purdy's specifically carnival sense of poetry's origins. In "The Viper's Muse," we learn that "Ananias'/ planet riseth silent gibbous yonder/ over Parnassus"(CH 56). Poems, we learn, originate in lies. Similarly, "The Winemaker's Beat-Étude" presents the origin of creativity in Bacchus, in drunkenness. At the end of the poem, the comic Bacchanalian poet exclaims to the cows, "O my sisters/ I give purple milk!"(WGW 8-9). This purple milk functions as a paradigmatic trope of Purdy's authorial activity and poetic output. In his poems, Purdy locates the source of poetic inspiration in carnival thought, in folk consciousness, whether that be in Bacchus or the collective unconscious.⁸⁶

The poem "In the Caves" deals specifically with this question of origins. Developing a parallel between the cave artist and the poet, the poem speaks through a dramatic monologue, for the artist is an earlier version of Purdy himself. We have here the artist as carnival fool, as bumbler and failure, as outcast from his society and yet part of his culture and people. He lives on a border between child and adult, pain and exaltation, weakness and courage. He is compelled to re-create the mammoth because its silent death scream haunts him; he is haunted by death and pain and blood. In his art, he attempts to bring to life what is now absent. He withdraws to the caves where his people do not have the courage to go, and in the womb-cave he takes what is

⁸⁶ See also "Side Effect"(LBB 37).

inside himself and outside himself and joins them on the cave wall. The proto-artist is driven to creation:

but there is something here I must follow
 into myself to find
 outside myself in the mammoth
 beyond the scorn of my people
 who are still my people
 my own pain and theirs
 joining the shriek that does not end
 that is inside me now
 The shriek flows back into the mammoth
 returning from sky and stars
 finds the cave and its dark entrance
 brushes by where I stand on tip-toes
 to scratch the mountain body on stone
 moves past me into the body itself
 toward a meaning I do not know
 and perhaps should not (SAD 83-84)

The artist inhabits a border world of inside and outside, of cultural definition and exclusion, of life and death. He creates not out of knowledge but lack of knowledge, and he does not seek final resolution but life and becoming.

"Homer's Poem" and "The Dead Poet," which frame Purdy's Collected Poems, also play a central role in indicating his sense of the poem's ambivalent origins. Both these poems intertwine poetry with ambivalent birth and death, with the womb, and with twinship. In the first poem, Homer is Odysseus and Odysseus Homer, and both are Purdy. Death and birth continually interchange, as is suggested in the poem's first lines:

Listen
 --we are about to be born
 we are soon to become alive
 and fear is always alive
 when death is near (CP 3-4)

Birth is a form of death, explains Odysseus entombed in the womb. And he speaks in the womb to his twin, to his other self, to himself. The

question he asks repeatedly is "what is my name?"(CP 34). In his birth which is also his death, he remembers that name and he speaks it to those who are being born into death. The poem originates in birth and death, "in the city of life/ which is the city of death," in questioning and naming, in twinship. In "The Dead Poet" we find the same ambivalent womb origins. Paradox lies in the title itself, for we have a dead poet speaking to us. This poet traces the origin of his words back to birth and dying:

I was altered in the placenta
 by the dead brother before me
 who built a place in the womb
 knowing I was coming:
 he wrote words on the walls of flesh
 painting a woman inside a woman
 whispering a faint lullaby
 that sings in my blind heart still (SB 13-14)

The poet becomes a poet in the womb by being altered by death. He reads the womb, sees art's reality encased in a larger reality, and hears the original placental lullaby of the beating heart and rushing blood. The poet then proceeds to trace his origins in his ancestral flesh, in lumberjacks and farmers, in meek Victorian women. In them he finds the origin of the song, the song he sings as a living, becoming poet, a song which moves into the future and yet is a journey back to that past, to the cave-womb and Plato's cave, to the "music of blood" on the streets. And he traces this song back to the earth, to constant cycles of birth and death engendered by the earth. It is here that Purdy as poet originates, and it is here that the original song continues into the future, for the song is a loophole song of becoming. In the beautiful ending (not conclusion) to the poem, the poet speaks to his dead brother:

Sleep softly spirit of earth
 as the days and nights join hands
 when everything becomes one thing
 wait softly brother
 but do not expect it to happen
 that great whoop announcing resurrection
 expect only a small whisper
 of birds nesting and green things growing
 and a brief saying of them
 and know where the words come from

The brother embodies the spirit of earth, earth that opens continually into the future, earth that whispers of life and death in a carnival embrace. Here the poet finds his voice, his brief saying of this life and acknowledgement of the word's origin.

In poems dealing with Purdy's literary originators, those poets who have some claim to have influenced him, we find the same carnival debunking.⁸⁷ He turns poetry's history and influence into a serio-comical affair. George Woodcock claims an eclecticism for Purdy in terms of influence, and suggests that the greatest influence on Purdy may have been audiences at readings.⁸⁸ This folk consciousness is clearly indicative of Purdy's authorial position with regards to influence. Great art, suggests the poet in "The Beavers of Renfrew," is "an alibi for murderers" (SAD 94-96). In "Ritual," a Winnipeg poem, the poet points to his gods being D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, "or Henry Kelsey who explored the west in bad doggerel," and he adds that "their shamans are drunk Indians/ reeling through the dives on Portage Avenue" (SUN 52-53). Winnipeg, concludes the poet, is no place for T.S.

⁸⁷ It could be argued that there is little of Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence in Purdy's authorial stance, or that such anxiety is well hidden. Instead, Purdy seems to hold a carnivalesque attitude to influence, simultaneously adopting and dialogizing other writers.

⁸⁸ Woodcock, Northern Spring 192.

Eliot. The poet's influences are carnival influences, unofficial poets associated with drunkenness. The poem "Bestiary" from Piling Blood gives us an ABC of poets admired by the poet, and the first in the list is indicative of Purdy's carnival thinking:

Whoever wrote `Tom O'Bedlam,'
the anonymous, the all-of-us,
encuring the pain of everyman,
perched on a throne in the gutter. (PB 65-67)

With these four lines, the poet captures the essence of the author position he himself inhabits. He is a wise fool, a mock monarch, no man and everyman; he is folk consciousness personified. The poet then goes on to list his remaining poets, and summarizes by calling them "Star painters, lapidaries, and often/ poseurs; craftsmen more than artists;/ but sometimes, when we had forgotten,/ they remembered where the heart is." Purdy's poets are dramatic craftsmen.

This carnival sense of influence is also apparent in poems where Purdy outlines his own development in relation to other writers. One such poem is "For Steve McIntyre." The poet recounts his initial ignorance about `great literature' and a friend's advice to read the greats. The poet as rube reads them, Proust, Woolf, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, and Joyce, and finds them as boring as he had expected. Nevertheless, something takes root and blossoms in the poet:

. . . but one night just before sleep
words were suddenly shining in the dark
like false teeth in a glass of water
like the laughter of Australopithecus
mocking other beasts surrounding his tree
like Thelessa for Xenophon and the Greeks
like Joshua's trumpet at Jericho
like sunlight under the bedsheets
with her arms around my neck
And I climbed down from the tree
instructed Darwin's non-evoluted

critters to get lost
 delighted in the Black Sea with Xenophon
 and the Greek Ten Thousand
 and stole the wavetips' green diamonds
 for my ballpoint-- (CP 363)

The poet transforms his reading not into 'great literature' but into carnival literature. His tropes become carnival tropes of deflation and laughter, of mixing high and low, Greek history, the Bible, and the bedroom. As poet, he becomes Australopithecus, a comic ancestor, delighting in life and stealing beauty for poems.

Paradoxically, an authorial crisis lies beneath this carnival sense of influence and authority. Purdy's development as a poet can in fact be seen in its entirety as a crisis of the author position, of the poet's authority and primacy, and this crisis is outlined in In Search of Owen Roblin.⁸⁹ In it Purdy writes retrospectively about the time in his life, the late 1950s, when he felt his own failure, and the poem gives shape to both this crisis and renewal. The crisis is a crisis of authorial ego, of his own primacy. In 1957, he tells us as poet re-creating the past, he and his wife moved out to Roblin Lake, building a second-hand house out of second-hand lumber. He had failed in Montreal at prose, plays, poems, "and just being a human being"; he feels his failure, both personal and creative, in its totality:

Now I'm talking about myself:
 there is a time of defeat in any man's life
 any woman's too
 If he's a writer that time
 is when he's hanging on better writers' coattails
 saying or thinking their reputations are inflated
 and he's just as good or much better than they are
 But comes that horrible time

⁸⁹ Al Purdy, In Search of Owen Roblin (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) no pagination.

the realization of knowing
 he's not better he just isn't
 and finds out suddenly or gradually or crushingly
 no one has paid him the least small miniscule
 roar of applause or loud whisper of attention

Purdy's crisis is a crisis of knowledge, of knowing other writers are better. His crisis is that of the unique self's death, the death of the myth of monologic being, of the myth of the poet's primacy.

The death of this myth becomes the poet's and the poem's starting point, and the rest of the poem outlines the process of gradual renewal, of change from monologic to dialogic being. Purdy, no longer able to inhabit the monologic authorial position of 'poesy,' grows into a carnival authorial position in which authority is dialogized. Through an exploration of his own folk roots, through a dialogue with those roots, the poet discovers connections and negates his own monologic isolation. The poem recounts his Holmesian search for clues to the past; he delights in the search for clues both in his immediate landscape and in books, and focusses on two key figures, his grandfather and Owen Roblin, "Two characters in a forgotten melodrama/ conceived by an unknown author." He as unknown author traces both men back to the landing of the United Empire Loyalists in the Bay of Quinte, and exhibits a moment of elation when he imagines a shotgun wedding between members of the Purdy and Roblin clans. He begins to write down all that he learns, constructing a history, finding an opening in the past. He becomes these settlers, feels as they felt and thinks as they thought: the poet gets outside himself, entering a dialogic relationship with the past. He says, "they were born and lived and died/ and nothing came easy for them/ and dammit nothing is easy for me." Getting outside

himself, the poet begins to understand himself. In fact, he says, these ancestors give him his words. The poet returns from this time travel, realizing that in his search for Owen Roblin he has found himself:

In search of Owen Roblin
 I discovered a whole era
 that was really a backward extension of myself
 built lines of communication across two centuries
 recovered my own past my own people
 of which I am the last but not final link

The poet discovers his dialogic past; no longer is his past sealed off monologically. No longer afraid of failure, he finds rooms now lighted up in his brain; his collective unconscious has become a source of life.

Moreover, he is now acutely aware of opening up into the future, of his participation in continuity. The discovery of himself clearly is not a simple recovery of individual ego but an understanding of his connections with larger humanity:

I am the sum total of all I know
 all I have experienced and love
 and if that makes me a monster of egotism
 bring on your Doctor Freud and Doctor Jung
 then go look at the face in your own mirror
 I don't mean solipsistic navel-watching either
 but John Donne's 'I am a piece of the main'
 meaning a part of everything larger
 and all the things I write about I've done myself
 oh not with hands, but with my mind
 I am a screen thru which the world passes
 a thermometer registering pain and sorrow
 and laughter sometimes at being ridiculous
 a writer--good, bad or indifferent
 embedded in all I've written about
 a fly speck in history
 dust mote cruising the galaxies
 I contain others as they contain me
 in the medieval sense I am Everyman
 and as Ulysses said of himself in the Cyclop's Cave
 'I am Nobody'
 and a lover

In this climactic passage of In Search of Owen Roblin, the poet proclaims his carnival author position, his discovery of his own basic humanity and relationship to humanity. Rather than monologic ego, the poet's ego is dialogic. He finds himself embedded in serio-comical life; he occupies the heteroglot main rather than the island. He is both small and insignificant and large, both nobody (a dust mote and fly speck) and everyman; in the end, this paradox comes to be summed up in the word 'lover.' In this passage, Purdy simultaneously takes us back to the roots of poetry and the roots of authorship and carries us forward to his own poems.

Indeed, Purdy makes this dialogization of the poetic ego essential to his poems. Repeatedly we witness the poet's ego deflated, and this deflation is ambivalent, for it frees and renews, opening the poet to wholeness and becoming. Consequently, among the many voices of the poet we hear the voice of self-deflation.⁹⁰ Again and again in Purdy's poems the poet's ego is carnivalized in order to draw the poet into a living dialogic relationship with his world. In the poems, too, Purdy continually exposes the poet as liar, trickster, and phony. In a 1984 interview Purdy comments, "I almost always tell the truth unless I want to impress somebody."⁹¹ This ambivalent attitude towards himself and discourse appears in the poems repeatedly. They participate in what Eli Mandel calls "the language of literature as hoax."⁹² These poems turn back on themselves; in their self-reflexiveness they expose the puppet strings, the pulleys and guidewires, the levers of the poet and poem.

⁹⁰ See, for example, "House Guest" and "Thank God I'm Normal."

⁹¹ Purdy, "Phony, Realistic, Genuine," with Meyer and O'Riordan 143.

⁹² Eli Mandel, Another Time (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1977) 18.

The fiction of the poem exposes the poet. In "Shoeshine Boys on the Avenida Juárez" we find the poet as trickster and the poem as deception. As the poet becomes a liar, the poem becomes a hall of mirrors, and the reader becomes aware of the literature of hoax. Initially, the poet tells the story of himself as the rich North American having twenty shoeshines. The poem turns into an image of a poem:

and probably only I shall remember
 (and the CIA man twenty steps behind me)
 being crazy as hell one morning,
 and writing a poem about it,
 and writing about writing a poem about it,
 and making it into the echo of a poem,
 the echo of a grin on the Avenida Juárez,
 the echo of being alive once,
 the echo of dying on the Avenida Juárez. (WGW 25-27)

The poem then revises this initial account, revealing that only one shoeshine took place. The grins on the street and in the poem, the grins on the poet's and reader's faces become sad and cynical, the grins of those in the know. We inhabit a world with no centre, no source of trust, no authorial reliability.

In spite of such undercutting of the poet's reliability and ego (or perhaps because of it), Purdy's poems affirm the continual crisis and joy of living. Bakhtin writes that "authenticity and truth inhere not in existence itself, but only in an existence that is acknowledged and uttered,"⁹³ and he writes elsewhere that "the dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth."⁹⁴ The problem of the author's position centres around the choice of discourses as a means to seeking truth, as

⁹³ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 138.

⁹⁴ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 110. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

a choice between poles of monologue and dialogue, and Purdy consistently chooses authorial dialogue. In his poetic utterances, Purdy seeks authenticity rather than authority. He seeks to capture life's fullness and ambivalence rather than monologic certainties. In the cosmic perspective, life disappears and sound moves to silence. Yet in the carnival fullness of life, the darkness of death can be partially and at times joyfully defeated.

In poems, Purdy enacts sympathy with others. In "Poem," a poem central to understanding what Purdy wants a poem to do, the poet-husband nurses his sick wife, saying "there is nothing at all I can do except hold your hand/ and not go away" (LBB 28). Purdy's poems generally seek to establish this basic connection of understanding, a connection fundamental to his author position. "The Sculptors," another poem in the same vein, sees the impatient poet rummaging through rejected Eskimo carvings, but impatience becomes replaced by profound connection as he envisions the maimed artists "who carve in their own image/ of maimed animals" (NOS 75-76). This poet is the same poet who in "Trees at the Arctic Circle" condemns the dwarf trees of Baffin Island, only upon second and third thought to become ashamed of his belittlement of another living thing. Purdy's poems create such sympathetic connections by writing out of living and dying. Purdy is Odysseus learning his name and speaking it to others.

In Piling Blood, Purdy returns to the Kikistan Islands of his memory in "Dog Song 2." Here he makes this singing at the top of the world paradigmatic to his author position:

The actual song-words didn't matter
but for a moment I was prehistoric man

coming out of his cave at night to howl
 from sheer self-importance
 because he was a damn good hunter
 or because a woman had smiled
 And the song said: Hello my friends
 Hello my friends because we're friends
 let's have a drink while we're alive
 And the song said: Let's have a drink
 for no reason or any reason
 and because there's a time in your life
 like bacon frying like stars exploding
 and you stand on your hind legs and sing
 because you're a dreaming animal
 trapped in a human body (PB 130-131)

The poet sings a simple song of carnival dialogic being. His song originates in the womb, the cave, and the tavern, and this song connects the poet with other people. This is an authorship of folk consciousness, of bacon and stars, of domestic and cosmic connections.

Moreover, Purdy's song is the song of his fellow-poet Archilochos. Both sing an unofficial folk song; both live and write while other poets court the Muses at the tables of rich men. Perhaps nowhere else in his poems is Purdy's author position more clearly stated than in "Archilochos." Although three thousand years dead, Archilochos lived fully: "he wrote all his life: how to bear a blow,/ to love life and even live with dying--" (PB 58-59). Here we find the essence of Purdy's authorial position, not in authority but in authentic living and loving and dying. The connection becomes even more apparent in the final lines of the poem:

He wasn't Homer, he wasn't anybody famous;
 He sang of the people next door;
 his language was their language; he died in battle
 (with a brand new shield). Living was honour
 enough for him, with death on every hand.
 Archilochos the soldier, he was us.

Three thousand years? I can still hear
 that commonsense song of the shield:

a loser who manages to be victorious,
his name is a champagne cry in my blood.

The identification between poets is overwhelming. This shared song, this bubbling cry in the blood paradigmatic of Purdy's author position, can hardly be less official.

It is indeed a long journey from Bliss Carman to Archilochos, but this journey is the becoming author Al Purdy. As his author position changes, his poems transform from enchanted echoes to purple milk to what he will be tomorrow, so central is this author position to the poems themselves. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin relates that "consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language,"⁹⁵ and he writes elsewhere that "the utterance is not a physical body and not a physical process, but a historical event, albeit an infinitesimal one."⁹⁶ Words are the author's tools for expressing consciousness, for expressing being itself, and Purdy's poems as historical authorial events express such complex being and becoming. Purdy's song of being alive clearly derives from the dialogized authority of the author, for the author becomes not authority but authenticity and open becoming. Closed, generic, official poetic discourse becomes carnival, unofficial, folk discourse. Purdy's poems enact and dramatize his own becoming; they blur the boundary between life and art, between perception and fiction. His carnivalization of the poet's and the poem's origins, his continual revision of the poet and the poem, and his constant play with images of himself all serve to pull the poem down into the carnival muck of the reader's and his own

⁹⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 295. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

⁹⁶ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 5.

daily world. In a short paper given at a conference in honour of Margaret Atwood, Purdy suggests that "no one knows one-tenth of one per cent of any other person: the human facets are multitudinous as seasands and just as different under any but a self-serving microscope."⁹⁷ This comment points to the complexity of and the motivation behind Purdy's play with the author-position tangential to the poems, to the dialogic basis of being human. This play creates living artistic discourse, living poems.

⁹⁷ Al Purdy, "An Unburnished One-Tenth of One Per Cent of an Event," The Malahat Review 41 (1977): 61.

Chapter 3

Driving a Nail in Silence: A Voice-Print of the Purdy Poem

The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect attunement, and all things come to pass through conflict. Heraclitus.

These are words. But there are times when thinking can be faithful to its situation only by sitting still, and unclenching, and waiting to see what will happen.

Till it has done so, there are few words that can properly be spoken, or that finally need to be said. Dennis Lee.

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of voice to literature in general and specifically to poetry, not to mention its centrality to living as people on planet earth. The implications of a vocal existence range from the daily acts of speaking and listening to the metaphysics of presence and absence, self and other. In fact, it is precisely this vast range of possibilities we find in both Purdy's poems and Bakhtin's thought. For Bakhtin, voice lies at the heart of the dialogic creation of meaning. In the Purdy poem, voice brings poetic discourse to life; Purdy does not use voice to monologically limit and control his poetic discourse but rather to open up the poem. In essence, he uses voice to express dialogic being and the dialogic attitude to the self. Putting voice to aesthetic use, the Purdy poem heightens what is typical of discourse; speech becomes represented speech, speech in quotes. By creating living discourse through voice, Purdy establishes a poetic of speaking and listening; he touches the carnival depths of heteroglot consciousness and the heights of poetic expression.

Purdy's practise of voice, Bakhtin's understanding of voice, and our own living through and with this phenomenon are necessarily complex, given the complexity of the term itself. Such a word escapes simple definition, particularly in the context of Bakhtin's dialogic thinking, but the OED definition clearly implicates voice in a broad range of human activities.¹ It is a physiological phenomenon, connected with utterance and speech, with sound, with ideological expression, and with the basic expression of being, and this multiple sense of voice lies at the heart of Bakhtin's thinking. For him, voice, integral to both speaking and listening, forms the foundation for communication in both life and literature.² Indeed, virtually all of Bakhtin's various concepts, from polyphony and monologue to dialogue to heteroglossia and carnival, find their source in voice.³ Voice for Purdy, as for Bakhtin, operates on the creative level of language; it functions to bring language to life. The human voice in the act of speech functions as the node of dialogic expression, dialogic thinking, and dialogic being. The importance of voice to Purdy's poems can hardly be overestimated.⁴ An analysis of voice in Purdy's poems must dialogize

¹ The OED variously defines voice as a sound formed in the larynx and uttered by the mouth (especially human utterance in speaking, shouting, singing, etc.), as the ability to produce this sound, as the use of the voice (utterance especially in spoken or written words) in expressing opinion, and in the verb form as a giving utterance to or expressing.

² In some notes for the revision of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin suggests that the definition of voice "includes height, range, timbre, aesthetic category," and he proceeds to add the following: "It also includes a person's worldview and fate. A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts, but with his fate and his entire individuality." Voice, claims Bakhtin, is not simply a function of various categories but is more fundamentally a part of dialogic and ideological being.

³ See articles by Sherrill Grace and Richard Cavell in Future Indicative: both summarize Bakhtin's poetic of voice in the context of Canadian literature.

⁴ It comes as no surprise that critics have concentrated on examining it. Virtually every critic from Peter Stevens to Dennis Lee has explored

the lyric, examining the full context surrounding speech. Rather than seeking to control and monologize voice in Purdy's poems, the reader must become open to the polyphonic elements in them and the dialogic principle at work in the Purdy poem.⁵

Indeed, Purdy's own comments support such an investigation of voice. In interviews and essays, letters and introductions, Purdy continually reveals a tongue-in-cheek attitude to himself and a dialogic attitude to others. His poetic emphasizes relational thinking. For Purdy, voice embodies not personality and monologue but a living speech of multiplicity, change, and becoming. In his interview with Alan Twigg, Purdy comments, "people think you want to be one thing. You're

Purdy's poetic voice. Whereas Eli Mandel argues that "no one . . . in this country is more sensitive to voice and tone in poetry than Purdy" (Another Time 75), Dennis Lee maintains that "Purdy is one of the living masters of voice" (afterword 380). Purdy's sensitivity to and facility with voice have been praised by these and other critics. Nevertheless, critical understanding of Purdy's use of voice remains incomplete. In his 1986 afterword to Purdy's Collected Poems, Lee could still say of Purdy's poems that "the polyphonic resources of a poetry like this have not been extensively explored," and he could add that "they are crucial to hearing his work, and hence to understanding it" (380). Many critics, moreover, slant their discussion of voice in the direction of a specific thesis, with the result that only a single aspect of voice in Purdy's poems is illuminated (see Keith 99 and Jones 170). Still other critics, notably Tom Marshall (89) and George Bowering (51), make Purdy's voice the centrepiece of an argument for cultural nationalism. Most importantly, however, critics of voice in Purdy's poetry hear these voices primarily in the context of traditional categories of lyrical subjectivity, of personality and psychology; criticism has emphasized the Purdy personality at the expense of polyphony. Furthermore, critics have often sought to stifle this polyphony by emphasizing one voice or personality trait over another (Bowering 51-52). Other critics from Peter Stevens to Margaret Atwood display these same emphases on Purdy, on personality, and on a psychology of wholeness (Stevens 27, Doyle 14, Lye 242-243, Atwood 62). Such judgements slant our understanding of voice in Purdy's poetry by throwing us back on the personality of the poet and an understanding of that poet as a whole and consistent being. The Purdy selves as given voice in the poems are larger, are shifting, open, and becoming rather than fixed or whole.

⁵ In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin tells us in connection with the Dostoevsky hero that "we see not who he is, but how he is conscious of himself" (49), and that in the end "a man never coincides with himself" (59). Bakhtin's poetics emphasizes not the personality of voice but the dialogism embedded in voice, and this dialogism is central to understanding Purdy's voices.

not one thing. You're everything."⁶ This clear expression of dialogic being extends to the polyphonic fibre of Purdy's poems. This emphasis on polyphony is apparent, in fact, already in his interview with Gary Geddes. Purdy criticizes Robert Creeley in particular for pinning his poetry down to one voice and style, for being monologic:

. . . style is something that I was hung up on a few years ago, when I kept noticing, or thought I did, that all the critics were insisting that you find your voice, that you find a consistency, and that you stick to it. Now this, of course, is what Creeley has done; and it's apparently something the critics still approve of. I disagree with it all along the line. I don't think that a man is consistent; he contradicts himself at every turn.⁷

Purdy seeks voices rather than voice, polyphony rather than monologue, dialogic becoming rather than static being.

Later in the same interview, Purdy discusses his use of voice in both The Cariboo Horses and Poems for all the Annettes. Again, the emphasis is on polyphony as Purdy explains how his poetic opened out into one of varied speech:

As far as I'm concerned, I found a voice (not necessarily a consistent one), but I thought that I was at my best beginning about 1961-62, when Poems for all the Annettes was first published; I was sure I had hit a vein in which I could say many more things. I'd been looking for ways and means of doing it; and finally, it got to the point that I didn't care what I said--I'd say anything--as long as it worked for me.⁸

The vein which Purdy hit, the technique which he lit upon, was a polyphonic one of dialogic speech. Living speech becomes both the form and content of Purdy's poetic; the process of speech, with its oral quality, built-in revision and response, and its metaphysic of presence

⁶ Purdy, "One of a Kind," with Twigg 11.

⁷ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 68.

⁸ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 68.

becomes the centre of the Purdy poem. In Morning and It's Summer, he writes of the gift of "reading a poem silently on the page, but hearing it lift aurally from the page: so that instead of just black squiggles on paper you may hear a living sound."⁹ Purdy's poetic is profoundly one of the ear; his poems strive to create this living sound.

This living sound, for Purdy, goes to the heart of being human and being alive. Speech is a two-edged sword in the Purdy poetic: it can be both monologic and dialogic. In "Angus," an essay in No Other Country, Purdy relates, "in my worst moments many people seem to me to be only talking heads, pre-programmed to speak all the words inherited from the faraway grunts and moans of a million years of human ancestry."¹⁰ Such speech is the speech of the living dead, packaged for easy use and sanctioned by monologic authority. Conversely, Purdy argues that speech rests as the gift we are given and give. In another essay from No Other Country, Purdy muses that "the words we speak, somehow only that, the Word, the thing we entered and which entered us, is all that can possibly survive of dying and being born and rising again as the grass springs green and the flesh is grass"¹¹ Purdy's prose reveals a poetic of dialogic speaking, a metaphysic of voice which seeks to understand being alive.

This poetic, it must be remembered, resulted from virtually decades of struggle on the part of Purdy. His maturation, which involved a crisis of the author-position, was equally a maturation in a

⁹ Purdy, Morning 27.

¹⁰ Al Purdy, No Other Country (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 96.

¹¹ Purdy, Country 137.

poetic and metaphysic of voice. Purdy's development from The Enchanted Echo to Poems for all the Annettes sees him leap from the monologic voice of poesy to the polyphony of a vibrant poetry. Purdy grows out of a poetic language and traditional poetic constructions into poems with the quality of oral speech, poems that are living utterances. If we take "The Enchanted Echo" as Purdy's starting point, we hear a poet in love with poesy. Rather than the rhythm and texture of speech, he seeks to create a discourse as far removed from daily speech as possible:

Across the autumn flushing streams,
 Adown the misty valleys,
 Atop the skyline's sharp redoubts
 Aswarm with colored alleys-- (EE 11)

These lines are typical of the early Purdy of this volume: diction is archaic; imagery is cliched; the rhythm is based wholly on regular meter; and rhyme puts a controlling, predictable stamp on the discourse. What we hear is a monologically controlled poetic discourse, the sealed-off product of poetic devices in the narrow sense. Indeed, what we hear is all enchantment and echo, not living speech at all. Moreover, the orientation is vertical rather than horizontal. The poet sends half of his song to heaven, only to hear later as in a dream his now transformed song. Instead of speech permeated with dialogic overtones, Purdy seeks to sing songs directed at some fuzzy transcendent realm which transforms these songs.

From this initial position, Purdy makes a great leap to the volumes of the 1950s. Here we find a growing prosodic and formal fluency leading to a new vocal fluency. By developing speaking voices, Purdy gradually transforms his poems into utterances rather than assemblages of poetic techniques and constructions. The subject matter

expands: Purdy puts flesh on his formerly ethereal world in such poems as "Meander" and "Elegy for a Grandfather," "Postscript" and "At Roblin Lake." We find not simply the conscious creation of voice but a growing play with it and its flexible boundaries. For example, "At Roblin Lake" announces Purdy's use of a speaker-listener polemic:

Did anyone plan this,
Set up the co-ordinates
Of experiment to bring about
An ecology of near and distant
Batrachian nightingales?
--Each with a frog in his throat,
Rehearsing the old springtime pap
About the glories of copulation.
If not I'd be obliged if
The accident would unhappen. (CSLL 17-18)

The poem originates in a polemical question about the origins of life, namely the life of Roblin Lake frogs, and such a question automatically constructs a dialogic drama (one that provides an interesting counterpoint to Archibald Lampman's "The Frogs"). Purdy gives voice to his more immediate world through examination of rather abstract questions in the context of actuality, loudly singing, mating frogs. The poet begins to both adopt various roles and become conscious of a listener, of the discourse of another; poems come to be constructed on the model of a posited speaker in dialogue with a posited addressee (dramatic monologue). Moreover, Purdy's poems exhibit a growing concern with internal dialogue, with "the long palavers and red parliaments of the heart" ("Onomatopoeic People," POS 10), the engagement of oneself in dialogue that becomes the basis of many mature poems. In addition, prosody begins to work to create the sense of oral speech. Full rhyme, end stopping, regular margins and line lengths are transformed to off rhyme, enjambment, and irregularity. Poems begin to exhibit a sense of

vocal fullness and vocal release. In terms of diction, Purdy begins to mix contemporary and archaic discourses. Moreover, rhythm now functions more to create a sense of voice and oral speech than a controlling meter.

Nonetheless, we must note that Purdy's craft is not yet fully developed. He continues to struggle with form; he often sounds like a walking dictionary; he more often than not describes what could be more effectively enacted or dramatized through the voice. In some ways, "Villanelle [plus 1]" reveals this growing poetic in this double sense. Purdy plays off strict form against prosodic freedom. In an echo of Dylan Thomas's use of the French villanelle in "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," Purdy uses the complex yet light French verse form to articulate an ideological stance. With the use of an extra tercet, with half rhyme and enjambment to blunt the musical impulse of the form, with difficult diction, the poet attempts to announce his vocal poetic, his rejection of the monologic truism that the poet disdain the language of his or her age. He constructs a voice both within and without the container of a genre, and he describes what he wishes his voice to be more than enacting it: "Embrace, my verse, the language of the age,/ Coeval sewers of speech that make a poem/ Live argot for the vermifuge of rage" (CSLL 4-5).

In his new poetic, Purdy seeks to re-create the living speech of his day, but he does not fully succeed until Poems for all the Annettes. In this touchstone volume, Purdy's poetic opens out fully in terms of polyphonic play. In this volume's long, diffuse, and exploratory poems, the lineaments of the voice in the process of thought, speech, and

becoming clearly provide a dynamic structure. As Dennis Lee suggests of this volume, "the mature Purdy simply vaults free of three decades of dead-end and marking time, in a riot of exuberant, full-throated energy."¹² Purdy's growth is growth in vocal facility, in volume, depth, and number. What Purdy has learned to do, according to George Bowering, is to prosodically incorporate his speech habits into the poem,¹³ and in Poems for all the Annettes, Bowering writes, "his notation reflects his learning that the written word is some sort of score for the voice."¹⁴

We hear this vocal poetic, for example, in "Poem for one of the Annettes," the poem from which the volume takes its title. This poem is virtually a manifesto for Purdy, with its energetic and open form, its ribald and yet profound subject, in its carnival exuberance and volume. Both form and subject work to create a sense of voice, as is clear in the poem's first lines:

Which one of you?--oh now
 I recognize that tear-stained pro-
 Semitic nose shaped wonderfully for
 your man Murray's kisses but
 he left didn't he?
 Oh Anne'te
 cry like hell
 for Columbus Ohio and Taos New Mexico
 where he is and you're not
 As if
 the world has ended and
 it has-- (PAA 7-8)

The questions, the dashes, the enjambment, the line irregularities and the colloquial diction all work to create orality, the sense of a

¹² Lee, afterword 374.

¹³ Bowering 28.

¹⁴ Bowering 60.

speaking voice and listener. Paradoxically, this poem is a gift addressed not to one Annette but three--Annette, Anita, and Janine. The poet addresses each of these women deserted by men, encouraging them to "Cry the common sickness with ordinary tears,/ As if/ they would flood the whole quasi-romantic town of/ Montreal. . .," and he concludes, "Oh Anita, they do." The poet's initial "as if" construction becomes replaced by a certainty as the poet speaks directly to these Annettes in this poem of vocal fullness. Essentially, these early volumes reveal a sea change in Purdy's understanding and practise of voice. Purdy grows into a vocal facility and a polyphonic fullness. His poems change from monologic 'poetic' constructions to processes of represented speech participating in heteroglot openness. Purdy's maturation in voice amounts to nothing less than a renewed understanding of sound in poetry. With Poems for all the Annettes, Purdy has learned that there are indeed no voiceless words.

ii.

The Dialogized Voice: Polyphony and Double-Voicing

Purdy's mature poems enact this play with sound through a variety of techniques making voice both form and content, techniques making voice the object of artistic representation. One such method of vocal dialogue in his aesthetic of social speech is the simple fact of polyphony itself. In the early poem "Love Song" from The Crafte So Longe to Lerne, the poet argues, "I can be two men if I have to" (CSLL 21-22). This comment, parenthetically made, an aside to us as readers, cuts to the heart of Purdy's polyphonic poetic: he can be many men, speak in many voices and use many discourses; he can adopt a dialogic attitude to himself through languages. Indeed, this understanding of

the importance of the voices of `others' can be found in "From the Foreign Visitors' Book" out of Hiroshima Poems. Here in this (un)poem Purdy lets the voices of others speak for themselves without the intrusion of his own voice. We hear both harmony and cacophony.

The long poem In Search of Owen Roblin,¹⁵ where we discovered the crisis of the author-position for Purdy, also reveals the poet in search of this poetic of polyphony. In this exploration of poetic rehabilitation, the speaking poet emphasizes repeatedly the centrality of hearing the voices of others to understanding and writing poetry; indeed, this poem stresses that the poet must speak through and in the voices of others. Polyphony provides the key to unlocking both self and other. Purdy discusses this use of voice with respect to In Search of Owen Roblin in a 1975 interview:

If you say that you have settlers coming up from the U.S. after the American Revolution--the U.E.L.'s--you try to conceive of what they may be thinking and put words in their mouths--I don't regard quite that as fictionalization. All right in a sense it is . . . Invention is perhaps a better word.¹⁶

Purdy stresses the importance of thinking as another and speaking as that other.

For him, polyphonic thinking is authentic thinking, and this becomes apparent in the poem itself. Incorporated into the poem are the voices of his grandfather, of an Old Man teaming on the Opeongo line, of a Man and Woman from the pioneer past, of the town drunk and the schoolmaster. Purdy takes us into the Loyalist past by giving us its voices, by quoting American action against Loyalists and inventing a

¹⁵ Purdy, Owen Roblin No pagination.

¹⁶ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright 51.

dialogue between Man and Woman as pioneers, a dialogue expressing pioneer betweenness in the destruction of the forest, the growing of food and engendering of children, the raising of fences. The Woman concludes, "and the land will take us at last/ before we vanish forever/ and we shall be born again & again & again/ neither waking nor sleeping." The poet enters the past by inventing its voices. The poet then returns from this dialogue to become himself and not himself: "After being them I become/ myself again rooted in Year One/ of all the directions I am travelling." The poet listens to all these voices from the past, gives voice to them, and finds his own voice in them; he tries to feel as these others felt and think as they thought, with the result that "somehow they gave me the words." The poet makes this polyphonic activity paradigmatic for writing, in fact:

Of course any writer can do this
 at least he ought to be able to
 his mind switching identities
 he enters bodies of long-vanished people
 the relay race ahead reversed
 and I go back down the stairway
 we all came up when we were born

Both our origins and our present being, suggests the poet, are polyphonic.

Within this polyphonic poetic, Purdy does not simply talk about voices. He seeks to create oral and aural speech. Whether in raucous or contemplative poems, speech patterns, colloquial diction, and rhythm all serve to make the poem's voices spoken and heard voices. As a craftsman, Purdy works hard to create this oral/aural quality of speech. This quality is evident in such poems as "Spring Song," "At the Quante Hotel," and "Complaint Lodged with L.C.B.O.," all of which create the

heard speech, Purdy modulates between a great range of moods and tones, through a polyphonic array of voices: spoken and heard speech registers interactive consciousness.

Such polyphony emphasizes that the author Al Purdy does not speak directly or simply or monologically in the voice of the poem. The Purdy poem takes shape as a dramatic monologue (which in spite of the label is filled with dialogic overtones). These poems are not lyrics in any simple sense: instead of hearing directly referential speech, we hear represented speech, speech in quotation marks as it were. We hear voices not the author, with the result that speech is conditional, aware of another. A further result of such represented speech is a dialogizing of the author's discourse and authority.¹⁷ His intentions are dispersed or refracted through the various voices of his polyphonic chorus, through what Bakhtin calls the "character zones" of the text; the voices created by the represented speech of the poems de-authorize authorial monologue. Purdy's poetic polyphony is filled with such autonomous character zones, the distinct and separate voices of characters inhabiting the text, from the many versions of the poet to the most distant of voices. In fact, all the voices of Purdy's chorus arrange themselves at varying distances from the author, some close but not identical, others far removed, and these character zones, with their autonomous voices, enter into dialogic relationships.

¹⁷ Sherrill Grace writes in "'Listen to the Voice': Dialogism and the Canadian Novel" that Bakhtin's refraction can be defined as "the scattering or dispersion of an author's intentional language through the words, voices, and character 'zones' of the text, so that the more refracted the authorial voice, the lesser his or her authority will be." Purdy's poetry is such refracted poetry. She goes on to define a character zone as "the autonomous voice of a fully self-conscious character within a given text" (Future Indicative 119-121).

Individual poems, in fact, become double-voiced--internally polyphonic--mixing disparate languages, discourses, world views, and ideologies. With double-voicing, discourse becomes no longer the tool of dogma but of open becoming and revision, and such double-voicing lies at the heart of Purdy's poetic. His world is one both de-monologized and de-authorized, a world of linguistic saturnalia in a post-Babel era of horizontal dialogue. In the poem "Johnston's on St. Germain (Or: comfort me with bagels)," the speaker occupies a carnival marketplace world of many languages. He himself speaks many languages in a carnival ruse (English, French, and Yiddish), "stapling bargain boxsprings and sweating among the goyim" (SAD 16-19) as he seeks to counter the anti-semitic voice of Beaudoin. In the Israel of poetry, Purdy occupies Galilee of the Goyim; in the Exodus, he is the mixed multitude that came up out of Egypt with the children of Israel, the slaves, the ruffians, the gentiles, the foreigners. Through double-voicing, Purdy occupies a heteroglot world of many languages and world views.

Through double-voicing, two or more discourses are mixed within a single utterance. Purdy dialogizes the voices in his poems by reminding us of voices in the background, voices of others. In many Purdy poems, we hear the voice of another poem or poet. "Homer's Poem" suggests the complexity of such double-voicing. The title initially suggests that the poem's voice is that of Homer, but by the end of the poem the voice reveals itself to be Odysseus. This purposeful play with identity makes the voice of Odysseus the voice of Homer and the voice of Purdy as well; the poem merges these various voices, suggesting the mystery at the heart of authorship as well as being. Indeed, such is the model for

Purdy as author and his many selves in the poems. Homer's voice, in fact, lies behind many of Purdy's poems, which speak both chorically and dialogically with Homer. For example, Purdy domesticates and carnivalizes the heroic in the dramatic monologue "Menelaus and Helen." In making light of myth through a colloquial voice, Purdy dialogizes discourses of sex, power, and heroism. Purdy's poem provides a parodic double for Homeric epic, a footnote to another voice. Similarly, all of the North of Summer volume participates in this dialogue with Homer. We hear repeatedly in this double-voiced volume the voice of Homer behind the poet's own odyssey. In "Odysseus at Kikastan," the poet relates, "Now I'm hard at work on a new translation/ of Homer's Odyssey Arctic-fashion/ but Jonasee invites me over for tea"(NOS 40-42). North of Summer is that translation, a translation in which the decidedly unheroic poet recounts his journey to the Arctic. Such double-voicing suggests that Purdy has carried on a continuous dialogue with literary history.

Moreover, these dialogizing background voices are not limited to other poets. Other poems force us to hear the discourse of Greek myth as such a dialogizing background. "Chronos at Quintana Roo" provides such an extensive play with background voices from myth. Chronos, from the Greek Khronos meaning time, becomes the poet's god in this poem, and the poem is filled with a parodic worship of this god along with other voices, both parodic and dialogic. Indeed, this poem is an extravaganza of double-voicing. The drunken, half-hearted, tourist poet offers up his parodic worship: "Hail Chronos thy servant approaches/ and please add these instant flashing birthdays/ of now to the rustling garment of

utterance: different linguistic consciousnesses often greatly separated in time and space, social position, or attitude are joined in a single voice.¹⁹ Such a technique of bringing disparate discourses together within the utterance is at the centre of Purdy's use of voice.

Through hybridization, Purdy does not simply mix his own voices; rather, he brings into contact disparate languages and world views. Each voice is heard in the context of another, highly different voice, with the result that each voice is heard anew. In the hybrid utterance, Purdy joins other authors' words with his own, thus dispersing his own monologic authority. Literary history takes on new flesh and new voice in the Purdy hybrid. Several poems in Poems for all the Annettes clearly demonstrate this form of hybridization. The brilliant "Archaeology of Snow" ends with a serio-comical mixing of everyday cursing with Gerard Manley Hopkins' "God's Grandeur":

My god what an agony to be sub-divided like
 this and to be continuous and to be every-
 where like a bunch of children's blocks
 disappearing inside each other my god
 and not being also migawd
 also what grandeur (PAA 15-18)

In this mixing of voices, Purdy contacts the essential mystery of being, living, and writing poetry. The dialogic play of the colloquial poet's

¹⁹ Bakhtin explains that "a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Dialogic Imagination 304), and he later adds to this definition by suggesting that hybridization "is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (Dialogic Imagination 358).

voice and the voice of Hopkins within the utterance allows us to hear each voice anew.

Purdy takes this hybridization of 'literary' discourses from the heights of being and poetry to the depths of popular culture. In the hybrid utterance, Purdy joins the high and the low, the comic and the serious, to fill out our one-sided understanding. Mixing the elevated and the carnival, in "Hymie's Hymn" the poet bursts forth with "Of thee I sing, Hymie,/ and of the mattress factory on St. Germain" (PAA 60). Such play with high and low provides a model for Purdy's poetic utterance, and such hybrids infect his oeuvre. We find this double-voicing in such poems as "Astronot," which combines the astronomical and the excremental: the poet who jumps, leaps, and sails through lunar, planetary, and stellar worlds also steps in cow dung on his front yard. In "Johnston's on St. Germain," the poet speaks a hybrid discourse of Yiddish, English, and French as he claims to be a Polish U.E.L. named Purelansky as he attempts to dialogize the anti-semitism of his fellow factory-worker Beaudoin. The poem is filled with hybridization for both comic and serious purposes. Discovered in his ruse, the poet relates, "my chutzpah leaked out from my tail between my legs/ I walked in the valley of the shadow of non-identity/ and none but Beaudoin annointeth my head with scorn" (SAD 16-19). In three lines, Purdy mixes Yiddish (chutzpah, meaning shameless audacity) with a carnival cliché and comic parody of the twenty-third Psalm.²⁰

²⁰ In other poems, Purdy mixes comic, domestic, and childhood discourses with metaphysical, political, and ontological ones. See, for example, "Hockey Players" (CH 60-62).

Many of these hybridizations of the elevated and the heteroglot involve the combining of the mythic and the domestic or even carnival, most often with comic results that dialogize what is traditionally heard and seen as serious. Such hybridization completes the mythic and enriches the serious. One such poem is "Archaeology of Snow," where in a parenthetical aside (literally parenthetical), the poet bursts out in exaltant praise, "O Helen of Illyria with the big behind" (PAA 15-18). These hybrids, to use a carnival trope, infect Purdy's poems. Not only providing an unusual aesthetic pleasure, they relate what is usually kept separate; they teach readers the connections between high and low, the serious and the comic; they provide a dialogized, upside down world view. In "Still Life in a Tent," with its comic subtitle "tenting tonight in the old camp ground," we hear the hybrid discourse of the poet artist in a tent pinned down to an Arctic island:

My blood burns and burns
with systole and diastole
tolling over the northland
while I strike cross-capillary
with ham sandwich and thermos
to find the court of the Seal-King (NOS 47-49)

In these six lines, Purdy joins languages of the body, music, hiking, and Inuit myth in a comic hybrid, a fevered discourse.

In many of Purdy's poems, it must be added, hybrids serve to dialogize the languages of human relationship. Purdy plunges from the sublime to the ridiculous and back again, with the result that these serio-comic hybrids expose the numerous laws that govern these human interactions. In "Shopping at Loblaws," the poet combines discourses of shopping, eating, desire, psychology, and prehistory. Each of these voices within the poet's voice reveals an aspect of the speaker's

attitude to the object of his desire. The woman he chases down the aisle is prey to be trapped, food to be eaten ("citrus fruits her little behind"). The poet himself, Neanderthal Man, hunter, lecher, and middle aged windowshopper, becomes a commodity:

Chaos again I guess is beginning
 even for middle aged windowshoppers
 tho ending in definite order with
 everything wrapped and packaged and
 instinct roped tight and the sub
 conscious caged hot in white bone turnstile (WGW 30-31)

The poet's hybrid utterance, with its dialogic play of languages of shopping and psychological activity, reveals the foundation of a rather comical episode. The poem "Home-Made Beer" is perhaps the best known, however, in this vein of hybrid poetic utterances. Throughout the poem there is a play between vocal control and vocal explosion, between the remembrance of the event and the language of the event itself. In relating the incident or anecdote of carnival domestic confrontation, the speaker exhibits control, inflated ego and diction, and self-righteousness. His sense of propriety is repeatedly dialogized by the other element of his discourse, by the making of beer, his yodelling at children, and his confronting his wife. He yodels "with excessive moderation"; he breaks a broom "with commendable savoir faire"; he tears open his shirt, bares his breast, tells her "calmly" and with "a minimum of boredom" (CH 64-65) to drive the knife home. Paradoxically, in this comic hybridization of languages the truly human qualities of the speaker and the relationship are revealed. Dialogization through the hybrid poem fleshes them out.

Finally, the hybrid utterance fleshes out time in the Purdy poem. The relationship between past and present is dialogized. Repeatedly,

Purdy mixes, through what can be described as variation, archaic and contemporary language. Each language is heard in the context of the other, with the result that the poetic utterance has distinctive echoes and reverberations. We hear this hybridization in Emu, Remember!, where in "Flies in Amber" the time-travelling poet mimics within the utterance itself his journey to past centuries:

I stung by youth, stretch, reach, run,
 Rotate round suns and tramp down time;
 Court Blake and Marlowe, question Donne,
 Think back hours, years, redeless dreame,
 Grow lanke, soulle thinne, flesh weake, eyes blinde.
 In such extremities, approche new landes. (ER 16)

Already in this early effort, Purdy's sense of time's flexibility reveals itself in the hybrid construction of archaic and contemporary discourses. In the much later Piling Blood volume, Purdy still carries on this mixing of archaic and contemporary discourses. In "Birds and Beasts," a poem about the whip-poor-will, we hear an archaic discourse of lamentation:

mourn ye rugged Newfoundlanders and Albertans
 and mourn ye bereft westcoasters likewise
 who never hear the bonfire song
 the dusk song the heart song of home
 And verily be complacent ye effete easterners
 for whom the jewelled guts resound
 and pour their sorcery in our ears
 jug-jug for dirty ears (PE 39-40)

The poet's lamentation is combined with a specifically Canadian discourse; moreover, elements of Romantic nature and the carnival body mix with the discourse of T.S. Eliot, giving the hybrid utterance a layered effect as Old World and past are played off against New World and present. In their mixing of two voices, Purdy's hybrid poetic utterances open up thought, meaning, and being alive itself.

One key to Purdy's double-voicing is what Bakhtin calls syncretism, or the juxtaposition of points-of-view on the same object. Juxtaposition as technique provides the energy for double-voicing; it is the dynamo that converts mechanical words into electrical, living speech. We have noted previously Purdy's explanation in an interview of the poet's ability to think relationally, to make sideways leaps and jumps, to connect what is not normally joined. In the same interview, Purdy also insists that he is "far more interested in objects in relation to something, in relation to people."²¹ Purdy's poetry relates and connects, places perspectives side by side in order to come to a dialogic understanding. Speaking of death in "Evergreen Cemetery," the poet revises his own cynical tendencies, admitting that "it is too complicated to sum up/ in telling phrase or easy pessimism,/ syllogism or denouement--" (PAA 33-34). This admission underlies Purdy's vocal juxtaposition: monologue, he suggests, is too easy, simple, and structured to provide answers. Instead, we must adopt a dialogic approach to both meaning and voice. The result is that in Purdy's poems the reader hears a constant play of perspectives, a continual vocal shifting. It quickly becomes clear that this vocal shifting, this process of vocal juxtaposition lies at the foundation of Purdy's dialogic poetic.²²

²¹ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 71.

²² Critics have begun to note this process at the heart of Purdy's poetic, most notably among them Dennis Lee. In his afterword to the Collected Poems, as we have already noted, he discusses at length Purdy's use of polyphony in connection with a world characterized by flux and process, and Lee writes that "no reader can get through twenty lines without becoming aware of the constant shifts in levels of diction and pacing and tone, the squawks and blips as Purdy's own consciousness intrudes and recedes, the startling turn-arounds from redneck coarseness to a supple middle style to soaring passages of joy and lamentation." Lee then proceeds to analyze "Love at Roblin Lake" with this understanding of

Although most often complex, Purdy's use of syncretism is often clearly marked in a poem, and these more obvious examples provide an entrance into Purdy's use of vocal juxtaposition. Many poems, such as "Miss Adventure" and "The Runners," are constructed out of actual dialogue between two autonomous character zones: juxtaposition is obvious. In other poems, shifts in stanza or verse paragraphs or section mark vocal shift. In the poem "Starlings," the second section begins "By contrast" (HOE 29-30): the poet marks the shift in perspective. In many poems, we hear an immediate juxtaposition between the title and the first line. The first words we hear in "Spring Song" are "Old father me" (PAA 27-28), while those we hear in "I am Definitely on the Side of Life I Said to Pausanias" are "But shit nobody will give me a ride" (SAD 81-82). The juxtaposition of tone, diction, and world view is immediate.

One often repeated and significant syncretic double-voicing technique is Purdy's use of parentheses. The frequency of parenthetical expressions, especially in the volumes of the 1960s, suggests that the aside, the second thought, and the 'other' voice are a natural part of the poet's thinking. At times parenthetical comments function as refrains, often combined with a sense of incremental repetition. Such is the case in "Arctic River," in which the poet repeatedly reminds us that the river is older than the many other objects of his attention. The poem is built on a pattern of address and asides. In other poems, parentheses mark off comic, dialogizing asides. Thus, in "Archaeology of Snow" we hear the poet say of himself, "(O hound/ of faithfulness)"

polyphony in mind. (Lee, afterword 380)

(PAA 15-18), and in "Lo: t in the Badlands" the poet makes the following aside after receiving the evil eye from his wife: "(I wonder if every female dinosaur/ ate her husband and therefore/ the species became extinct?)"(PB 26-31). Such comic asides often serve to dialogize the speaker, and more specifically to undercut any sense we may have of the author's authority over this discourse. For example, in "One Rural Winter" the poet notes that there are "In the backyard/ pieces of wood and stones embedded in ice/ (notice the Freudian terminology please)," and he adds, "I'm trapped forever in the 3rd Post-Atomic Glacial Period/ (making witty remarks like `Cold out, ain't it, Zeke?')"(CH 67-68). Through these parenthetical comments, with their humorous dialogic overtones, Purdy sets out to undercut his own words. He does so again in "Mind Process Re a Faucet":

(Absurd delight in this sort of thing--
as if the sprawled mind was exercising,
asking its sybil self questions--grins derisively
behind the hand at its own shell game.) (PAA 22-23)

Purdy continually reveals through asides the tricks behind the special effects; he repeatedly blurs the boundary line between stage and reality.

In still other poems, parenthetical comments serve as fundamental extensions or revisions of another discourse, as larger vocal juxtapositions. "The Quarrel," for example, has a middle parenthetical section in which the poet dreams himself and his wife into a state of lunar bliss:

(Mare Imbrium, my darling!
Running with great 30 foot strides
in the apogee and perigree of love,
throwing handfuls of pumice and sliding
down hills in a dream slalom

to Lacus Mortis and Lacus Somniorum,
 where youth is a twinkle in the eye
 of the absolute) (PAA 59)

This parenthetical discourse takes us into a lunar dream world where domestic arguments do not exist; when the parenthesis closes, however, the quarrel remains: "Self conscious on Mare Imbrium?/ Mad as hell in a bedroom/ in Ameliasburg Township."²³ Parenthetical asides accomplish the double-voicing of the Purdy poem, dialogizing the serious with the comic and the comic with the serious, indeed dialogizing voice in the pursuit of open selfhood.

More subtle vocal transitions, shifts, and jumps, though not obviously marked, equally help to double-voice the Purdy poem.²⁴ The voice we hear is the voice of unclenched thought, at times meditative and at other times exuberant. We hear this dialogic mental process in "Evergreen Cemetery," in the poet's constant revision of his own conclusions concerning death and the constant play between serious and comic tones. The poem's first lines usher us into this playful world:

²³ See also the parenthetical ending of "Hockey Players."

²⁴ Such subtle vocal changes are both technique and philosophy. If we turn again to Dennis Lee's afterword to the Collected Poems, we learn of Purdy that in his juxtaposition of voices he is "capable of shifting from one to the next in a seamless way, one that mimes a cosmos in which all things flow," and Lee emphasizes that this shifting is not the juxtaposing of discontinuous voices, "the main tradition of 'polyphony' in this century" (Lee, afterword 380). In the Purdy poem, relational thinking is demonstrated in the very temporal progress and process of the poem; poems become explorations rather than monologic statements. Purdy's prosody often turns poems into a series of mild electric shocks, with jumps in tone, energy, and pace; surprise turn arounds and second thinking revise previous conclusions. What we hear is the mind in motion through voice, the dialogic process of mental contemplation and action, and this process is what the juxtaposition of voices through shifting reproduces in the Purdy poem. In a moment of self-revelation concerning his poetic, the poet of "Mind Process Re a Faucet" insists that the reader needs to be repeatedly shocked; he then turns to himself, saying that "for myself continuous discovery,/ else in the midst of somnolence: defeat after defeat" (PAA 22-23). The poetic enterprise defeats static matter, form, and thought, and the vast majority of Purdy's poems demonstrate this mind never at rest, always joining, connecting, and shocking.

"I guess it is ever green . . . / What's sure if green isn't?" (PAA 33-34). These lines, referring back to the title, are followed by a mixed meditation on death, specifically the death of his mother. We hear the poet's mixed discourse in the cemetery world:

Me standing here in death's
ceded town
 in full summer
the dead down there unfreezing comfortably
the cold miserable rain untouching them--
outnumbering all to hell the last newcomers:
1 human, 2 chipmunks, some squirrels . . .

The poet mixes a discourse of death with humour, and he proceeds to catalogue the cemetery's community--swaggerers, braggarts, and lovers--and relate his mother's death, noting that while she may belong here, he himself doesn't "with the taverns open." The serio-comical poet cannot escape the evergreen cemetery soon enough.

The extent and depth of these vocal shifts in Purdy's poems can better be understood and felt by hearing polyphony at work in extensive passages, and the following two passages exhibit an extraordinary but typical polyphonic power in terms of voice transitions. The first passage comprises the final half of "Dominion Day," from Wild Grape Wine:

Next day all this red paper
makes me think of the H-Bomb
which is silly I guess
because firecrackers are
 Jubilate JUBILATE
to neighbourhood kids
each red scrap stands for
a 10 year old boy's freckled grin
a happy little girl's
 clap hands clap hands
CLAP HANDS
all together then
in the red rain
my darling children

and maybe you
 (or dammit someone)
 can hear as well
 the faint unfunny
 beginning adult chuckle
 of nuclear laughter
 which also stands for something
 at least it does before hand (WGW 87)

In these lines, the poet awakens the reader to hidden connections. Like the title, a hybrid of holiday, biblical, and power discourses, the poem mixes the discourses of celebration and apocalypse, of red rain and young green leaves. The entire passage works through relational thinking. After making the unusual connection of the first two lines, the poet slides into a discourse of apology and second-guessing; he is the sensitive if odd poet, a fool and bumbler. From this point, he slides into a discourse of childhood innocence and wonder mixed with a language of religious celebration. Eventually, the language becomes that of the adult song leader, the nursery school teacher, the pied piper. Mixed into this discourse are hints of apocalypse, firecrackers connecting with red rain and H-bombs. In another transition, the poet turns to his adult audience (with an aside exhibiting frustration) away from childhood celebration to apocalyptic laughter. In the final two lines, the poet makes a statement and then revises it apocalyptically. Thinking and thinking again, transition, juxtaposition, and ambivalence characterize these lines in which the poet explores the meaning and unmeaning of words, things, and symbols.

"The Children" demonstrates a similar dexterity with vocal transitions, and as with "Dominion Day," the seriousness of the subject matter is conveyed by an almost comic play between adult and childhood discourses. The following passage comprises the last lines of the poem:

suppose the whole world
 is a garbage dump
 well just supposing it's so
 and old tin cans are lovely
 as pearls for a lovely princess
 on the front of her lovely evening gown
 and rotten spaghetti isn't
 crawling white worms crawling
 under the falling snow
 that makes all things beautiful
 Well just imagine just supposing
 Mother goose lived here
 whispering stories to the dead children
 about home sweet home on the garbage dump
 for another million years
 while Hickory Dickory Dock solemnly
 concurs and Humpty Dumpty never
 fell before Peter Rabbit became rabbit stew
 and it isn't true
 that Indian kids live like that
 and die like that it isn't true
 somebody's bound to say
 besides it doesn't make a very good poem
 and isn't pleasant either I guess
 but to hell with poems
 to hell with poems (SAD 24-26)

This poem, exploring as it does the lives of Indian children in Churchill Manitoba, provides a constant juxtaposition of reality and fairy tale, scavenging for food with a quasi-Romantic notion of childhood. In this particular section, the juxtaposition remains constant and intense, and it is in this juxtaposition that the voices find their power; it is the double-voicing that makes the passage almost horrific. Again, we find seamless transitions between poet, children, and posited readers. The first lines quickly mark a shift from the poet's discourse to the suppositions of the children: we hear a constant tension between what is and what can be imagined; we hear a Dickensian waif imagining him or herself out of hell. Quickly we move from this discourse more specifically into Mother Goose, Beatrix Potter, and a parodic discourse of domestic bliss; in this discourse with its

higher diction we again hear the poet's voice. In the lines which follow, we shift into the discourse of a posited listener, perhaps ourselves, a discourse of guilt avoidance spoken by a comfortable outsider. These words then become shared by the poet, who acknowledges the inappropriateness of the subject matter for 'poesy.' In the final lines, however, we hear his radical rethinking, his radical revision of the monologically acceptable as he sends poetry to hell; he dismisses poetry, but in another sense he has indeed taken poetry to hell on the garbage dump. In these voice transitions and juxtapositions, Purdy brings this world to life. He takes us to hell rather than Parnassus.

We hear such vocal juxtaposition as well in patterns of inflation and deflation found within poems. In such patterns, Purdy dialogizes one discourse with another, the serious with the comic, the elevated with the low, the cosmic with the domestic, the poetic with the heteroglot. "The Country North of Belleville" enacts this pattern. This country, the poet tells us, is a country of defeat, of Sisyphus and glacial rubble, of "days in the sun/ when realization seeps slow in the mind/ without grandeur or self deception in/ noble struggle/ of being a fool--"(CH 74-76). Nobility and foolishness are dialogically placed side by side in a pattern of inflation and deflation that does not seek to cancel but to comprehend. On a more comical note, the first lines of "One Rural Winter" provide us with a pattern of humour replacing seriousness:

Trapped
 cut off
 marooned
 like a thief sentenced to a country jail
 the rural mail my only communication with outside
 surrounded by nothing

but beautiful trees
& I hate beautiful trees (CH 67-68)

The initial discourse of life-threatening danger and impending doom (marked particularly by the line arrangement) gives way to rural jokes and winter peevishness. It is in such passages of vocal inflation and deflation, extant in Purdy's poetry, that we find the dialogization of meaning at work.

Moreover, we find this dialogization in the vocal open-endedness of the Purdy poem. Juxtaposition of various voices within the poem does not lead to a closing down of voice with the poem's ending. Often this ending signals the expansion outward of voice to the universal, or conversely a settling down of the rambunctious or exuberant voice to the domestic. Either way, through such vocal transitions Purdy refuses to shut down polyphony. In "Death of John F. Kennedy," a bombardment of chronotopic messages quiets down to the remembered television grin of J.F.K. and an inconclusive dash. The poet's mourning provides vectors penetrating the pinpoint now:

for which the power supply
jams under a heavy load of messages from
huntsmen falling asleep standing in snowstorms
in the 2nd Ice Age forever and Sumerian shepherd
kings catching cold and dead of the sniffles and
messages from rock cairns in Transylvania
and exiles in a Roman province from Hyannisport
and Sierra Maestra and Crimea and silence:
for which the power supply
is an inflection of a subordinate clause
on television
a remembered grin-- (CH 79-81)

Such a quieting down to a continuing pedestrian existence is one syncretic pattern which Purdy uses often. Another pattern sees Purdy expand outwards rather than contract. The poet's contemplation of the

faucet, water, and thought itself in "Mind Process Re a Faucet" expands out of urban and human Montreal into "the hazy azimuths of earth--" (PAA 22-23), opening outward with a dash. The poet's perspective quietly moves out into a larger celestial circle around the earth. In such vocal open-endedness, double-voicing opens outward rather than shuts down; voice re-creates dialogic becoming both within and without the poem's boundaries.

One other method of double-voicing needs to be explored in connection with Purdy's poems. We have examined the complex juxtaposition of discourses in the Purdy poem as well as the mixing within the poetic utterance of two or more voices; this double-voicing, we have seen, frees consciousness from monologue and disperses the author's authority. A third method, namely the speaking of words oriented towards the words of another, also accomplishes this dialogization of voice. Hearing the words of another person or another self, the speaker speaks with a sideways glance, in Bakhtin's terms. The speaking voice acknowledges in his or her own discourse the presence of another's voice or voices, of a listener's already-spoken words or anticipated answering words. An outside voice or discourse influences and shapes the voice we hear, the result being that what we do hear is not monologic but dialogic speech. It is this quality of living speech that Purdy's poems seek to both re-create and explore: voice for him is both form and content. Voice continually acknowledges a shadow voice. Speaking of living dialogue, Bakhtin writes, "forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and

in fact anticipated by the answering word."²⁵ In living dialogue, voice is surrounded by voices. Indeed, the relationship between these voices is often polemical. As a complement to syncretism, Bakhtin posits anacrisis, which he defines as the provocation of the word by a word.²⁶ In this act of provocation we find yet another double-voicing key to the Purdy poem. For Purdy, consciousness is either internally dialogic, filled with struggle and debate, or is dialogically related to another consciousness.

His poems, in fact, are riddled with the voices of others. In many cases, the poet makes quite obvious the voice of the other with quotation. Bakhtin writes that "someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them; that is, they become double-voiced."²⁷ Such introduced speech we find regularly in Purdy's poems; we sense a continual dialogic awareness of and concern for the words of others. "Sestina on a Train," originally entitled "The Madwoman on the Train," is one such poem. Here, we find the poet travelling by train to Vancouver, sitting beside a woman-wife-mother gone mad and being escorted by a Mountie to an asylum. The poem is propelled forward by her question addressed to the poet: "Do you take drugs?" (CH 13-14). In the poet's struggle with these words and her insanity lies the poem's

²⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 280.

²⁶ Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics helps define this dialogic method: "In Dostoevsky, consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness. Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself--but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person"(32).

²⁷ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 195.

centre, its energy. The poet discovers his own participation in her madness: "`Yes, I do take drugs,'/ I say to her and myself. `I get high on hemp and peyote biting/ at scraps of existence I've lost all the smoky limitless marbles/ I found in my life once long lost before Vancouver--." The poet discovers in her question his own lost childhood, the madness and hurt he had forgotten: the quoted words of another dialogize the poet. In this poem and numerous others, contemplating the words of others constitutes both form and content.

Purdy delights in letting other voices speak for themselves, but also in revising those voices within the poem, in colouring them dialogically. In "Old Alex," the poet actually begins the poem by quotation: "`85 years old, that miserable alcoholic/ old bastard is never gonna die' the man said"(CH 57-58). The poet begins his discourse on Alex with a sideways glance at the words of another, indeed official and sanctified words, and he then sets out immediately to revise and dialogize these words. Similarly, Purdy uses quotation in "The North West Passage" for comic effect; quotation dialogizes our accepted notions of heroism and greatness: "I amuse myself with the idea of/ Martin Frobisher/ `Admiral of the Ocean-Sea' who was/ `hurte . . . in the Buttocke with an Arrowe'"(NOS 20-21). Through quotation and quoted dialogue, through open acknowledgement of and play with the voices of others, Purdy instills his poems with a double-voicing that brings himself and us as readers more closely into contact with the dialogic basis of thinking, speaking, and being.

Purdy's poetic discourse is, moreover, a discourse of addressivity. Again and again we hear discourse oriented towards a

reader or other posited addressee. In virtually every Purdy poem we sense the traces of this double-voicing technique, but in some this addressivity is startling in its intensity. Purdy continually hears other voices, builds response into his discourse, and addresses listeners and other speakers. In "My Grandfather Talking--30 Years Ago," the poet's grandfather addresses the poet as boy:

Not now boy not now
 some other time I'll tell ya
 what it was like
 the way it was
 without no streets
 or names of places round
 an nothin but moonlight boy
 nothin but that (CH 105-106)

In these first lines of the poem, the grandfather speaks while refusing to speak: he proceeds to tell what he had refused to tell, the texture of pioneer life disappearing. Paradoxically, in listening to this voice, the poet finds his own. Moreover, this addressivity often takes a bizarre carnivalesque turn. In "The Winemaker's Beat-Étude," he addresses cows in a comic discourse to close the poem: "O my sisters/ I give purple milk!" (WGW 8-9). Such odd posited audiences are common in Purdy. He addresses the dead, the earth, and his own poems. His poetic discourse constantly takes into account other discourses by addressing the other.

Indeed, such double-voicing through addressivity comprises not only the technique but the meaning of many of Purdy's poems. The sideways glance at another comprises the dialogic basis of understanding, and "Homer's Poem" is paradigmatic in this regard. Being itself finds its origin in listening to others and addressing others. "Listen," we are told chorically; the speaker of the poem addresses his

twin brother in the womb; and finally he says his name to those others around him about to be born:

I say my name to them
 my name is Odysseus
 in the city of life
 which is the city of death
 --my name that you may remember
 my name is Odysseus (CP 3-4)

Shifting from third to second person in the last two lines, the speaker Odysseus initiates being by giving his name in a direct address to the others. In "Birds and Beasts," we also hear the dialogic basis of being in the address to the other. Not only do we hear the poet's direct address to his fellow Canadians concerning the song of the whip-poor-will, but we hear nothing less than a poetic of listening and speaking. Hearing the bird's song, the poet translates it as a morning song, an egg song, a song of surprise at being alive. His listening, his sideways glance, causes him to revise the American interpretation of the song with a Canadian one: the bird sings not "Poor Will" but "More Still"(PB 39-40). At the end of the poem, the dialogic foundation of being is again revealed in the evening song of the birds, in their address and response, their "sleep well" and "we will." This attitude of listening and addressing is simply and beautifully suggested by the poet in this dusk song.²⁸

One of Purdy's most common and most important posited addressees is his 'wife.' The poet's sideways glances at her act as a vehicle of self-revelation, of opening up the self to change through addresses,

²⁸ Purdy continually includes the reader in this double-voicing process of addressivity. The poet repeatedly takes a sideways glance at the reader. See In Search of Owen Roblin and "Place of Fire" (SUN 90-91).

listening, quoting, and responding. In fact, their both comic and serious interaction takes on the qualities of a yin and yang relationship. In these poems, Purdy plays specifically with masculine roles, parodying himself as husband and lover, making himself into the fool. He balances sentimentality and irony, dialogized by his wife's words, actions, and attitudes. We hear this comical sideways glance in "The Divorced Wife," a poem in which the poet mocks his own jealousy of his wife's study of photography. She, we learn, is "--divorced from plain honesty and integrity/ qualities for which I am justly famed--" (SUN 79). He belittles her photography but realizes he cannot embarrass her by quietly excelling her:

as if to say stick to home and babies
 cleave to the dominant male
 stop making coloured paper miracles
 begin to explore the nearest planet again
 stop loving me
 in surrogate effigy

The poet, feeling ignored and slighted by his wife, replaced by her photographs of him, feels fixed and diminished. This sideways glance turns upside down his own masculine, patriarchal attitudes, exposing them to laughter.

"The Horseman of Agawa" examines this relationship in a different light, again, however, through the poet's sideways glance at his wife. Indeed, this poem concerning a rock painting is equally concerned with this relationship, specifically with the connection between husband and wife in spite of or rather because of their differences. While she climbs nimbly over Lake Superior rocks, he fumbles behind. When they find the rock painting, they "stand there and hold onto each other for balance above the big lake"(SAD 14-16). While contemplating the

painting, the poet turns to contemplate his wife, who "is quiet as she generally is because I do most of the talking." He observes his wife's face, forty years old, etched with the pain of children and the pettiness of daily living; and yet, he finds nobility there:

but standing on the rock face of Lake Superior
 it is not lessened in any way
 with a stillness of depth that reaches where I can't follow
 all other thoughts laid aside in her brain
 on her face I see the Ojibway horseman painting the rock with red
fingers
 and he speaks to her as I could not
 in pictures without handles of words

Again, the poet is humbled by his wife, by her ability to see that has nothing to do with words; his linguistic imagination is dialogized by her visual imagination. The poet's continual sideways glances at his wife, his listening to her difference (whether sympathetically or polemically), work to turn upside down the poet's poetic and masculine attitudes.²⁹

Such sideways glances at the discourse of a reader or posited addressee are often filled with a dialogizing polemic. Purdy's poetic discourse is filled with question marks that turn authoritative statement into open-ended exploration, the direct address into a dialogic sideways glance. And Purdy uses the question mark in a great variety of different situations: he challenges the reader or posited addressee; he begins or ends a poem with a question; he reveals his own limits as author and those of his voices by suggesting incomplete knowledge and limited perspective. The question is one double-voicing

²⁹ See also "For Eurithe" (PB 82-83), "The Battlefield at Batoche" (SAD 41-43), "Song of the Impermanent Husband" (CH 27-28), "In Sickness" (CH 42-43), "Home-Made Beer" (CH 64-65), and "Lost in the Badlands" (PB 26-31).

technique that takes a dialogic approach to meaning and becoming. Moreover, such questioning constitutes a poetic of both continual polemic and continual revision. Such a discourse is one of continual dialogic interaction. The poem "Old Alex" has the poet repeatedly offering up asides to the reader in the form of questions. In the second stanza, we hear such an aside: "So you say: was I fond of him?/ No--not exactly anyhow"(CH 57-58). Propelled forward by this sideways glance at the reader's voice, the poem then asks a series of questions to its very end: "Why commemorate disease in a poem then?/ I don't know"; "Well, who remembers a small purple and yellow bruise long?/ But when he was here he was a sunset!" The poet repeatedly asks questions which cannot be answered but which nevertheless open up dialogically or relationally into other thoughts.

Such questioning, it must also be noted, also takes place in more meditative poems between a speaker and posited addressee. Yet again, the context is polemical. We hear this dialogic interaction at work in "The Stone Bird." Speaking with that combination of sympathy and difference to the agoraphobic, the poet asks, given that the earth is a mausoleum, that life is death, "is Lethe better?/ tell me lady?"(SB 105-108). This question, this life and death polemic, lies at the heart of the poem and the poet's relationship with the woman who functions as posited addressee. We hear a similar serious line of questioning in "To an Attempted Suicide," a poem in which the poet comforts, chastizes, and debates with his poet friend. In the first section, the poet immediately approaches his friend with questions:

What can I do for you
my friend?

Will you try again soon?
 Is the goddam world that desolate?
 --thrown away cigarette butts
 picked up by bums and
 people's lives nobody
 picks up-- (CH 92-93)

The poet's expressions of sympathy and concern quickly turn into a questioning of life's worth and character. Indeed, the poet's struggle with the attempted suicide through questions becomes a struggle with life itself; his discourse takes a sideways glance at life. The poem ends in uncertainty and with a question:

 --stand somewhere in imagination's distance
 from your foolish dreams and
 halfway back to here from there
 sustain me with your presence
 --my friend?

Command turns into plea into question. While the questions remain unresolved, life remains possible and meaning open-ended. Purdy's double-voicing poetic of questioning dialogizes simple and monologic discourses of being alive.

In terms specifically of addressivity, moreover, the speaker in the Purdy poem often takes a sideways glance at another version of him or herself. Bakhtin writes that "a dialogic approach to oneself breaks down the outer shell of the self's image, that shell which exists for other people."³⁰ Purdy's poems exhibit such a dialogic attitude to selfhood in their very vocal fabric. The speaker's many selves are found in a dialogic interaction embodying open becoming; the self constantly revises itself. Purdy's poetic is one filled with ifs, ands, and buts. This sideways glance at another self, this vocally heard

³⁰ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 120.

I'm so glad to be here
 with the chance that comes but once
 to any man in his lifetime
 to travel deep in himself
 to meet himself as a stranger
 at the northern end of the world (NOS 47-49)

Meeting oneself as a stranger, suggests the poet, is an opportunity for becoming, changing, and growing; the dialogic attitude to the self opens the self up out of monologic being's boundaries, and it is this self-revision through the voice's sideways glance at another self that we hear repeatedly in this volume and indeed in each of Purdy's volumes. In this poetic of addressivity, we hear a poet keenly aware of what has previously been spoken and anticipating what has yet to be said. The poem, he understands, is a link in a larger chain of utterances; the voices of the poems respond and seek response. Such double-voiced discourse functions in Purdy's poetry as a polemical, boundary-breaking discourse of the loophole.

iii.

The Voice of Carnival

Purdy understands that voice becomes dialogized not simply through the presence of polyphony and these various double-voicing techniques. In addition, this process is carried out through a tapping of carnival speech, forms, and history (making Purdy a poetic ancestor of Robert Kroetsch). Purdy opens voice up through an infectious carnival consciousness, and one such carnival method can be found in Purdy's extensive play with genre. Each genre is a typical form of speech, and Purdy fills his poems with carnival genres. Drawing on carnival consciousness, Purdy dialogizes his poetic voice through inserted genres that blur the line between fact and fiction, between poem as official

work of art and poem as re-creation of life. Continually in Purdy's poems we hear a dialogic tension between the official voice of poetry and the carnival voices in the poems. Expressing heteroglot consciousness, Purdy's play with carnival genres, with the lower strata of the generic hierarchy, turns the poetic world view upside down.

Instead of hearing pure poetic genres of lament and elegy, of lyric and epic, we hear in Purdy's poems a play with speech genres and what Bakhtin calls skaz. These inserted genres of carnival and heteroglot speech subvert official discourse, the official discourses of poetry and more broadly of literature. Speech genres and skaz infect and renew high genres with marketplace speech.³¹ When used by an author, skaz dialogizes discourse by introducing an 'other,' heteroglot voice. Similarly, speech genres, defined by Bakhtin as "relatively stable types"³² of individual utterances, provide an author with types of speech from heteroglot consciousness. Bakhtin goes on to differentiate between primary and secondary speech genres; the latter "absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones."³³ We witness this process of interplay in Purdy's poems; poems, as secondary speech genres, absorb carnival and other heteroglot primary speech genres, and in doing so, both the primary and secondary genres are

³¹ In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin defines skaz as "an orientation toward oral speech," and he goes on to suggest that "in most cases skaz is introduced precisely for the sake of someone else's voice, a voice socially distinct, carrying with it precisely those points of view and evaluations necessary to the author"(191-192). The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

³² Bakhtin, Speech Genres 60. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

³³ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 62.

transformed. Brought into dialogic contact, official and unofficial genres dialogize voice, and Purdy's poems are radically transformed by the introduction of these heteroglot elements of lower speech into poetic discourse. To use Bakhtin's terms, in Purdy's poems we hear the dialogizing voices of billingsgate, of curses and oaths, of abuses, profanities, and improprieties; we hear marketplace genres, street cries and tirades, what Bakhtin calls loud words spoken in the open.

More specifically, Purdy's poems speak with the voices of domestic argument, the tall tale, and the tavern anecdote. Each of these voices subverts the poet's 'official' voice.³⁴ These poems are filled with carnival speech genres, with oral anecdotes, comic arguments, and bawdy tales. Not only are these genres inserted into Purdy's poems; more often than not, his poems are wholly constructed out of such genres, with the author's literary discourse present as a dialogizing background. Such vocal dialogization through play of speech and poetic genres takes place specifically in domestic arguments. In these poems, the poet's exploration of being alive is hidden between carnival speech genres. We hear such play with voice genres in the polemic embedded in "Song of the Impermanent Husband." Domestic argument overlays less obvious issues of loving, relating, and being alive. The first lines of the poem quite obviously and energetically reveal the speech genre of the husband-wife argument:

³⁴ In his study of Purdy, George Bowering relates that "Purdy's poems are often like a beer-parlour drunk's long rambling stories, his horny old hand on your knee, with some people nervous that the beer will be spilled and people at other tables looking" (Al Purdy 100). Such a statement suggests quite clearly the carnival roots of the Purdy poem.

Oh I would
 I would in a minute
 if the cusswords and bitter anger couldn't--
 if the either/or quarrel didn't--
 and the fat around my middle wasn't--
 if I was young if
 I wasn't so damn sure
 I couldn't find another maddening bitch
 like you holding on for dear life to
 all the different parts of me for
 twenty or twenty
 thousand years (CH 27-28)

These lines, clearly evoking a sense of skaz, play with the speech genre of the spouse's threat to leave, here comically presented. Incorporated into Purdy's poem, this primary speech genre is transformed. This domestic polemic heard in the uxorious-lecherous husband's vacillation between the desire to escape and the need to stay becomes a speech genre in quotes; coloured by comic overtones, this dialogue of speech genre and poetic genre exposes the unfaithful husband pose, the speaker's essential weakness and personal fear, the impermanence of being itself, and his underlying unconventional love.

We hear this dialogization of voice through a play with speech genres in another common Purdy poem, the tavern tale. With this often drunken discourse, the pub anecdote often overlays a richer poetic discourse; the drunk's voice and story dialogize the Purdy lyric. The amusing anecdote (broadly speaking the most common of Purdy's speech genres) when incorporated into the poem takes on and gives off dialogic overtones; the poet's ulterior motives are suggested. "Hazelton, B.C." is one poem filled with such tavern speech. The poet tells the story of his drunk self in the beer parlour of an Indian town: "Go to the beer parlour/ and it's lousy with Indians--"(BIB 10). This "red-neck" discourse initiates us into the tavern world; moreover, in this tavern

speech we also hear the popular genre of the political discussion as the drunk and getting drunker poet argues with Indians about political action. More importantly, however, the poet's play with these speech genres involves a dialogization of his own voice; he himself is revealed along with his personal and cultural guilt in connection with these native peoples:

And full of social wrath
 I buy what I need
 for continued existence
 at the store, get in the car
 and drive out of Hazelton--
 past the lineup at the Agency,
 the old men with green socks
 and the shapeless women,
 into the mountains--

The poet, ambivalently desiring to lead these Indians in rebellion, reveals his own discomfort, his own status as an outsider trying to appropriate the native cause as his own, his own status as white, male saviour in this poem that provides a counterpoint, for example, to Duncan Campbell Scott's tense lamentations of the Indian's fate. A discourse of selfhood underlies the tavern anecdote.

Not only do Purdy's poems dialogize voice by incorporating everyday marketplace speech into their very fabric, but they also do so by playing with 'literary' genres considered to be on the lower levels of the hierarchy of genres. Specifically, Purdy's 'lyrics' play with the carnival genres of confession and soliloquy, Socratic dialogue and symposium, menippea and diatribe. In these genres we hear precisely an encounter between the 'I' and an 'other.' We could argue that in Bakhtin's terms the majority of Purdy's poems speak at least in part through the voice of confession and soliloquy, and more broadly through

menippean patterns and forms, where the boundary between artist's fiction and socio-historical 'fact' is blurred. Indeed, this boundary Purdy continually plays with through use of the tall-tale genre. The speaker of the tall tale has one foot in each camp, as it were; he speaks both fact and fiction. Purdy uses this carnival genre to overlay, again, his own poetic voice, to suggest something deeper behind the comedy. For example, "The Listeners" begins as a bawdy tale: "I might have married her once but/ being an overnight guest of hers changed my mind--" (PAA 49-50). The first lines of this tavern poem are filled with sexual overtones, but the poem and the tall or bawdy tale quickly transform into a study of human misery, entrapment, and sympathy. What we hear instead is the tale of a desperate woman in pain, a woman whose husband is dying slowly and painfully; she attempts to make the teller of the tale her saviour by running out of the house into the fields:

`Migawd, what was she waiting for in
that wheat field?
 What did she want to make me do or say or be suddenly
 there in the ordinary moonlight--
Well (he said defiantly), I wouldn't!

Her waiting is more than the man can bear. The bawdy tale turns tragic; a folk figure is opened up and revealed; life and death are woven together in the dialogization of voice through play with carnival genre.³⁵

The incorporation of these genres into Purdy's poetry points to his fundamental play with all forms of carnival free speech. The poetic

³⁵ See also "Archaeology of Snow," which begins "Bawdy tale at first/ what happened/ in the snow" (PAA 15-18), but goes on to explore the nature of being alive in a world in flux.

voice of the Purdy poem finds itself dialogized by the (un)literary voices rooted in carnival. Carnival speech is threshold speech and marketplace speech: it is filled with ambivalence and laughter, hyperbole and exaggeration, exaltation and degradation. Such speech breaks down the illusion of individual monologic wholeness, the myth of the whole and bounded individual. Carnival speech is loophole speech, and as Bakhtin suggests, "the loophole makes the hero ambiguous and elusive even for himself."³⁶ Carnival free speech opens the speaker to becoming. Moreover, such speech remains unofficial. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin relates that "the familiar language of the marketplace became a reservoir in which various speech patterns excluded from official intercourse could freely accumulate."³⁷ The voices of Purdy's poems reveal that he consistently taps this reservoir of unofficial speech for the purpose of dialogizing the poetic voice, the voice of official and higher culture.

We hear this play with vocal freedom first of all in the various forms of threshold speech found in Purdy's poetry. Threshold speech, as the term suggests, is a speech of the border, of the boundary from one state or world to another. Threshold speech grows out of emotional extremes, dream, delirium, split personality, and even insanity, and threshold speech is often the voice of the grotesque. In Purdy's poems, this threshold speech takes on many forms: we hear laughter, hyperbole, and lying as the poet explores the boundary between fact and fiction, sanity and madness. Speech is exaggerated and inflated, filled with

³⁶ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 234.

³⁷ Bakhtin, Rabelais 17.

laughter and truthful lies. In "One Rural Winter," the poet exaggerates his rural existence. Tapping into folk consciousness, he says, "Why just close your eyes hard out here/ and you don't see little dots of light/ you see fresh cowpads"(CH 67-68). We move into a world of folk jokes, of excrement and outhouses. In such poems, the poet undercuts his own authority, his own voice. We hear this process in "Thank God I'm Normal" where the poet speaker dialogizes himself and his craft:

Me, I'm like all the rest: I wanta be famous!
 But I'm not gonna be paranoid
 I'm not I'm not I'm not I'm not I'm not--
 Anyway, I don't know how to end this.
 But the morning mail drops in the slot
 and a letter from the scholarship people says,
 'It is with regret that we inform you--'
 Why--why, the sonsabitches! (CH 15)

In this discourse of cheap fame, paranoia, and carnival cursing, the poet dialogizes his own voice. Threshold speech undercuts the monologism of poetic speech.

In still other Purdy poems, threshold speech occurs on the boundary between life and death. This speech is speech of the body, its living and its dying. In some poems, the poet carries on a polemic with the dead, whereas in other poems the poet's threshold speech celebrates the energy of life. In "Homage to Ree-Shard," we hear Roblin Lake's celebration:

Frog music in the night
 and all the dogs and cats and cows
 on farms for miles in all directions
 screech and howl and moo from shore to shore
 the beasts of God bust their guts with song (SAD 36-39)

Many of Purdy's poems are filled with such celebrational threshold speech, but they also speak through death. We hear this speech on the threshold between life and death in "Old Alex" where the poet intimates

that his voice comes from the dead. Speaking of the cantankerous old man of the title, the poet slips into a carnival threshold voice:

I search desperately
for good qualities and end up crawling
inside that decaying head and wattled throat
to scream obscenities like papal blessings,
knowing now and again I'm at least God-- (CH 57-58)

The poet's voice becomes a voice of living death, of carnival life and death mixed together, of parodic blessings and loud curses; the poet is both decaying body, rotting flesh, and God. Speaking from the grave, the poet dialogizes his own voice and that of poetry.

A similar carnivalization of poetic speech in general and specifically the poet's voice occurs through the infection of poems with the threshold speech of drunkenness. This speech continually reminds us of the voice's origins in a human orifice. Filled with bacchanalian overtones, Purdy's poems speak with the freed voice of wine. Poems filled with this threshold speech play with the Greek dithyramb, the wild choric hymn with its inflated passion. The importance of this threshold speech to Purdy's poetic is indicated by the title of Wild Grape Wine and "The Winemaker's Beat-Étude," the first poem in the volume. In this poem, where the poet becomes part of the grapes' "purple mentality" and listens to "fermenting bubble-talk"(WGW 8-9), we hear the speaker moo off key, bark like a man, laugh like a dog, talk like God, and address his sister cows. We hear this threshold speech as well in "At the Quinte Hotel." Drunkenness allows the poet oral liberties; speaking to the bartender, he says, "I tell him the beer he draws/ is half fart and half horse piss/ and all wonderful yellow flowers"(PAA68 95-97). Alcoholic threshold speech enables carnival

comparisons to blossom, frees up relational thinking, and dialogizes poetic discourse.³⁸

Moreover, this free speech is not a private, lyrical affair. Rather, the voices we hear are marketplace voices, voices in the open air and public places. Free speech takes place on the open road, in Loblaws, and at the Quinte Hotel. Indeed, it would be difficult to overemphasize the marketplace quality of Purdy's poetic speech. Threshold speech is heard in public squares and fairgrounds, in cemeteries and in cellars, and most notably in connection with Purdy in taverns. Purdy's poems haunt such places; we hear repeatedly "the familiar friendly/ roar of the jammed full tavern"(PAA 49-50). Speech in such places dialogizes accepted norms of poetic speech. Purdy's marketplace speech is speech of the Greek agora, the place of assembly. His words are words heard in the open; his song is one of the public square. We hear this song distinctly in "The Stone Bird" where the poet addresses the woman with agoraphobia, or fear of the marketplace. The song of life, argues the poet, is a marketplace song:

--a wind-song a sun-song
 an earth song and a song of the sea
 I hear it among the nickel-and-dimes people
 I know it in the supermarket
 I feel it waiting for that moment
 of grace in the unexpected word
 the pure spontaneous gesture
 to join the swelling human tide
 when all your weakness becomes strength
 and your body floats in light (SB 105-108)

³⁸ See also "Homo Canadensis" (CH 94-95) and "South" (NOS 60-63).

The voice of the marketplace, one of the earth, sun, and sea, of ordinary people, counters the voice of official monologism and authority, official hierarchies and powers, and official culture.

In threshold speech, as well, the poet speaks through the carnival masks of the rogue, fool, and clown. The speech of these three figures turns the official world upside down. Their speech is unsanctioned, unauthorized, and unrepentent; their voices speak loudly in the public square, and these are the loud voices we hear in Purdy's poems. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin explains that "opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception we have the rogue's cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool's unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown."³⁹ Each of these figures exposes the monologic when he or she speaks. Through parody, the rogue exposes and disarms; the fool makes stupidity polemical in an unwitting dialogic encounter with intelligence. At the heart of the fool's discourses lies what Bakhtin calls "a polemical failure to understand generally accepted, canonized, inveterately false languages with their lofty labels for things and events: poetic language, scholarly and pedantic language, religious, political, judicial language and so forth."⁴⁰ Stupidity exposes and embarrasses; it attacks the boundaries of the accepted voices of a culture; it exposes lofty and powerful lies. Bakhtin goes on to define the clown:

Between the rogue and the fool there emerges, as a unique coupling of the two, the image of the clown. He is a rogue

³⁹ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 162.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 403.

who dons the mask of a fool in order to motivate distortions and shufflings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them. The clown is one of the most ancient of literature's images, and the clown's speech, determined by his specific social orientation (by his privileges as a clown) is one of the most ancient artistic forms of human discourse.⁴¹

The clown, along with the rogue and fool, rooted in the origins of culture itself, speak in order to dialogize speech. As life's maskers, they are free to revise and transform. Rather than homogenization and harmonization, they allow for difference and differentiation, for relativity rather than conformity, for change and metamorphosis rather than stasis. Their speech is playful speech; the speech of the rogue, fool, and clown liberates voice from monologue.

Quite clearly, Al Purdy speaks through these masks. Critics have long talked about the Purdy personae, the many versions of Al Purdy, but few have discovered the roots of these many masks in the fool, rogue, and clown. Indeed, few have recognized the depth and importance of these roots. Purdy's comical personae grow out of these folk figures, out of well-known maskers such as Maccus, Pulcinello, and Harlequin. In the various personae identified by critics, in the drunk, the lecher, and the trickster, in the lumberjack and the rural rube, in the old man and the Neanderthal we hear the clown, the rogue, and the fool, and these voices continually dialogize the scholar, the patriotic Canadian, the sensitive and meditative poet. We hear a dialogic process of masking and unmasking, of understanding and misunderstanding. Whereas in "Song of the Impermanent Husband" the "slimiest most uxorious wife deserter" (CH 27-28) is exposed in his roguish pose, in "Shopping at

⁴¹ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 404-405.

Loblaws" the lecherous, roguish Neanderthal poet repackages himself at the nearest tavern as "'alcoholic' with/ flesh coloured label outside/ dow or red cap"(WGW 30-31). Similarly, in "South" the clownish poet becomes a ham actor standing in a boat reciting a poem, "Laurence Olivier feeling his oatmeal/ Alec Guinness unsober at Stratford/ Henry Irving rambunctious on Broadway"(NOS 60-63). By donning the masks of the clown, rogue, and fool, Purdy dialogizes himself, *live*, false seriousness, and numerous monologic voices. We share as readers in the process of vocal carnivalization, the poet's own good luck at being a fool ("Over the Hills in the Rain My Dear," WGW 112-113).

This carnivalization of voice in Purdy's poems, moreover, does not lead to vocal negation or erasure; instead, it leads to vocal fullness. Vocal dialogization does not seek to close off but to open up. Speaking of carnivalized literature, Sherrill Grace comments that carnival "doubles and therefore completes and enhances instead of reducing, silencing, or replacing."⁴² The carnivalized voice is a full voice; thus, we find in Purdy that unique mixture of the high and the low, the official and the unofficial, the serious and the comic; we find affirmation and negation, exaltation and degradation, optimism and pessimism. What we hear is the paradox of opposites incorporated in the very lineaments of voice itself: voice acts as a register for the complexity of being alive.⁴³ Purdy's poems are mixed with the joy and

⁴² Grace 121.

⁴³ In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin remarks that "the men of the Middle Ages participated in two lives: the official and the carnival life. Two aspects of the world, the serious and the laughing aspect, coexisted in their consciousness"(96). Purdy is similar to medieval humanity. He is an inheritor of this medieval-early Renaissance world view, and this connection can be heard in the vocal fullness of his poems.

pain of living, the beauty of ugly things; his poems comprise a song of death and life intertwined, carnival life and carnival death. Purdy's various means and methods of dialogizing voice, from straight polyphony to double-voicing techniques and carnivalization, all serve to destroy closed off monologue and replace it with a discourse of fully being alive and continual becoming. Moreover, the richness of Purdy's use of these means and methods cannot be overemphasized. Not only are these techniques found in vastly different poems, and not only are many of these various dialogizing methods found mixed within individual poems, but each Purdy poem constitutes a unique construction of these vocal elements.

The poems "When I sat down to Play the Piano" and "Trees at the Arctic Circle," both from North of Summer, provide very different examples of Purdy's polyphonic poetic at work in all its complexity. Both poems draw on double-voicing and carnivalization techniques for different ends, together creating a polyphonic impression of poet Purdy. The first poem is an exuberant carnival uncrowning of the poet's philosophical pretensions through double-voicing parody. The following lines constitute the poem's musical first movement, its prelude or theme:

He cometh forth hurriedly from his tent
and looketh for a quiet sequestered vale
he carrieth a roll of violet toilet tissue
and a forerunner goeth ahead to do him honour
yclept a snotty-nosed Eskimo kid (NOS 43-45)

The poem begins with this parodic version of the procession of the king or entrance of the hero. The lofty edge of the poet's vision continues to decline into mock-heroic defecation in the midst of a plague of

huskies, into shrieking and cursing juxtaposed to inflated heroic discourse. Mock-heroic discourse becomes the discourse of the fool, Barrett's irrational man chased by dogs. The poem winds down with a mixing of the religious and the ridiculous in a parody of the twenty-third Psalm:

`Lo tho I walk thru the valley of
 the shadowy kennels
 in the land of permanent ice cream
 I will fear no huskies
 for thou art with me
 and slingeth thy stones forever and ever
 thou veritable David
 Amen'

P.S. Next time I'm gonna take a gun

Carnival comedy completes one-sided seriousness, offers the corrective of the low and bodily and open to the tragic and lofty and finished. The mixture of heroic, religious, and foolish discourse in this exuberant manner turns the poetic world upside down.

"Trees at the Arctic Circle" provides a much calmer version of Purdy's double-voicing poetic. On the surface of the poem, few double-voicing and carnival traces make themselves apparent; nevertheless, the poem enacts a radical cultural, philosophical, and ontological revision that finds its source in the carnival tradition of foolish wisdom, of folly exposed and turned upside down. The title initiates us into the carnival world: how can trees live above the tree line? Yet, in the poem's first two sections, the poet ignores this paradox. His fool's diatribe against these ground willows clearly reveals his southern ethos. The third section, however, marks a sharp turn for the poet. He begins to observe the landscape on its own terms: his folly, his southern ethos, his Old World stance, and he himself are all

transformed. Contemplating the strength of their living, he moves deeper into this northern world and further from his own. They have three months to propagate the species, "and that's how they spend their time/ unbothered by any human opinion/ just digging in here and now"(NOS 29-30). Going still deeper, he discovers life and death in a pure carnival embrace, hell and paradise conjoined:

And you know it occurs to me
 about 2 feet under
 those roots must touch permafrost
 ice that remains ice forever
 and they use it for their nourishment
 use death to remain alive

The poet's southern foolishness gives way completely to a carnival understanding of living and dying, of the ambivalence at the heart of existence. In the poem's final section, the poet makes this carnival turn around explicit by chastizing himself for his humiliating foolishness. We hear a radical revision of the self, the poet's author-position, his poetic ethos, his cultural and ontological assumptions:

I see that I've been carried away
 in my scorn of the dwarf trees
 most foolish in my judgements
 To take away the dignity
 of any living thing
 even tho it cannot understand
 the scornful words
 is to make life itself trivial
 and yourself the Pontifex Maximus
 of nullity

The poet exposes himself for the carnival fool he has been; his discourse of folly has made him the Pontifex Maximus of nullity, Nobody, and yet the expression of that folly and the poet's turning of it upside down allow for his self-revision. The poem, juxtaposing northern and

southern world views, mixing two discourses in one voice, enacts his metamorphosis from the oak god fool to the ground willow poet.

iv.

The Ontology of Voice

Purdy's poems constitute an ontology of voice, a metaphysics of speech and being. The lineaments of the human voice serve as the subject as well as the form of these poems, and what we hear in this carnival fullness of voice is nothing less than a continual exploration of the link between speech and consciousness. We hear both expansive thought and limitation in voice; we hear both individuality and participation in a heteroglot world. In this poetic of listening and speaking, we hear a continual play with the permeable and malleable border between self and other. In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin makes the claim that "to be means to communicate dialogically."⁴⁴ Elsewhere, he relates that "consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of having to choose a language."⁴⁵ Not only are consciousness and discourse intimately intertwined, but being alive itself becomes defined by dialogic communication, by the breaking down of the cocoon around the self. In cultural terms, polyphony or polyglossia or heteroglossia free human consciousness from the prison of it/self, from its own sense of self-sufficiency, monologic being, and individual wholeness. And literature, suggests Bakhtin, plays a key role in dialogizing human

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 252.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 295. The emphasis is Bakhtin's. As Bakhtin says in Dostoevsky, "the genuine life of the personality is made available only through a dialogic penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself"(59). The self reveals itself through dialogue.

consciousness, in breaking down these deadening, limiting borders.⁴⁶
Literature enriches, expands, and dialogizes our inner speech.

Purdy's poetry dialogizes human consciousness quite consciously. For him, we are reminded, creative literature addresses the "expanding human consciousness,"⁴⁷ for the poet is not one thing but everything. In voice, we do not hear omniscience, omnipresence, or omnipotence, but we do hear the shifting, fluid, essentially limited and human consciousness at work and play.⁴⁸ In Purdy, we hear a poetry revolving around being and speech.⁴⁹ We hear in this metaphysic of speech and being, in fact, a continual play of sound and silence in relation to life and death and past and present and absence and presence. "The Runners" explores this world and existence of sound and silence. The Gael runners find themselves on a silent continent, but in their voices we hear an end of and defeat of silence:

I am afraid of this dark land,
ground-mist that makes half ghosts,
and another silence inside silence . . .
But there are berries and fish here,
and there are worse things than silence,
let us stay and not go back-- (WGW 110-111)

In their confronting of the deeper silence w'ithin silence (the same silence we find in D.C. Scott's poems), the runners take their first

⁴⁶ He describes this role already in The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: "As the plastic arts give width and depth to the visual realm and teach our eye to see, the genres of literature enrich our inner speech with new devices for the awareness and conceptualization of reality" (134).

⁴⁷ Purdy, introduction, Handful of Earth 8.

⁴⁸ In his study of Purdy, Tom Marshall claims that in the Purdy poem "everything is happening now in the continuity of consciousness," and he adds that "the floating consciousness of the poet is itself both medium and message" (Harsh and Lovely Land 90-91).

⁴⁹ See especially "Man Without a Country" (PB 60-62), "Method For Calling Up Ghosts" (CH 111-112), "What It Was--" (CH 47-48), and "In the Caves" (SAD 83-86) for explication of this metaphysic of speaking and listening.

tentative strides at voicing a new continent, at articulating fear and freedom. In the blending of their voices we hear the hint of a human victory. We hear a similar hint distinctly in "The Horseman of Agawa," where the poet imagines the ghost artist calling out to his friends; "and the rock walls will seize his voice," says the poet, "and break it into a million amplified pieces of echos/ that will find the ghosts of his friends in their dust"(SAD 14-16). While the poet does go on to express distrust at his own imagination, he does affirm here sound's defeat of silence and death.

Indeed, many of Purdy's poems express this same notion, this same concern with voice and death. In the long poem In Search of Owen Roblin, we have already explored the connection between hearing the voices of the dead and the poet gaining his own voice and giving the past life through his poetic voice. Purdy explores this paradox in "Old Alex" as well:

I'll say this about Alex's immortality tho:
 if they dig him up in a thousand years
 and push a spigot into his belly why
 his fierce cackle'll drive a nail in silence,
 his laugh split cordwood and trees kow-tow
 like green butlers, the staggering world
 get drunk and all the ghouls go scared-- (CH 57-58)

Carnival voice defeats the silence of death; in this energetic voice, we hear victory over and laughter at death. Other poems are less affirmative and more disturbing. In "Listening," the poet presses his ear against Arctic stone, listening for any sign of God's presence. What he hears is his own body, the silence of the universe, and the black scream of a white bird. In still other poems, the poet affirms that words are limited regarding consciousness. In "Artifact," the poet

discusses "the basic thing under froth and flesh/ commonplace and mysterious/ at which words end helpless" (SAD 80-81). Words themselves have their limits.⁵⁰

Purdy's concern with voice as a subject of his poems is thus essentially a concern with its both humble and profound nature. Voice in Purdy sings a carnival earth-song. We hear this song repeatedly, first of all, in poems connecting the human voice with that of animals. We hear this song in that of Roblin Lake's frogs, as well as in the "earth-wail of the burro-soul" (SE 17-19) found in "Bestiary," and most prominently in the voices of Arctic huskies heard in "Dogsong" and "Dog Song 2." Their voices, we learn, resemble the voices of humans faced with the unanswerable riddle of being alive together. Perhaps we hear the song best in "The Stone Bird" where the poet outlines for the agoraphobic woman the vibrant voice of earth-song. Recounting the ambivalent incident recounted already in the poem "Listening," the poet affirms now the beating heart of the world as it is reflected in the song of his own body:

It was a singing sound
 steady and with no discernible pauses
 a song with only one note
 like some stone bird with such a beautiful voice
 any change of pitch would destroy it
Oh I know
 a specialist of eye ear nose and throat
 he would say it's a body sound
 he would say blood capillaries indigestion
 but the specialist would miss something
 everything (SB 105-108)

⁵⁰ Within this metaphysic of speech and consciousness, we also hear a poet concerned with human origins. See "In the Beginning was the Word" (PB 32-33), "Meeting" (SB 47-49), and "The Dead Poet" (SB 13-14).

The poet links earth and body, listening to the carnival song of the body-earth. The poet explains, "--that body-sound is earth sound/ a singing sound of the past." In the earth-sound and body-sound, the poet hears the symphony of the planet's and humanity's fluid history; he hears the song of the human tide, of birth, violence, and death, a song in and of the carnival folk.

Finally, Purdy's metaphysic of speech and being suggests that for good or bad voice is the basis of being human. As the site and medium of dialogue, voice expresses both the polemical life of the idea and the creation of human empathy and sympathy. We are reminded by Bakhtin that "the consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things--one can only relate to them dialogically,"⁵¹ and Purdy consistently seeks to perceive both himself and others in this fashion. Bakhtin goes on to argue that "human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse."⁵² Purdy also consistently seeks out this contact with another's thought, another's voice, another's discourse and consciousness, unlike the Layton of whom he is so critical. He continually seeks to get through the barrier and beneath the skin of another, although occasionally he has to acknowledge failure to create these connections. Nevertheless, such poems do succeed because this failure dialogizes the poet's ego, breaks down or at least defines the

⁵¹ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 68. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

⁵² Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 88.

boundaries of aloneness, of oneness. "Poem" provides us with a paradigm of the poet's and poem's power and impotence. All the poet can do is sit by his sick wife's bedside and not leave. There are no words to be said, and yet there is victory in this admission of powerlessness, for it breaks down the ego's boundary and creates a basic human connection.

Other poems, however, express the dialogic conditions of sympathy in a more positive manner. "The Runners" provides a paradigm in this respect. In this dialogue between Haki and Haekia we hear two people established together in simple contact that defies an empty universe:

Brother, take my hand in your hand,
 this part of ourselves between us
 while we run together,
 over the stones of the sea-coast,
 this much of ourselves is our own:
 while rain cries out against us,
 and darkness swallows the evening,
 and morning moves into stillness,
 and mist climbs to our throats,
 while we are running,
 while we are running-- (WGW 110-111)

"Sister--" is the brother's simple reply to these words calling for a oneness in continual running. The poem opens outward at the dash into the twin possibilities of victory and defeat, communion and becoming or silence.

Driving a nail in silence, the Purdy poem's vocal dialogue does indeed support Dennis Lee's assertion that Purdy is a master of voice. Voice is the energy source for the aesthetic centre of the Purdy poem. Through voice, discourse comes to life. Whether in a polyphonic refraction of poetic authority, in methods of double-voicing (hybrids and stylization, juxtaposition or syncretism, or words spoken with a sideways glance), in carnivalized speech, or in an ontology of voice,

Purdy's poetic of voice represents a profound rejection of monologic being. In both form and content, voice constitutes the dialogic heart of the Purdy poem, its foundation. Voice is both the means of representing the world and being alive and is itself the object of representation. Through voice, Purdy expresses dialogic meaning and being, explores and gives life to the chronotopic world, engages the socio-historical communal cultural world surrounding him, and engages the reader in creative dialogue. Purdy's poems express Bakhtin's assertion that "with a creative attitude toward language, there are no voiceless words that belong to no one."⁵³ Indeed, his poems, for better or worse, bring voice to life in all its complexity: we hear nothing less than the dialogic attitude to being alive enacted on the page.

⁵³ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 124.

Chapter 4

Borderlands:

Consciousness and Chronotope in Purdy's Tangential Backyard Universe

Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language. Heraclitus.

Life rejects the complete dictatorship of mind. D.G. Jones.

In his introduction to Storm Warning 2, a 1976 anthology of promising young poets, Al Purdy reflects that "to be alive even briefly is like being in debt to all things outside yourself forever."¹ His poetry constitutes an extended and complex expression of that debt. In his poems, Purdy (like other poets) re-creates or represents 'reality'; the poems represent the poet's continual debate with what Bakhtin calls chronotope, the space and time in which we move. Through play with chronotopic markers, the poet reveals his understanding of inhabiting reality, and this understanding, we learn from Bakhtin, indeed this representation of 'reality' in the text, is as much a function of language as the creation of voice and the imaging of the tangential author. Al Purdy's particular creation is a loophole world of time and space; in his poems, we find a constant play with boundaries and borders. In this engagement with forces that contain, Purdy continually decenters and turns upside down; he bridges, erases, pushes back, and explores borders. In essence, we come to inhabit along with the poet a fluid world, a world of flux rather than clock time and static space. While the past is retrievable, the present continually opens into the future. Purdy's chronotopic loophole thus functions as an ontological

¹ Al Purdy, introduction, Storm Warning 2, ed. Purdy (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 23.

loophole, an exploration of the boundary between consciousness and reality.

Bakhtin's consideration of the chronotope provides emphatic links between consciousness, literature, and reality. He defines this concept in The Dialogic Imagination, relating that "we will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."² At the end of the same essay, he insists that "every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope."³ In his definition, Bakhtin emphasizes both the inseparability of time and space and the importance of the chronotope to both being and meaning. Drawing on Kant and borrowing the term from mathematics (more precisely from Einstein's Theory of Relativity), Bakhtin uses chronotope as a trope for the fluid nature of time and space and the dialogic use of these interconnected axes in life and literature. The way we perceive the world and the manner in which we give it artistic shape are both tied up with the chronotope; indeed, this world of perception and shaping is the borderland we continually inhabit. As Bakhtin maintains, "everything that carries significance can and must also be significant in terms of space and time."⁴

Moreover, Bakhtin not only emphasizes the importance of the chronotope to literature, but he also indicates precisely how the

² Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 84. The emphasis is Bakhtin's. His exploration of the chronotope is found primarily in two essays, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics" in Dialogic Imagination and "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)" in Speech Genres.

³ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 258.

⁴ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 150.

chronotope works in literary texts and more broadly in art. The writer, with the text as a field of play, explores what cannot be explained, namely the point at which time and space intersect as in an axis. Bakhtin writes that "in literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another,"⁵ and he goes on to insist that "any and every literary image is chronotopic."⁶ Every aspect of the literary text is shown forth through the play of temporal and spatial markers. In the literary artistic chronotope, suggests Bakhtin, space and time are fused into a whole: "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."⁷ In the text, both space and time become organic and dynamic rather than insubstantial and static. Moreover, this creative sense of the chronotope manifests itself as a creative sense of human consciousness, for, as Bakhtin insists, "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic."⁸ It is this chronotopic image of humanity and this creative use of the chronotope that readers and critics discover in the reading of Purdy's poems. Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope provides a means of exploring Purdy's poetic of time and space, a framework for experiencing the play of consciousness and reality in poetic texts.

Moreover, such an undertaking is clearly promoted by Purdy's own prose comments in essays, introductions, interviews, and letters. These

⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 243.
⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 250.
⁷ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 84.
⁸ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 85.

statements originating in a variety of contexts provide a prelude to the symphony of Purdy's poems, announcing major themes to be explored more extensively through the genres of poetry. Particularly in such documents as the postscript to North of Summer, the preface to the Collected Poems, Morning and It's Summer, and the essays in No Other Country do we hear Purdy's fertile chronotopic imagination at work. Indeed, these and other works are filled with chronotopic tropes expressing Purdy's understanding of writing and being alive. In his 1966 interview with Gary Geddes, Purdy speaks of repeatedly attacking absolutes in poems, testing their borders, "until you find something that will stand up, may not be denied, which becomes a compass point by which to move somewhere else."⁹ His trope of travel, of mapping, and of standing underlines the chronotopic quality of thought and imagination themselves. In his article "Some Opinions on Canadian Poetry," Purdy explores the literary and cultural history of Canada, and he concludes by advising that Canada travel "its own direction, to continually reach out and explore all the alternatives and highways inward and outward."¹⁰ Again in a chronotopic trope, Purdy suggests that the country itself is on a journey (both inner and outer), a moving outward over present borders while exploring the boundary between self and reality.

In fact, Purdy's prose writings reveal a profound play between actual and metaphoric travel, between motion and stasis, the strange and the familiar, and centre and periphery. We sense these dualities in the

⁹ Purdy, "Interview," with Geddes 69.

¹⁰ Purdy, "Opinions on Canadian Poetry" 17.

postscript to North of Summer, where the poet speaks of his "oddly regional" experience in the Arctic with a chronotope "strange, but not alien."¹¹ Moreover, in his preface to the Collected Poems, Purdy speaks specifically of his various travels and their effects on his poetry, relating that "strange landscapes and foreign climes have produced a feeling of renewal, the earth itself has given me a sense of history, the stimulus of the original events carrying over in time and entering my own brain."¹² Travel for this poet has meant an intimate contact and interpenetration with the earth and with time; travelling and inhabiting are activities both of the mind and the body.

Purdy delineates this map of the self in detail in No Other Country, particularly in the significantly entitled introduction "The Cartography of Myself." Here he speaks of "the map of myself, what I was and what I became," and he adds that "it is a cartography of feeling and sensibility: and I think the man who is not affected at all by this map of himself that is his country of origin, that man is emotionally crippled."¹³ Purdy equates the continual interpenetration of consciousness and country with selfhood itself. The mapping of country and self is played out on the border between the two and takes its energy from an exchange between the two, and writing for Purdy, specifically poems, enacts this mapping, this defining and redefining of borders. Again in No Other Country, Purdy relates that "there is a kind of joy about both going and coming that stems from making the map of

¹¹ Purdy, "Postscript," North of Summer 82.

¹² Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xv. Purdy proceeds to discuss the mischievous elves of creativity who inhabit his unconscious: the mind has its landscapes, rooms, and creatures.

¹³ Purdy, Country 18.

yourself on paper coincide with a 5,000-mile-wide country."¹⁴ The poems, suggests the poet, provide a map of himself coextensive with the country he inhabits. Finally, says Purdy, "having written and edited some twenty books, I hope to write a dozen more--to follow all the unknown roads I have not explored, until they branch off and become other roads in my mind."¹⁵ Travel, both physical and poetic, continues for Purdy. Roads are explored; circumferences are pushed back; borders are redefined in the shifting perspective provided by motion.

Purdy's prose further reveals his deep sense of the knot of time and space, of their inseparable entanglement and interconnection acted out more fully in the poems themselves. Like Bakhtin, Purdy has a passion for the interpenetration of time and space. We need only turn again to No Other Country to hear this Bakhtinian understanding of the chronotope voiced. In "Norma, Eunice, and Judy," Purdy makes the following suggestion: "reality is what you can touch and feel in the areas immediately beyond your eyes, and in the space that surrounds your body. It is the consciousness of self as the last link in a long line of selves, a knowledge of what those others did in the past before the present self fades and rejoins the past."¹⁶ Touching upon the boundary between consciousness and reality, Purdy goes on to link both space and time in the body. Moreover, in the introduction to No Other Country he defines his chronotopic imagination, saying, "I take a double view of

¹⁴ Purdy, Country 185.

¹⁵ Purdy, Country 17.

¹⁶ Purdy, Country 109.

history, for then and now merge somewhat in my mind."¹⁷ Time and space are alive, fluid, and flexible for Purdy.

In the context of this view of time and space, Purdy suggests in his prose writings that the chronotope is a carnival experience. Time and space are understood partly through a matrix of carnival images indicating chronotopic fluidity. Images of the grotesque body abound, and in these images we find a body open to and participating in chronotope. In the introduction to No Other Country, Purdy pictures his body itself as the country, extending the map metaphor. "There is a tireless runner in my blood," he writes, "that encircles the borderlands of Canada through the night hours."¹⁸ In this physiological trope, the poet is body is country is borderland, and within him we find a giant circulatory system navigated by his running, moving, and mapping self. Similarly, the poet writes in his lengthy introduction to Moths in the Iron Curtain of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow as "a visceral experience: a multiple sensation: you feel it thru eyes, ears; nose and tongue if you get close enough; and soul if you have one."¹⁹ The poet's experience is of the grotesque body, of the viscera, the inward feelings and sympathetic nerve, the interior organs in the great cavities of the body (brain, heart, liver, intestines), as well as of the soul. This participation in carnival consciousness is further emphasized in Morning and It's Summer, where the poet recalls childhood night frog music. "Everyone joined in," writes Purdy, "thousands and thousands, the sounds entering my ears as one sound that had joined

¹⁷ Purdy, Country 15.

¹⁸ Purdy, Country 17-18.

¹⁹ Purdy, introduction, Moths xv.

together and set up a corresponding tremble in the bones."²⁰ Time and space enter the poet's body in a carnival invasion that creates a correspondence between outside and inside felt in the body itself. Purdy's preface to the Collected Poems repeats this understanding of the carnival relationship of self and reality. Recollecting in tranquility his Baffin Island odyssey of 1965, Purdy relates his impressions: "Rancid pieces of fat, gnawed bones, and dogshit littered the gravel beach. The sea surrounding our island was like the concentrated essence of all the blue that ever was; I could feel that blue seep into me, and all my innards change colour."²¹ The poet's engagement with the chronotopes around him is again one of the innards, of excremental beauty.

Finally, Purdy's imagination continually returns to borderlands that make strange, disorient, and decentre the comfortable world of chronotopic reality. This is the poet we hear in the preface to the Collected Poems, "To See the Shore." The shore, it turns out, cannot be seen, and is not only the shore of the poet's winding-down life but of the sea of beer he has quaffed in his lifetime. That carnival sea is shoreless, marginless. This carnival sea, moreover, takes us back to the Arctic seas of Purdy's 1965 journey. In his postscript to North of Summer, he relates how he climbed a 3000 foot mountain near Pangnirtung, completely fooled by its size as it began to stretch out before him in the act of climbing it. The poet's disorientation, surprise, and tongue-in-cheek anger provide a paradigm for his poetic confrontation

²⁰ Purdy, Morning 24.

²¹ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xvi.

with the chronotope where boundaries shift and time and space become fluid. Later in this same postscript, the poet discusses the size and relative emptiness of the Arctic and he relates that "you'd have a helluva time shoving vast lonely distance into poems."²² The poem itself, suggests this comic remark by Purdy, is a creation of borders and boundaries, is a vessel for chronotopic reality. Purdy explores this chronotopic borderworld again in No Other Country where he argues that the map of himself on paper (in poems) and the map of his country never coincide: "all you can do is hint at something much larger than yourself."²³ The poet continually pushes back borders without completely containing the world, and this failure paradoxically accounts for the success of the poems. They touch upon, hint at, and wonder at what in the end is inexplicable.

Indeed, Purdy's early volumes demonstrate, as they do with his use of voice, the growth in sophistication of his chronotopic imagination. As a poet, he grows into the borderland world of time and space. For instance, in The Enchanted Echo we hear a poet whose chronotopic orientation is vertical rather than horizontal, general rather than specific, and other-worldly rather than here and now. We hear echoes and lays from the world of fairy and fancy. These poems are fundamentally divorced from chronotopic reality. In "The Lights Go On," ostensibly a poem about war-time London, the poet inhabits a rock-solid world of permanence and endurance. London, never visited by the poet, is nonetheless imagined by him in terms of its tourist clichés. This

²² Purdy, postscript, North 83.

²³ Purdy, Country 185.

chronotope provides an anchor and a centre for the poet: "Mayhap the bombs have scattered dreams afar,/ But Caxton's shop/ Stands proud, aloof from wreckage"(EE 13). Instead of a world of flux, we inhabit a world of stasis. Moreover, the poet's orientation is outside of this chronotopic world. In "The Comet," for example, the poet exclaims, "Like a flash of inward vision that bursts upon the eye,/ It seared across my consciousness that men shall never die / And travail of the three score years--an episode gone by"(EE 59). Similarly, in "Summons to Vagabonds" we hear the poet as an imitation of Bliss Carman "Following eternal Pan/ Down the road forever"(EE 16). This early version of Purdy clearly reveals that instead of tourist travel and chronotopic extravaganza, he desires an essentially atemporal vagabondia divorced from actual space. In these initial poems, we hear a Pan poet bent on escaping his own chronotopes in favour of a mythical Arcady.

When we turn to the three volumes of the next decade, however, we hear a poet in the process of coming to grips with the chronotopic world. In the eleven-year gap between the publication of his first and second volumes, Purdy has undergone a radical re-education concerning the role of chronotopic markers in the poem. In these 1950s poems, for example, Purdy demonstrates a new concern for specific and concrete places, places he himself knows. In "Meander," with its suggestive title, the poet makes the following manifesto:

I will find a story in every rock
 Along the Fraser, write everything,
 Perhaps not well.
 But someone has to write about the Indian dock
 At Rupert, the dreamlike murmuring
 Of lonesome waterclosets in a deserted hotel.
 The minutiae and trivia that people think
 Is unimportant. (POS 11-12)

The poet pledges to give voice to the chronotopic world surrounding him rather than imaginary Arcady; his poetic now includes an examination of the everyday and everywhere as a means to insight. We sense here the beginnings of Purdy's engagement with the centre of his own experience, a centre which is paradoxically also a peripheral world, a world on the margins and borders. This engagement appears again in "At Roblin Lake," where the poet speaks of "This tangential backyard universe/ I inhabit with sidereal aplomb"(CSLL 17-18). In this touchstone poem, the poet places himself with the "At" of the title: his poetry does not so much describe chronotopes as inhabit them. That little "At" becomes a key word in Purdy's poetic vocabulary. In addition, the poet reveals that he inhabits at Roblin Lake a fringe backyard universe of time and space. This new and specific space of the poet's imagination comes to light as a border world.²⁴

Moreover, in the 1950s volumes Purdy begins to display a carnival consciousness of reality that would come to dominate his mature poems. Many of these poems hint at or openly display a sense of humanity's involvement in space and time and more specifically in earth. The poet accomplishes this connection through images of the grotesque body, through linking the cosmic and the human. We enter the world of microcosm and macrocosm in these poems. In the poem "Vestigia" we find a paradigm of the poet's growing carnival consciousness. Here, the

²⁴ An equally radical revision can be heard in the poet's engagement with temporal markers in these 1950s poems. Rather than seeking escape to an atemporal static realm outside of experience, the poet turns to explore the implications of time's passing. See, for example, "I See No Hand" (POS 3), "Barriers" (POS 9), "Mary the Allan" (POS 14-15), "Chiaroscuro" (POS 16), "For Oedi-Puss" (CSLL 13-14), and "Where the Moment Is" (CSLL 8-9).

poet's formerly ethereal world takes on flesh. With the poem's suggestive title, we enter a world of ambivalent gain and loss where "Soon the goddess will be swallowed in flesh,/ divinity obscured by accretion of tissue,/ like dust on a centuries old idol"(CSLL 18). In this trope we sense the paradox of life and death, of matter and organism, of the poet's shift from a world of static art to fleshy reality. Moreover, the poet's mourning of this lost world is itself ambivalent: "I mourn this veritable truth, this beauty,/ which is never seen but only remembered." The poet's own mourning unmasks the duplicity of this lost golden world, for this world is one of "veritable truth" and of the memory only, not of the senses or consciousness. In one of his best poems of this period, "Elegy for a Grandfather," Purdy further fleshes out this carnival body and its relationship to time, space, and death. His grandfather, perhaps the first truly carnival figure to appear in Purdy's poems, is a man of the flesh and of earth, both in life and death. "His wide whalebone hips will make a prehistoric barrow," the poet relates, "A kitchen midden for mice under the rough sod"(ER 2). This is a world of the refuse heap and dunghill, of the 'midden' as muck heap of prehistory. This is a carnival world where ". . . earth has another tenant involved in her muttering plans." In such poems we make our entrance into Purdy's carnival world, a world of the grotesque and cosmic body involved and implicated in the life, both spatial and temporal, of the earth.

ii.

Genres, Models, Motifs, and Warps

The poems of Purdy's poetic maturity reveal at every turn the applicability of Bakhtinian concepts of art and chronotope to them. In

our reading, we confront continually the knot of space and time, in generic dialogue, chronotopic motifs and models, Purdy's particular and specific borderlands, carnival chronotopes, and finally in an ontology of consciousness and space-time. As we have seen in previous chapters, genre for Bakhtin links up with authorial authority and vocal definition and play. This linkage is no less true of genre and the representation of reality. In his early book, The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, Bakhtin makes already the fundamental connection. "Every significant genre," he writes, "is a complex system of means and methods for the conscious control and finalization of reality,"²⁵ and he proceeds to suggest that "genre appraises reality and reality clarifies genre."²⁶ On the one hand, artistic consciousness controls, cuts off, completes, and gives shape to chronotopic reality through the rules of genre, and on the other hand that chronotopic reality historically exerts a pressure on genre that redefines those rules through the activities of different artistic consciousnesses. Genre occupies the borderland (to drive the point home) between consciousness and chronotope, particularly for the literary artist, and genres themselves create chronotopic borders. Purdy both participates in and is affected by the historical processes at work in genres and their characteristic conceptions of chronotopic reality. His representation of reality in the poems occurs in the context of the breakdown of strict poetic generic boundaries. Essentially, Purdy's poems tap into low genres and

²⁵ Bakhtin, Formal Method 133.

²⁶ Bakhtin, Formal Method 136. As Bakhtin can re-emphasize in a much later essay, "genres (of literature and speech) throughout the centuries of their life accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world" (Speech Genres 5).

carnival culture of laughter with the result that traditional generic chronotopes are dialogized. Carnival genres bring low what is high; they participate in the living present. Bakhtin writes in The Dialogic Imagination that "contemporaneity, flowing and transitory, 'low,' present--this 'life without beginning or end' was a subject of representation only in the low genres," and he adds, "more importantly, it was the basic subject matter in the broadest and richest of realms, the common people's creative culture of laughter."²⁷ The flux and flow of time and space we see represented in literature's low genres, parodies and travesties, menippeia and Socratic dialogue. Moreover, this chronotopic flux finds its roots in carnival forms. Clearly, this is the generic world of Purdy's poems.

In addition, Purdy mixes various motifs and models central to the artistic representation of reality. Not only does Purdy explore the knot of time and space through generic dialogue, but he does so as well through the hybridization of literary givens and commonplaces. The traditional is disunified and the disparate are united. In his essay on the chronotope, Bakhtin lists various common motifs--meeting and parting, loss and acquisition, search and discovery, recognition and nonrecognition, escape, marriage, and the open road--and he writes, "by their very nature these motifs are chronotopic (although it is true the chronotope is developed in different ways in various genres)."²⁸ To differing degrees, each of these chronotopic motifs "saturates" (Bakhtin's term) Purdy's poetry, often in odd mixtures and combinations.

²⁷ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 20.

²⁸ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 97.

Moreover, Purdy mixes the many chronotopic models that Bakhtin lists in this same essay. For example, Bakhtin explores adventure time and everyday time, metamorphosis and miracle, ancient biography and autobiography, and fairy tale. He speaks of Socrates, of the real-life chronotope in which the individual is laid bare and made public. He notes also the chivalric romance with its "subjective playing with time, an emotional and lyrical stretching and compressing of it," and its "emotional, subjective distortion of space."²⁹ In addition, speaking of Don Quixote Bakhtin sheds light on the picaresque novel's chronotopes, in this case Cervantes' mixture of road and chivalric romance chronotopes. Purdy's poetry participates in these common motifs and models.

Special note, however, must be made of several key chronotopes. The first of these is the idyllic chronotope of love, labour, and the family, a chronotope in which we find "an organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home."³⁰ Such specifications bring to mind immediately Purdy's Roblin Lake and Ameliasburg, his Trenton, Belleville, and Prince Edward County. Closely related to this idyllic chronotope is that of folkloric man. "A new chronotope was needed," writes Bakhtin, "that would permit one to link real life (history) to the real earth."³¹ Elsewhere he relates that "local folklore

²⁹ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 155. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

³⁰ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 225.

³¹ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 206.

interprets and saturates space with time, and draws them into history."³² Folkloric time and space are typically creative, collective, and productive. Time and space are concrete, and as Bakhtin puts it, "the life of nature and the life of man are fused together in this complex."³³ In poem after poem, Purdy plays with this folkloric chronotope, both participating in it and being alienated from it. Finally, Bakhtin relates concerning carnival genres that "the `serio-comical' is characterized by a deliberate and explicit autobiographical and memoirist approach."³⁴ Such an approach overcomes epic chronotopic distance and wholeness. As Purdy adopts this posture in his poems, time and space are touched, turned over, and opened up. Indeed, the argument could be made that chronotopically speaking, Purdy's use of memoir and autobiography as poetic genre and mask slides into bildungsroman, into the novel of the becoming hero, "the novel of human emergence."³⁵ While Purdy clearly does not work within the novel genre, his poems share chronotopic markers central to bildung. Indeed, all of these motifs and models mentioned and still others point to both the historical bases and the individuality of Purdy's play with the artistic representation of reality in poetic texts.

Purdy's specific chronotopic method, growing out of this framework of play with genres, models, and motifs, involves a warping of the pinpoint now and here, the living present. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin concludes that "the present, in all its openendedness, taken as

³² Bakhtin, Speech Genres 52.

³³ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 210.

³⁴ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 27.

³⁵ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 21. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

a starting point and center for artistic and ideological orientation, is an enormous revolution in the creative consciousness of man."³⁶ He further concludes that "when the present becomes the center of human orientation in time and in the world, time and world lose their completedness as a whole as well as in each of their parts."³⁷ In the artistic chronotope of the living present, we enter a world temporally and spatially incomplete as well as a world in flux, a world which grows out of the past and into the future. The world of what Purdy repeatedly calls the "pinpoint" now provides the starting point for his poems. These poems, for the most part, grow out of everyday experience; they are of the moment and for the moment in the sense that in the poem the poet re-creates the experience of the moment. Purdy's poetic hinges on this understanding of the fluid present and its function in the representation of chronotopic reality. Indeed, it is this comprehension of the present that provides the basis of Purdy's expansion through various chronotopes.

The poet continually breaks out of this pinpoint now. Through imaginative perception, Purdy continually warps chronotopic reality. We find in the poems an energetic expansion out of the here and now and at the same time a subtle domestication of what is distant temporally and spatially. Chronotopes become mixed in a type of double vision with the result that a world of flux is acted out in the chronotopic markers of the poem. Essentially, this warping creates a chronotopic loophole

³⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 38.

³⁷ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 30. Speaking again of the effect of novelization on other genres, Bakhtin suggests that "the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)"(Dialogic Imagination 7).

world. Dennis Lee's discussion of the cosmos of process in Purdy's poems provides us with a starting point for understanding such warps and their activity of turning boundaries into fluid margins. In his afterword to Purdy's Collected Poems, Lee relates that "the cosmos of Purdy's poetry is one in which familiar laws of movement in both space and time may be suspended without warning, and a different set of principles take over."³⁸ Elaborating upon this cosmos of process, Lee argues that "the distant past juts into the immediate present; faraway is near at hand. Space/time is plastic, elastic, fantastic."³⁹ Purdy continually warps and breaks accepted markers of time and space. The distant is drawn near; then merges with now. Arguing that this world of process involves the coexistence of disparate or jarring things, Lee writes that "time and again the poem presents, not a single reality which would enforce a single-keyed response, but that reality and its converse--or (more subtly) two or three further realities which chime off the first, in a discordant but richly complex music of being."⁴⁰ Through chronotopic warping, Purdy carries on a dialogue of disparate realities. We enter into, while reading the Purdy poem, this chronotopic dialogue; Purdy's representation of `reality' finds us flowing from one world to another or leaping over boundaries that we have erected to separate or compartmentalize time and space.

Indeed, Purdy's play with chronotopic reality in this fashion reveals the joy of breaking out of the here and now. Drawing the reader into a form of magic reality, the poet does indeed play in the warping

³⁸ Lee, afterword 377.

³⁹ Lee, afterword 378.

⁴⁰ Lee, afterword 379.

of time and space. We sense this activity in the archaeological poem "Tent Rings," where the poet's contemplation of these traces left by vanished Dorset and Thule cultures allows him to fuse past and present:

In some sense I think of them
 as still here in the circle
 the small brown men
 they lived so strongly
 with such a gift of laughter
 the morning sun touches
 and glances off
 their sparkling ghosts
 To enter these tent rings
 is mingling with the past
 being in two places
 having visions
 hearing voices sounding in your head
 almost like madness
 summoned by wizard angakoks (NOS 68-69)

Entering the tent rings, the poet travels back in time, sensing the life of vanished people. Having returned to the present, moreover, the poet travels into the future, fusing the disappearance of past cultures with the future vanishing of white culture:

Turning away from here
 now in the future I suppose
 the stones will be rectangular
 even octagonal maybe
 having the shape of canvas tents
 that came from white traders
 and some visitor
 (probably non-human)
 will notice them
 and not know whether
 they belonged to the Innu
 the 'men pre-eminently'
 or white men
 who were also visitors
 and thought to be human

The poet's play with time within the tent rings underpins a meditation on extinction, culture, and being alive as a continual motion, a nomadic

impersonal. In "Lost in the Badlands," the poet reads the layers of time etched on space. The space he inhabits is also the space of long-dead dinosaurs:

my body coinciding with theirs
 knowing those giant heartbeats
 knocking on empty air
 living so near to them
 that a snap of the fingers
 or twist of perspective
 would make them visible
 clomping bone corridors
 joining my thoughts of them
 their image taking over
 the pictures in my brain
 In fact they are visible
 an aperture in my primitive brain
 allows their enormous heads
 to peer into the mammal mind
 with red reptilian mouths (PB 26-31)

We witness in these lines a gradual fusion of the prehistoric time of the dinosaurs with the poet's present. In the brain and body of the poet, distant chronotopes are joined. "Remains of an Indian Village," a much earlier archaeological poem, provides a similar fusion of past and present in the poet's space. Through this poetic of fusion, absence becomes presence; meditation on the relics of the past opens up that past. Thus, the poet observes "wispy legs of children/ running in this green light from/ a distant star," wood violets and trilliums blooming and dying one hundred years ago, "toppling and returning" villages, and the poet remarks, "What moves and lives/ occupying the same space,/ what touches what touched them/ owes them" (PAA 57-58). Purdy sees the present's debt to the past in this fusion of chronotopes.⁴³

⁴³ See also "Iguana" (PB 35-36) and "Country Snowplow" (CH 87-88).

Essentially, through such techniques of fusion and warping Purdy enacts in his poems the flux of the chronotope. Through such means of representing reality, borders come under erasure: our narrow perceptions are dialogized as the world is turned upside down and made strange. Purdy's poetic of the chronotope provides a loophole through which he and we can escape the domination of the here and now. In this world out of joint, time and space become fluid rather than static. Loopholes provide spaces for connecting what our everyday thinking seeks to keep apart, ordered, and bounded. "Time that tick-tocks always in my body," we read in In Search of Owen Roblin,⁴⁴ "its deadly rhythm is only a toy of the mind/ so that I leap back and forth." As we read further in the same poem, chronotopic connections become obvious:

whatever is underneath a village
and one-time pioneer settlement goes deeper
rooted inside human character
contemporary as well as ancient
and the sloppy drunk on a village street
is first cousin to wine tipplers reeling
thru the marketplace of Athens and Rome
the model citizens and much-respected men
all have their counterparts in antiquity
as well as fools and idiots

Purdy's chronotopic fusion provides an arena, indeed a carnival marketplace, for meditation where sideways leaps may light up dark spaces, where surface appearance gives way to depth of understanding.⁴⁵

"Archaeology of Snow" expresses in a singular fashion through its chronotopic play this creation of a loophole world. In this highly comical anecdote, an ontology of flux is enacted; startling connections

⁴⁴ Purdy, Owen Roblin No pagination.

⁴⁵ See also "Roblin's Mills" (CH 70-71) and "I Think It Was Wednesday" (CH 98-100).

the lovely omniscience of women

In this chronotopic extravaganza, this exclamation of insight, we hear Purdy's articulation of human living in a world of flux, human transience-permanence in a world of clock time. Purdy as an archaeologist of the imagination demonstrates how the pinpoint present grows out of the past and flows into an open future.

iii.

Chronotopic Tropes and Common Chronotopes: Dwelling and Moving

The depth and extent of this chronotopic warping and fusion quickly become apparent in the recurring chronotopes we find in Purdy's poems. For instance, chronotopic tropes pervade the poems; these tropes reveal a manner of thought and express the texture of Purdy's imagination. In a letter to George Woodcock, Purdy writes, "I discovered what was important thru poems."⁴⁶ Purdy's poems themselves are filled with tropes of exploration and discovery, mapping and travel, vectors and compass points. Perhaps the most pervasive of these tropes is that of time travel. In this particular trope we find Purdy giving expression to the knot of space and time: time is a field to be explored, a space of inhabitation. In this trope, time takes on material form and even flesh in a paradoxical comparison that breaks the boundaries of our normal understandings of both time and space. The flux of the chronotope takes shape through this trope. "Inside the Mill," for instance, explores the mind's engagement with time:

When you cross the doorway you feel them
 when you cross the places they've been
 there's a flutter of time in your heartbeat

⁴⁶ Purdy, To Woodcock, 24 May 1971, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 76. The emphasis is Purdy's.

of time going backward and forward
 if you feel it and perhaps you don't
 but it's voyaging backward and forward
 on a gate in the sea of your mind (SUN 21)

These lines are pervaded with chronotopic tropes--doorways, voyages, seas, gates--all suggesting the interdependence of spatial and temporal categories. Such time-travel pervades all of "Lost in the Badlands," a poem from beginning to end controlled by the trope of time-travel. Travel here is a movement down into a dinosaur graveyard, a trespassing "into the immense vistas of time." In this exploration the poet is led by his wife into "this grey land of lost time" and up and out into and onto "the dangerous present/ a dirt track of tourist road" (PB 26-31). Time is a space in which to become lost, a field in which to play. Essentially, these tropes of time-travel reveal the complex relationship of time and space, a realm where we "touch the moving moment" ("Necropsy of Love," CH 23).⁴⁷

If we move from Purdy's chronotopic tropes to his common chronotopes, we come to inhabit poetic borderlands, spatial-temporal fringe worlds. Whether his chronotopes are cosmic or national, foreign or familiar, Purdy exerts a continual pressure on the field of inhabiting an alien world. Purdy's 'native' chronotopes in particular participate in this play of centre and fringe. His places and times have little of the conventional centre about them. Even when he writes of cities such as Montreal or Vancouver, Purdy's concern centres on fringe elements. His imagination, however, is more likely to settle on fringe locations such as Cariboo and Hazelton B.C., Batoche, United

⁴⁷ See also "Museum Piece" (PB 99-100) and "Moses at Darwin Station" (SB 37-40).

Empire Loyalist places and history, the Bearpaw Sea's present and past, the nation's country roads and railroads and highways. In his afterword to Purdy's Collected Poems, Dennis Lee describes one of Canadian writers' native reflexes as "instinctively locating our fragile human settlements, even the big cities, in a surrounding space of almost inconceivable magnitude, and as tenuous moments in a field of time which loops back at once to Stone Age man and out through intergalactic light years."⁴⁸ Purdy's native chronotopes clearly participate in this native reflex of cosmic contexts, of distant space and all time. As a borderland poet, Purdy gives voice to the chronotope of the hinterland, the chronotope of the fringe.

One key fringe location for Purdy is the north, as witnessed by North of Summer and several Arctic poems distributed through various other volumes. "The Country North of Belleville," with its chronotopic title, provides a paradigm for Purdy's northern imagination. A poem about 'north' and 'northness,' about the fringe, this meditation on time, place, and people locates us in "lakeland rockland and hill country/ a little adjacent to where the world is/ a little north of where the cities are"(CH 74-76). North for Purdy equates with what lies outside the centre, on or outside the imaginative chronotopic boundaries we set, and yet, he suggests, this fringe world is also one of origins. This 'northness' is where we came from, yet what we now have difficulty finding. "Sometime/ we may go back there/ to the country of our defeat," suggests the poet, "But it's been a long time since/ and we must enquire the way/ of strangers--." We sense this paradox of origins

⁴⁸ Lee, afterword 388.

in "The Country of the Young," where the poet sees on an Arctic island "the original colour-matrix/ that after a giant's heartbeat/ lighted the maple forests/ in the country south"(NOS 79-80). The northern edge of the country and the planet paradoxically occupies the centre. In specific locations embedded in these common chronotopes, as well, we sense the play of fringe and centre. These fringe places are paradoxically places where the poet feels at home: the boundary world of the open road, railway tracks, the Battlefield at Batoche, rock cliffs, crumbled houses, the borderland of the Alberta badlands, decayed Indian villages, in the centre of tent rings left behind by vanished northern peoples, the pub and the drunk tank and the marketplace, and a mattress factory. Numerous poems locate the poet and reader in the borderland of the cemetery, "death's/ ceded town"("Evergreen Cemetery," PAA 33-34). Other poems literally take place on the border between land and water, and enact on that boundary evolutionary and ontological meditations. Among these poems is perhaps most significantly "The Runners," a touchstone poem for many critics in which the two Gael runners straddle the borders of ocean and shore, Old World and New, centre and edge. In a perhaps paradigmatic borderland twist, the poem "Time Past/Time Now" speaks of "Coming alive at the womb's doorway"(PB 86-87). Each of the borderlands of these poems connects with this boundary experience of birth: the fringe, the border, and the edge all provide loophole experiences of birth-death; biological and ontological birth experiences are chronotopic experiences of the borderlands.

One of Purdy's central chronotopes, of course, is the Roblin Lake and Prince Edward County area of southeastern Ontario. The many poems

anchored in this world constitute an ontology of dwelling, of inhabiting familiar space and time. But as is true of other realms of Purdy's chronotopic imagination, this dwelling is wholly ambivalent, a boundary experience. A whole universe is built up around a lake, an A-frame house, a decayed mill, and a rural village: the poet's world is chronotopically centred. As George Woodcock relates, Loyalist Ontario manifests itself as "the heart" of Purdy's world, "the heart without which no mental vision can really live."⁴⁹ Such centering, however, provides only a partial understanding of Purdy's chronotope of dwelling at Roblin Lake, for this world is a peripheral omphalos, both centre and fringe. This paradox is the boundary inhabiting enacted in the poems. We find this ambivalence in the opening lines of "The Country North of Belleville":

Bush land scrub land--
 Cashel Township and Wollaston
 Elvezir McClure and Dungannon
 green lands of Weslemkoon Lake
 where a man might have some
 opinion of what beauty
 is and none deny him
 for miles-- (CH 74-76)

Place names roll off the poet's tongue in a chronotopic incantation, an invocation of the spirit of place. Nonetheless, we hear as well traces of ambivalence in these lines: green land is mixed with bush and scrub; enjambment works both to suggest and to deflate notions of ownership of the land and ownership of an undeniable opinion of beauty.

The ambivalence concerning inhabiting this omphalos becomes more pronounced in "One Rural Winter" and In Search of Owen Roblin. In the

⁴⁹ Woodcock, Northern Spring 42. See, for example, "A Handful of Earth" (HOE 37-38).

first, comical poem, we find the poet trapped in his rural abode by winter. The emphasis lies on the isolation of this chronotope and its fringe status. In comical tones the poet laments, "& I ask you/ what could be more remote than a burg/ named after someone/ named Amelia?"(CH 67-68). The poem is filled with similar indicators and tropes of entrapment. The poet speaks of his dread of going outside for fear of becoming stuck forever in a lateral moraine; nevertheless, he proceeds to make an Odyssean journey to the outhouse, that extreme fringe of the poet's fringe world, and returns to his humble Ithacan A-frame. "And the door knob," he relates, "is a handle I hold onto the sky with." The poem enacts this ambivalent play of fringe and centre. In In Search of Owen Roblin, this chronotopic play with dwelling is equally comical. While relating his creative crisis, the poet takes time to laugh at himself and his omphalos, for Roblin Lake is understandably at the heart of In Search of Owen Roblin. Speaking of himself and his wife, the poet relates that in 1957 "we built a house so flagrantly noticeable/ it seemed an act of despair/ like the condemned man's bravado on the gallows," a house "at a backwater puddle of a lake" built out of second hand lumber on a lot "so far from anywhere/ even homing pigeons lost their way/ getting back home to nowhere." These lines are filled again with tropes of entrapment and marginalization, serio-comical at their very core. They build a house that is not a home but "a place to camp," at a lake that is not a lake, a place that is not a place but a nowhere. The poet's act of dwelling at Roblin Lake is characterized root and stem by ambivalence.

In addition, Purdy's concentration on the chronotopes of Roblin Lake reveals his ambivalent play with models of idyllic and folkloric time and space. The poet senses in his omphalos the depth of time; he reads the traces of time in place. "A locality," writes Bakhtin in his essay on the chronotope, "is the trace of an event, a trace of what had shaped it," and he adds that "such is the logic of all local myths and legends that attempt, through history, to make sense out of space."⁵⁰ Purdy's many Roblin Lake poems both establish and question these local myths and legends; they simultaneously establish idyllic and folkloric interpretations of time and space and deflate them with considerations of absence and presence. The poet adopts the role of village scavenger or diviner, or more broadly of archaeologist of the imagination. These poems dig deeply into the layers of time lying on this place, the times of the poet's grandfather, of Owen Roblin, of pioneers and United Empire Loyalists arriving on the Bay of Quinte. We hear this concern for idyllic and folkloric time in a poem such as "The Old Woman and the Mayflower," where the poet likens the dead woman's eighty years of life to an era, "an era akin to the Peloponnesian Wars/ for some chronicler of Ameliasburg Township" (BIB 1). In some respects, Purdy himself acts as that chronicler. His poems are full of archaeological excavations of a kind, digs in the Ameliasburg kitchen midden (alias the town dump), digs in crumbled pioneer homes ("Private Property"), and most often perhaps digs in the decayed Roblin's Mills. The poet as scavenger rummages among time's rubble, building up a sense of time's work on

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 189.

space. His establishing of idyllic and folkloric chronotopes around himself, of the rhythms of life in one place, give him a sense of life.

Nevertheless, idyllic and folkloric chronotopes are accompanied in his poems by indications of decay and destruction, by an ambivalence concerning time's working. We sense decay in several poems, a decay often accompanied by a sense that the present is haunted by the past. In "The Country North of Belleville," we turn from magic and affirmation to defeat:

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
 when realization seeps slow in the mind
 without grandeur or self deception in
 noble struggle
 of being a fool-- (CH 74-76)

The poet's omphalos is one of human folly, of circular entrapment, and of time's erasure of human achievement. This same attitude to idyllic time appears in "Detail." "The ruined stone house," writes the poet, "has an old apple tree/ left there by the farmer," and this tree, he adds, "It bears fruit every year/ gone wild and wormy/ with small bitter apples/ nobody eats" (WGW 14). The poet's omphalos provides no temporal haven, no atemporal paradise. The house and tree stand as icons of a harsh and unforgiving land.

The ambivalence of this activity is fully captured in "Roblin Mills," found in Wild Grape Wine. We find in this poem a liquid place on which to stand. The mill, the poem explains, has fully disappeared; it has essentially been erased, and the millpond itself supplies an objective correlative for this erasure:

explorations and mappings that emphasize the transient occupation of time and space, the flux of the chronotope. Indeed, Purdy's poems are dominated by the chronotope of the open road. We find more than a trace of the picaresque in their lines. In one sense, the poems serve to record a string of adventures along the open road, adventures which bring to bear on the familiar that which is foreign. Roads and railroads, highways and paths, jet corridors and ocean lanes provide the poet's chronotopic imagination with means of exploring the flux of time and space. In the open road chronotope, Purdy explores the boundaries of start and finish, of continual motion, of self-becoming and self-definition.

In effect, this representation of reality along the borderline of the open road underlies Purdy's ontology of humanity's transient occupation of time and space. Here we occupy a moving and shifting centre that continually redefines horizons and circumferences. Here, we continually disappear from there; now, we continually disappear from then. This ontological and chronotopic paradox is extensive in Purdy's poems, but the sense of uneasy or impermanent occupation of the chronotope is best expressed, perhaps, in "Transient," with its title suggestive of a continual moving and changing. Indeed, this process is enacted in the poem as the poet rides the rails west to the edge of the continent and back again. Coming to know one's chronotope involves coming to know oneself, and the poem suggests this is no simple process. The poet rides a boxcar out of Winnipeg; on a morning after rain he finds himself close to swaying fields, "like running and running naked with summer in your mouth"(CH 107-108). The poet, "Being a boy scarcely

a moment," travels across the prairie surrounded by the country and railway hobos, "knowing/ what it's like to be not quite a child/ anymore and listening to the tough men/ talk of women and talk of the way things are/ in 1937." In Vancouver, an Indian woman yells "at the boy-man passing," offering her daughter for his pleasure, but the boy-man, sensing life's degradation, heads east again. Having ingested this chronotope as part of his education, the poem ends by expanding chronotopically into a Montreal apartment and mattress factory, where "you stand there growing older." Time and space both flow in the poem, and the poet's life flows with them. In an essay entitled "'Her Gates Both East and West'," found in No Other Country, Purdy writes, "Sometimes it seems I've been wandering most of my life. Come to think of it, maybe wandering is my life."⁵¹ Purdy lives a life of motion, with the result that chronotopes flow in and out of the poems.

Connected with this chronotope of the open road, moreover, are pervasive tropes of exploration and mapping which suggest Purdy's understanding of the flow of time and space, human participation in this flow, and the occupation of borderlands. Purdy's poems provide maps; they embody what the poet calls in "Transient" the "mapmaker's vision"(CH 107-108), a vision defined by In Search of Owen Roblin as "Employing here and now for compass points." The poems embodying this chronotopic vision continually carry us to boundaries, to the edges of the poet's imagination and the world. In "A Walk on Wellington Street," the poet reveals explicitly this borderland imagination:

⁵¹ Purdy, Country 172. The emphasis is Purdy's.

(suddenly
 a little man in a track suit
 leaps out of my head
 where it's still daylight
 and begins to circle as much
 land as he can before dark
 stepping along the boundary lines
 learned in Trenton high school
 and the Americans haven't changed yet
 reaching west to Juan de Fuca north
 to where the whale-coloured coasts
 sink against the Beaufort Sea
 and piled ice shines like frosted cake
 round the Arctic archipelago
 the tireless runner in my blood
 makes it back to Ottawa before lunch
 to eat a sandwich at the same
 drugstore as Tolstoy) (WGW 78-80)

The country's borders, its furthest reaches, provide the parentheses within which the poet's imagination runs. Purdy's poems regularly travel to these borders. Indeed, the shape of whole volumes is determined by this travel to the edges.

Many of these travel poems emphasize dislocation and disorientation. The poet is a trespasser of and interloper on borderlands; he becomes lost and confused in time and space. Much of North of Summer explores this dislocation, but we find it in other poems as well. One such poem of (dis)location is "Lost in the Badlands," with its title suggestive of precisely this chronotopic dilemma. Travelling in the fringe world of the Alberta badlands, the tourist poet and his tourist wife disobey the "NO/ TRESPASSING" sign and move into a "locked away" world. The poem proceeds to chronicle the poet's becoming lost, following "meekly fearful/ in this grey land of lost time"(PB 26-31). The poet journeys through a chronotopic maze; the poem is filled with confusion, imbalance, dangerous and unauthorized exploration. Moreover, this exploration takes us down into the earth; the poet's trespassing

(both spatial and temporal) takes us into an underworld. We walk along with the poet and his wife down into a "wound," "a torn gash in the earth," "a canyon leading downward/ into the dinosaurs' graveyard." The poet's chronotopic exploration takes the shape of a hellish fantasy in a fissure of the earth. He climbs fifty feet "into a dull grey land/ of eroded chalky hills like Satan's nightmare/ into another time of being"; he complains to his wife, "How in hell we gonna get outa here?/ --it's a hall of mirrors/ everything looks the same." The poet's exploration of time and space provides a hellish experience, indeed a borderland experience.⁵²

The paradox, moreover, of such hellish exploration is the fact of discovery. Chronotopic exploration, suggests the poet, is ontological. In the continual running and moving of the poet through time and space we find a model of the becoming self. What we find in such poems is a man in the act of revision. Perhaps this self-revision is most fully enacted, however, in "Trees at the Arctic Circle." Confronted with a northern chronotope, the poet's initial response is the condescension of a southern ethos:

They are 18 inches long
 or even less
 crawling under rocks
 grovelling among the lichens
 bending and curling to escape
 making themselves small
 finding new ways to hide
 Coward trees
 I am angry to see them
 like this (NOS 29-30)

⁵² See also "Private Property" (WGW 98-99) and the whole of North of Summer, which makes the whole Arctic experience analogous to Odysseus' journey into Hades.

The poet's initial response is one of anger and condemnation. In the poet's southern understanding, trees are vertical and dominating, Douglas firs, green maples, "oaks like gods," "the whole horizon jungle dark." Nevertheless, the poet turns back to the dwarf willows and observes them on their own terms:

And yet--and yet--
 their seed pods glow
 like delicate grey earrings
 their leaves are veined and intricate
 like tiny parkas

The poet's exploration takes him down onto the ground, close up; he becomes horizontal rather than vertical. "I see that I've been carried away in my scorn of the dwarf trees," he writes, "most foolish in my judgements." The poet's chronotopic exploration of an Arctic tree, a living paradox, results in a revision of the poet's chronotopic interior.

Much of Purdy's poetry enacts such discovery or the frustration of discoveries not made. Indeed, a metaphysic of discovery manifests itself in the poems; writing and motion are both acts of discovery. Much of this discovery is personal, much national, and much basically human, and much of the time, these discoveries are mixed together as Purdy follows in the footsteps of such explorers as Samuel Hearne and Martin Frobisher with his own imaginative footsteps. In an interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, Purdy says of travel, "my motives are to shake myself out of lethargy, to be stimulated in both thought and action."⁵³ Travel stimulates the poet, opens new chronotopic experiences, allows for discovery. In "A Walk on Wellington Street," we

⁵³ Purdy, "Phony, Realistic, Genuine," with Meyer and O'Riordan 143.

share in the poet's discovery of an open, becoming, ambivalent, paradoxical, and hybrid nation:

. . . a country nourished on self-doubt
 where from the reverse image of detractors
 an opposite nation is talked into existence
 that doesn't resemble any other one
 a cross-breed plant that survives the winter
 to stand between yes and no
 a two-headed coin that spins forever
 and balances on vertigo
 to glint sometimes in frosty sunlight (WGW 78-80)

The poet enacts in his exploration of the country's borders the (re)definition of a very Bakhtinian country. Travel, the open road, exploration, mapping, and discovery all provide chronotopes which allow the flux of time and space to be experienced and actual, mental, imaginative, and human boundaries to be broken.⁵⁴

Essentially, Purdy's poems express and enact an ambivalence concerning both dwelling and moving. In fact, we hear in the poems a constant play between these two chronotopic poles, poles of stasis and motion, being at home and alienation, digging in and spreading out, and inhabiting the pinpoint here and now and exploding outwards into all time and all space. Purdy's poems enact the ambivalence of inhabiting a chronotopic continuum, a fluid world, a loophole world. Distant times and places fuse together in the poet's relational thinking, in his sideways leaps and jumps. Time and space are tentatively inhabited by the poet. The play between here and there and now and then can lead to confusion as easily as to understanding. "Man Without a Country" explores these possibilities. The poet relates that "being an exile is beginning to understand yourself," and he concludes that culture in the

⁵⁴ See also "Detail" (WGW 14) and "The Horseman of Agawa" (SAD 14-16).

running along the shore of the New World, occupying the borderlands of the alien and the familiar, slavery and freedom.

iv.

Microcosm and Macrocosm: Carnival Time and Space

Within the framework of this poetic of dwelling and travel, Purdy expresses the fluidity of time and space in an extensive use of carnival thought and imagery. The fabric of the Purdy poem is woven with prominent carnival threads, with tropes of the grotesque cosmos and the grotesque body and with the carnival concept of time. Carnival time is ambivalent time, time expressing both human transience and continuity: life and death join in a carnival embrace. In Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, Bakhtin insists that "everything--from an abstract idea to a piece of rock on the bank of a stream--bears the stamp of time, is saturated with time, and assumes its form and meaning in time."⁵⁵ This world saturated with time, the realm of carnival culture, is the object of representation in Purdy's poems. The self faced with time's flux is both in the act of becoming and under erasure; the poems enact this doubleness, this anxiety of absence and joy of presence, this contemplation of mutability and continuity. The poet expresses alternately defiance and resignation, joy and depression, carnival ribald disrespect and calm meditation.

To say that Purdy is acutely aware of human transience does not need to be said. His poems are filled with absence, with chronotopic

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 42. Elsewhere, Bakhtin relates that "carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time" (Dostoevsky 124), and he elaborates upon this point in Rabelais and His World, suggesting that "carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal"(10). Purdy's poems exhibit to their very core this ambivalent attitude towards time's working.

markers of human transience and annihilating time. The poet's mind dwells on time's passing and human death, on vanished ancestors and disappeared cultures, on human rubble and human insignificance in time's vast stretches, on growing old and on rotting flesh. This contemplation of time's annihilating work strikes close to home with Purdy, in his personal chronotopes and in his person. We hear the poet's pessimism in "Roblin Mills," where the poet contemplates the vanishing of the mill, its complete erasure: "Of all these things/ not even an outline remains/ no shadow on the soft air/ or broken place/ where the heavy walls pressed"(WGW 46-47). The poet explores time's erasure of human purpose as well in these lines from "The Country North of Belleville":

Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
 a pile of moss-covered stones
 gathered for some ghost purpose
 has lost meaning under the meaningless sky
 --they are like cities under water and
 the undulating green waves of time are
 laid on them-- (CH 74-76)

Purdy's common places, his familiar spaces, are washed over by time that works to erase human attempts at permanence. Similarly, the waves of time wash over the poet, suggesting the source of his anxiety. In "What It Was--," the poet confronts this personal decay:

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
 oh heavy as the heavy cellar stones of the world
 but hammering on the gates of the sun
 or merely a little older and bewildered about things
 you didn't understand and perhaps meant nothing
 and fumbling to stay alive
 and always the listening-- (CH 47-48)

We hear in these lines the fumbling poet in a declining world, a world in which he himself participates. His attitude towards time's work is ambivalent: the moment takes him to both cellar and sun. Death, as the agent of annihilating time, is all too familiar to the human poet; death ends his travels, his participation in the chronotopic flux of the world.

In Purdy's poems, however, life and death are locked in a carnival embrace. Time not only annihilates but also renews, and to suggest that pessimism concerning human transience remains unanswered would be inaccurate. These poems emphasize presence, becoming, and temporal-historical-generational-personal continuity. In this doubleness, Purdy's poems embrace a wholehearted carnival ambivalence concerning the flow of humanity within the flux of time and space. The poem "Survivors" from the Hiroshima Poems chap book provides a paradigm in this regard, as the following lines illustrate:

It's difficult to be objective
 or personally optimistic about life
 when you see so much evidence of nothing
 but death around you in the great mausoleum
 the world is
 or make pretty poems for joy
 in the short space before departure
 and at this moment I can't think of one
 good reason for staying on earth at all
 except that over near the atomic hospital
 the garage mechanic
 must have had several (SAD 116-117)

In the midst of cynicism and despair, the poet retrieves hope from a radiation victim's insistence on life. Similarly, the "soundless golden bells/ alone in the storm" (WGW 14) of "Detail" suggest simultaneously the decay and the exuberance, the victory and defeat, the paradox of living in time.

Other poems affirm more completely the renewing power of time. Human continuity and presence are fully explored; participation in the open becoming of a chronotopically fluid world is emphasized. In "For Her in Sunlight," a poem in Sex and Death, the poet writes, "in the loopholes and catacombs of time/ travel we pass thru glance back/ to see far-distant replicas of ourselves/ waving to us/ surprised to find us still alive"(SAD 39-40). For the poet and his lover, and for us as readers, time provides loopholes and catacombs, escapes into the future and retrievals of the past. Inhabiting these escape hatches allows for a defeat of clock time: time not only annihilates, but it also renews. Purdy's poems and the poetic imagination indicate and demonstrate such escape. Indeed, poems such as "Tent Rings" and "Lament for the Dorsets" suggest that the poem, the work of art, and the artistic imagination play a key role in defeating time's destructive work of human erasure. It is the poetic imagination that returns the ghosts of long dead men to the tent rings; vanished Dorsets live variously in the memories of modern Inuit, in the poet's imagination, in the ivory swan carved by a Dorset sculptor, and in the poem itself as an imaginative reconstruction determined to open a loophole in time.⁵⁶

We find the same exploration and affirmation in "Lost in the Badlands" and In Search of Owen Roblin. The first poem explores the paradox of absence and presence in the context of vanished dinosaurs. In his temporal fantasy, the poet brings to life the reality of their death, "this non-silence/ a mirage of screaming sound/ or an illusion of

⁵⁶ See also "Scott Hutcheson's Boat" (PAA73 62-64) and "Spring Song" (PAA 27-28).

silence"(PB 26-31), and he proceeds to fuse these distant chronotopes through this loophole. Lost in a "maze of conjecture," he affirms "the simultaneity of things/ not the false measurements of clocks/ but the instant of the dinosaurs/ whose instant I am part of." In Search of Owen Roblin concentrates on an historic rather than prehistoric loophole, on a generational rather than an evolutionary escape hatch. "Stare back at the mirror," the poet advises the reader, "seeing yourself a temporal transvestite." The poem's emphasis lies on descent, on shared strength and weakness, on continuity in the body, and on survival:

In search of Owen Roblin
I discovered a whole era
that was really a backward extension of myself
built lines of communication across two centuries
recovered my own past my own people
of which I am the last but not final link

This movement out of the past into the future signals the victory of the continuum. Rather than inhabiting a monologically sealed off past, the poet discovers his own depth, his own participation in the dialogic world out of which the present grows, the fluid chronotopic world.

Purdy models his involvement with carnival time, moreover, on the carnival image of the grotesque body. Poem after poem reveals this grotesque body, a body which is characterized by its openness, by its intimate connection with both time and space, indeed its existence in time and space. Grotesque realism provides what Bakhtin calls a "materialistic concept of being,"⁵⁷ and that sense of being alive is consistently exhibited in Purdy's poems, filled as they are with bodily

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, Rabelais 52.

images. This concentration on the body is suggested, in fact, by the whole notion of the poetic omphalos, with its connotations of navel and umbilical cord, womb and birth, and body and earth. Purdy is keenly aware of bodily existence; his poems create a giant body, a body of internal grotesque functions, a body implicated as well in evolutionary flux and change. In "Poem for one of the Annettes," the poet thinks of Anita "with undressed hips" and "big unpainted Rubens breasts affixed to/ a living woman/ swinging high over Montreal" (PAA 7-8). The poem's landscape is dominated by giant, vibrant bodies, exuberant flesh. Other poems, however, take us on a fantastic chronotopic journey into the body, through its organs and operations. We enter this cosmos of the body in "Joint Account," where the poet relates, "Dead Beothuks of Newfoundland track down my blood;/ Dorsets on the whale-coloured Beaufort Sea/ carve my brain into small ivory fossils" (LBB 66) and in "Johnston's on St. Germain," where the poet relates, "unleavened bread bubbled yeastily/ in my belly and borsht patrolled my vertabrae/ bagels played hopscotch with my waistline/ and I moved farther and farther into that country" (SAD 16-19). These examples simply suggest Purdy's larger poetic of the grotesque body, with its emphasis on physiological function, size, domination of landscape, play of microcosm and macrocosm, and interaction with time and space.

Rather than a closed body, the grotesque presents an open and becoming body, one continually overcoming the boundary between itself and the world. The grotesque body is defined by its growths and protuberances and orifices; it tastes, eats, and drinks; it digests, defecates, and urinates; it gives birth and dies; it enacts a continual

exchange between itself and the world. Speaking of this body in Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin emphasizes that "eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world,"⁵⁸ and he proceeds to define this body by "that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines."⁵⁹ Furthermore, writes Bakhtin, "all these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation."⁶⁰ The open grotesque body provides with its material images a model for human interaction with the chronotope on all levels, an interaction involving a bursting of often sanctified boundaries demarcating self and world. Grotesque realism provides a startling link between self and world, for the grotesque body is a degraded and materialized body, an open, growing, and becoming body which reminds humanity of its fundamental involvement in the chronotope.

Purdy's poems are literally and figuratively filled with images of a grotesque body that continually facilitates exchange between itself and the world. The poet's experience of the world is consistently visceral, of the large internal organs. The world continually violates in carnival fashion the boundaries of the poet's body, entering through

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, Rabelais 281.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, Rabelais 316.

⁶⁰ Bakhtin, Rabelais 317. Speaking of carnival images of an excremental nature, Bakhtin notes that "we must not forget that urine (as well as dung) is gay matter, which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter. If dung is a link between body and earth (the laughter that unites them), urine is a link between body and sea" (Rabelais 335).

any available orifice, any grotesque organ or pore. The grotesque world, a world mixing beauty and ugliness, a world both debased and exalted, enters the poet's grotesque body, seeps into him and transforms him utterly. The poem "Transient" provides a paradigm for the poet's visceral experience of chronotopic reality. This touchstone poem recounts the poet's ingestion of the country through which he finds himself continually moving. A fluid chronotope becomes part of his very body:

after a while the eyes digest a country and
 the belly perceives a mapmaker's vision
 in dust and dirt on the face and hands here
 its smell drawn deep thru the nostrils down
 to the lungs and spurts thru blood stream
 campaigns in the lower intestine
 and chants love songs to the kidneys
 After a while there is no arrival and
 no departure possible any more
 you are where you were always going
 and the shape of home has planted itself in your loins
 the identity of forests that were always nameless
 the selfhood of rivers that are changing always
 the nationality of riding a boxcar thru the depression
 over long green plains and high mountain country
 with the best and worst of a love that's not to be spoken

(CH 107-108)

The poet's body has taken his country inside; it flows through his organs. A fluid nation, a continually transforming chronotopic world, enters the poet's open grotesque body, with the paradoxical result that the literal and ontological transient is no longer homeless but is at home.

Moreover, the poet's grotesque body not only takes in the chronotopic world but also imposes itself upon time and space. Purdy's poems give expression to grotesque realism's emphasis on bodily functions, on birth and death, defecating and urinating. The body that

ingests also excretes, and the mouth that takes in the world physically also manifests itself chronotopically and ontologically through speech. These interconnections range from the profound to the comical. The poet undertakes such grotesque activities in "When I sat down to Play the Piano" and "South," two poems from North of Summer. In the first poem, Purdy constructs a mock-heroic anecdote out of the poet's attempt to defecate on an Arctic island, "buttocks balanced above the boulders" (NOS 43-45). Attacked in the process by hungry huskies, the poet retreats degraded, materialized, and connected with the world of earth. Similarly, in the second poem Purdy establishes the connection between body and sea. The poet, out in a boat with Jonesee the Inuit hunter, drinks a toast to the world and our illusions with "fermented blubber juice" (NOS 60-63). As time passes in the poem, the toast works its way to the poet's left kidney, and he stands to empty it into this Arctic sea at the world's top:

reverse blessing on the world
 from a sacriligious well-wisher
 impure joy and powerful impulse
 love and hate together
 a libation from the Arctic
 blood of a most experienced lambkin
 stand up in the boat rocking gently
 in all directions South
 and say
 `Look out down there!'

The poet showers the earth with urine, with a carnival curse-blessing that mixes love and hate. The grotesque body repeatedly expresses the poet's ambivalent interchange with the chronotopic world, his reversals and turn arounds of accepted borders.⁶¹

⁶¹ See also "Homer's Poem" (CP 3-4), "The Uses of History" (PB 112-114), and "Recipe" (SUN 29).

The grotesque body provides Purdy with chronotopic openings, breaches in the walls of time and space, for the degrading and materializing body involves humanity in birth and death, renewal and becoming. The body's unfinished being comes to parallel and participate in the fluidity of the chronotope; the connection between the self and the world is the omphalos, the navel cord of the grotesque body, a trope of continuous feeding, growth, and exchange. Grotesque realism's matrix of physiological and biological tropes provides the basis for ontological understanding of human participation in time and space; the grotesque body takes on cosmic and historical implications for selfhood. Grotesque realism, writes Bakhtin, "seeks to grasp in its imagery the very act of becoming and growth, the eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being,"⁶² and the grotesque body, he adds, "is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception."⁶³ Grotesque imagery captures, in essence, human involvement in the flux of time and space.

Purdy's poems continually suggest this connection. "Love at Roblin Lake" plays with this grotesque becoming in its ironic emphasis on the poet's imaginary and vulgar love-making. "My ambition as I remember and/ I always remember was always/ to make love vulgarly and immensely," says the carnival poet. We enter an ambivalent grotesque world where sexual activity of elephantine proportions defeats cosmic fear and emptiness:

every lunge a hole in the great dark
for summer cottagers to fall into at a later date

⁶² Bakhtin, Rabelais 52.

⁶³ Bakhtin, Rabelais 318.

and hear inside faintly (like in a football
 stadium when the home team loses)
 ourselves still softly
 going
 `boing boing boing'
 as the vulgar elephant doth
 & immense reptiles did
 in the star-filled places of earth
 that I remember we left behind long ago
 and forgotten everything after
 on our journey into the dark (WGW 118)

For Purdy, sex and death and love and life are indeed intertwined, tangled in a carnival grotesque embrace. These final lines combine carnival comedy with cosmic fear, sexual prowess with personal insignificance in humanity's chronotopic journey into the dark. The open body is deeply implicated in time's flow and time's defeat. These implications are expressed in the poem "In the Dream of Myself," where the poet affirms the presence of the dead in himself:

father and grandfathers are here
 grandmothers and mother
 farmers and horsebreakers
 tangled in my flesh
 who built my strength for a journey (HOE 19)

Past and present are entangled in the poet's own flesh; what appears to be absent is actually present; the boundaries of clock time are defeated by the ever-renewing grotesque body containing ancestors: "Old hunters and farmers and woodsmen/ who lived in the bright day/ and sowed earth with their bones/ alive in me." Earth, time's flow, and the body all intertwine in this fertile yoking of carnival death and life.

What such images suggest, as does Purdy's larger work, is that time and space themselves participate in the grotesque ethos. The earth and in fact the entire cosmos are repeatedly presented in grotesque terms as fluid grotesque bodies. This cosmos presents itself as huge,

permeable, continually changing, dying, and growing. Through a matrix of grotesque bodily tropes, Purdy presents a spatial and temporal universe characterized by its loophole quality, its continual decentering and upsetting, its shifting boundaries. Such images materialize the earth and cosmos, providing the Janus face of a universe both dying and being born, a world both blessed and cursed, crowned and uncrowned. From one perspective, the earth is a giant graveyard, a physical container of temporal erasure and destruction. Many poems articulate the poet's exploration, for instance, of the giant global kitchen midden. In and around Roblin Lake, he explores "the shoreless subterranean world" (Owen Roblin), the world of decayed mills, pioneer homes, and vanishing farms. The poet operates as a chronotopic garbage collector, a scavenger accumulating a collection of oddities. In other poems, however, Purdy offers a comical understanding of this grotesque cosmos. These poems are filled with domestic, excremental, and fertility tropes. In "Gondwanaland," for example, we find a fluid planet of continental plates and the earth's crust, of stone as "grey oatmeal-porridge stuff/ criss-cross tweedy patterns/ stone like pink cooked ham" (PB 88-90). Still other poems emphasize the fertile quality of this grotesque cosmos. Purdy continually takes us into the earth's womb, into womb-caves where carnival chronotopic births are enacted. The cosmos itself is a vessel of death and conception. "The Country North of Belleville," for example, describes this chronotope as "a lean land/ not fat/ with inches of black soil on/ earth's round belly" (CH 74-76). The earth-womb, with its pregnant belly, provides a tenuous and fragile fertility and existence. Clearly, the grotesque cosmos is both

graveyard and womb, origin and destination; it is a cosmos of ambivalent chronotopic flux.⁶⁴

Purdy's poems thus establish connections between humanity and chronotope through grotesque imagery. Rather than providing the common dichotomy of self and world, Purdy's poems explore the intertwining of the two, indeed their identity. The Purdyian self is not bounded, static, cut off from the cosmos; instead, it is woven physiologically and historically into time and space. We find not only chronotopic markers of an expansive becoming cosmos in these poems but also human citizenship and participation in that cosmos. The grotesque body establishes that link poetically. "Let us point out," writes Bakhtin, "that the grotesque body is cosmic and universal,"⁶⁵ and he goes on in Rabelais and His World to relate that in folk consciousness, "man assimilated the cosmic elements: earth, water, air, and fire; he discovered them and became vividly conscious of them in his own body. He became aware of the cosmos within himself."⁶⁶ Profoundly elemental, the grotesque body provides a model for both the cosmos and humanity, for both macrocosm and microcosm. In folk culture, claims Bakhtin, this grotesque body was a means of defeating the terror associated with cosmic disturbances. As a defeat of cosmic fear, the grotesque offered "the historic, progressing body of mankind"⁶⁷ and an image of "the gay, material bodily cosmos, ever-growing and self-renewing."⁶⁸ The grotesque, with its cosmic connotations, provides the image of a

⁶⁴ See also "Poem for one of the Annettes" (PAA 7-8) and "Country Snowplow" (CH 87-88).

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, Rabelais 318.

⁶⁶ Bakhtin, Rabelais 336.

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, Rabelais 367.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin, Rabelais 340.

chronotopic being and world in flux, continually changing and becoming together.

These grotesque cosmic connections are part of Purdy's poetic. Earth and sea, sources of life, provide origins to which the poet continually returns, origins flowing forward in the sea of human blood in the grotesque body's circulatory system. This connection that breaks the border between self and world is the connection we hear established in "The Stone Bird," with its exploration of earth song as body song, and in "Friends" where the poet's friends "have come to resemble the land" (PB 106-107) and where his mind contemplates the "glacial till that shaped their bones/ soft clay and silt and yellow sand/ with a mineral matrix/ coalesced in the human flux." Such poems offer a continual play of microcosm and macrocosm, an interpenetration of self and world, as does "Death of DHL," where Purdy quotes Lawrence, appropriating for himself his fellow writer's words:

But the magnificent here and now of
 life in the flesh is ours, and ours alone,
 and ours only for a time.
 I am part of the sun as my eye
 is part of me. That I am part of the earth
 my feet know perfectly, and my blood
 is part of the sea-- (PB 92-95)

These borrowed words offer Purdy's own participation in the human community's involvement in the world across time and space. We hear in these dying words a living knowledge of humanity's connection with a grotesque cosmos, a fleshly and material world out of which we are born and to which we return.

v.

Earth-Song, Consciousness, and Chronotope

Through grotesque realism, in fact, Purdy's poems enact a tension between self and world, consciousness and nature.⁶⁹ This ontological borderland underlies most, if not all, of Purdy's poems; for his poetic sensibility it offers a realm of exploration in terms of the chronotopic nature of being alive. From one end of Purdy's career to the other, poem after poem enacts life on this ambivalent borderline. They reveal the constant tension within the world and within the self between consciousness (and its results) and material life (and its effects), and the simultaneous alienation and participation brought about by this strife. The early poem "The Death of Animals" articulates this strife. As night/time passes for the watchman poet, he contemplates the connections between urban and hinterland worlds, city and forest. In fact, the poet makes connections and denies them at the same time. "Fox in deep burrow suddenly imagined," says the poet, "A naked woman inside his rubric fur,/ Lacquered fingernails pushing, edging him out--/ And screamed, directly into the earth"(BIB 6). Death comes equally for fox, bear, and stag, indeed, for humans barricaded against the wild as well. "What's the point then? None at all, really," says the poet, "8 o'clock and all's well. Temperature rising." With the poet's conclusion (essentially ironic) that no connection exists between animal and human

⁶⁹ Of particular relevance to this discussion of chronotope in Purdy's poetry is Dennis Lee's Savage Fields, a meditation on the strife between what Lee calls earth and world. My discussion of Purdy's play of consciousness and chronotope is indebted to Lee's book for its philosophical and ideological basis (although Purdy does not enter into Lee's discussion).

deaths, between hinterland and baseland, forest and city, we sense the strife of earth and world.

This strife, moreover, is the focus of Purdy's more mature poetry, in poems such as "The Cariboo Horses" where a conflict of energy and stasis, instinctual freedom and conscious control is enacted through a play with horses and machines, dry grass and human roads, golden dung and gasoline dust, and in the more recent "Piling Blood," with its exploration of mechanized death and blood retrieval. The poet recounts working at Arrow Transfer on Granville Island piling bags of dried blood:

if you weren't gentle
the stuff would belly out
from bags in brown clouds
settle on your sweating face
cover hands and arms
enter ears and nose
seep inside pants and shirt
reverting back to liquid blood (PE 13-15)

The covered in blood poet then tells of hoisting sides of beef in Burns' slaughterhouse on East Hastings, touching frozen death and listening to the bawling animals from above whose blood would be retrieved. Haunted by the screams in this mechanical Inferno, the poet finds himself unable to write poems. "There were no poems," he says, "to exclude the screams/ which boarded the streetcar/ and travelled with me." Here, the poet finds the strife of earth and world at his fingertips, overwhelming his senses and intellect.

Purdy's poems enact humanity's larger involvement in earth's exuberant life and at the same time remind humanity of its participation in the process or flux of life and the erasure of consciousness and its primacy. The poet's involvement in earth's life can be traced in two

very different poems, "Spring Song" and "My Grandfather's Country." In the first, an initial separation between poet and earth is posited in the fissure between the title and the first line ("Old father me" PAA 27-28); furthermore, we find this contrast between poet and earth's cycles deepened by the poet's act of changing the oil under his old Pontiac (his participation in the mechanical world of conscious control) as opposed to "sweetly hymning pike spawning,/ frogs larruping loopholes of silence/ with ditties of deathless blasphemy." Nevertheless, the poet rejects this separation ("Include me out of it all?/ Never."), pressing his eyes against the "jiggling jelly buttocks" of a neighbouring farm girl, and concluding his meditation on participation in earth's life with his hands under the skirts of the world. In the second poem, a gradual shift from alienation to dwelling is enacted as the poet comes to claim ownership of and being owned by his grandfather's country. This poem meditates on the poet's involvement in earth:

and if I must give my heart to anything
 it will be here in the red glow
 where failed farms sink back into earth
 the clearings join and fences no longer divide
 where the running animals gather their bodies together
 and pour themselves upward
 into the tips of falling leaves
 with mindless faith that presumes a future (WGW 125-126)

These lines demonstrate an ambivalent play of life and death, the tentative dwelling of the poet in a land where the vestiges of conscious control are continually erased by earth's processes and yet where life continually recreates itself 'mindlessly' out of death.

Purdy's attitude, manifested in a wide variety of forms and individual poems, is essentially ambivalent, ambivalent concerning the

value of consciousness, ambivalent concerning the primacy of his own consciousness and the value and products of his own words. The poet relates in "Excess of Having" that "Until now I hadn't quite/ realized nobody owns anything/ tho crazy men have said so all along"(SAD 68). People do not own even their own bodies, he adds in this reminder to humanity of its origins, chronotopic dwelling, and destinations. "The Beavers of Renfrew"(SAD 94-96) provides a key example of this ambivalence enacted in a poem. Here, Purdy questions the human project itself. The poet's foolish wisdom, his poetic polemic, turns consciousness on its head in an effort to change the course of this destructive strife. At the base of the poem lies a fundamental juxtaposition of chronotope and consciousness in the form of the beavers and Jake Loney respectively. The beavers, in their upright "pride of being," go about their business, carrying within their bone camera minds images of ancestors and Indian girls. Conversely, Jake Loney cuts his winter wood with a chain saw, creating absence out of presence, his "tongue drowned in a chaw of tobacco" while the beavers hold silver fish in their mouths. Jake eats the earth aimlessly, stencilling the poet's brain with "black quotes" while the beavers essentially ignore him, urinating on the poet by mistake occasionally. Within this framework, the poet constructs a myth of origins explaining how the beavers built dams to create dry land for humans to inhabit; an earth pact was agreed upon that humanity has since forgotten, a vestige of which is "the secret of staying completely still,/ allowing ourselves to catch up/ with the shadow just ahead of us." The poet criticizes humanity's destructive and self-destructive ethos, our attempt through

consciousness to control earth, and he offers instead his foolish wisdom: instead of going on, forward, and up, turn left and stay here. He confronts polemically the inarticulate Jake Loney with this question, but the only response received is the bucking chainsaw "chewing out chunks of pine that toppled/ and scarred the air with green absence" and the possibility of the tobacco spit drowning the planet in "brown water." Outlining the strife of consciousness and chronotope in this poem, Purdy holds out both hope and failure as twin possibilities; the imaginative discourse of the poem itself, with its carnival logic, offers itself as both problem and solution.⁷⁰

Purdy's poems, then, are written in the knowledge and context of this strife, but not without hope. In fact, his poems constitute a celebration of chronotopic life, of what he repeatedly calls earth-song; his poems are an earth-song. These poems celebrate the vitality of life in spite of death; their lines are filled with an energy that reflects the exuberance of being alive in time and space. In his brief description of Purdy and his poetic in From Here to There, Frank Davey relates that "there is no despair in Purdy's poems, and certainly no retreat into gnosticism or aestheticism. There is only joy in the continuing struggle to survive and understand."⁷¹ Davey's summary is an apt one with respect to Purdy's continual engagement with the chronotope. Purdy's poems repeatedly announce and explore the doubleness of being alive in time and space. Readers share in

⁷⁰ See also "Remains of an Indian Village" (PAA 57-58) and "Starlings" (HOE 29-30).

⁷¹ Frank Davey, "Al Purdy," From Here to There, by Davey (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1974) 238.

experiencing this exuberance in poems such as "Trees at the Arctic Circle." Here, we participate in the poet's self-revision; learning to observe the Arctic landscape on its own terms, he contemplates the life of these dwarf trees, their roots touching permafrost, "ice that remains ice forever/ and they use it for their nourishment/ use death to remain alive"(NOS 29-30). The poem goes on to affirm the dignity of all living things, and this affirmation, this rejection of making oneself 'the Pontifex Maximus/ of nullity," stands as a paradigm of the poet's continual engagement with life.

Indeed, Purdy's poems insist that, for better and worse, humanity participates in this earth-song. Listening to the signs of chronotopic flux, the poet discovers that the body exists in the chronotope: the border is under continual erasure and redefinition. Listening to earth-song, the poet hears continually a body-song, for the two are identical. Being alive becomes a constant dialogic interaction and interpenetration of self and perceptible reality, of consciousness and chronotope in poetic terms, of interior and exterior landscapes. The borderland of consciousness and chronotope underlies all other borderlands in Purdy's poems; each poem functions as a unique episode in this continuing dialogue, as a dialogic address or sideways glance at the world. The poems mark a growing consciousness of the chronotopic world through articulation, an exploration of being alive in time and space. The poems search for origins and pose questions concerning destinations in the context of human consciousness; they constitute an ontological quest played out between the poles of dwelling or inhabiting and wandering or travelling. The poet we hear in the poems is a Dostoevskian hero, as

Bakhtin puts it, "occupied primarily with the task of becoming conscious, the sort of hero whose life would be concentrated on the pure function of gaining consciousness of himself and the world."⁷² In Purdy's poems, then, gaining consciousness of self and of world are twin aspects of the same task, for consciousness and chronotope are inextricably intertwined: the boundary is fluid, malleable, continuously punctured and redefined.⁷³

In the poems, moreover, consciousness expresses its debt to all that lies outside itself, in fact to all that penetrates itself, robbing it of its isolation. This penetration transforms the self from simply egocentric to altercentric. "The Cave Painters," a poem from the early volume Emu, Remember! and prototype of "In the Caves," ushers us into the poet's chronotopic poetic. The painters of the title, themselves prototypes of the poet, "Become inhabitants of loneliness and applicants/ To leave the mind-prison" (ER 14). Purdy's poems are applications to leave the mind-prison, and the larger role of all art, suggests Purdy, is such an attempted escape through continual engagement with chronotopic reality. The border between consciousness and chronotopic reality comes under attack, suffers a positive erasure that negates the natural narcissism of the ego. Purdy's poems embody escape from the trap of pure consciousness.⁷⁴ His poems, in fact, posit a

⁷² Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 50.

⁷³ See in particular "The Stone Bird" (SB 105-108).

⁷⁴ A volume such as North of Summer records this loophole in detail. Here, the poet finds himself deposited in a strange but familiar landscape that sets out to dialogize his world views and indeed himself. These Arctic poems provide an image of a man in the act of revision through engagement with chronotopic reality. The arena of many of these poems is the borderland between consciousness and cosmos. See, for example, "Still Life in a Tent" (NOS 47-49).

model of consciousness consistent with the flux of time and space. Participating in chronotopic fluidity, the Purdyian self becomes a fluid self, a self in the act of becoming; while consciousness makes and unmakes reality, reality constructs and deconstructs consciousness in a continual play. Chronotope, in the Purdy poem, is a field of play for consciousness, and conversely consciousness finds itself continually overwhelmed by chronotope. Purdy repeatedly ruptures the false boundary between self and other, consciousness and unconsciousness.

"Man Without a Country" strikes this note in a nationalistic context. Here, Purdy explores the power of time and place in relation to selfhood and self-definition, the combined exile and belonging that defines being alive on the earth, in a country and culture. Recounting his friendship with a man who left Canada because it had nothing to offer, the poet tells us not to condemn him:

Well let him be
 for I have wondered who I was myself
 as a youngster riding freight trains westward
 noticing how the landscape in giant steps rose
 to exceed itself in a continental hubris
 of snow peaks and clouds piled skyward
 with the hurtling upward roller coaster down sensation
 that races thru blood with the alcohol of knowing
 when dawn is the petals of a million flowers
 with engine grit in my teeth and eyes stinging
 with half the flying landscape a mince pie stuck to my face
 the rest an omelet in shirt and pants and brain and under my
 fingernails

Call it inoculation--but not immunity
 there is no immunity for place and time
 and something grows inside you if you feel it
 and something dies if you don't
 an exaltation
 when I knew if anyone could ever know
 what must escape telling and become feeling alone (PB 60-62)

These lines express the tentative dwelling in the chronotope experienced by the poet, his tracing of the wavering boundary between his

consciousness and time-space as he traverses the landscape. He explores the significance of time and space for selfhood, adding, "I am learning what a strange lonely place is myself/ reflecting the present reiterating the past/ reconnoitring the future." Place and time are in the flesh, and consciousness and flesh are in space and time. "These are my history," says the poet, "the story of myself/ for I am the land/ and the land has become me." Purdy's poems repeatedly announce this understanding of consciousness and chronotope as interpenetrating entities, the knowledge that "history is asleep/ in all our bones the long history of becoming," the awareness that culture is meaningless "without a sense of place/ the knowledge of here which is the centre of all things."

In this context, the Purdy poem records the imagination's confrontation with chronotopic reality. Capturing the moment's discovery, the poem offers the author's revelation concerning how we inhabit space and time; the chronotopic markers embedded in the poem offer not a described and distant landscape, a given world, nor a mimetic one, but a created world, one engaged by the poet's consciousness. In this sense, the poem defeats clock time while existing in time itself: the poet represents chronotopic reality in the text, a text itself participating in spatial-temporal flux. The Purdy poem embodies the loophole world of the retrievable past and open-ended present. In his essay on the chronotope in literature, Bakhtin writes that "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic,"⁷⁵ and he proceeds to relate that "in the final analysis everything that carries

⁷⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 85.

significance can and must also be significant in terms of space and time. Folkloric man demands space and time for his full realization; he exists entirely and fully in these dimensions and feels comfortable in them."⁷⁶ Poet Purdy is such a folkloric man, fully alive in time and space. His poems comprise an exploration of being alive in all its complexity, tentative explorations of "the untranslatable universe" ("A Graceful Little Verse," SAD 89). In the borderlands of the Purdy text, we find a rethinking of accepted inner and outer dualisms. In the fluidity of chronotopic reality, Purdy has paradoxically found the forms for his experience: the hell and paradise of time and space are the framework of Purdy's poems, their ambivalent field of play.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 150.

Chapter 5

Poems from the Purdy Centrifuge: Ideological Dialogue in the Marketplace Dithyramb

Lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces in a game.
Kingship belongs to the child. Heraclitus.

For what of mortal things is not full of folly, done by
fools, and in the presence of fools? Erasmus

A poem is a human event. Literature, through the vehicle of discourse, becomes a human act rather than a static thing and participates in the tragedy and the comedy of the human condition. "No human events," writes Bakhtin, "are developed or resolved within the bounds of a single consciousness."¹ All human events are socio-historic, communal, and dialogic, with language as the foundation of this communal dialogue, and Al Purdy's poems participate in such socio-historic structures. The Purdy poem (existing within a poetic community, a national culture, and a larger human context) is a human event, an expression of his understanding of both the individual and the communal. Within this broad framework, however, Purdy displays a specific perspective: he seeks continually in his poems to dialogize hardened ideologies. The result is that his poems express an ambivalent attitude to human life within its social framework. He speaks both dialogically and chorically; when the two are combined, he displays a paradoxical polemical sympathy to humanity, to both himself and to others. Through a play of ideologies, carnival marketplace speech, and dramas of egocentricity and altercentricity, Purdy, as Nobody and Everyman,

¹ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 288.

affirms the "special human lunacy" ("The Son of Someone Loved," PE 126-127) of the "swelling human tide" ("The Stone Bird," SE 105-108).

Everywhere in his texts, Bakhtin affirms that all discourse is a human event, that language is essentially social. The signs of language, as communal property, are shared according to the rules established by a given social collective,² and any collective, suggests Bakhtin, is heteroglot, filled with many world views at play and in dialogue, world views not simply of the present moment but of the historic past, world views given voice through concrete discourse. Moreover, literary texts both participate in and explore a given ideological 'horizon.' Rather than picturing such texts as individual productions, Bakhtin stresses their communal origins and function: the literary text interprets the heteroglot world of which it is itself a part.

When we begin to read Purdy, it quickly becomes clear that he is a social and communal poet, a precisely human poet in this Bakhtinian sense. People are never absent from the Purdy poem; indeed, they comprise the centre of his poetic explorations. His poems are dedicated to dramatizing the ambivalent fullness of human existence on all levels. Purdy's community takes the shape of a series of concentric circles: personal relationships (the poet and lovers and friends), his region (Roblin Lake community and United Empire Loyalist ancestors), his nation (its common people and multiple origins), his world (including current events, human history, and prehistory), and his readers (the world of

² See Dialogic Imagination 259, where Bakhtin stresses that discourse is a social phenomenon in which idea systems are played out to create shared meanings.

the shared text). The Purdy poem grows out of local, national, and universal social realities; he takes as his field the themes of "human literature, the best literature," namely sex and death that include love and life.³ Indeed, the centrality of this social context to his poetic can be seen in the overlap between this concern and the foci of preceding chapters: chronotope is social for Purdy, the realm of folk existence and humanity's earth song; voice in his poems is a social event, an act of dialogue in a drama of anticipation and response, of polemical sympathy; and Purdy as author is a precisely social being seeking to establish community through strategies that deflate authorial authority and ego. No matter what the ostensible subject or process of the Purdy poem, his primary concern is people. Indeed, he says of poets themselves that "all our lives we've got to live and survive as human beings rather than poets."⁴ The origin of the Purdy poem, the poem itself, and its ultimate destination are all inextricably bound up with socio-historic reality.

Purdy's prose comments offer a paradigm (as was the case with chronotope, voice, and authorship) for Purdy's social orientation, his communal concerns and imagination. In these texts, we read a folk world come to life, a carnival world of the communal marketplace. Purdy's world view is intimately connected with the world of common people. He sympathizes with the unofficial and the defeated rather than the powerful. His world is the world of Johnston's mattress factory on St.

³ Al Purdy, note, *Sex and Death*, by Purdy (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) iv.

⁴ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright 56.

Germain Street in Montreal, "a dog's breakfast of nationalities."⁵ Moreover, these prose texts reveal Purdy's specifically Canadian context, his continual play with the socio-historic structures of Canadian society. Specifically, they suggest Purdy's ambivalent attitude towards his native society. He notes its cultural richness and historical depth as well as its monologisms. In No Other Country, he writes, "It is difficult not to think of those people on the river [St. Lawrence], the dispossessed from France, England, Scotland, and Ireland; difficult because we are their children, and their children's children,"⁶ and he proceeds to explore "French-Canadian history, which joins and becomes my own history in 1759--you have to think of Quebec that way, with a whole net of capillaries and nerves stretching back to the past, woven into the body of Canada as well as into our own bodies, countless invisible threads binding us together in ways that we don't even know about."⁷ Purdy's national universe has depth, for he sees the invisible threads joining us together through time. And this national culture, a world both personal and communal, is Purdy's ambivalent home, the context for his life and poems. Again in No Other Country, he comments, "I have this . . . feeling of enjoyment, of being at home, all over Canada. Maybe part of the reason comes from an earlier feeling of being trapped forever in the town of Trenton, Ontario, when I was a child: then the tremendous sense of release when I escaped, riding the freight trains west during the Depression."⁸

⁵ Purdy, Country 137.
⁶ Purdy, Country 88.
⁷ Purdy, Country 180.
⁸ Purdy, Country 15.

This native culture, Purdy suggests, involves both freedom and entrapment.

Purdy's prose texts reveal, in addition, that his concerns extend to the larger human community. His explorations involve humanity's humble origins and its collective unconscious, the communal elves he hears in his head. The larger issues of death and human continuity preoccupy Purdy; indeed, these texts reveal that his focus rests on human essentials, on pointing out things of value overlooked and on dialogizing sanctioned world views. Thus, his poems take the form of love poems exploring the ambivalence of the human condition, the intertwining of the grand and the ridiculous, of hope and despair, and of individual and community that is life. In a 1975 interview, Purdy discusses his early and later poetry, commenting that "those earlier poems are love poems about what happened to other people, how other people lived and how I feel about other people," and of his later poetry he says, "they're poems in which I am analyzing myself as well as other people."⁹ His poems, he himself suggests, are love poems exploring both himself and other people. Moreover, in his introduction to Love in a Burning Building, Purdy claims "male-female love in its highest, lowest, absolutely non-platonic, physical and intellectual level" as his field, and he adds the following explanatory comments:

It isn't just the euphoric dreams of lovers I want to evoke,
it's the ridiculousness inherent in the whole comic disease.
And the mordant happiness of despair as well. Pain and its
red blot in the brain, sorrow that things end, fade into
little rags of memory that haunt us in their absence. (How
wonderful to be made of stone and endure forever! Except,

⁹ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright, 53.

in some mysterious way, that which has existed truly once does last forever.)¹⁰

Purdy underlines his heteroglot attitude to the human condition: his exploration of human love in all its carnival craziness expands into a meditation on larger questions of pain and joy intermixed, of death and continuity, and of absence and presence.

His concern is for that expanding human consciousness and for the aspects of life that make being part of the human community worthwhile, "like trying to find purpose and meaning in your own day-to-day living, or exploring someone else's personality in relation to your own."¹¹ Such a comment, in fact, underlies the polemical sympathy that we find in the Purdy poem. Indeed, his friendship with Milton Acorn offers a paradigm of this activity. Purdy relates of their first meeting in 1958 that "we talked poems until early morning, disagreeing violently about almost everything, but seemed to get along well anyway."¹² Purdy's polemical friendship with Acorn suggests in microcosm his attitude to larger humanity; thus, in his introduction to Bursting into Song, Purdy comments that "all human beings are so different, and should be different from each other, that finding common ground and common humanity with those others seems an effort worth making."¹³ As a result, Purdy continually seeks to dialogize all monologisms that undermine the diversity of the human community--whether those be class hierarchies, race, religions, false sentimentality, or the vicissitudes

¹⁰ Purdy, introduction, Love in a Burning Building 9-10.

¹¹ Purdy, Country 141.

¹² Purdy, introduction, I've Tasted My Blood vii.

¹³ Al Purdy, introduction, Bursting into Song: An Al Purdy Omnibus (Windsor, Ont.: Black Moss Press, 1982) 11.

of our modern culture. In a letter to George Woodcock, Purdy laments in the context of white infiltration of Eskimo culture that "all pockets and isolated minorities are being eventually swept into the human mainstream, which tends to homogenize and wipe out all traces of the past."¹⁴ Purdy laments this homogenization and attacks it in poetry.

Indeed, Purdy's Arctic prose expresses particularly well this attitude, this polemical sympathy to humanity. In his postscript to North of Summer and in his 1966 Beaver article "North of Summer: Arctic Poems and Prose by A.W. Purdy," he relates his fully dialogic experience of an 'other' yet Canadian culture, of another people. Instead of an experience of loneliness and alienation, his Arctic trip provides him with a sense of region and community, of his own participation in and separation from this world, 'perhaps because I looked at things close up," Purdy suggests, "flowers, rivers and people: above all, people."¹⁵ His Arctic experience is one above all of people, of social dialogue and cultural dynamics. Thus, he comments that "'smiling native peoples' from my childhood picturebook became flesh and blood absolutely," and he adds that "that was really the chance I'd been waiting for: to live among the Eskimos without English-speaking people around, and find out their own terms of existence."¹⁶ Purdy's purpose takes the shape of an intensive exploration of the basic humanity of another part of the human community.

¹⁴ Purdy, "To Woodcock," 13 November 1964, Purdy-Woodcock Letters 3.

¹⁵ Purdy, postscript, North of Summer 83.

¹⁶ Purdy, "North of Summer" 20.

In this context, the Arctic huskies that plague the poet offer a model of the carnival community experienced by him; his attitude to them is one of polemical sympathy:

Dogs congregated around the tent, fought major wars and minor battles, whined and cried like people. At intervals the dogs all howled together, beginning with a tentative wavering tremolo, rapidly swelling into Tom O'Bedlam's song of an arctic madhouse. I'd wake in the night thinking they were trying to get into the tent. The sound of running circling footsteps, thudding against the canvas, breaking two guy ropes on one occasion, urinating over the entrance flaps . . .

I didn't appreciate it. When I saw the dark dog bodies inside the white canvas, I'd scream and howl with calculated rage in an effort to discourage them. And couldn't. I think they must have loved me.¹⁷

These dogs, who offer a parallel to people in their wars, discourse, choral howling, and community, are carnival brutes who sing a carnival madhouse song and shower the poet with a parodic blessing. In their interaction with the poet, they and he express that polemical sympathy, for their collective madness is a form of love.

This world functions, moreover, as the larger community of Purdy's poems, the Shakespearean Bedlam song of a communal madhouse. This polemical sympathy, indeed, extends to the Eskimo community to which he finds himself transplanted:

. . . sitting in that cold tent on the Kikastan Islands I began to realize that all the books I'd read about the Arctic prior to going there amounted to a mere collection of statistics. Like staying in a small room, reading newspapers and encyclopedias to discover the nature of the world outside.

You have to be there, see the colour of things, the look of land and people. And throw away the preconceptions. The Arctic does not seem to me, as many books and articles describe it--a strange barren alien place, unfriendly to

¹⁷ Purdy, "North of Summer" 25.

man. That's a cliché used by writers who've read other writers, and can't think for themselves.

Like any other region of the world the Arctic is not just one thing. It's a great many. The colours are there if you look, and the friendliness is there if you know how to find it. But you have to look for yourself.¹⁸

Purdy's Arctic experience allows for new insights, for growth and self-revision, indeed for the revision of monologic stereotypes of the Arctic and its people fostered by other writers. Preconceptions are discarded and the strange grows familiar as book knowledge is replaced by personal, dialogic, human experience, and it is this multifaceted nature of living that Purdy communicates to his readers in the poems themselves. After this dialogic encounter with these Eskimo families, Purdy leaves this 'other' culture, the women Leah and Regally "standing among the stone dolmens on the beach to wave goodbye."¹⁹ In the end, separation of lives never fully meshed is necessary, and the poet departs with a picture of two living women among megalithic stone tombs, human life in the midst of death.

If such prose comments provide a paradigm for Purdy's socio-historic imagination, his early poems demonstrate the growth of his communal sensibility. If we again take The Enchanted Echo as a starting point, it becomes clear that Purdy's initial impulse was egocentric, for these poems demonstrate the Romantic ego in a negative sense and a separation from the larger human world. Purdy's first efforts lack the sharp edge of heteroglot reality: they focus either on the poetic 'I' in his ivory tower or on the world to follow this human one.²⁰ But

¹⁸ Purdy, "North of Summer" 26.

¹⁹ Purdy, "North of Summer" 26.

²⁰ See, for example, "The Lights Go On" (EE 13), "Votaries of April" (EE 18), "The Comet" (EE 59), and "In Memorium" (EE 19).

Purdy's 1950s poems signal a gradual but radical shift into a mode of the communal imagination. Pressed on Sand, Emu, Remember!, and The Crafte So Longe to Lerne demonstrate Purdy's transformation from egocentricity to altercentricity on all levels. The poet now engages history, facing death and disappearance; the poems show as well a new awareness of cultural dialogue. Moreover, folk consciousness makes itself felt in the form of carnival traces as carnival characters (including the poet himself) take centre stage in the poems. Purdy begins here to address the monologisms connected with socio-historic structures, exploring the relationship of the artist to his community. And he undertakes a polemical interaction with others, with lovers, friends, readers, and himself, as he plunges into the world's condition.

Essentially, Purdy is now concerned with the social context in all its complexity that surrounds and penetrates the poem, specifically the underside and the unofficial. Thus, poems such as "Elegy for a Grandfather" initiate the gallery of carnival characters to be found in Purdy's oeuvre, characters which populate the poet's communal landscape. Such characters are disrespectful doubles of the dour Victorian past. Moreover, Purdy's love poems usher us into the mess that constitutes human relations, into the world of the body, of hyperbole and bombast, of conflict and contact, of will, power, and surrender, and of loss and death. Finally, these 1950s poems initiate Purdy's explorations of the relationship of the poet to his community. In "Villanelle [plus 1]," as we have previously seen, the poet embraces the language of his age, "Coeval sewers of speech that make a poem/ Live argot for the vermifuge of rage," "The crowbar words, the sputnik slang," and "The verbs that

itch like acid, nouns that ache/ On human skin and sometimes must explode"(CSLL 4-5). The poet announces his own participation in the heteroglot world of sewer speech, of jargon and slang, of classes and groups especially of society's underside. Words here are drugs expelling intestinal worms, tools that pry apart and torture at a basic human level. The poet finds his voice, in fact, in human folly, as is suggested in "Old Man Ostrum," where he listens to a dead man "stammering his challenge to omnipotence"(POS 6-7), and his preferred position in relation to society is that of the clown, as is clear from these lines in "Meander":

If the atom-gods allow,
I would like to be a dirty, unkempt, old man,
Creating a drunken row
For no good reason, and chuckling now
And then beneath a greasy coat of tan.
And death shall come by with a roguish caper
To take my attention, a gesture of infinite glee.(POS 11-12)

Turning himself into a Yorick figure, the poet now views life from its underside, from the perspective of factories and alleys, through the eyes of ordinary workers and society's discarded people. Purdy now involves himself in life's heteroglot complexity.

ii.

A Play(gue) of Ideologies

Purdy's entrance into the underside of the socio-historic world surrounding him signals his larger involvement in ideological dialogue. His mature poems, in fact, are dialogic communal dramas in which the dynamic nature of human culture is explored; they participate in a diachronic model of human affairs posited by Bakhtin, a model in which dialogue lies at the heart of human events and structures. In Speech Genres, Bakhtin relates that "the unity of a particular culture is an

open unity,"²¹ and he proceeds to explain that "we know our native language--its lexical composition and grammatical structure--not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us."²² He underlines that culture in the broad sense grows out of living daily dialogue, out of individuals in speech communion. Every utterance, including the poetic, participates in the living social dialogue that constitutes a given collective's world views. Bakhtin emphasizes, moreover, that language within a culture is heteroglot and stratified, and that the use of language involves a struggle of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Heteroglossia is defined by the dialogic play of idea-systems embodied in language, by the struggle of world views given a concrete shape by discourse. In socio-historic dialogue, including that which we find in Purdy's poems, authoritative and unifying forces struggle with lower, internally persuasive, and diffusing forces.²³ In fact, literature in particular occupies a special position in relation to this dialogue of forces: "Literature is capable of penetrating into the social laboratory where these ideologemes are shaped and formed. The artist has a keen sense for ideological problems in the process of birth and generation."²⁴ Thus, Purdy as a poet participates in this exploration of idea systems in dialogic contact; he exposes them at the level of specific human beings interacting through individual-national discourse.

²¹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 6. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

²² Bakhtin, Speech Genres 78.

²³ See Dialogic Imagination 272 for Bakhtin's discussion of centripetal and centrifugal forces and 342-346 for his discussion of authoritative versus internally persuasive discourse.

²⁴ Bakhtin, Formal Method 17.

streets, rural villages and Inuit communities. Even the poet's home offers a paradigm of community with the play of husband and wife constantly foregrounded in domestic tales of connection and difference, rural bliss and domestic argument, alter and ego polemics. Frank Davey speaks of Purdy's "uniquely homespun wit" and of his poems as "the everyday experiences of an ordinary man wandering through the small towns, farms, and tourist stops of the nation."²⁵ These comments suggest Purdy's intimate contact with the heteroglot world he inhabits. Many poems, for instance, find us in the world of the factory, poems such as "Johnston's on St. Germain," a world that sees Jewish, French, English, and a multitude of other cultures in daily, sweaty contact; this mattress factory world where centuries-old blood feuds are lived out during coffee breaks acts as a mirror image to the distant peak of Mount Royal.

Indeed, as this poem suggests, Purdy's poetic society takes the shape of a social underworld, an underworld with which he is familiar through hands-on experience. His world, rather than the world of the powerful (at least as it is typically perceived), is a domestic and pedestrian world. The communal elves in the poet's head, those inhabitants of the collective unconscious, have their own internal moons and suns which dictate that the imagination catch fire not from wars and newspaper headlines but from trivial, heteroglot events.²⁶ "House Guest," the poetic version of the polemical friendship between Acorn and

²⁵ Davey, "Al Purdy" 236.

²⁶ Purdy, preface, Collected Poems xvii.

Purdy, suggests the mixture of high and low to be found in the Purdy poem, the domestic matrix underlying any exploration:

For two months we quarreled over socialism poetry how to
 boil water
 doing the dishes carpentry Russian steel production figures
 and whether
 you could believe them and whether Toronto Maple Leafs
 would take it all
 that year and maybe hockey was rather like a good jazz combo
 never knowing what came next (PAA68 27-29)

Providing an account of the time Purdy and Acorn spent together working on Purdy's A-frame house, the poem proceeds to give a catalogue of disagreements (both profound and pedestrian) that sketches the twists and turns of their friendship.²⁷

Purdy's emphasis on this social underworld indicates, moreover, his identification (polemical sympathy) with common humanity. The context of the Purdy poem is precisely these voices of everyday people, voices which include and mingle with his own. In "Fidel Castro in Revolutionary Square," we see a crowd swaying in the sunlight, joining hands, and singing, people who "make some remark about being human/ addressed to no one exactly/ spoken to no imperialist/ snarled at no invader" (CH 72-73). In "The Stone Bird" this song of life sung by the common people is affirmed by the poet as his own:

I hear it among the nickel-and-dimes people
 I know it in the supermarket
 I feel it waiting for that moment
 of grace in the unexpected word
 the pure spontaneous gesture
 to join the swelling human tide
 when all your weakness becomes strength
 and your body floats in light (SB 105-108)

²⁷ See also "Hockey Players" (CH 60-62), "Private Property" (WGW 98-99), and "There is of Course a Legend" (PB 53-55) for other elements of this domestic vision.

This song of common humanity is the poet's song; indeed, his poems comprise a continual listening for that song and recording of what he has heard in others and himself, those pure spontaneous gestures that join the swelling human tide.

Furthermore, this heteroglot song explored by Purdy embraces many world views in dialogue and chorus, many voices within the same cultural framework. The wealth of heteroglot voices available to the poet are brought into play through juxtaposition--white and Indian, male and female, and past and present--and these various world views are dynamic rather than static because the poet gives them voice in flesh and blood people.²⁸ If we return to "Johnston's on St. Germain," we find this multi-voiced culture in action; here the poet inhabits the bottom of a dialogic world:

When I was a goy in Babylon I worked in Montreal
with French Irish English Jewish Italian Polish--Canadians
with blood feuds translated intact during the instant coffee break
from Sicily's dazzling sunlands and dark foothills near the Adriatic
the body odour of race sprang from new box springs I made
when I was a goy in Babylon dead broke in Montreal. (SAD 16-19)

The poet, a man in exile among many people in exile, inhabits an underworld where Klein's "body odour of race" takes on a physical and serio-comic quality; the world of the factory floor is a Galilee of the Goyim, a world of outcasts and misfits, of many nations coexisting, and a world of many ideologies physically and concretely at play. This multi-voiced mattress factory world is the poet's social context, the heteroglot basis of his communal vision.

²⁸ Tom Marshall argues that "Purdy is . . . the national poet that Pratt set out to be . . . because he has given us the voices of the past, the ghosts, as well as those of the present" (Harsh and Lovely Land 97).

It is this social underworld, therefore, which informs the poet's explorations of larger social structures as they are manifested in current events and political figures and developments. This heteroglot perspective leads to a full ambivalence towards these structures; the heteroglot poet refuses to support any specific system; instead, he expresses admiration for those "heroes" who attempt to go against the grain of political systems or any other system that governs human relations, for those who attempt to dialogize the structures that rob people of their vitality in all its forms. In fact, in "Fidel Castro in Revolutionary Square," the poet questions his own conclusions about the people swaying in the sunlight making their statement about being human. The poet distrusts the cartoon world of political ideals:

Or else that's another illusion
 something nice to believe in
 the continuity of people
 a we/they and me/you concept
 as saccharine as religion
 to comfort a world of children
 with proletarian lullabies-- (CH 72-73)

Expressing doubt concerning the communal basis of this political ideology, the poet refuses to accept any political agenda or worship any political hero, and the poem ends with the poet noticing the body "of a small dead animal" beneath the wheels of a car.²⁹

Purdy, then, chooses to identify himself with the 'people,' with the majority who constitute society but do not rule its structures. George Bowering writes of Purdy that "he is deeply and habitually allied with the underdogs in a country and a world that allow bosses to ignore

²⁹ See also "Death of John F. Kennedy" (CH 79-81), "Lament for Robert Kennedy" (SAD 100-102), and "Hombre" (WGW 67-68).

or suppress the underdogs."³⁰ Purdy's poems demonstrate a sympathy for the fringe members of his own, his national, and the larger human community. However, far from glamourizing these people, the Purdy poem shows their humanity. Indeed, Purdy's sympathy for the underdog grows out of his own heteroglot experiences: riding the rails as a teenager, serving in the air force, working in factories and supporting the union movement, and building a house with used lumber and no money. His poems, then, are filled with defeated people, and in "Bums and Brakies," the poet captures from first-hand experience the texture of a defeated life, of homeless men who move from trains to all-night restaurants "for coffee and sitting there for/ a nickel's worth of not being alone/ often not bothering to wash on/ red stools," of bums bent stiff over counters while cops and railway bulls approach them:

sure that nothing is about to happen
 & knowing they don't look much like railwaymen
 (cops can always tell the difference)
 & wonder if they're even very human
 & have no way of knowing-- (CH 82-83)

Purdy's sympathy is clearly and repeatedly with such people who have been robbed of their dignity, of their basic humanity, and who are now faced with unsympathetic societal forces.

In socio-historic and Bakhtinian terms, the unofficial elements of life (the lower orders of heteroglossia, the underdogs, the fringe) dialogize the official (the monologic societal structures, the powerful, the wealthy, the central). Thus, the perspective of the underside allows the poet to confront the larger authority and inertia of the socio-historic structures surrounding him, and the poems participating

³⁰ Bowering 7.

in this perspective create a new understanding of people and community. Rural Ameliasburg revises our understanding of our largely urban world; factory dynamics offer the underside of Canada's officially enshrined multi-culturalism; the lives of Baffin Island Eskimos dialogize the poet's and our southern, Judaeo-Christian assumptions; the prehistoric decentres human history. That which lies on the fringe of our communal experience calls into question that which lies at the centre. Purdy's heteroglot fringe world, then, counters socio-historic monologisms. Nationalist fervour, wealth, power, science, progress, parents, respectability, smugness, high culture, simple morality, false modesty and propriety--these are simply a handful of the centripetal forces that Purdy seeks to dialogize in his poems with his underworld. Repeatedly, his poems counter authoritative discourses, conventional wisdom and stereotypes, with vibrant internally persuasive and unofficial folk voices. "St. Francis in Ameliasburg" provides a model of this dynamic: having discovered two robins' nests with four eggs in each perched on his stove outlet, the poet turns down his stove, becoming a surrogate robin, "a super-special big momma/ social worker among the birds"; the hydro man, however, who had come to extract from the poet "the rural loyalty oath" smashes both nests and the eggs, making it impossible for the poet to be a mother robin (WGW 103). This microcosmic incident of power destroying life serves as a model of Purdy's larger explorations of ideological forces.

Many poems, for instance, dialogize intellectuals and their systems, exposing their failure to understand life. In "Athens Apartment," the poet relates that he has spent the night reading books

"about the past and the great dead/ all that crap/ when brave men were few and cowards numerous" (SAD 75). In the context of suffering beggar children who cry "their wail inside the bones of things," cowardice and heroism are irrelevant. Similarly, in "Lost in the Badlands" the poet contemplates the Great Dying of the dinosaurs, relating that "The books tell you something/ with names to grasp at nothing/ geology zoology palaeontology" but leave out everything about what the dying felt like:

--the academic with the degrees
 that man didn't feel a thing
 in fact left something out
 about how the sun went down at 5:30
 p.m. one evening and next morning
 the Great Dying began
 until nothing of any size remained
 but some scampering rodents
 a few half-assed mammals
 still trying to say something
 back there at the end of the Cretaceous (PB 26-31)

The poet's own attempt to say something counters the official scientific text-book versions of the past and death. In "Atomic Museum," this criticism of science comes to a pitch; here the poet attacks scientists as prophets of progress, "Innovators and so-called emancipators" who sing "holy holy holy to their wives/ in bedrooms adjoining laboratories." To their madness, the poet counters the simple concern of a hotel maid "wearing a white gauze mask/ to prevent me catching her cold" (SAD 123-124). The poet offers as an antidote to the monologic madness of knowledge simple human concern.

Essentially, Purdy seeks to dialogize any form of power; the folk world counters the monologisms of corporations, governments, and countries. His poems strike holes in monologic structures that speak through discourses of war, government insensitivity, racism, the

with a kind of unbearable priggishness/ I detest in other people" (SAD 125-126). This stated moral concern is enacted in "Names," a poem in which two men, Marcus Flavinus (a Roman Centurion) and Conrad Schmidt (a soldier in Rommel's Afrika Korps), find themselves disillusioned by the corrupt empires to which they belong. The question becomes how not to waste your life when you are surrounded by such monologisms:

It seems to me these particular names
are synonymous with the question itself,
and remember their names:
Marcus Flavinus, Centurion
of the Augusta Legion;
Conrad Schmidt, Oberleutnant
in the Afrika Corps:
two men about to die,
who spent their last few moments
wondering how they could change things
on the earth they were leaving-- (PB 51-52)

Confronted by death and monologic power, the poet posits a simple yet profound (almost religious) solution to a moral question. The play of idea systems in Purdy's poems, therefore, dialogizes human arrogance, the false pride of human achievement, intellectual exploration, progress, political power, wealth, and culture.³¹

The poet, moreover, clearly includes himself in this overturning of social monologisms; the play of idea systems within the Purdy poem demonstrates that the poet too is part of this community in which world views are at play; indeed, many of these poems are dramas of self-revision in which the poet's ideological assumptions are overturned by the heteroglot underworld he himself inhabits; the poet is drafted into the socio-historic world; he exhibits the polemical sympathy of the

³¹ See, for example, "Arctic River," "Tent Rings," and "Lament for the Dorsets," three Arctic poems which counter pride of being with the inevitability of human extinction. See also "At Babiyy Yar" (MIC 17-18).

ironist rather than the distant criticism of the satirist atop Mount Royal. One such drama of self-revision, "The Sculptors," sees the poet's initial impatience with Eskimo sculptors because of their inability to satisfy his southern needs transformed to identity and oneness: polemic is replaced by sympathy. We find the poet bargain shopping, "going thru cases and cases/ of Eskimo sculpture" rejected by T. Eaton Co. Ltd (NOS 75-76). The poet is searching "for one good carving/ one piece that says 'I AM'/ to keep a southern promise," but he discovers only partial, broken and malformed art. His search continues for "one piece that glows/ one slap-happy idiot seal/ alien to the whole seal-nation," but he soon grows impatient. His cultural ethos, southern and Judaeo-Christian, asks of these northern artists what they cannot possibly give. The poet sees "broken/ bent/ misshapen/ failed animals/ with vital parts missing," but these carvings lead to a sudden vision of the artists themselves, their pain and failures. The poem concludes with the poet's new understanding of them, of the old Inuit "who carve in their own image/ of maimed animals." The poet's initial folly, his misunderstanding, allows for a deeply felt cultural revision: the poem enacts a radical self-revision experienced by the poet and shared with the reader.

The relationship between men and women, moreover, is one specific focus for this dynamic of dialogizing monologisms. A large proportion of Purdy's poems enact this polemical sympathy characteristic of human relations and societal structures. Certainly, Purdy is not a feminist writer; indeed, his poetry is decidedly masculine. In her review of Love in a Burning Building, Margaret Atwood is critical of exactly this

quality in Purdy's poetry. "Purdy's love poems," she writes, "demonstrate the self divided against itself to perhaps an even greater extent than do his poems on other subjects,"³² and she adds that "it is the fear of death and vanishing, we realize, that underlies a lot of the Victory Burlesque joke-man routines."³³ Having said this she proceeds to question the ideology underlying these love poems:

Love in a Burning Building raises a lot of extra-poetic, even extra-Purdy questions. Is it possible for men and women to stop mythologizing, manipulating and attacking one another? Do all men divide women into Wife and Ocheas, do they all share Purdy's tendency to think of women in terms of separate anatomical features--for Purdy usually ass and breasts, he's not much of a leg man and there's only one fully-described face in the book--like cut-up chickens? Is Purdy's attitude towards women that of his sex, his country, his generation (in which case Love can be a handy guide for women who want to know what really goes on in the male skull, the Canadian male skull, etc.) or is it strictly personal?

Personal it certainly is. It may be more, but it's also one man's reflections, experiences and emotions, recorded so honestly that even the lies, the cruelties, the bathos and the trivialities are included.³⁴

In this long passage, Atwood calls into question Purdy's attitude towards women as betrayed by the poems. While she acknowledges that he has recorded those attitudes honestly, she questions those attitudes themselves. What Atwood doesn't touch upon, however, is Purdy's self-consciousness, particularly in these love poems. Purdy, I would argue, wears specific male masks (husband, lover, etc.) in order to play with those masks: many of his love poems are self-conscious parodies of masculine attitudes. Also, as even Atwood's comments suggest, the poet's attitude is polemical; rather than appropriating for himself

³² Atwood 99.

³³ Atwood 101.

³⁴ Atwood 101-102.

female voices (a form of colonialism), the poet addresses women polemically, argumentatively (paradoxically establishing sympathy), and speaks directly to them or with a sideways glance at their discourses and associated world views.

Strangely enough, Linda Hutcheon's comments on Robert Kroetsch as a male writer are relevant to our discussion of Purdy's polemical sympathy with the feminine. "While Kroetsch is not a feminist writer," she relates, "he shares many of the concerns of those who are: especially the need to challenge unexamined humanist notions such as centred identity, coherent subjectivity, and aesthetic originality. He offers instead decentred multiplicity, split selves, and double-voiced parody."³⁵ She goes on to suggest that "Kroetsch has always . . . worked to show how male and female roles are fictions, in the sense that they are creations of cultural restraints."³⁶ Purdy, too, shares these concerns and exposes these roles in his poetry. In this regard, Purdy is Kroetsch's predecessor; of course, Purdy reached his maturity as a poet both before feminism became a force and Kroetsch came on the scene as a postmodern writer, but Purdy, in spite of these generational differences, does address many of these same male-female issues, exposing his both centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. In this context, Purdy's focus on love as a "comic disease,"³⁷ as he puts it in the introduction to Love in a Burning Building, makes particular sense.

Many of these "love" poems, then, expose "maleness" and its monologic assumptions; the power strategies that men employ are brought

³⁵ Hutcheon 161-162.

³⁶ Hutcheon 171.

³⁷ Purdy, "On Being Romantic," in Love in a Burning Building 10.

to light and dialogized. Many of these poems can be called nothing less than documents or case histories in the abuse of women, abuse of various kinds and to various degrees. Dennis Lee relates that "Purdy has claimed, and in many ways created, an indigenous imaginative patrimony in English Canada."³⁸ Lee's positive comment, when turned around, underlines this paternalistic streak in Purdy's poetry, but what we must remember is that the poet expresses an ambivalence to the male agenda as well as the female and seeks to overturn the monologisms that govern the relationship between sexes. Again and again Purdy allows the voice of Man to speak in the poems, man who lies, cheats, and lusts but also who is true and loving.

By far the darkest portrait of male power is drawn in "Love Poem," a poem which suggests the violence and pain lying below the surface of some male-female relationships. Here, the male speaker engages in real and imagined psychological and physical torture, his sexual aggression resulting in an abortion. The poem begins with an immediate frustration of the love theme announced in the title:

She's hurt.
 Many times before
 I was the torturer
 no matter how
 I was able to swing
 her world
 terribly awry (PAA 37-38)

The speaker acknowledges his power over his lover, his ability to twist and contort her world, to decentre it with his own maleness. This maleness, moreover, is characterized by sexual aggression, by a roar made in her body and "my falcon digging its dirty nails/ into the

³⁸ Lee, afterword 390.

despair of this comic disease. "Necropsy of Love," for example, meditates on the connection between love and death. As the title suggests, the poem is a post-mortem examination, an exploration of love from the perspective of death. "If it came about you died," says the poet, "it might be said I loved you:/ love is an absolute as death is,/ and neither bears false witness to the other--"(CH 23). These first lines of the poem suggest the paradox of love and death that is explored in the remaining lines, a paradox of separate madnnesses and connection, of flesh that loves and flesh that rots. Says the poet-lover, "If death shall strip our bones of all but bones,/ then here's the flesh and flesh that's drunken-sweet/ as wine cups in deceptive lunar light." The poet's address to his lover moves towards a quiet union in the face of death and cosmic insignificance: "but reach across the darkness with your hand, reach across the distance of tonight,/ and touch the moving moment once again/ before you fall asleep--." The poem ends with a call to move across the dark gap, to make contact with the 'other' and the pinpoint now as it flows into the future.⁴⁰

Purdy's love poems, then, dramatize human community; in microcosmic form, they demonstrate the dialogic dependence of one person on another: they refute the monologic perspective of "aloneness" or "at-one-ness" or individual "wholeness" or "unity." The poet's polemical sympathy, his expressions of domestic strife and love, delineate the community at the level of its household gods. We see this tentative community in "Over the Hills in the Rain My Dear," a poem in which the comic husband-wife relationship "is about to end in violence"

⁴⁰ See also "Arctic Rhododendrons" (NOS 36).

in spite of the speaker's attempts "to manufacture/ a verbal comfort station,/ a waterproof two-seater"(WGW 112-113) for his wife, in which unresolved tensions paradoxically teach both about their need for each other. The poet's relationship with his wife is also one of wonder and tenderness, for she gives him direction when he is lost, being in the midst of extinction. In "Remains of an Indian Village," the poet relates, "And I have seen myself fade/ from a woman's eyes/ while I was standing there/ and the earth was aware of/ me no longer--"(PAA 57-58). These lines offer a paradigm of dependence, for the speaker knows what it is to vanish when no other person is aware of his being; our own being, he suggests, is fully dependent on the acknowledgement (dialogic) of others. In the later poem "Yes and No" the poet expresses a similar attitude to the mystery of human dependence:

when I looked in your eyes
 there was no semantic play of word-games
 in this more important arena
 where we drown and swim to shore
 and have no selves and discover ourselves
 and melt in the silences
 and our opposites join
 and now and then we are happy (CP 35b-357)

In this community of two, the marvel of selfhood lost and found, of dying that is living, of opposites somehow joined adds up to occasional happiness.⁴¹

A second paradigm for his socio-historic poetic, moreover, perhaps less pervasive than male-female love but equally demarcated, can be found in the poet's relationship with native peoples, whether Indian or

⁴¹ See also "Poem for one of the Annettes" (PAA 7-8), "The Quarrel" (PAA 59), "Engraved on a Tomb" (CH 22), "Winter at Roblin Lake" (CH 59), and "Lost in the Badlands" (PB 26-31).

Inuit. Again, as with the feminine, Purdy does not appropriate native voices as his own; rather, poems involving these peoples generally involve a clash of disparate cultures. Indians and Inuit, fringe members of Canadian society (far from power and prestige), dialogize white culture and its assumptions. In part, the degradation of these members of society serves as a criticism of that society. In "Inuit," the poet relates how "the race-soul has drawn back/ drawn back/ from settlements and landing fields/ from white men"(NOS 32-33). White culture has infringed on the native world, forcing it back into hiding, and it can only be retrieved "if you have your own vision." Other poems, such as "Beothuk Indian Skeleton in Glass Case," are subtle condemnations of the arrogance of white culture. Here, the poet contemplates the skeleton of an Indian whose nation was decimated by European settlers; he thinks of both his separation from and connection with this dead man, and gawks at "the gawking tourists/ over this last symbol/ of his extinct nation"; all he can feel, we learn, is not sadness but "only a slight amazement/ at the gawking tourists/ that these specimens survived/ and the man in the glass case didn't"(WGW 109). Native culture both condemns white culture and reminds it of the threat of extinction.

The native world is, moreover, a both familiar and foreign world for Purdy. It is a part of his culture that reminds him of a tentative community across time and space of which he is himself a part, and his poems acknowledge this debt of white culture to native. Eli Mandel writes that "Purdy seeks both the comic and tragic affinities of Indian,

has commented, "writers don't interpret national characters; they create them."⁴⁴

One aspect of Purdy's polemical sympathy to his native culture involves paradoxically a rejection of calls for a Canadian identity. Purdy, in fact, sees such defining as an attempt to monologize what is richly heteroglot.⁴⁵ A poem such as "Homo Canadensis," with its play with disguise and cliché, suggests the complexity of the national character and frustrates attempts to label and categorize. In this beer parlour poem, the loud Canadian hunter, "aggressive and pro-Canadian,/ stubbing a Players outside the ashtray,/ swaying in his chair and gulping beer/ like water"(CH 94-95), carries on a tirade against those in the bar who accept American influence, who wait for the country to be taken "by some big bellied American in Washington." The poem's irony and ambivalence become apparent, however, when it is revealed that the homo canadensis comes, in fact, from New York.

Purdy's polemical sympathy affirms the vitality of his native culture, its heteroglot energy as opposed to its monologisms. Bakhtin relates that "verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages."⁴⁶ Canadian society has from its inception been characterized by this decentering, and it is this decentred quality and decentering activity that Purdy focusses on in his poems. In "Man Without a Country," the poet relates of an exile from Canada that "He is

⁴⁴ Frye, Divisions 120.

⁴⁵ See "On Canadian Identity" (PAA 47-48).

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 370. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

beginning to know that the ruined grey cities/ of Europe and eastern lands and ingrown culture/ of the world mean nothing without a sense of place/ the knowledge of here which is the centre of all things"(PE 60-62). The poet's native world affords him the perspective of the fringe, allows him to reject the ingrown cultures of other worlds as not his own. Purdy echoes these sentiments in "Home Thoughts," a quiet poem in praise of his own social context. The following lines encapsulate Purdy's socio-historic poetic, the play of ideologies within the framework of the poem:

One hears often the lyrical praise
 lavished on other nations by their
 fortunate citizens--with hands
 laid over their hearts for example
 attending stirring renditions of the national
 anthem with adjectives piled high
 paeon after paeon attaining hallelujah
 their valour in war and steadfast practice
 of all the arts especially glorious
 Sometimes it seems that people of nations
 outside my own country's boundaries are dancing
 and shouting in the streets for joy
 at their great good fortune in being citizens
 of whatever it is they are citizens of--
 And at other times it seems we are the only
 country in the world whose people
 do not dance in the streets very much
 but sometimes stand looking at each other
 in morning or evening as if to see there
 something about their neighbours
 overlooked by anthropologists
 born of the land itself perhaps
 what is quietly human and will remain so
 when the dancing has ended (CP 360-361)

Rejecting the pathway of lyrical praise (of monologic nationalism), the poet chooses the quiet dialogue of the nations within his nation, of people who are neighbours rather than citizens, of people who are quietly human rather than boisterously nationalistic.

This focus on his national context underlines the larger framework within which Purdy is working, the international context of modern society. In essence, Purdy exposes the monologic elements of the modern world, western cultural givens of nation-state pride, science and progress, European superiority and wealth, and personal freedom and communal responsibility. Exploring larger origins and destinations, the Purdy poem counters European history with native and prehistory; the hinterland, New World imagination undoes the urban, Old World, to paraphrase Dennis Lee.⁴⁷ Repeatedly, the poet counters assumptions of human greatness with reminders of our prehistoric origins, urban values with rural wisdom, and the modern with postmodern in Richard Cavell's sense of what lies behind and before the modern. Purdy resists the will to power, the will to control the world with wisdomless knowledge and technology. "Religion is part of all our lives," comments Purdy in an interview, "even if we don't believe in a god as such. Because religion is saying where we are going and what we're going to do with our lives."⁴⁸ His poems are religious in this sense, explorations of where we have been and where we are going with our human lives as individuals and community. Countering the monologisms of modern thinking, the play of ideologies and world views within the Purdy poem establishes a pedestrian but profoundly human world.

iii.

Living in a Carnival Commune

As with chronotope, voice, and authorship, the specific forms for Purdy's socio-historic poetic, for his enactment of world views in

⁴⁷ Lee, afterword, Collected Poems 389-391.

⁴⁸ Purdy, "Perspective," with Buri and Enright 56.

dialogue, find their source partly in folk consciousness and specifically in the idiom of carnival culture as Bakhtin describes it. Purdy's poems are peopled with a carnival community from the past and the present, a tinged and tainted community of life's maskers. George Bowering speaks of "the concatenation of figures from history, myth, and rude contemporary life"⁴⁹ in the Purdy poem, and Doug Fetherling notes Purdy's "feeling for folklore," a feeling "apparent in the anthropological turn he takes in many of his poems on native peoples and early explorers and in ones arising from travels overseas."⁵⁰ His poems, these comments suggest, overflow with folk figures maskers for the poet, vehicles of insight concerning human life.⁵¹

Clearly, moreover, these characters originate in the poet's daily life and more specifically in his childhood world, in his own family. His family comprise a both comical and grotesque carnival crew. We learn in Morning and It's Summer of the child's "Lilliputian complex"⁵² from living in a land of giants, aged giants at that, for we learn that Purdy's grandfather was more than eighty, his father fifty-eight, and his mother forty, when he himself was born; the poet's immediate community was one filled with old, seemingly ludicrous figures. In "Evergreen Cemetery," the poet remembers his mother and her death:

But I remember her savage grey face
before she died in a drugged fever,
and nurse telling me she'd stuffed her false teeth
up her rectum (in a pleased shocked voice):

⁴⁹ Bowering 84.

⁵⁰ Doug Fetherling, The Blue Notebook: Reports on Canadian Culture (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1985) 61.

⁵¹ See, for example, "Sidewalk Beer Barden" (SUN 76-77), "Percy Lawson" (CH 17-18), "Homage to Ree-Shard" (SUN 36-39), and "The Old Woman and the Mayflowers" (BIB 1).

⁵² Purdy, Morning 15.

that sharpened elemental
 grinning face
 with empty jaws which
 almost as I watched bit

hard on death . . . (PAA 33-34)

The poet's grinning, dying, drugged mother who stuffs those teeth in a grotesque bodily orifice constitutes a major figure in the poet's gallery of ambivalent carnival characters.

Other family members in this gallery include, of course, the poet's grandfather, as we discover in In Search of Owen Roblin.⁵³ This poem begins, in fact, with the poet's contemplation of family members in a family album, of the gothic grotesque inheritance. He sees "remote unhumans" scaring "the child who changed into me," people with frozen faces and bulging eyes, Mormon beards, and "bosoms resembling the prows of sailing ships/ rumps like overloaded barges." Such are the fearfully funny grotesque ancestors confronting the poet, ancestors who "begat and begat and begat/ and never missed a tricky stroke." And the central figure here for Purdy is his grandfather,

250 slagheap pounds of ex-lumberjack
 barnbuilder and backwoods farmer
 all-night boozier and shanty wrestler
 prime example of a misspent life
 among ladies of the church sewing circle
 poker player and teller of tall tales

This carnival character, a grotesque giant of the frontier, looms large in Purdy's family album and his more extensive gallery of folk portraits: these constitute the folk community at the centre of Purdy's socio-historic poetic.

⁵³ Purdy, Owen Roblin No pagination.

Purdy's poems, taken in their totality, give expression to the folk imagination and its wisdom; they are dramas in a ritual communal play giving expression to the community and expressing an attitude towards the community. These dramas, in effect, turn upside down the official structures, world views, and orders that constitute society: Purdy's poetry is by and large one extended carnival drama. "Carnival," relates Bakhtin, "is past millennia's way of sensing the world as one great communal performance,"⁵⁴ and "in reality, is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play."⁵⁵ Traces of these ritual patterns of play constituting the drama of carnival culture as it existed already thousands of years ago can be found in Purdy's poems, in their enactment of folk logic in ritual fashion on the borderline between life and art. At the end of Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin comments that "we cannot understand cultural and literary life and the struggle of mankind's historic past if we ignore that peculiar folk humor that always existed and was never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes," and he concludes by arguing that "all the acts of the drama of world history were performed before a chorus of the laughing people. Without hearing this chorus we cannot understand the drama as a whole."⁵⁶ This peculiar folk humour lies below and at the surface of many if not most of Purdy's poems, and in hearing this ritual humour in his poetic dramas we find the centre of his socio-historic

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 160.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, Rabelais 7.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, Rabelais 474. At the same time, we must remember the darker side of carnival culture, as is suggested by Michael Andre Bernstein in "When the Carnival Turns Bitter." See also Mandel's The Family Romance (244) for comments on the carnival of Fasching.

"with the very modern illness/ agoraphobia/ but ancient as fear/ in a Greek marketplace"(SB 105-108). In his poems, Purdy repeatedly contemplates the ambivalent fullness of the marketplace.

Marketplace speech, moreover, is filled with ambivalent carnival laughter, and Purdy's poems are infected with this laughing aspect of the world. Such laughter turns upside down and disrobes the lofty and official, simultaneously praises and abuses.⁵⁹ Laughter offers an alternative to the serious understanding of the world; it counters a vision of humanity that sees life as simply tragic or lofty or solitary. This communal laughter is central to the Purdy poem; again and again we hear not only the poet's laughter and that of his carnival characters but also our own renewing and reviving laughter as readers. Laughter here sounds the note of communal liberation from lofty and monologic understandings of the world.

The poet himself, we soon discover, occupies the privileged position of the clown in relation to this marketplace world and its larger social context. The masks of the clown, fool, and rogue allow the poet to overturn monologic certainties with the perspective of the underside, of folly, and of the grotesque. Bakhtin remarks in connection with The Golden Ass by Apuleius that "the position of an ass is a particularly convenient one for observing the secrets of everyday life."⁶⁰ Purdy often gains a similar perspective by making himself such an ass; he too learns of the secrets of everyday life by lowering

⁵⁹ Bakhtin conceives of laughter as "an objectivized, sociohistorical cultural phenomenon, which is most often present in verbal expression"(Dialogic Imagination 236).

⁶⁰ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 122.

and masking himself. The heteroglossia of the clown, Bakhtin goes on to explain, continually undermines the forces which seek to centralize the verbal-ideological cultural, national, and political world; "he is," we learn, "a rogue who dons the mask of a fool in order to motivate distortions and shufflings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them," and all three of these characters "are the heroes of a series of episodes and adventures that is never resolved, and of dialogic oppositions that are unresolved as well."⁶¹ The poet in the Purdy poem is such an underworld hero participating in a series of unresolved adventures and dialogic oppositions.

Purdy repeatedly draws on the ancient image of poet as privileged clown and the rights that go along with its social position, its underworld status. Indeed, Doug Fetherling comments that Purdy "himself a character from folklore, a sort of updated, Canadian version of Chaplin's Little Tramp, and a most unrepresentative Everyman," adding, "such a tatterdemalio pose allows Purdy to comment on everyday misadventures and non-adventures."⁶² Similarly, Margaret Atwood notes that "Purdy writes like a cross between Shakespeare and a vaudeville comedian (so did Shakespeare),"⁶³ and Laurie Ricou relates that "like the Fool, his nonsense, his irreverence, even his repetitions and his silence, are his intelligence and wisdom."⁶⁴ In his poems, Purdy clearly dons the masks of fool, rogue, and clown in order to counter the monologisms confronting him in the socio-historic world. We hear the

⁶¹ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 404-405. See also p. 273.

⁶² Fetherling 71.

⁶³ Atwood 98.

⁶⁴ Laurie Ricou, "Al Purdy," Profiles in Canadian Literature 2, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto and Charlottetown: Dundern Press, 1980) 28.

poet comment in "Dark Landscape," "all I have is laughter/ all I have is wine and laughter"(WGW 95-96). This offering of wine and laughter constitutes many of his poems--alcoholic, rambunctious, wild, and Bacchanalian--and the clown's voice we hear filled with these two liberating elements.

The poet's Bacchanalian impulse, his marketplace dithyramb, puts all world views to the test. Within the carnival traces in the Purdy poem are traces of ancient Menippean forms. Life and death, love, poetry and high art, nationalism, cultural differences, "maleness," political systems, business interests, human striving and achievement, human history, human knowledge, human being, and a host of other idea-systems are turned over and exposed. Menippean forms use the comic, the fantastic, and the inappropriate to test the truth; Menippea is philosophy in the trenches: "a very important characteristic of the menippea is the organic combination within it of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and (from our point of view) crude slum naturalism," writes Bakhtin.⁶⁵

Purdy's poems regularly see such a combining of the extreme high and low, and these poems are indeed preoccupied with philosophical questions on the broadest scale. The Arctic poem "South" provides an example of such a mixing. The poet finds himself in a boat with an Eskimo hunter on an Arctic sea. From here, the whole globe is south, and this dislocation leads to the poet's contemplation:

And the world shrinks away from me
gathers itself as a ghostly premise
in my own head

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 115. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

tragedy comedy boredom love
 impersonal abstraction here
 objectively mixed together
 without correlatives (NOS 60-63)

The poet becomes a ham actor, a clown reciting one of his poems, "waving my arms and declaiming/ intonations nuances and everything." As time proceeds in the poem, the poet broods on Schopenhauer's will and idea, a comical but dead seal, and drinks a toast to the power of necessity, the competitive idea, pessimists Housman and Schopenhauer, optimists Leibniz and Browning, the twenty names of snow, the million names of god, Lyndon Johnson, and Sedna the one-eyed. The poem's mixed contemplation and carnival ends with the poet showering the globe with an ambivalent urine blessing. "The Uses of History" offers another example of this mixing, one in which acceptable notions of history are put to the test by tavern noise and stripper acrobatics. The tavern provides a double vision of the Gatsby Lounge and the sixteenth century kingdom of Vijayanagar, the poet claiming that "This noisy cultural environment/ does not inhibit my scholarly bent" (PB 112-114). In the end, it is the conjoining of the low and high activities that turns upside down accepted views of knowledge and historical importance.

Menippean testing, the fool's discourse, and laughter in the marketplace provide, in fact, an unofficial communal wisdom that manifests itself as the reverse of official culture. The perspective of society's underside overturns sanctified hierarchies, allowing the human world to be seen anew in all its variety. Rejecting the official truth of a static and ordered and bounded social order, the pathos of carnival wisdom sees the doubleness of existence, its continual change and renewal and its gay relativity. "Carnival brings together," writes

Bakhtin, "unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid."⁶⁶ The social drama of carnival enacts the dialogic play of ideologies, of elements in a social hierarchy; carnival crowns and uncrowns in a dualistic ritual that intertwines life and death, and seeks to break down the boundaries between the official and unofficial.

Traces of this social phenomenon embodying a set of social truths can be found in Purdy's poetry, for the forms and idiom developed over the centuries survive in his folk consciousness.⁶⁷ The Purdy poem provides us with an understanding of the unholy holiness of daily living. In "Wine-Maker's Song," the poet offers a world seen by "gentle gutter connoisseurs" who provide "bottle necking wisdom" which sounds "harsh and hoarsely in/ continent men's ears and in/ coherent to such and such and sober so and sos"(CH 96-97). Such carnival wisdom counters sober wisdom. In "Complaint Lodged with L.C.B.O. by a Citizen in Upper Rumbelow," the fool finds himself confronted with God and his cop: the poem enacts in humourous fashion the play of official and unofficial social forces. The citizen relates driving through town with two empty beer bottles in his car, trying to evade a cop with a ground loop inverted immelmann plus unorthodox Christiana learned on Parnassus, ending up in a tree and "there encountering/ God (hi pops)" (CH 49-50). The citizen, of course, fails in his escape:

⁶⁶ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 123.

⁶⁷ Richard Cavell argues in a specifically Canadian context that "carnivalization operates at the macrotextual levels of culture and society, in that it enacts a confrontation between high culture and low, turning the world of high culture upside down Carnivalization is concerned with the breaking down of social and cultural (as well as linguistic and formal) hierarchies"(Future Indicative 207). Purdy's poetry enacts this larger socio-historic dialogue.

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
 and I says `You didn't make the turn signal'
 and he says `It ain't in the book'
 and I guess that's so it ain't so
 I get fined fifteen bucks
 and let off with a warning
 but just the same--

Confronted with these social monologisms in this comical anecdote, the beleaguered citizen must pay the fine (under protest). "Old Alex" articulates a similar folk wisdom, for we find in this poem a revision of accepted norms of human behaviour and worth. The official world condemns Alex as a miserable alcoholic (his landlord, his children, and his community): "they rolled him onto a stretcher/ like an old pig and prettied him with cosmetics,/ sucked his blood out with a machine and/ dumped him into the ground like garbage--"(CH 57-58). Conversely, the poet celebrates Alex's life and death, his disease and his hate, his being that was both a bruise and a sunset, his meanness that "had the quality of making everyone else feel noble,/ and thus fools." Purdy's poems celebrate the wisdom of folly and the beauty of ugliness. They offer a poetic folly as an alternative to the ideological monologisms surrounding us, the full ambivalence of life as a countering voice to idea systems and discourses that limit that fullness.⁶⁸

Carnival folly, moreover, articulates life and death embracing. Folk wisdom gives voice to the play of transience and continuity that defines human life. Purdy's poems express the ambivalent flux of that existence; everywhere the poet sees the erasing work of death on the

⁶⁸ See, for example, "Track Meet at Panqirtung" (NOS 70-71).

human community. He hears it in "Orchestra," where the poet tells himself, "life is a holding pattern/ of molecules gathered together/ in social intercourse that/ briefly delays but does not arrest/ decay"(CP 355-356). Nevertheless, Purdy's poems picture death locked in a carnival embrace with life; the Purdy poem affirms the intertwining of these twin aspects of existence, of transience and continuity. "Archaeology of Snow" meditates upon our unfathomable immortality, our existence inside each other like Chinese boxes, "Ourselves amorous/ ourselves surly/ ourselves smiling/ and immortal as hell"(PAA 15-18). This carnival embrace of life and death is enacted in "Evergreen Cemetery" as well, which finds the poet "standing here in death's/ ceded town/ in full summer"(PAA 33-34). He contemplates how all aspirations end here, "as earth shapes and reshapes itself/ again and again--" Yet he revises this one-sided view of life, the summing up "in telling phrase or easy pessimism,/ syllogism or denouement" as he contemplates the vibrancy and worth of life itself.

As these and other poems indicate, Purdy's focus upon issues of transience and continuity takes the shape very often of a play with images of the grotesque body, a body which reveals itself as a communal body. As a reply to the erasing work of time, the Purdy poem contemplates the historically becoming body of humanity. Here, the biological body becomes a symbol of the body of humankind. This body, writes Bakhtin, is "a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body," and he adds, "it is a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and

conception."⁶⁹ Through images of the grotesque body, Purdy gives voice to the temporal community of the folk world. Indeed, this temporal community is central to Purdy's socio-historic poetic, for the human community exists for him across time rather than purely in the present moment. His poems harken back to humanity's shrew-like ancestor and look forward to far-off descendants. In Bakhtinian terms, Purdy explores the feast of time; his poems constitute a carnival communal feast, a table at which all humanity sits. Purdy's poems are such a grotesque symposium, mixing high and low, sacred and profane, and celebrating the human community across time. He affirms the interconnectedness of all people, our Chinese box being, and our participation in the continuation of the human community.

The world of Purdy's *United Empire Loyalists*, moreover, constitutes the context of this temporal community. This community gives shape to issues of death and continuity and form to the ambivalent freedom and entrapment, origins and destinations, that constitute life and death in their carnival embrace.⁷⁰ The poems on Roblin Lake extract from disappearance the continued presence of these ancestral figures and the surrounding community.⁷¹ The poet's ancestors alive in him are all folk figures, many of them comical and grotesque figures, many of them fools and clowns. Yet these people, suggests the poet in "Prince Edward County," have created a legacy which tentatively endures:

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 317-318.

⁷⁰ Critics of Purdy have concentrated on this focus in his work. See especially Dennis Duffy's *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada / Ontario*, W.J. Keith's *Canadian Literature in English*, and John Lye's "The Road to Ameliasburg."

⁷¹ See, for example, "Private Property" (WGW 98-99), "In the Dream of Myself" (HOE 19), and "Time Past/Time Now" (PE 86-87).

And we--the late-comers
 white skins and brown men
 no voice told us to stay
 but we did for a lifetime
 of now and then forever
 the fox and flower and rabbit
 and bells rung deep in limestone
 for any who come after
 you have heard our names
 and the word we made of silence
 bobokink and-- (HOE 59-60)

In these lines, the poet expresses a communal legacy for his place, a "we" that includes not only UELs but also Indians, animals, plants, and the rock itself: the word spoken by these ancestors is left unspoken by the poet, open-ended and still becoming in the present, as is suggested by the dash.

Nevertheless, these poems express ambivalence concerning this specific ancestral past; they simultaneously celebrate it and lament its vanishing. In Search of Owen Roblin offers Purdy's fullest and most sustained exploration of this specific ancestral past, and in this long poem we again find communal folk wisdom at work, for it is in part an ambivalent affirmation of the ancestral community and of the poet's own carnival origins. The poem celebrates "a silent kind of triumph in survival," the survival of the pioneer past, of centuries old houses, and of the poet himself by contemplating "Biblical fathers and forefathers/ forerunners and outriders/ patriarchs of the forest biblelands." The poem's opening trope ushers us into this world of the ancestral past: "Open the album/ it is a cage of ancestors/ locked in by metal clasps and still cardboard/ released by my own careless fingers." The poem begins with the family album, the gallery of the poet's people, trapped and held by death, "flickering quicksilver image

of myself/ locked in a cardboard graveyard." Yet, as the poet extends the trope, he affirms the continued life of these people in spite of the photographic trick of making them appear to be wooden dummies:

Close the book again--but gently
 seeing your own unformed face
 twisting and leaping at you
 from a dozen different directions
 reaching back again to them
 and ahead
 for the book is not closed

The poet affirms the continued life of these people in himself; the rest of the poem, then, recounts this discovery for the poet, a discovery in which the solitary and defeated poet discovers his community, in which the poet discovers in his UEL ancestors (particularly his grandfather and Owen Roblin) the strength of being precisely human. In the Bay of Quinte UEL history, in the ten townships and the Ten Towns which parallel Rome's ten hills, the poet finds his own origins. And, he concludes, those origins and that community are enough:

The long-gone Loyalists stand as forefathers
 for one small area of a giant country
 only men and that is enough to be
 and descendents partake of their own weakness
 but also share their strength
 it is a human weakness and a human strength

The poet affirms and takes as his own what is tangled in his flesh. In Search of Owen Roblin itself affirms the strength of the temporal community, the vitality of folk consciousness, and the energy of society's underside.

iv.
 Egocentric / Altercentric

What Purdy's long poem reveals, furthermore, is that a crucial part of his poetic is a dialogic play between the individual and his or her

community, a struggle between the ego and society, self and other, solitude and contact. In this respect, Bakhtin relates that "the more sealed-off the individual life-sequence becomes, the more it is severed from the life of the social whole, the loftier and more ultimate becomes its significance," and he explains that "the link between death and fertility is severed (the sowing, the maternal mons, the sun), as well as its link with the birth of new life, with ritual laughter, with parody and the clown."⁷² Purdy's poems constitute a concerted effort to counter the individual ego with community, to violate the individual ego so that the sentimental and solipsistic self can be escaped; a dialogic tension of egocentricity and altercentricity that takes the shape of a polemical sympathy with the self and with others underlies the poems. The Purdy self exists dialogically, endlessly seeking to maintain those communal and heteroglot connections.

The poems, then, are filled with dialogizing polemic--husbands and wives, lovers, friends, workers and bosses, the folk and the powerful, the poor and the wealthy, and the poet and reader. In Search of Owen Roblin articulates this struggle more largely at work in the poems. The poet relates his attempts to get outside his own despair, and he does so through an imaginative engagement with these ancestors, specifically by identifying with their struggles and rejecting self-pity. Indeed, Purdy's poetic reveals that the poet occupies a special position in this dialogic relationship, for the poet is a border figure, a person who is both part of his or her society and also part of its fringe. This special position, moreover, allows the poet a unique perspective, not

⁷² Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 216.

the view of Parnassus but that of the social underworld, of the fool and the clown. The drunken poet of "At the Quinte Hotel" recites his poem to his tavern audience, noting that "it was a heart-warming moment for Literature" encapsulating "great Art and the brotherhood of people," but when he requests some beer in payment silence falls, leaving him to conclude "that poems will not really buy beer or flowers/ or a goddam thing" (PAA68 95-97). This poet inhabits the social underworld, the marketplace world, and his marketplace poems paradoxically make him both part of and alien to this world.

In spite of this fringe position, or rather because of it, the poet is able to establish a communal vision; he is able to give voice to the shapes and intricacies of his or her specific socio-historic world. For Purdy, the poet is Archilochos, a singer of the people next door in their language, a singer who celebrates life, rather than the poet of "Portrait," a man whose "public utterance" has produced "this one stone creature," "this single man" with "his lavish certainties,/ the onion secure in its vegetable destiny,/ the long foreshortened shadow of a poet all in one place" (CH 29). The poet's paradigm, the first on his list in "Bestiary" in fact, is that anonymous author of "Tom O'Bedlam," "the anonymous, the all-of-us,/ enduring the pain of everyman,/ perched on a throne in the gutter" (PB 65-67). The poet we find in the Purdy poem is such a communal poet, one who gives voice to the life of everyday people, who is himself not single and all in one place but rather in the trenches and gutters wearing the carnival crown of everyman and nobody.

The poet, moreover, gives voice to that temporal community of which he or she is a part, the larger community of humankind. In this context, the poet breathes life into what has vanished; the text becomes the vehicle of human community in the larger temporal framework. In "There is of Course a Legend," El Greco's painting of Toledo, Spain presents itself as a defeat of clock time, a precisely human answer to the monologisms of power and temporal erasure. The light of the painting, we learn, corresponds to the light in Dona Geronima's eyes, "a reality outside of time/ tenderness preserved in paint"(PB 53-55). The poet proceeds to relate that the artist's brush "supplies a human meaning" and that regardless of the Inquisition, "nothing is either possible or provable/ except El Greco's painting." The painting, like the poem itself, acts to preserve basic human feeling, thought, and wisdom. Similarly, "The Horseman of Agawa" offers the painting of a long-dead Ojibway artist as a defeat of time and affirmation of community, as the poet imagines the man balanced above the water below, painting on "the stone canvas/ with fish eggs or bear grease to make the painting permanent/ pitting fish eggs and bear grease against eternity/ which is kind of ludicrous or kind of beautiful I guess"(SAD 14-16). The poet underlines the ludicrous beauty of the work of art, its heroic folly in the face of time.

"Lament for the Dorsets" explores the same folly, offering itself as an example of that imaginative folly that seeks to redeem humanity from extinction. The poet's grief over the disappearance of the Dorsets, these comical giants, translates into an imaginative reconstruction of their world from a collection of fragments that

includes a pair of ivory swans. The poet imagines into existence the last Dorset, "Kudluk," sitting in his caribou skin tent "carving 2-inch ivory swans/ for a dead grand-daughter/ taking them out of his mind," "and one of his thoughts/ turns to ivory." Kudluk dies in darkness, his tent blown down and covered by snow, but, says the poet, "After 600 years/ the ivory thought/ is still warm"(WGW 54-55). The work of art, the text of a community, is a thing of beauty shared, a warm thought that passes from one hand to another, from the hand of the dead to the hand of the living. The poem itself, with its imaginative resurrection, produces this same human warmth for the reader, taking time's fragments and retrieving from them an affirmation of human community. The Purdy poem, like bear grease or fish eggs or ivory swans, pits itself against eternity.

In fact, the Purdy poem takes as its subject the field of human consciousness, the realm of the collective unconscious. Purdy's pedestrian but profound world, a world of polemical sympathy, roots its communal vision in the interconnections between people. The collective unconscious underlies the play of ego and alter in the poems, expressing the community and its origins, origins and community that belong to the poet as well. Tom Marshall writes of Purdy's poetic that "something continues eternally, exists still in the light from a distant star and in ongoing human consciousness. Continuity, communion, and community are Purdy's major themes, not victimization and defeat."⁷³ Purdy's poetry affirms the human community, a community that exists across time. The collective mind, moreover, is both prehistoric and historic. Thus,

⁷³ Marshall 95.

Purdy explores the collective sources of his personal imagination in his poems, particularly in In Search of Owen Roblin. Here, the poet speaks of sharing in what his UEL ancestors had done, feeling what they felt, becoming them, "the relay race ahead reversed/ and I go back down the long stairway/ we all came up when we were born." He claims his words as theirs, his identity as theirs. "Certain small rooms" light up, "the hall bedroom maybe/ and definitely the downstairs hallway." The poet's bone cave, the house of his collective unconscious, becomes a marketplace where common humanity dwells. The poet affirms his dialogic being, the community of ego and alter to which he belongs as both Everyman and Nobody.

Moreover, this collective unconscious embodies folk wisdom for Purdy, the folly of the fringe. The collective mind holds both the wealth and the degradation of the past, both the horror of being human and the maxims of shared wisdom that ensure continued survival. In his poems, Purdy seeks to tap this realm of foolish wisdom in order to counter ego with alter. The process of altering the ego, of dialogizing the self through engagement with the other, can be seen at work in Purdy's Arctic poems, poems which in fact provide a model of this process. Attempting to penetrate another ethos, culture, and world view, the poet makes discoveries concerning the passages of the collective mind. In fact, these Arctic poems suggest as well the agenda of the Purdy poem and its paradigmatic form--its combination of polemic and sympathy in its very lines. The Purdy poem attacks the monologisms that separate people and seeks to establish sympathy, empathy, humanity, and understanding through the ego's dialogic interaction with the

'other.' Indeed, we find a strong "we-ness" in Purdy's poems: the language he uses is inclusive, embracing the larger human community.⁷⁴ This solidarity, paradoxically, finds its strength in the poet's polemical attitude to others. Rather than filling his poems with manifestoes of human oneness, Purdy enacts the difficult and tenuous dialogic give and take that characterizes simply being human.

Indeed, this polemical sympathy defines the poet's relationship with his reader. Purdy's socio-historic poetic extends to the poet-listener dynamic that functions as the very basis and purpose of the poem, for the poem itself not only reflects and enacts the dialogic nature of the communal world but also participates in socio-historic becoming. Bakhtin writes, "the idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses."⁷⁵ The larger dialogue of idea-systems that constitutes social intercourse, this comment suggests, is an unfolding event. A literary text, suggests Bakhtin, is no different, for "every literary work faces outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself."⁷⁶ The literary work contains within its very fibre a dialogic interaction with posited readers or listeners; its basic purpose is social, intent on constructing a dialogic community with an audience. Purdy's poems are clearly such live events, such points of intersection for several

⁷⁴ See, for example, "For Steve McIntyre" (CP 363), "Homer's Poem" (CP 3-4), and "The Runners" (WGW 110-111).

⁷⁵ Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 88. The emphasis is Bakhtin's. Elsewhere, Bakhtin argues that "any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances," "a link in the chain of speech communion" (Speech Genres, 69 and 76). Any utterance both responds to other utterances and anticipates future responses.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 257. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

consciousnesses. These poems are largely defined by the dialogic interaction of poet and reader, the establishment of a community through a play of idea-systems. This community, moreover, is again defined by a polemical sympathy, by a play of power and freedom that is dialogic: the poet is as shifting, fluid, and limited as the reader. The Purdy poem enacts the struggle and empathy of ego and alter on the very level of poet and reader, within the very social context that activates the poem.

Purdy's poems do not solve the enigma of the human condition; rather, they point out some of its mysteries, pains, and joys. Based on a sympathetic polemic, these poems engage the reader in an active dialogue, establishing a microcosmic community; they outline, moreover, the play of alter and ego, self and other, and individual and community that defines our socio-historic being, and they do so in a serio-comical and expansive fashion, employing traces of folk culture and consciousness in their form and idiom, a culture that expresses life's underside. Essentially, Purdy's poems embody a dialogue of idea-systems in which the low and the fringe and the unofficial dialogize the lofty and the powerful and the central, a dialogue in which the very bases of our socio-historic world are called into question. These poems express in each of their lines the ambivalent fullness of human life and the dialogic basis of being. In his introduction to Love in a Burning Building, Purdy writes, "all my poems are love poems--in some way, shape or form."⁷⁷ All his poems are indeed love poems, poems which capture the folly and grandeur of humans being human together.

⁷⁷ Purdy, introduction, Love in a Burning Building 9.

Conclusion

Living in the Loophole

Not knowing how to listen, neither can they speak.
Heraclitus.

I perceive you are expecting me to sum this up in an epilogue. I hope you are not so foolish as to suppose that after this melange I can remember anything I have said. There is an old saying, "I hate a drinking companion with a memory." Here is a new one: "I hate a student with a memory." Therefore, to your health, cheers, live and drink, O most celebrated devotees of Folly. Erasmus.

Bakhtin writes in Speech Genres that "the author when creating his work does not intend it for a literary scholar and does not presuppose a specific scholarly understanding; he does not aim to create a collective of literary scholars. He does not invite literary scholars to his banquet table."¹ The critic is, in this context, the most glorified of party crashers, the voice of authority at the author's carnival banquet (the dietician or etiquette expert). His or her role as a special reader does not result from a special invitation; rather, the critic's position itself is one open to the overturning powers of folly. In order to enjoy the banquet, then, the critic must dialogize or have dialogized his or her own authority. It is within this framework that I conclude with Purdy's loophole.

Bakhtin's writings are a radical affirmation of the loophole word. Everywhere he emphasizes the ideological life of this word, its life in time and in a social context. The word lives through response. "The word," Bakhtin reminds us, "is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It

¹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 165.

never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation."² This transfer is the life of the word, the life desired by the speaker who is also a respondent; the speaker responds to past words and seeks response. The life of the word is in time. As Bakhtin suggests, "the speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other's active responsive understanding."³ In the dynamic of this suggestive metaphor, then, Bakhtin himself relinquishes the floor to others, and Purdy does so to his readers. All of our thought and speaking contain within them these dialogic overtones, this loophole look to the future.

This principle of responsiveness, in Bakhtin's thinking, extends to the literary text. In fact, the literary word intensifies response. In some notes made in 1970-71, Bakhtin contemplates "the inexhaustibility of the second consciousness, that is, the consciousness of the person who understands and responds: herein lies a potential infinity of responses, languages, codes. Infinity against infinity."⁴ The second consciousness is for the first a loophole consciousness, an inexhaustible openness, and such is the consciousness necessary for the life of the literary text. The act of writing and the act of reading take place in this dialogic loophole. To live in this loophole, the author must construct an internally persuasive rather than authoritative

² Bakhtin, Dostoevsky 202.

³ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 71.

⁴ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 136.

or unitary discourse. "The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite," writes Bakhtin, "it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean."⁵ Internally persuasive discourse, dialogic in that it allows multiple meanings, different meanings in different times and places, allows the writer to inhabit the loophole. Indeed, Bakhtin argues that "the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee)."⁶ The addressee and superaddressee are already present in the writing of the text: the act of reading is accounted for. In fact, all genres, trends, styles, and periods contain within them their version of the loophole addressee.

Although critics are not invited to the author's banquet table, they do play a crucial role in the life of the text according to Bakhtin. He writes, "The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from this captivity, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation."⁷ If we follow Bakhtin's metaphors, the critic sits at the author's table, gains the floor as it were, to assist the author through the loophole, to help free the author's texts from their prison. Margaret Avison announces in "Snow" that "Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes./ The

⁵ Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 346. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

⁶ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 126. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

⁷ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 5.

optic heart must venture: a jail-break/ And re-creation."⁸ The metaphor applies to the reading experience as well; the Bakhtinian loophole is such a venturing. How does this jail break happen? Only through dialogic, responsive understanding. "It is much easier," argues Bakhtin, "to study the given in what is created (for example, language, ready-made and general elements of world view, reflected phenomena of reality, and so forth) than to study what is created."⁹ Studying the given is in Bakhtin's terms a monologic activity, one that refuses to venture into the loophole. A dialogic stylistics takes a different form: "The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects."¹⁰ Moreover, suggests Bakhtin, "a stylistic analysis that embraces all aspects of style is possible only as an analysis of the whole utterance, and only in that chain of speech communion of which the utterance is an inseparable link."¹¹ A dialogic stylistics for Bakhtin is one that sees two consciousnesses dancing on the boundary of the text, one that perceives the author's utterance as an utterance, as discourse, diachronic speech made alive through responsiveness.

Al Purdy's poems inhabit this loophole, looking as they do to the past, the present, and the future, scanning horizons for listeners, making stops along the highway in strangely Chaucerian taverns where they tell their tales. They invite the reader to join them in a drink, to sit at the same table. If the reader will jump into this loophole,

⁸ Margaret Avison, "Snow," in Winter Sun / The Dumbfounding: Poems 1940-66 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982) 27.

⁹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 120. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

¹⁰ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 106. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

¹¹ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 100. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

she or he will find a very Bakhtinian poet indeed, a poet with a folk and carnival imagination, a poet tentatively dwelling in the flux of the chronotope, a poet speaking dialogically through polemic, sideways glances, and double-voicing, a poet continually undercutting his own authority as poet in order to make room for the reader in the loophole. Recent developments in Purdy's journey have only intensified this openendedness in him. During the final stages of editing this study of his poetry, I learned that Purdy had published a new volume of poetry, The Woman on the Shore. The back cover relates that he has just completed a novel and is presently working on his memoirs! His Collected Poems have proven to be little defense for the critic who would pin Purdy down. As he himself says in the note to the new volume, "I hadn't expected to be writing [the previous sentence] after my Collected Poems appeared, but life and death are full of surprises."¹² The dialogue continues.

As such a dialogic poet, Purdy occupies the paradoxical position of a major poet of the borderland. As a Bakhtinian poet, he overturns many of the cherished conventions of poetry, the myth of a unitary language, the ideology of individual expression, the authority of the poetic voice. As a Canadian poet, he occupies a cultural borderland by default. As the descendent of United Empire Loyalist culture, he is tuned in to a carnival pioneer world, a world of losers glorying in their loss. As a working-class poet, his world is the marketplace--the

¹² Al Purdy, Note, The Woman on the Shore, by Purdy (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990) iv.

tavern, the agora, the supermarket, the co-op, the freight train.

Dennis Lee makes the following assessment of Purdy:

It seems to me incontrovertible that he is among the finest of living poets, and one of the substantial poets in English in the century. If we have to realign our notions of what great poetry can look like, to accommodate his best work--and it is part of his achievement that we do have to--that is scarcely a novel experience when an original writer of stature comes along.¹³

Lee's comments stress that Purdy's best poetry forces us to change our understanding of what poetry is and does, forces us to read poetry rather than worship Poetry. Reading Purdy challenges us to read differently perhaps than we have read or would like to read, but such a reading leads into the loophole. "The person who understands," relates Bakhtin, "must not reject the possibility of changing or even abandoning his already prepared viewpoints and positions. In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment."¹⁴

This dialogic reading is the kind of reading I have attempted to do here. Through examining the interdependencies of author, text, and reader, I have tried to perform a formal analysis of Purdy's poems, of their authority, voices, chronotopes, and ideologies (rather than an analysis of Purdy's personality). Moreover, this performance at Purdy's banquet table has itself been an act of discovery for me, not only about his poems but also about the nature of poetry, literature, and criticism. I have learned, on the one hand, that poetry contains within it great polyphonic possibilities, and on the other hand that reading

¹³ Lee, afterword, Collected Poems 389.

¹⁴ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 142.

dialogically is hard work, a skill that must be nurtured. Moreover, while I have become convinced of the importance of Purdy's poetry, I have also come to realize that certain issues need more attention: the poet and his influences, the poet and the process of revision, the poet's relationship with the female, the poet's participation in the dark side of carnival, and the poet within the framework of great time.

But we must leave these to the gods of all serious things, as Purdy himself does. Whether we are invited or uninvited guests at Purdy's banquet table, we may enjoy the feast, knowing that we have participated in the symposium, entered the loophole. In The Lovely Treachery of Words, Robert Kroetsch speaks of the two sides of language, of langue and parole, of "the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and literature and concluded speech" as opposed to "what one of us says, the uniqueness of the speaking (writing) person." He relates that "if you are unlucky, the great-given swamps you, and even when you speak, you are silent. If you are incredibly lucky, and if you work your ass off, the great-given sounds, not over, but in your unique speaking. If that happens, then you have found a Voice."¹⁵ At his best, Purdy is such a lucky poet: langue sounds in his parole; the totality of language can be heard in his discourse, his poems as diachronic events. When this happens in the Purdy poem, he has indeed found a Voice, paradoxically in a dialogue of voices. I conclude, then, with Bakhtin: "For the word (and, consequently, for a human being)

¹⁵ Kroetsch 19.

there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response the word moves ever forward in search of responsive understanding."¹⁶

¹⁶ Bakhtin, Speech Genres 127. The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

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