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SECCIÓ D'ANGLÈS

THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH POETRY

VOLUM I



TESI DOCTORAL DIRIGIDA PER LA DOCTORA SUSAN BALLYN.
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N E L A B U R E U i R A M O S

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green lands of Weslemkoon Lake
where a man might have some
 opinion of what beauty
is and none deny him
 for miles-

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
 backbreaking days
 in the sun and rain
when realization seeps slow in the mind
without grandeur or self-deception in
 noble struggle
of being a fool-

A country of quiescence and still distance
a lean land
 not like the fat south
with inches of black soil on
 earth's round belly-
And where the farms are
 it's as if a man stuck
both thumbs in the stony earth and pulled

 it apart
 to make room
enough between the trees
for a wife
 and maybe some cows and
 room for some
of the more easily kept illusions-
And where the farms have gone back
to forest
 are only soft outlines
 shadowy differences-

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-

This is the country of our defeat
 and yet

during the fall plowing a man
might stop and stand in a brown valley of the furrows
and shade his eyes to watch for the same
red patch mixed with gold
that appears on the same
spot in the hills
year after year
and grow old

plowing and plowing a ten-acre field until
the convolutions run parallel with his own brain-

And this is a country where the young
leave quickly
unwilling to know what their fathers know
or think the words their mothers do not say-

Herschel Monteagle and Faraday
lakeland rockland and hill country
a little adjacent to where the world is
a little north of where the cities are and
sometime
we may go back there

to the country of our defeat
Wollaston Elzevir and Dungannon
and Weslemkoon lake land
where the high townships of Cashel
McClure and Marmora once were-
But it's been a long time since
and we must enquire the way
of strangers-

THE COUNTRY OF THE YOUNG

A.Y Jackson for instance
83 years old
halfway up a mountain
standing in a patch of snow
to paint a picture that says
"Look here
You've never seen this country
it's not the way you thought it was
Look again"
And boozy traders
lost in a dream of money
crews of homesick seamen
moored to a China-vision

hunting the North West Passage
they didn't see it either
The colours I mean
for they're not bright Gauguin
or blazing Vincent
not even Bruegel's "Hunters in the Snow"
where you can get lost
and found in five minutes
- but the original colour-matrix
that after a giant's heartbeat
lighted the maple forests
in the country south
You have to stoop a little
bend over and then look up
- dull orange on a cliff face
that says iron deposits
olive leaves of the ground willow
with grey silver catkins
minute wild flower beacons
sea blue as the world's eye-
And you can't be looking for something else
money or a night's lodging on earth
a stepping stone to death maybe
or you'll never find the place
hear an old man's voice
in the country of the young
that says
 "Look here-"

Pangnirtung

MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

An eagle does not know who he is
nor yet a rat nor lice in a dog's fur
none of them know who they are
in the speechless scream and snarl of being
And yet in a dark hole
louse biting blood from flesh is louse of lice
and in the eagle's scream is the whole sum
and mystery of being one of a flying nation
of birds in darkness in blood and riding
the shining helm of the sky...

But I have heard a man say
 "This is not a country

I am going away from here"
It was as if he had said
"I am no man because-
because this is not a country"
- his face twisted in contempt for himself
and he spoke of all the great things
other countries had accomplished
one country in particular he named
and said "Look at them
their pride their arts and science
and above all they have not sold out
to the highest bidder

No I will not stay
I am no man here
because this is not a country"
and the loss was his overwhelming in sadness

I can see him now in my mind
going to and fro in the world
hobbling around on a one-legged syllogism
crying out to himself "I have no country!"
a warcry against himself
with nothing inside him except bitterness
and a condemnation of the place he came from
because he was not a man
because his country was not a country

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 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

I am a child fishing for sunfish in a river
I am learning to skate under the town bridge in Trenton
I am lost for two days in the northern forest
I am going to school and failing at French and Latin
I am learning what a strange lonely place is myself
reflecting the present reiterating the past
reconnoitring the future

These are my history
the story of myself
for I am the land
and the land has become me

Years later I think of that wandering exile
- and being an exile is beginning to understand yourself
as he is beginning to know that history is asleep
in all our bones the long history of becoming
He is 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
of being a boy fishing for sunfish in a river
and always forever after knowing the direction of home
of things that resit telling the gods coded deep in memory
arriving here in total where the sun stands still at noon

Yes if you would like to hear his name said aloud
the name of the man without a country
for whom I feel such insulting compassion
then he would hate me for it if he knew
I can say that name but it would mean little
and perhaps he does know
and this poem of sadness and exaltation is written for him
tho poems speak names which are only words
and what words are that you have not said yourself
which we must always go beyond
and arrive there naked
as it was in the beginning

MY GRANDFATHER'S COUNTRY

(Upper Hastings County)

Highway 62
in red October
where the Canadian shield hikes north
with southern birds gone now
Thru towns named for an English novel

a battle in Scotland and Raleigh's dream of gold
- Ivanhoe Bannockburn El Dorado
with "Prepare to Meet Thy God" on granite billboards
Light thru the car window
drapes the seat with silken yard goods
and over rock hills in my grandfather's country
where poplar birch and elm trees
are yellow as blazing lemons
the maple and the oak are red as red
as the open mouth of a dinosaur
 that died for love
of eating

Of course other things are also marvellous
sunsets happen if the atmospheric conditions are right
and the same goes for the blue sky
- there are deserts like grey yellow beds of flowers
where a man can walk and walk into identical distance
like an arrow lost in its own target
and a woman scream and a grain of sand will fall
on the other side of the yellow bowl a thousand miles away
and all day long like a wedge of obstinate silver
the moon is tempered and forged in yellow fire
it hangs beside a yellow sun and will not go down

And there are seas in the north so blue
that a polar bear can climb his own wish and walk the sky
and wave on wave of that high blue washes over the mind
and sings to each component part of the hearing blood
a radiance that burns down the dark buildings of night
and shines for 24 hours a day of long sea-days
and is held trembling in a bubble of memory
to remember summer by
when the white pause begins

But the hill-red has no such violence of endings
the woods are alive
and gentle as well as cruel
unlike sand and sea
and if I must commit myself to love
for any one thing
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
Earth that has discarded so much so long

over the absentminded centuries
has remembered the protein formula
from the invincible mould
the chemicals that after selection select themselves
the muscles that kill and the nerves that twitch and rage
the mind-light assigned no definite meaning
but self-regarding and product of the brain
an inside room where the files are kept
and a little lamp of intelligence burns sometimes
with flickering irritation that it exists at all
that occasionally conceives what it cannot conceive
itself and the function of itself:
the purpose we dreamed in another age and time
an end just beyond the limits of vision
some god in ourselves buried deep in the dying flesh
that clutches at life and will not let go

Day ends quickly as if someone had closed their eyes
or a blind photographer was thinking of something else
it's suddenly night
the red glow fades and there is no one here
but myself and I am here only briefly
and yet I am not alone
Leaves fall in my grandfather's country
and mine too for that matter
- later the day will return horizontal and gloomy
among the trees and leaves falling
in the rain-coloured light
exposing for ornithologists here and there
in the future
some empty waiting birds' nests

THE NORTH WEST PASSAGE

is found

needs no more searching
and for lack of anything better to do
waiting the plane's departure north from Frobisher
I lounge on the bed poring over place-names
on maps
and baby it's cold outside
I amuse myself with the idea of
Martin Frobisher
"Admiral of the Ocean-Sea" who was

"hurte...in the Buttocke with an Arrowe"
running down the beach near here
to escape the blood-mad Skraelings hoping
to reach Mrs. Frobisher in time for tea
But Frobisher didn't make it either
in 1576

and it's two hours until dinner
tho I'm not really very hungry just now
Locate Fury and Hecla

on the orange-coloured paper
north west of where I am on Baffin
and go rocking thru history
in search of dead sailors
suspended from Ariadne's quivering cord
and find them at the precise point
where the meter registers "alive"
when a living man remembers them
and the Minotaur's bull-roar
trembles in the northern lights
and a red needle flickers
on the playback device

Locate the *Terror* and *Erebus* that way
Franklin's ships preserved in ice
with no place-names for them
it'd be much too close to hell
and the big jets might take a wrong turn
skimming over the top of the world
or the ICBM computers make a quarter inch error
and destroy the illusion of paradise by mistake
and Capt. James' letter to the Emperor of Japan
suddenly gets delivered three centuries later
Or take the Ringnes boys

Ellef and Amund
heroic Norwegian brewers whose names
cling alcoholically to islands up there
or Boothia after an English gin distiller
Names like Ungava and Thule

The Beaufort Sea and Ellesmereland
places to drop cigarette butts in
while the big jets go popping over the horizon
to Moscow and you can snooze 5 minutes
before the stewardess brings dinner
or read the *New Yorker* with a double whiskey
and make it last a thousand miles
for it's a long time since Luke Foxe's cook
served "beer in small cans" to the sailors
and it didn't last one nautical mile

The North West Passage is found
and poor old Lady Franklin well
she doesn't answer the phone
tho once she traded her tears for ships
to scour the Arctic seas for her husband
but the *Terror* and *Erebus* sank long ago
and it's still half an hour before dinner
and there isn't much to do but write letters
and I can't think of anything more to say
about the North West Passage
but I'll think of something
maybe
a break-thru
to strawberries and ice cream for dinner

Frobisher Bay

STILL LIFE IN A TENT

(Or, Tenting tonight in the old camp ground)

In a cave hollowed out in the rain
near a pile of ghostly groceries
and some books
The wind comes
within two feet of where I'm lying
then stops
waiting
and the canvas bulges

I have a slight fever
temperature or maybe 100
nothing to speak of
but no medicine here
And I have a small fear that changes
shape and size
when I consider what might happen
[canoe trip by sea to Pang
among the waving kelp lines
that anchor somebody's world
maybe to seal towns
or Erewhon and Atlantis
with Jonahsie nursing the motor
smiling but irritated
at me for making him
miss the good hunting weather
and myself sick in the bilge)

Waves rumble and rant now
on the still listening beach
pounding motherless bergs
to death on rocks
stranding the big calves
at tidal ebb

A clump of yellow flowers
I noticed this afternoon
must be straining their roots
in the windy twilit night
hoping to hold onto
their few home-inches
(like comic yellow flags
of a 40-acre duchy
between Russia and China)
Oh misery me misery me
I am sick as hell
and so sorry for me
touch my forehead
and swallow carefully
expecting it to hurt
smoke a cigarette
drink some coffee
wish it were brandy
hope for morning
and the big wind howls
Now a berg splits
inside/outside the tent
a dry white noise
wet dogs drift in
and out of hearing
I lie there fevered and
float a single thought out
into a night tinted
with day flowers in my mind
then send a second one
to join the first
and my thoughts travel together
in fevered fantasy
north of summer
with ice become a thousand-foot wall
so photo-real it might be
me both here and there
staring up and up
a fevered little man
at the cold altar
where June July and August

are a brief tremor
on god's thermometer
My blood burns and burns
with bells of 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
where trader and blind explorer
fumbled along the kelp lines
to reach their graves in a blizzard
or came at last to drown

Here I am again
back from the court of the Seal-King
lying in bed with fever
and I'm so glad to be here
no matter what happens

- riding the wind to Pang
or being bored at Frobisher
(waiting for clearing weather)
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
Now the bullying wind blows faster
the yellow flags rush seaward
the stones cry out like people
as my fever suddenly goes
and the huskies bark like hell
the huskies bark like hell

In a cave hollowed out in the rain
near a pile of ghostly groceries
and some books
morning soon

Kikastan Islands

TREES AT THE ARCTIC CIRCLE
(Salix Cordifolia- Ground Willow)

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
not proud of what they are
bowing to weather instead
careful of themselves
worried about the sky
afraid of exposing their limbs
like a Victorian married couple

I call to mind great Douglas firs
I see tall maples waving green
and oaks like gods in autumn gold
the whole horizon jungle dark
and I crouched under that continual night
But these
even the dwarf shrubs of Ontario
mock them
Coward trees

And yet- and yet-
their seed pods glow
like delicate grey earrings
their leaves are veined and intricate
like tiny parkas
They have about three months
to make sure the species does not die
and that's how they spend their time
unbothered by any human opinion
just digging in here and now
sending their roots down down down
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
they use death to remain alive

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
I have been stupid in a poem
I will not alter the poem
but let the stupidity remain permanent
as the trees are
in a poem
the dwarf trees of Baffin Island

Pangnirtung

WASHDAY

An oil drum full
of greasy water simmering
all morning with
a bubbler fire
underneath
Two women dip
water into plastic tubs
then scrub by hand
with store detergent
I stand and watch
then join the scrubbing
myself
for no reason or any
I can think of
and work at the clothes
seriously as hell
And Leah laughs
her smooth broad face
convulsed with it
a small saliva bubble

blown from her lips
and even Regally
so much darker and quiet
concedes a smile
I think then
even without knowing
the language at all
it's possible to speak
to them
 dark hair falling
in Leah's eyes as
she laughs and brushes
it back giving me
washday instruction
the baby asleep
on her back
Regally impatient
at this foolery
her standing darkness
looms over me like speech
disapprovingly
They chatter about it
in Eskimo
and I try to figure out
what they're saying
remembering I read somewhere
how they add syllable to
syllable so
that a sentence
is just one long word
that keeps being added to
or something like that
Leah still smiling
over the crazy visitor
who wants to wash her clothes
brown eyes and
deep dimples in cheeks
she keeps talking
Suddenly I
feel I'm picked up
with surprised vertigo
and held
between those lips
as she adds my name
to the weightless sounds
breathed out
some of the "me" I am
removed
the walled self

defenses down
altered
I'm given to the air
then back to myself
like a gift from her
On impulse
I say
 "Leah"
and stop then
but she looks at me
queerly
And wind promenades
among the tents
and big white clouds
wander westward

Kikastan Islands

WHEN I SAT DOWN TO PLAY THE PIANO

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
He findeth a quiet glade among great stones
squatteth forthwith and undoeth trousers
Irrational Man by Wm. Barrett in hand
while the other dismisseth mosquitoes
and beginneth the most natural of natural functions
buttocks balanced above the boulders
Then

 dogs

 Dogs

 DOGS

 all shapes and sizes
all colours and religious persuasion
a plague of dogs rushing in
having been attracted by the philosophic climate
and being wishful to learn about existential dogs
and denial of the self with regard to bitches
But let's call a spade a shovel
therefore there I am I am I think that is
surrounded by a dozen dozen fierce Eskimo dogs
with an inexplicable (to me) appetite
for human excrement

Dear Ann Landers
what would you do?
Dear Galloping Gourmet
what would you do
in a case like this?

Well I'll tell you
NOT A DAMN THING
You just squat there cursing hopelessly
while the kid throws stones
and tries to keep them off and out from under
as a big black husky dashes in
swift as an enemy submarine
white teeth snapping at the anus
I shriek

and shriek
[the kid laughs]
and hold onto my pants
sans dignity
sans intellect
sans Wm. Barret
and damn near sans anus

Stand firm little Eskimo kid
it giveth candy if I had any
it giveth a dime in lieu of same
STAND FIRM
Oh avatar of Olympian excellence
noble Eskimo youth do your stuff
Zeus in the Arctic dog pound
Montcalm at Quebec
Horatius at the bridge
Leonidas at Thermopylae
Custer's last stand at Little Big Horn
"KEEP THEM DAMN DOGS OFF
YOU MISERABLE LITTLE BRAT!"

Afterwards
Achilles retreateth without honour
unzippered and sullen
and sulketh in his tent till next time appointed
his anus shrinketh
he escheweth all forms of laxative and physick meanwhile
and prayeth for constipation
addresseth himself to the Eskimo brat miscalled

"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"

PS Next time I'm gonna take a gun

Kikastan Islands

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

ORIGINS

Out of the dreams that heap
The hollow hand of sleep-
Out of the dark sublime,
From the averted Face
Beyond the bournes of space,
Into the sudden sun
We journey, one by one.
Out of the hidden shade
Wherein desire is made-
Out of the pregnant stir
Where death and life confer-
The dark and mystic heat
Where soul and matter meet-
The enigmatic Will-
We start, and then are still.

Inexorably decreed
By the ancestral deed,
The puppets of our sires,
We work out blind desires,
And for our sons ordain,
The blessing or the bane.
In ignorance we stand
With fate on either hand,
And question stars and earth
Of life, and death, and birth.
With wonder in our eyes
We scan the kindred skies,
While through the common grass
Our atoms mix and pass.
We feel the sap go free
When spring comes to the tree;
And in our blood is stirred
What warms the brooding bird.
The vital fire we breathe
That bud and blade bequeath,
And strength of native clay
In our full veins hath sway.

But in the urge intense
And fellowship of sense,
Suddenly comes a word
In other ages heard.
On a great wind our souls
Are borne to unknown goals,
And past the bournes of space
To the unaverted Face.

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT

THE HEIGHT OF LAND

Here is the height of land:
The watershed on either hand
Goes down to Hudson Bay
Or Lake Superior;
The stars are up, and far away
The wind sounds in the wood, wearier
Than the long Ojibwa cadence
In which Potàn the Wise
Declares the ills of life
And Chees-que-ne-ne makes a mournful sound
Of acquiescence. The fires burn low
With just sufficient glow
To light the flakes of ash that play
At being moths, and flutter away
To fall in the dark and die as ashes:
Here there is peace in the lofty air,
And Something comes by flashes
Deeper than peace;-
The spruces have retired a little space
And left a field of sky in violet shadow
With stars like marigolds in a water-meadow.

Now the Indian guides are dead asleep;
There is no sound unless the soul can hear
The gathering of the waters in their sources.

We have come up through the spreading lakes
From level to level,-
Pitching our tents sometimes over a revel
Of roses that nodded all night,
Dreaming within our dreams,
To wake at dawn and find that they were captured
With no dew on their leaves;
Sometimes mid sheaves
Of bracken and dwarf-cornel, and again
On a wide blueberry plain
Brushed with the shimmer of a bluebird's wing;

A rocky islet followed
With one lone poplar and a single nest
Of white-throat-sparrows that took no rest
But sang in dreams or woke to sing,-
To the last portage and the height of land-:
Upon one hand
The lonely north enlaced with lakes and streams,
And the enormous targe of Hudson Bay,
Glimmering all night
In the cold arctic light;
On the other hand
The crowded southern land
With all the welter of the lives of men.
But here is peace, and again
That Something comes by flashes
Deeper than peace,- a spell
Golden and inappellable
That gives the inarticulate part
Of our strange being one moment of release
That seems more native than the touch of time,
And we must answer in chime;
Though yet no man may tell
The secret of that spell
Golden and inappellable.

Now are there sounds walking in the wood,
And all the spruces shiver and tremble,
And the stars move a little in their courses.
The ancient disturber of solitude
Breathes a pervasive sigh,
And the soul seems to hear
The gathering of the waters at their sources;
Then quiet ensues and pure starlight and dark;
The region-spirit murmurs in meditation,
The heart replies in exaltation
And echoes faintly like an inland shell
Ghost tremors of the spell;
Thought reawakens and is linked again
With all the welter of the lives of men.
Here on the uplands where the air is clear
We think of life as of a stormy scene,-
Of tempest, of revolt and desperate shock;
And here, where we can think, on the bright uplands
Where the air is clear, we deeply brood on life
Until the tempest parts, and it appears
As simple as to the shepherd seems his flock:
A Something to be guided by ideals-
That in themselves are simple and serene-
Of noble deed to foster noble thought,

And noble thought to image noble deed,
Till deed and thought shall interpenetrate,
Making life lovelier, till we come to doubt
Whether the perfect beauty that escapes
Is beauty of deed or thought or some high thing
Mingled of both, a greater boon than either:
Thus we have seen in the retreating tempest
The victor-sunlight merge with the ruined rain,
And from the rain and sunlight spring the rainbow.

The ancient disturber of solitude
Stirs his ancestral potion in the gloom,
And the dark wood
Is stifled with the pungent fume
Of charred earth burnt to the bone
That takes the place of air.
Then sudden I remember when and where,-
The last weird lakelet foul with weedy growths
And slimy viscid things the spirit loathes,
Skin of vile water over viler mud
Where the paddle stirred unutterable stenches,
And the canoes seemed heavy with fear,
Not to be urged toward the fatal shore
Where a bush fire, smouldering, with sudden roar
Leaped on a cedar and smothered it with light
And terror. It had left the portage-height
A tangle of slanted spruces burned to the roots,
Covered still with patches of bright fire
Smoking with incense of the fragrant resin
That even then began to thin and lessen
Into the gloom and glimmer of ruin.

'Tis overpast. How strange the stars have grown;
The presage of extinction glows on their crests
And they are beautied with impermanence;
They shall be after the race of men
And mourn for them who snared their fiery pinions,
Entangled in the meshes of bright words.

A lemming stirs the fern and in the mosses
Eft-minded things feel the air change, and dawn
Tolls out from the dark belfries of the spruces.
How often in the autumn of the world
Shall the crystal shrine of dawning be rebuilt
With deeper meaning! Shall the poet then,
Wrapped in his mantle on the height of land,
Brood on the welter of the lives of men
And dream of his ideal hope and promise
In the blush sunrise? Shall he base his flight

Upon a more compelling law than Love
As Life's atonement; shall the vision
Of noble deed and noble thought immingled
Seem as uncouth to him as the pictograph
Scratched on the cave side by the cave-dweller
To us of the Christ-time? Shall he stand
With deeper joy, with more complex emotion,
In closer commune with divinity,
With the deep fathomed, with the firmament charted,
With life as simple as a sheep-boy's song,
What lies beyond a romaunt that was read
Once on a morn of storm and laid aside
Memorious with strange immortal memories?
Or shall he see the sunrise as I see it
In shoals of misty fire the deluge-light
Dashes upon and whelms with purer radiance,
And feel the lulled earth, older in pulse and motion,
Turn the rich lands and the inundant oceans
To the flushed colour, and hear as now I hear
The thrill of life beat up the planet's margin
And break in the clear susurrus of deep joy
That echoes and reëchoes in my being?
O life is intuition the measure of knowledge
And do I stand with heart entranced and burning
At the zenith of our wisdom when I feel
The long light flow, the long wind pause, the deep
Influx of spirit, of which no man may tell
The Secret, golden and inappellable?

ARTHUR JAMES MARSHALL SMITH

THE LONELY LAND

Cedar and jagged fir
uplift sharp barbs
against the gray
and cloud-piled sky;
and in the bay
blown spume and windrift
and thin, bitter spray
snap
at the whirling sky;
and the pine trees
lean one way.

A wild duck calls
to her mate,
and the ragged
and passionate tones
stagger and fall,
and recover,
and stagger and fall,
on these stones-
are lost
in the lapping of water
on smooth, flat stones.

This is a beauty
of dissonance,
this resonance
of stony strand,
this smoky cry
curled over a black pine
like a broken
and wind-battered branch
when the wind
bends the tops of the pines
and curdles the sky
from the north.

SMITH

This is the beauty
of strength
broken by strength
and still strong.

PETER STEVENS

PRAIRIE

There is nothing

nothing to stand in
the way of the eye.

Earth rolls under light
scabbed by brush.

Over water course
over slough and sand-flat

eye travels out
to rest on land's ledge.

Sky sheets down
sun-glazed air

eye open
in/to space where

there is nothing

PRAIRIE NEGATIVE

No shore here
gnawed by sea
only thinkhorizon lip
level surge
of land broken
by city cliffs.

No gulls here
sweep white
cries raw
above the oil

swell harbour
smell litter;
here birds only
darkly flicker
mute and small
across grey rivers.

No pines here
climb slopes
no slopes here
deep green
in the heat
only aspens
struggle bunched
in clumps
stalk white
sweep white
in the dust.

PRAIRIE: TIME AND PLACE

We can't comprehend the prairie
flattened into need; we feel it
in the cold testing flesh
tight across our skulls
waiting for the ease of greenness
where bunch-topped aspens lean
in the wind's reach for the sky
struggling to trap in their branches
all the wide horizon.

The sun's clear-edged heat
parches minds to dry bone
but we grope for firmness;
we see brush holding on
huddled in blurred clusters.

A single track stitches towns
along straight lines; above them
white names flake from red walls
thrown black across bleached fields.
Trucks bounce over gravel ruts
through their own dust flying
along all the main streets
banked by wind-skinned snow
melting to mud and dust.