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THE SENSE OF PLACE AND HISTORY IN  
THE POETRY OF A. W. PURDY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
University of Saskatchewan

by

Jean Lenore Wilson  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

July, 1968.

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We, the undersigned members of the Committee appointed by you to examine the Thesis submitted by Jean Lenore Wilson, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, beg to report that we consider the thesis satisfactory both in form and content.

Subject of Thesis: The Sense of Place and History in the  
Poetry of A.W. Purdy.

We also report that she has successfully passed an oral examination on the general field of the subject of the thesis.

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THE SENSE OF PLACE AND HISTORY IN  
THE POETRY OF A. W. PURDY

In "Tent Rings", a poem included in Alfred Wellington Purdy's 1967 collection of poetry, North of Summer, the poet remarks that entering ancient Eskimo ~~burial grounds~~ <sup>settlement sites</sup> marked by rings of stones gave him a sense of "mingling with the past", of "being in two places". Similarly, in an article accompanying several of his North of Summer poems in The Beaver, Summer, 1966, Purdy remarks that he would not have been surprised to wake up one morning and find that several recently abandoned winter houses, located on the Kikastan Islands, which he and two Eskimo families inhabited for two weeks, had been re-occupied, "the people having just returned from founding a colony in Carthage or Antarctica".<sup>1</sup> These remarks, though specifically referring to Purdy's experience with the Eskimos and their culture, seem to me to express aptly his sense of place and history in all his poems.

Purdy is acutely aware of an intimate relationship between the present and his place in it, and the past, in which he can only participate objectively, from a distance of years or ages, but which fascinates and intrigues him and which he incorporates into his subjective response to the present. In "Tent Rings", for example, he is entranced by:

a thousand year old spell  
relayed and handed down  
a legacy  
from dead to the living

(North of Summer, p. 69)

Even as he lives with the Eskimo and adapts to their hunting culture, Purdy is conscious of the imposition of the past upon the Eskimo way of life and, by his intrusion into the Eskimo world, upon himself as an exile from twentieth century Canadian urban culture. This consciousness is directly expressed in almost every poem in North of Summer. It is not, however, a state of mind restricted to the particular geographical and social environment which Purdy describes in this volume. It is simply his most recent and most explicit expression of it. The relationship between national or

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<sup>1</sup>A.W. Purdy, "North of Summer. Arctic Poems and Prose", The Beaver, Outfit 297 (Summer, 1966), p. 24.

cultural history and Purdy himself as a twentieth century poet in Canada, has been evolving as a significant theme in his poetry since the forties.

Since, as Northrop Frye points out, "Poets do not live on Mount Parnassus, but in their own environments, and Canada has made itself an environmental reality", Purdy is necessarily and obviously identifiable as a Canadian.<sup>1</sup> This identification is not a liability, though; it is simply a contributing factor to ~~the~~ Purdy's expression as a contemporary Canadian poet. He is not strictly a regional poet although he may find inspiration for a poem from a particular geographic and social environment. Often he places such an environment in a broader, more cosmopolitan geographical, social, and historical context which may or not be specifically Canadian. The external circumstances from which his poetry springs are overshadowed by Purdy's interest in people themselves as products of these circumstances, whether past or present. His sense of place transcends his Canadianism at the same time as this identity is an ineradicable element in both his personality and his poetry. Purdy himself has explicitly denied that Canadianism is the most significant factor in his poetry. Instead, he claims to be a personal poet who is, as he said in an interview for Time in May, 1965:

... primarily interested in people. Philosophically speaking, I guess you could say I'm looking for some sort of absolute. Life seems so impermanent. One looks for a certain permanence in the qualities of people.<sup>2</sup>

With this qualification that Purdy does not consider himself a strictly "Canadian" poet and that his poetry supports this contention, it is necessary in a discussion of his sense of place and history to consider Purdy as a Canadian poet, since such an identity is inescapable. Purdy, who was born in 1918 in the "mythological" village of Wooler, Ontario, as he refers to it in a note at the end of Emu, Remember!, has used that particular area of Canada extensively in his poetry. Wooler, located in the Murray Hills, is slightly north of Trenton, in which town Purdy grew up. He attended school there and in Belleville, Ontario, until he had completed grade ten, after which he "got bored and just left".<sup>3</sup> He began to write poetry during high school - "it was the only thing I could do that impressed the teachers" -

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<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, "Letters in Canada: Poetry 1952-1960", in Masks of Poetry, ed. by A.J.M. Smith (Toronto, 1962), 97.

<sup>2</sup>Anonymous, "The Purdy Pigment", Time (Canadian Edition), (May 28, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Sheila Stone, "Paris Not for Purdy. Baffin Island Bid by Bard", Montreal Star (July 10, 1965) 22



and after spending his winters attending school, spent two springs and summers riding freights across Canada.<sup>1</sup> Of this experience, Purdy remarked that he "managed to see more of Canada and really get the feel of the people and the landscape than a professional tourist armed with a book full of American Express travellers cheques".<sup>2</sup>

This knowledge of the country and its inhabitants is expressed in a poem such as "Transient", in Cariboo Horses. Purdy recreates in this poem the sum of his experience in riding C.P.R. freights from Winnipeg to Vancouver. He specifically retraces his 1937 route and his experiences along it, referring to such cities, areas, or even streets as Regina, the Crow's Nest Pass, or Water Street in Vancouver, and to such an incident in Vancouver one "spit-grey sea level morning", as an old Indian woman's offering her "yawning scratching daughter" to the "boy-man passing". While he is thus relating himself to particular places and situations with which he is personally familiar, Purdy also relates himself to Canada as a whole and his feeling of and for it, in a frank and unsophisticated manner that is one of his trademarks.

Stand in the swaying boxcar doorway  
moving east away from the sunset and  
after a while the eyes digest a country and  
the belly perceives a mapmaker's vision

(The Cariboo Horses, p. 108)

He acknowledges his Canadian identity honestly and unashamedly. As he says in reference to the outcome of his life as a transient, after a while the constant arrival and departure ceases because:

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 were changing always  
the nationality of riding a boxcar thru the depression

(The Cariboo Horses, p. 108)

"The shape of home", for Purdy, is Canada as a whole.

There are three aspects of Purdy's sense of place and history, one of which is his relationship to Canada and its people and history. Sometimes this relationship is confined to a narrow geographical area such as Ameliasburg, or other places in which Purdy has lived and their inhabitants. He is able to recreate the very atmosphere, geographical and human,

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Lunn, "The Best Full-Time Poet in the Country", The Canadian (December 4, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Stone, ibid.

of a particular area through his descriptions and allusions. Ameliasburg, for example, where Purdy and his wife, Eurithe, built a cottage after Purdy left Montreal in 1958 "to begin life as a poet full-time", and the country around Ameliasburg, figure prominently in Purdy's poetry, especially in Cariboo Horses.<sup>1</sup>

In that book in a poem such as "The Country North of Belleville", Purdy indicates his attachment to this area of Canada and effectively transmits his impressions and knowledge of it in the poem. He sees it in present and in past terms. While it is systematically arranged into "Cashel Township and Wollaston/Elveair McClure and Dungannon", it is also

... the country of defeat  
where Sisyphus rolls a big stone  
year after year up the ancient hills

(The Cariboo Horses, p. 74)

Considering it in terms of age renders the country's arbitrary division into townships an insignificant and ephemeral characteristic. Purdy indicates in the passage quoted his strong sense of the present's association with the past. This "country of defeat", later on in the poem, belongs to an age whose influence upon his own Purdy senses in the very terrain. Old fences and a pile of moss-covered stones suggest to him a geological era so remote from the present one that it is as if "the undulating green waves of time" had been "laid on them". Most people, seeing this country, would probably be aware superficially of its geologic age, but it is unlikely that they would be inclined to contemplate its affinity with the present or be able to suggest this affinity as well as Purdy does.

Purdy proves, most conclusively in North of Summer, that he can also achieve a special relationship to people of cultures other than his own, as well as with his own culture and environment. His extra-cultural interest seems to extend particularly to the Eskimos in Canada, rather than to other cultural groups transplanted in Canada from European or other environments outside that of North America. There is one poem in Cariboo Horses, "In the Wilderness", in which Purdy deals with the Sons of Freedom sect of the Doukhobors. This poem derives from an interview Purdy had in 1963 in Agassiz, B.C. with "Big Fanny", one of the sect's spokemen. In the poem, Purdy con-

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<sup>1</sup>Lunn, ibid.

siders the predicament in which these people find themselves, opposed as they are to being assimilated into conventional, urban Canadian culture. However, such a consideration of a cultural group whose origins lie in Europe is relatively rare for Purdy.

Perhaps the restriction of interest to the Eskimos, and, to some extent, to the Indians, is simply due to an unfamiliarity with such other cultural groups as the Sons of Freedom. It was, after all, not until he had received a Canada Council grant of \$1,000 in 1960 and a second grant of \$5,000 in 1965, that Purdy had the opportunity and means of becoming familiar with native peoples in Canada. With the aid of the first grant, he toured the northern interior of British Columbia and explored the Tsimshyan Indian country around the town of Hazelton. From this month-long tour, Purdy gleaned impressions and information about the Indians, as well as about the other inhabitants of the area, of course, which he has not incorporated significantly into his poetry yet, but which he may do eventually. He has, however, written several poems dealing with the Indian in Canada, poems which usually lament the abrupt displacement of the native culture by that of the "white" man. "Remains of an Indian Village", included in Poems for All the Annettes, is an example. The last stanza of this poem is a lucid expression of Purdy's regret and nostalgia for the necessary transition from the Indian's world to the modern, supposedly civilized one;

Standing knee-deep in the joined earth  
Of their weightless bones,  
in the archaeological sunlight,  
in the trembling voltage of summer,  
in the sunken reservoirs of rain,  
standing waist-deep in the criss-cross  
river of shadows,  
in the village of nightfall,  
the hunters silent and women  
bending over dark fires,  
I hear their broken consonants -

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 58)

It was with the aid of the second Canada Council grant that Purdy was able to spend six weeks in the Arctic among the Eskimos, from which experience North of Summer evolved. Prior to its publication in 1967, Purdy's poetry does not indicate any particular knowledge of or extensive interest in the Eskimos.

As I have already indicated in my reference earlier to "Transient", Purdy is not restricted as a Canadian poet to any one region or place. In an unpublished review called "The New Poetry and the Old", Purdy remarks:

Unlike the older poets, [Carman, Campbell, Roberts, Lampman, and Scott], few if any of the new generation leave the country of their birth. They stay. And take one reason to be that with all its supposed cultural and material short-comings, they like the place.<sup>1</sup>

Purdy himself is obviously one of those Canadian poets who "like(s) the place". The extent to which this attitude is expressed in his poetry will become more obvious as I discuss the development of his sense of place and history. The most significant way in which Purdy does express his sense of place as a Canadian poet is through his use of Canadian history, contemporary or otherwise.

He may, for example, refer in a poem such as "On Canadian Identity", (Poems for All the Annettes), to "Riel's pitiful, insular, Metis kingdom" or "Van Horne's railway hooting in the night", in order to stress a point or paint a picture with the support of past Canadian history. Similarly, he may refer to contemporary events which will become past history, as in a poem such as "Canadian New Year Resolutions", (The Crafte so Longe to Lerne). This volume of poetry was published in 1959; so there are references in the poem mentioned to Purdy's impressions of situations and events of the time. Although the incidents and people referred to are no longer contemporary, the fact remains that they were when Purdy included them in his poem. Whatever his use of contemporary history, Purdy is always conscious through his use of it of his own Canadian identity. Occasionally he even experiences an elation and exuberance at being in Canada, such as occurred "coming back from Cuba in the summer of 1964, landing at Windsor Airport to go through customs, walking along a white corridor with other passengers and suddenly thinking: "Why, I'm home! This is Canada!"<sup>2</sup> Such elation and exuberance are tempered by irony and satire, as is especially evident in a poem such as "Canadian New Year Resolutions", but such tempering seems rather more indulgent than malicious.

The second major aspect of Purdy's sense of place and history, besides that of his relationship to Canada, is his relationship to cultural history

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<sup>1</sup>Murray Memorial Library, University of Saskatchewan, A.W. Purdy Literary Papers, ca. 1940-67. Box 5 MSS 4/6. Hereafter, references to the MSS, which are catalogued in thirteen boxes, will consist of the box number and the manuscript number where provided.

<sup>2</sup>Purdy, "North of Summer. Arctic Poems and Prose", p. 18.

in general. This second aspect balances the first and protects Purdy from being accused of indulging in nationalistic insularity which, as is pointed out by E.K. Brown in On Canadian Poetry or Wilfred Eggleston in The Frontier and Canadian Letters, can be a significant factor in <sup>retarding</sup> ~~the retardation~~ in the development of a national literature. By "cultural history" as it applies to Purdy and his poetry, I mean especially the history of the ancient civilizations of the Orient, the mid-East, and Greece and Italy, these civilizations seeming to be those which most interest Purdy. European civilization is less extensively used. Purdy has a certain way of relating <sup>gets</sup> ~~elements~~ of these civilizations so as to emphasize the common origins of modern cultures, including Canadian. He may refer to an era in ancient times, as in "Jade Stag" (Poems for All the Annettes), or to individuals and periods in European history in such a poem as "Notes on Painting", (The Cariboo Horses).

The way in which Purdy most effectively introduces this common inheritance is through his reference to forms of art and to myth. In The Cariboo Horses, for example, "Potter" is a good illustration of how Purdy juxtaposes ancient history and contemporary Canadian experience through a form of <sup>visual</sup> ~~art~~, in this case, that of pottery-making. The potter's craft is a remnant from that practised by a "saucer-eyed Sumerian" 5,000 years before him or by "an apprentice from Kiangsi province" in ancient China. Myths are also frequently introduced in Purdy's poetry in order to emphasize the association between the past and the present. Purdy's conception of this association is aptly expressed in a review that he wrote on Dorothy Reid's Tales of Nanabozho. Nanabozho was an Ojibway storyteller, of whom Purdy remarks, "Turn the Ojibway Storyteller around backwards and you find he's a white anthropologist, a man who also explains the origins and beginnings of human habitation".<sup>1</sup> The storyteller's explanations are in mythological terms, the traditional means by which primitive and ancient peoples recorded their beliefs and history. After a discussion of Nanabozho's tales, Purdy makes the following comment which I think clearly reveals the extent to which he relates past and present civilization.

Beyond the drawings [in Tales of Nanabozho] and the tales themselves, and in my own imagination I see the shadowy form of the old Ojibway Storyteller. He is standing by a campfire, and falls silent after a lapse of moments or years.... Beyond the brown Ojibway man I see Greek and Sumerian Storytellers. Beyond them again are other fires, and older trees in an earlier forest.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "Big Man of the Ojibways", Evidence (Winter, 1966), 135.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

This attitude to myth, combined with his use of forms of <sup>visual</sup> art, enable Purdy to communicate effectively his sense of place in relation to cultural history.

There is one other major aspect of Purdy's sense of place and history which I believe is sufficiently evident in his poetry to deserve individual attention at this point. It is, in some respects, related to each of the two previous aspects, but can be dealt with separately because it is distinctive. This aspect is Purdy's sense of place as acquired from historical people, Canadian or otherwise; or as acquired from contemporary people with whom he has come in contact or with whose lives he is familiar; or as expressed through his creation of fictional people whose characteristics and attitudes are synopses of those of contemporary people. He uses biographies of such people quite extensively. In The Cariboo Horses, for example, there is a poem entitled "Death of John F. Kennedy". In this poem, Purdy considers Kennedy and the assassin, Oswald, in relation to both the present and the past. Oswald, for example, becomes the

. . . prototype of the deranged assassin  
 He murdered Caesar and Lincoln  
 Archduke Ferdinand and all those titles  
 even attempted Hitler  
 and just the other day downtown  
 in a poolroom made a pass at me - (The Cariboo Horses, p. 80)

Kennedy, "a god of our time", and therefore supposedly "indestructible", "the man everybody knows", becomes a part of the whole history of mankind

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.

(The Cariboo Horses, p. 81)

Purdy's ability to suggest the conjunction of past and present is clearly demonstrated in such lines. Such a conjunction, however, did take Purdy several decades to evolve satisfactorily. What might be referred to as the beginning or exploratory stage in his poetry provides only vague suggestions of the way in which he was to juxtapose place and history to achieve the incisiveness and emotional intensity of "Death of John F. Kennedy" or the many other excellent poems in The Cariboo Horses and in North of Summer.

## Chapter 1: The Beginning or Exploratory Stage

In the beginning or exploratory stage in Purdy's poetical career, he had not yet determined upon the means of expression which would best suit his view of life. His early poetry, therefore, tends to follow traditional poetic conventions practised in Canada by such poets as Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, Charles G.D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Wilfred Campbell, all of whom Purdy was to dismiss later on in his career as members of the "schoolboy establishment".<sup>1</sup> During the 1930's and 1940's, however, Purdy himself belonged to this "establishment", at least in so far as he was an adherent of its poetic conventions. The eight hand-printed and hand-bound volumes of his pre-1944 poetry, as well as his first published book of poems, The Enchanted Echo, reflect the influence of the "establishment" on subject and technique in Purdy's poetry. Although he may have been susceptible to this influence, he failed to create the occasionally magnificent and memorable poems of which his mentors were capable. There is nothing in Purdy's early verse, for example, to equal the intensity of Lampman's "Heat", or the lyricism of Carman's "Low Tide on Grand Pre".

The following comment by A.J.M. Smith, included in a preface that he wrote for the 1936 anthology of mid-thirties Canadian poetry entitled New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors, applies to Purdy's pre-1944 poetry and that included in The Enchanted Echo, as well as to much of that of the "establishment":

The bulk of Canadian verse is romantic in conception and conventional in form. Its two great themes are Nature and Love- nature humanized, endowed with feeling, and made sentimental; love idealized, sanctified, and inflated. Its characteristic type is the lyric. Its rhythms are definite, mechanically correct, and obvious; its rhymes are commonplace.<sup>2</sup>

Smith's preface was ultimately rejected by E.J. Pratt, who is reported to have "objected to its contents", but although it may then have seemed to Pratt to be a harsh judgement, it now seems a just one, at least of Purdy's verse, if not of much of the "establishment's" as well.<sup>3</sup> Smith was a precursor member of the group of 1940's poets known as the "modernists", who reacted against "establishment" verse, but Purdy seems to have been unaffected by

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "The New Poetry and the Old", Box 5 MSS 4/6.

<sup>2</sup>A.J.M. Smith, "A Rejected Preface", in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, ed. by Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski (Toronto, 1967), 38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

this movement until the closing years of that decade. One reason for this late development may have been his participation in the War as a member of the R.C.A.F., a participation which removed him from contemporary literary life in Canada from 1939 until 1945. Purdy was probably unaware of the innovations in Canadian poetry which the modernists were promoting.

It was during his career as an airman, apparently a colorful one in which he was at one time "busted from N.C.O. rank" because "I didn't like other people telling me what to do", that Purdy collected and bound his "establishment" poetry and had The Enchanted Echo published.<sup>1</sup> This poetry is pastoral, lyrical, sentimental verse in which any personal sense of place and history which Purdy may have had then is well disguised by romantic cliché and ambiguity. As Smith commented in the preface referred to above, this type of verse concentrates on nature and love, of which the poem "Jug-o-rum", from a leather-bound volume entitled The Land of Over Yonder, and "By Lake Louise", selected from The Dream That Comes No More, are typical examples.<sup>2</sup> The center of interest in the former poem is a bullfrog, whose "throaty chuckle sounds" and "echoes from the swampland/ Jug-o-rum jug-o-rum". The poem seems ludicrous in its superficiality and sentimentality. The Purdy of 1967 who recreates with such vividness the landscape of the north was unable two or three decades ago to hint at a genuine landscape, let alone recreate it. The vague, lyrical conclusion of "Jug-o-rum" is indicative of this inability.

Is not old earth rejoicing  
And gladness reigns supreme  
To hear the woodland chorus  
To see her children dream.

(The Land of Over Yonder, p. 25)

"By Lake Louise" is hardly less superficial in conclusion and content. Neither the poet nor his lover seems real; certainly they are only remotely associated with a specific time and place, despite the implication that they sat "by Lake Louise" "three years ago" and that they have since been separated by the War. They are merely fanciful figments of a conventional imagination. Love is some kind of undefined emotion which endows the lover with "shining eyes", "beauty dear", and a smile which is a "mountain

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<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, "The Purdy Pigment", Time (Canada Edition), (May 28, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Poems cited from Purdy's pre-1944 poetry are included in the appendix.



tryst". Such endowments inspire the poet to "face the future unafraid", although he

... may not see that lake again  
When dawn in splendor runs  
Across the shining vault of space  
To whisper with the guns.

(The Dream That Comes No More, p. 52)

Poetry of this type comprises the bulk of Purdy's pre-1944 poetry and of The Enchanted Echo. Occasionally, there are suggestions of his eventual sense of place and history, but these tend to be vague and inconclusive. Usually, if he can be said to be aware of place at all in his early poetry, Purdy is aware of it negatively. Numerous "vagabond" poems, reminiscent of Carman, are to be found in each of the hand-produced volumes of poetry and The Enchanted Echo. Sometimes, as in a poem such as "Toronto Maple Leafs", (The Road to Barbary), Purdy identifies himself as a Canadian, but this identification is almost as superficial as the love and nature poems because it consists essentially of the monotonous repetition of names and actions which convey none of the excitement of a poem like "Hockey Players" in Cariboo Horses. "Toronto Maple Leafs" is suggestive of Purdy's future interest in a particular place, but at this beginning or exploratory stage, it is merely a superficial identification with an aspect of Canadian "culture".

References to Canadians of other cultures than Purdy's own are rare in the early poetry and marred by its characteristic superficiality. "The Eskimo Chieftain", in Songs of Twilight Land, for example, abounds in generalizations which prove Purdy's unfamiliarity with the North or with Eskimo culture. He does not, at this stage, capture in his poetry either the vitality of his own environment or that of another. Canadian historical references are equally rare and insubstantial as references to other cultures in Canada. They contribute little more than factual detail, whether they are references to contemporary history as in "Dunkirk", (The Dream That Comes No More), or references to past Canadian history, as in "The Shining Mountains", (Song of the Restless Ones). The latter poem, for example, ostensibly concerns Sieur de la Verendrye, "Pathfinder of the West", but the connection between the exploration of the Canadian west and La Verendrye and his party is lost in such lyricism as

The shining mountains far and dim  
 Uplift oh vagabond  
 And always in the dreamer's eyes  
 Are rising just beyond.

(Song of the Restless Ones, p. 66)

In his early poetry, Purdy tends to express his sense of place and history, such as it is at this stage, more in relation to what I have termed "cultural history" than in relation to a sense of place as a Canadian. As with the references to this latter sense of place, however, those dealing with the civilizations mentioned in the prologue are primarily objective and only vaguely suggestive of the association between the present and the past. Purdy seems to have no intense awareness of this association, for example, in a poem such as "Voice From the Past", included in The Enchanted Echo. He declares that he will "capture a rainbow/From Babylon's sunken shores" and "conjure a splendid palace", but such assertiveness is mere whimsy and lacks the perception which evolves later in Purdy's poetry when he juxtaposes the ancient and modern. Myth does play a relatively large role in Purdy's conception of the cultural history in this early poetry, but again, as in a poem such as the narrative Robin Hood, it is lyricized and a mere repetition of tales from folklore with no effort to make them exciting.

This lack of effort is evident as well in Purdy's early biographical poems. Biographies of historical figures such as "Prester John", (The Land of Over Yonder), or "Louis de Buade. Count Frontenac, Governor of New France", (Songs of Twilight Land), are romanticized, stilted versions of the lives of historical personages, and as such incite no interest in the reader. It is particularly in such poems that Purdy is most doggerel-like. A few verses from "Prester John" will illustrate this characteristic:

Prester John will live forever till  
 the setting sun is pearled  
 With the guarding gates of heaven at  
 the ending of the world.

(The Land of Over Yonder, p. 13)

It is fortunate that, following the publication of The Enchanted Echo, Purdy began the gradual evolution away from this kind of doggerel insipidity. Perhaps Purdy read Smith's 1939 admonishment to Canadian poets:

Set higher standards for yourself than the organized mediocrity of the authors associations dares to impose. Be traditional, catholic, and alive... Remember that poetry does not permit the rejection of every aspect of the personal except intuition and sensibility... It is an intelligent activity.<sup>1</sup>

In the miscellaneous sheets of poetry included in the unpublished manuscripts and in Purdy's next three volumes of poetry, that is Pressed on Sand, Emu, Remember!, and The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, published in 1955, 1956, and 1959, respectively, the kind of revitalization in Canadian poetry which Smith invited is definitely apparent in Purdy's work. Correspondingly, his sense of place and history becomes much more apparent. As Desmond Pacey remarks, "... by the mid-fifties he [Purdy] had gone a long way towards mastering a modern idiom and point of view."<sup>2</sup> In general, the "idiom" and "point of view" of the miscellaneous unpublished poems is similar to that of the published volumes. Because of this similarity and because there are approximately 500 of these miscellaneous poems, most of them undated and many of them duplicates of those which appear in the pre-1960 published volumes of poetry, I believe that a general discussion of those volumes will sufficiently indicate how Purdy's sense of place and history develops in the latter years of his beginning or exploratory stage as a poet.

By 1955, Purdy had turned bitterly on the "establishment" poets. In a review which appeared in The Canadian in December, 1965, Purdy is quoted as saying of The Enchanted Echo,

It's pretty bad. It's the only thing that has survived those far off days and it shouldn't.<sup>3</sup>

This remark is slightly dishonest, but then Purdy probably never expected that anyone would ever read his early poetry. Another remark he made in his unpublished review, "The New Poetry and the Old", is more incisive regarding the "establishment". Purdy quotes a poem written by James Reaney concerning this group:

Dear bad poets  
who wrote  
Early in Canada  
And never were of note.

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<sup>1</sup>A.J.M. Smith, "Canadian Poetry - A Minority Report", University of Toronto Quarterly (January, 1939), 138.

<sup>2</sup>Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, (Toronto, 1967), 245.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Lunn, "The Best Full-Time Poet in the Country", The Canadian (December 4, 1965), p. 17.

Purdy's comment on this judgement is,

But Reaney was wrong, for they are noted all the time, unkillable, infallible, and inescapable as the advertising jingle that sells Sweetheart Soap or Status Floor Wax, and deafens the unwary customer with repeated falsehood.<sup>1</sup>

This is a severe and sweeping condemnation of the poets from whom Purdy learned his craft, but it marks the extent to which his poetry changed between the publication of The Enchanted Echo and that of Pressed on Sand. He abandoned vague, sentimental generalization in favor of a more personal, unpretentious point of view, and also abandoned traditionally rhymed and rhythmed poetry in favor of free verse.

In a review of The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, Milton Wilson comments that:

Purdy has never been able to stand still, and while his poetry shows a good deal of interest in his personal past, and in the past of the race for that matter, it shows little respect for his past poems, or for the influences...that shaped them. He has picked up and discarded a good deal in his persistent attempt to find a special style of his own, and in The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, he is certainly closer to it than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

The three volumes of poetry representing the latter part of Purdy's exploratory stage reveal a persistent effort to find his voice. In discarding so abruptly his early poetry, he undermined his original poetic foundations and so had to construct new ones. Because he was not sure at first what materials to use, there is a tone of ambiguity and tentativeness in much of the three volumes being discussed. Purdy seems to have a sense of the past's elusiveness which he lacks in Cariboo Horses and North of Summer. This sense lends an air of gloom or sombreness to books in which appear such poems as "In Mid-Atlantic", (Emu, Remember!), "Pressed on Sand", (Pressed on Sand), and "Visitors", (The Crafte so Longe to Lerne). Purdy seems perplexed as to how to come to terms with the past. In "Pressed on Sand", for example, he says,

I see no hand in the hand shape pressed on sand;  
No men in the tide-walking town of time could  
Clamber from Phoenix flesh, or in any way extend...  
But the cupped pooled reservoir of their blood

(Pressed on Sand, p.13)

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "The New Poetry and the Old", Box 5, MSS 4/6.

<sup>2</sup>Milton Wilson, "The Crafte so Longe to Lerne", Canadian Forum (January, 1960) 263.

He had yet to learn how to see the "hand shape pressed on sand".

Not all of the poetry in Pressed on Sand, Emu, Remember!<sup>emb</sup>, and The Crafte so Longe to Lerne is ambiguous. There are poems in these volumes which indicate the evolution of the three aspects of Purdy's sense of place and history. There are, first of all, several poems in which Purdy's sense of place in relation to particular areas in Canada is obvious. Instead of the superficial kind of reference to parts of Canada which he practised in an early poem such as "By Lake Louise", Purdy is now more realistic about his reference to places, and is more concerned with the social and geographical atmosphere of the Canadian environments to which he refers than in exhibiting a flair for doggerel.

In "Freighter", for example, although there is a trace of uncertainty in this poem, as in the following lines,

And a poet loaned himself to a ship's purpose  
Reaching into the land mind and the land tide's fall,  
In a lunar synthesis of men and ships that I sailed once,  
And once forgot to sail.

(Pressed on Sand, p. 4)

Purdy conveys a vision of one aspect of life in Vancouver. (Having been a periodic resident of Vancouver between 1947 and 1967, Purdy is certainly qualified to evoke this city's moods.) The sluggish freighter, travelling towards the sea, "past the Lion's Gate", past watching totem poles on the shore, "the new paint on their faces cracked in a grin", past wives and girls "with pain/ Lessening into trivial loss", is a metaphor for the ships which "appear in life" and are "lost with Aldebaran when it's time for bed". There is an impression of timelessness about the bridge, the totems, and the women, and by implication, about Vancouver itself. Purdy is seeing the city from a new perspective. It is not a teeming waterfront city which the freighter passes, but rather a somnolent, lonely one. It is lost, like the ships of life, on an "empty ocean", "under the white riveted stars". Purdy does not, in "Freighter" and most others like it in Emu, Remember! and The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, identify himself so directly with place as he does in Cariboo Horses and North of Summer, but he is beginning to express at least some of his personal feeling for a particular area without going into a romantic ecstasy about it. He has yet to abandon the tendency to philosophize

which sidetracks him in "Freighter" and in such a poem as "News Item: 'Ice-boats nearly extinct in eastern Canada'", (Emu, Remember!).

There are two poems in The Crafte so Longe to Lerne which definitely foreshadow those in Cariboo Horses. One is "Short History of X County" and the other is "At Roblin Lake". In these poems, Purdy fulfils the intention he expresses in "Villanelle [plus 1]" when he says,

The verbs that itch like acid, nouns that ache  
On human skin and sometimes must explode.  
Embrace my verse, the language of the age -  
Live argot for the vermifuge of rage.

(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p. 5)

His language is that of the age, at least as he interprets it. He is unpretentious, ironic, and in control of his material. Both poems referred to above originate from the country north of Belleville with which Purdy is so familiar. ("At Roblin Lake" is a direct progenitor of the Roblin Lake poems in Cariboo Horses.) "X County" is probably a thin disguise for <sup>Hastings</sup> ~~Prince Edward~~ County, in which Roblin Lake and Ameliasburg are situated. In "Short History of X County", Purdy's sense of the recent past in Canada and its relation to the present is clearly brought out.

He regretfully recalls that only "fifty years back", his ancestors or other pioneers industriously cleared and worked "those thousand/ Bits and pieces of land", and "kept bees, boys, grew daughters". Into this pastoral idyll breaks the rich M.L.A. from Toronto who simultaneously buys up all the bits and pieces and all the votes that go with them. His ownership marks the decline of "X County", its once cleared land "Going to woods and weeds and long/ Foreshadowing shapelessness". Purdy seems to indicate in these verses a latent antagonism towards the city and city-dwellers which is also evident in Cariboo Horses and North of Summer. He is scornful of the M.L.A.'s superficial interest in the rural setting and mocks his brief visit to the farm:

... coming for childhood cure  
For ma - nostalgia - half an hour  
Later jumps into car and flees  
As from dead love affair or a murder ...

(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p.4)

Purdy realistically acknowledges that nostalgia for the frontier has little credence in the contemporary world, and in the concluding stanza of the poem questions his own sincerity regarding "X County" and the past it evokes.

This I say, since the manner  
Of telling has made me guilty:  
Holding the mirror up, flaunting  
Mock morals and dropping acid  
On reputations - at least before this I  
Was innocent - before that I wonder.

(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p. 4)

Purdy is refreshingly frank in such poetry and even more so in such lines as these from "At Roblin Lake",

The pike and bass are admirably silent  
About such things, and keep their  
Erotic moments a mensa et thoro  
In cold water. After that I suppose  
Comes the non-judicial separation.

(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p. 17)

It is in such poems as "Short History of X County" and "At Roblin Lake" that Purdy's sense of place as a Canadian becomes more definite. In Pressed on Sand, Emu, Remember!, and The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, there are few indications of his future interest in Canadians of other cultures, except in the poem in Pressed on Sand entitled "Onomatopoeic People", or in the Canadian historical background, but as suggested by the Ryerson Press release issued on the publication of The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, Purdy was beginning at that time to emphasize his Canadian identity. The press release states that

Mr. Purdy believes that Canadian poetry has a national identity. He is impatient with those who would think our poetry is a pale colonial offshoot. He claims that neither Yeats nor Eliot has the flavour and tang which is distinctively and unmistakably Canadian. He offers these poems as evidence of this, and of the present-day ferment he shares.<sup>1</sup>

Purdy's sense of place in relation to cultural history and his use of historical or fictional biographies also becomes more explicit in Pressed on Sand, Emu, Remember! and The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, than in the earlier poetry. There are several poems in each volume which indicate these two aspects of Purdy's sense of place and history. "Far Traveller", for example,

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<sup>1</sup>Ryerson Press Release, July 29, 1959. Box 5 MSS 4/6.

in Pressed on Sand, or "The Cave Painters", in Emu, Remember!, or "From the Chin P'Ing Mei" and "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'", in The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, all reflect Purdy's cultural interest. Such poems as "Mary the Allan", Pressed on Sand, "Elegy for a Grandfather", Emu, Remember!, and "About Pablum, Teachers, and Malcolm Lowry", The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, are examples of his use of biographies. Unlike the early poems which deal with these aspects of Purdy's sense of place and history, the poems above provide a much more subjective view of the relationship between the past and the present.

Purdy would have been much more effective if he had been as explicit in the pre-1955 poetry as he is in the cultural and biographical poems in the later exploratory poetry. "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'", for example, juxtaposes the ancient and the modern in an explicitly satirical fashion which attracts attention and reveals Purdy's intense dislike of pedantry. Archaeologists, "the code breakers", propose scholarly interpretations of the Cretan and Mycenaean artifacts which to Purdy seem absurd and unrealistic because these interpretations disregard the element of human fallacy. Purdy indicates his scorn by translating the archaeological jargon into casual comment which reduces the magnificent to the ordinary:

It turns out Minos was an expatriate  
Greek, and thought to hell with hiero-  
Glyphic symbols; brought in the smith Daedalus  
(A bad mistake re Pasiphae's morals)  
To promote enosis, Greek investment, and Linear B -  
(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p. 16)

This passage also indicates Purdy's use of myth in reference to ancient civilization. The ancient past in this poem, and in the others like it which I have mentioned, is not a remote and somewhat terrifying concept to Purdy as it tends to be in his earlier poetry. By referring to the past in contemporary terms, he does away with this concept and shows himself much more at ease with his medium.

"About Pablum, Teachers, and Malcolm Lowry" is also successful because Purdy balances the ancient and the modern through contemporary, irreverent jargon. Lowry, whom Purdy imagines to be a modern Proteus

... who struggled against  
His own beliefs  
With agonized reverence,  
At 'Quauhnhuac' in Mexico,  
At Katchewanook and Port Moody; (The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, pp. 7-8)



is also a "paleozoic blunder". Here Purdy is mixing both the scientific, the archaeological, and the human, civilized past in a modern context. Lowry, an expatriate Englishman who lived for fifteen years in a shack on Vancouver Island and who died in 1959, is for Purdy the epitome of the wisdom and truth which is an inherent, timeless element of human civilization. Purdy believes that it is essential that the modern young be taught the wisdom and truth possessed by men like Lowry,

To teach them -  
The savage, sensitive young,  
The tyro Caesars, embryo Alexanders

...

To teach them -  
The youthful aborigines,  
That wisdom is knowledge with death in it;  
That verisimilitude is not verity

(The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, p. 7)

As in "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'", Purdy's evocation of past and present in this biography of Lowry shows the insight into the past-present relationship of which Purdy is capable. With the publication of The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, he completed the beginning or exploratory stage in his development. He had now, "... a new technique, a vision, a gift for making art out of matters of fact", a technique which had to undergo one further process of refinement before his sense of place and history became truly essential to his poetry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Dudek, "Ou Sont les Jeunes?", The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, ed. by Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski (Toronto, 1967), 142.

The intermediate step between Purdy's beginning or exploratory poetry and The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer is represented by The Blur in Between, published in 1962 and subtitled "Poems 1960-61", and Poems for All the Annettes, also published in 1962. In these books, such poems as "Pause" and "Winter Walking", (The Blur in Between), or "Archaeology of Snow" and "Mind Process re a Faucet", (Poems for All the Annettes), reflect a new confidence which suggests that "the craft so long to learn" is gradually being mastered by Purdy. He himself believes that it was with the publication of Poems for All the Annettes that he "came into stride".<sup>1</sup> Despite this confidence, The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes are flawed and experimental. A creative writer, if he is not to stagnate, must naturally be in a constant state of experimentation, and so produce vigorous art. As Eli Mandel states in his preface to Poetry 62:

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.<sup>2</sup>

The poetry in The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes "shatters limitations", but its liveliness is flawed by an occasional ambiguity or superfluity, especially in The Blur in Between. That title seems aptly chosen. Such poems as "The Death of Animals" and "Decree Nisi" are neither excellent nor mediocre, but blurred and incoherent. In "The Death of Animals", for example, such diverse elements as "a fox in deep burrow", a deer who "stood by mate", an exploding tree, suburbanites "rinsing their unsaid thoughts/ In javex" have "no connection", as Purdy suggests in the final stanza of the poem. "What's the point then?" he asks, and appropriately replies, "None at all, really." This answer applies to several poems or parts of poems in The Blur in Between.

Purdy is trying to seem erudite and enigmatic in poems such as those mentioned above. He uses extensively polysyllabic, pretentious words and phrases such as "rubric fur", ("The Death of Animals"); "eyebrow cicatrice", ("Twin Heads"); and "callipygous whores", ("Towns").

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<sup>1</sup>Sheila Stone, "Paris not for Purdy. Baffin Island Bid by Bard", Montreal Star (July 10, 1965), 22.

<sup>2</sup>Eli Mandel, "Preface to Poetry 62", in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, ed. by Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski (Toronto, 1967), 199.

Equally pretentious are such verses as these referring to Montreal and also taken from "Towns";

City of poets with enormous egos,  
And the high wild courting yard of the mountain...  
Your soul is schizoid and your winter like  
Frost bitten leprosariums.

(The Blur in Between, p. 9)

Such verses are labored and clumsy. Purdy is much more effective when he suggests the same kind of deflation in a less superficially sophisticated manner. He is wearing a mask of sophistication in The Blur in Between which prevents honest expression of his impressions and ideas because it distracts him. The Purdy who responds so naturally and personally to people, places, and incidents in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer shows through in The Blur in Between, especially in a poem such as "Bullfrogs", but usually the spontaneity of such a poem or the sensitivity of a poem such as "Kispiox Indian Village" is either lacking in The Blur in Between or else buried in contrived, stilted words or phrases. Ambiguity is the usual result. It is a different ambiguity from that of Purdy's early poetry, where he is also wearing a mask and hiding his personal responses. The mask in this transitional poetry is different in that there is potential behind it whereas there is none behind the early mask.

While Poems for All the Annettes, on the whole, is less ambiguous than The Blur in Between, it too is flawed and ultimately less satisfying than either The Cariboo Horses or North of Summer. Phyllis Webb is correct, I think, when she remarks that Poems for All the Annettes suffers from "clutter". This flaw is evident in both the beginning or exploratory poetry and The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer, as well, but much less so in the latter two books than in the exploratory and transitional poetry. As Miss Webb explains in her review of Poems for All the Annettes,

Many of these poems need trimming. In this book, unlike The Crafte so Longe to Lerne, the poems are open; he [Purdy] is working in the "field", and the field invites the casual thought, the extra adjective, the self-indulgent deception. The field ought to be magnetic, but it ought not to be too attractive.<sup>1</sup>

The poetry of Poems for All the Annettes, as Miss Webb suggests, is definitely "open", if by that term she means that it is diverse. George Bowering

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<sup>1</sup>Webb, "Magnetic Field", Canadian Literature, No. 15 (1963), 80.



Because of the ambiguity and superfluity in much of The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes, Purdy's sense of place and history tends to be somewhat vague, although it is more evident than in the pre-1960 poetry. He is more interested in communicating his own everyday experiences and impressions than in such books as The Crafte so Longe to Lerne and Emu, Remember!, but he is still less successful than he is in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer. Purdy's subjectivity would be more obvious if it were not for the flaws in the transitional poetry. An examination of it reveals that most poems are expressed as if Purdy himself were speaking or acting, not a stand-in. In "The Old Woman and the Mayflowers", for example, (The Blur in Between), Purdy associates himself and the old woman with Ameliasburg Township and allies himself with the township's inhabitants by saying that "We think it was Mueller's goat" who had eaten the dozen or~~so~~ mayflowers clutched in the woman's hand when she died. However, because he tends to become involved in the verbal gymnastics of a poem such as "And We Shall Build Jerusalem - In Montreal", (The Blur in Between), or the ambiguity of ~~of~~ a poem such as "Courtier's Soliloquoy", (Poems for All the Annettes), his subjectivity becomes obscured. As Eli Mandel remarks in a review of Poems for All the Annettes,

There is no still centre here and certainly no unifying pattern within which multifarious experience can take on meaning. Purdy's is a book in which intelligence wars with the senses, desire and restraint clash with ear-splitting force, and syntax threatens at any moment to tear itself to pieces simply out of spite at its own difficulties. Everywhere there are patterns which almost take shape, but refuse to.<sup>1</sup>

This remark is applicable to The Blur in Between, too, and indicates the difficulties involved in discussing this transitional poetry.

The significant pattern which I believe "almost takes shape" in this poetry is that of Purdy's sense of place and history as it appears in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer. Because he shows more interest here in communicating his everyday personal experiences, he seems more conscious of his Canadian identity and~~of~~ of the relationship between the present and the past. The various aspects of this sense are much in evidence although in varying degrees. The poem which is central to the expression of this increased consciousness of place and history is

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<sup>1</sup>Eli Mandel, "Turning New Leaves", The Canadian Forum, (March, 1963), 279.

"Archaeology of Snow", in Poems for All the Annettes. It is an extraordinarily fragmented poem, but this fragmentation serves to emphasize Purdy's search for form and meaning in the present, which is fragmented and disorganized, while maintaining awareness of the past. Like the impression of Anna's buttocks in the snow, "printed there/ like a Cambrian trilobite", form seems impermanent and illusory:

next day gone  
gone next day  
to Melbourne Vienna or that place I forget  
on de Bullion Street and get lost  
looking and can't find any more and go home

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 15)

Meaning had been making love with Anna, but once the experience is complete and past, the poet has lost that meaning. His efforts to restore it are desperate and as hopeless as it is to expect snow to remain frozen. The poet can pretend that his pathetic efforts to "make repairs" and "fill in the melted places" of the "eroded and almost erased mannequin" have a chance of success, but desperate pretense fails.

Yet the poet knows that somewhere in the rapidly fading illusionary form which he imagines to exist in the snow and which joins his sexual experience with Anna and his present isolation, "the form is HERE". This assertion suggests Purdy's preoccupation with the present and his efforts to define it for himself and find his place in it. At the same time, he senses that "there's no end of humans" and that the human race is "continuous" and endlessly "sub-divided":

As if we were all immortal  
in some way I've not fathomed  
as if all we are  
co-exists in so many forms  
we encounter the entire race  
of men just by being

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 18)

This awareness is at once an "agony" and a "grandeur". Significantly, in "Archaeology of Snow" it is the notion of grandeur with which Purdy ends the poem. This choice of ending seems to confirm that Purdy is more intrigued than repelled by the past-present relationship and his place in it.

My god what an agony to be sub-divided like  
this and to be continuous and to be everywhere  
like a bunch of children's blocks  
disappearing inside each other my god  
and not being also migawd  
also what grandeur

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 18)

It is this very sense of grandeur, although rather awkwardly expressed in the above lines, which so impressed Purdy in the North and which he expressed so vividly in North of Summer.

"Archaeology of Snow" is one of the relatively few outstanding poems in The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes but it is particularly significant because it is a landmark in the evolution of Purdy's sense of place and history. It does not reflect increasing effort in his poetry to communicate his ordinary personal experience and his corresponding consciousness of himself in relation to Canada and the contemporary world in general, but it is in attempting to express his sense of the past-present relationship that Purdy develops the ability to evoke the mood or portray the physical features of a narrow geographic area and its inhabitants. "Archaeology of Snow" fixes the past-present relationship more firmly in Purdy's mind. He is thus free to explore and express a more specific sense of place and history. Only a few poems in the transitional poetry concern a specific place, but it is significant that there are more of these poems here than in the pre-1960 poetry, and that there are to be yet more poems like them in the subsequent two books of poetry. The poems of specific place in The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes are similar to "Short History of X County" and "At Roblin Lake", mentioned in Chapter 1. Such poems as "Negroes on St. Antoine", in Poems for All the Annettes, and "Hazelton, B.C.", in The Blur in Between, indicate more clearly than in the previous poetry Purdy's familiarity with and attachment to particular places. ("Hazelton, B.C." is a direct result of Purdy's 1960 visit to that town and the surrounding area.)

"Negroes on St. Antoine", for example, is a poem similar to "Freighters", in Pressed on Sand, in that it evokes a particular mood of a city, Montreal this time instead of Vancouver. However, it is a better poem because it does not lapse into uncertainty. This is also true of the other poems of specific place in the transitional poetry. Purdy knows now how to express effectively his feeling for a place without being vaguely philosophical. Montreal, in "Negroes on St. Antoine", is a "stopped city", as indifferent to the human elements composing it, as the "non-involved mountain", Mount Royal, in its midst. On the mountain, "human history is meaningless",

although it does not seem so to Purdy when he places himself in the context of St. Antoine Street itself, where

swaying boy forgets  
                                   what century  
                                   it is and dances -

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 19)

and where

... there's a blackness under the sun  
 where tracks cross and glum groceries are molars  
 set in slums that no forceps budge -

(Poems for All the Annettes, p.19)

This "blackness under the sun" is one aspect of Montreal. Such an immense and cosmopolitan city, however, has many aspects. Purdy suggests this diversity through the juxtaposition of the particular, the Negroes on St. Antoine, with the general, Montreal as seen from the "admirable stillness" of Mount Royal. There where "no human heartbeat" reaches, the poet finds himself recalling past and present history, both that of his own environment and that of foreign environments. He thinks of Israeli gunners on the Sinai Peninsula, Spartacus staring across the Straits of Messina, Lumumba dead in "coppery Katanga province", or "a janitor on St. Antoine picked up for questioning". Montreal's cosmopolitanism inspires a similarly cosmopolitan view of life beyond the city and beyond Canada as well. "Negroes on St. Antoine" is an admirable expression of this cosmopolitanism.

As in the pre-1960 poetry, the transitional poetry contains few poems relating to other cultural groups in Canada than Purdy's own, but those that there are confirm Purdy's ability to place himself in another cultural context. "In Ellesmereland", in The Blur in Between, is interesting to compare with the North of Summer poems. Although it does communicate one aspect of Eskimo life, that of hunting and trade, "In Ellesmereland" is less satisfying than such poems as "Two Hunters" and "Eskimo Hunter", because it is not a result of Purdy's personal experience in the Arctic. Instead of Purdy narrating the poem and presenting his impressions directly, he has the Eskimo hunter, who refers to himself as "Someone", express his thoughts as he waits for white traders to meet him "on the edge of the bad ice" and trade him "sharp knives and wood/ for sleds" for pelts. Because the interest of the poem is thus removed one step from Purdy himself, it is not as memorable



as the North of Summer poems. Purdy is almost always best when he imposes no barriers between himself and his material.

Since this is so, such poems as "Kispiox Indian Village", (The Blur in Between), and "Remains of an Indian Village", (Poems for All the Annettes), in which Purdy speaks for himself, seem to be more natural than "In Ellesmereland". The former poems both concern the plight of the Indian as a member of a dead or dying culture. Purdy is romantically nostalgic and regretful in these poems as he was in "Onomatopoeic People". In "Kispiox Indian Village", for example, he is looking at a present-day village and imagining the inevitable deterioration of this village and its inhabitants from the place both once held.

I am able to see them  
only a moment passing  
as mothers and children  
and very old women  
on the roads of the world...  
Leaving totems by the river:  
most of them will be gone  
in two or three years  
of that direction

(The Blur in Between, p. 11)

The Indians and their culture, Purdy seems to reflect nostalgically, are "moving with the current", and like the fisherman he sees on the river, are obscured from vision by darkness, in other words by the passage of time. Purdy sympathizes with and mourns the degeneration of the Indian culture, but he is powerless to prevent it and so must regretfully see it fade from his view just as it is fading from its past glory.

"Remains of an Indian Village" is somewhat more specific than "Kispiox Indian Village", but it too mourns the degeneration of the Indian culture. Purdy includes such verses as the following in order to indicate the contemporary decay evident in this culture:

Underfoot rotten boards, forest rubble, bones...  
Animals were here after the plague,  
after smallpox to make another ending -  
For the tutelary gods of decay  
acknowledge aid from any quarter...

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 57)

Purdy is both attracted to and dismayed by this decay. While he regrets the passing of the traditional Indian culture, he is also impressed by the conjunction of the past and the present in this culture. Seeing Indian children running into the forest, he thinks of wood violets and trilliums of a hundred years ago "blooming and vanishing". He senses the connection between these ephemeral flowers and "toppling and returning" Indian villages and their inhabitants. The flowers have witnessed both the rise and fall of the Indian in Canada, and mark the continuity in which the Indian exists. This continuity is an archaeological one.

Standing knee-deep in the joined earth  
 of their weightless bones,  
 in the archaeological sunlight,  
 in the trembling voltage of summer,  
 in the sunken reservoirs of rain,  
 standing waist-deep in the criss-cross  
 rivers of shadows,  
 in the village of nightfall,  
 the hunters silent and women  
 bending over dark fires,  
 I hear their broken consonants -

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 58)

It is, however, Purdy's sense of place and history as, first of all a modern man, and secondly, as a Canadian, which predominates in the transitional poetry. As I have already suggested, this sense is often obscured by ambiguous references, but it is discernible nevertheless. Such poems in The Blur in Between as "Twin Heads", "Gawd, the Eumenides!", or "Night Song for a Woman"; or poems in Poems for All the Annettes such as "One of his Mistresses is Found Missing", "Mind Process re a Faucet", or "Poem for One of the Annettes", all indicate Purdy's increased concern with his personal world. As George Bowering says, Purdy's diversity of material is essentially not diverse, but rather it

... is actually a process of embracing things that happen to him, and putting out a response via a poem. This, too, is why he does not go out of his community, seeking large game on the world front; he is not interested because these things have not made themselves interesting to him.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bowering, "For Myself Continuous Discovery", Box 5, MSS 4/6.

In The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes, it becomes clearer than in the pre-1960 poetry that Purdy is interested primarily in those things which have "made themselves interesting to him". In other words, it is his personal response which comes to be most important.

Since he is a product of this century and of the particular Canadian environment in which he has spent all of his fifty years, it is natural that Purdy should come to emphasize his sense of place in contemporary Canada. The things which interest him are contemporary. As he declared in a review of Leonard Cohen's writings in 1964,

...I am aware of something common to much modern verse in Canada. Not just disillusion and gamey decadence, but the present fact that all good things in life are done and past. A longing for what was, the sense of inadequacy in what is.... Once we were happy, now we are not. Rather ridiculous. Also completely ruinous for any present content.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, by the time the transitional poetry appears, Purdy has chosen to reject this attitude which he senses to exist in Canadian poets such as Cohen. Purdy's attitude is one of "present content". As S.G. Mullins remarks in a review of Poems for All the Annettes,

Mr. Purdy is contemporary, not only in idiom and form but also in his references to the world in which he lives. He has that great poetic gift, the eye for what is essential, for what is characteristic of life today.<sup>2</sup>

Because he has this eye for what is "characteristic of life today", Purdy makes little reference to past Canadian history in the transitional poetry. The only poem in which this history is significant is "On Canadian Identity. A Sentimental Monograph for the Daughters of the Empire". In this ironic poem, Purdy incorporates his sense of place as a contemporary Canadian with his sense of Canada's past history. He is perfectly well aware that he cannot explicitly define "Canadian identity". All he can do is suggest characteristics of the land, people, and history of Canada. Labels, definitions, and comparisons with other environments such as that of the United States, are irrelevant and do not solve the puzzle of "Canadian identity". As Purdy points out, it is easy to choose what seem to be typical elements of Canada and take them to be a definition.

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "Leonard Cohen. A Personal Look", Canadian Literature (Winter, 1965), 10.

<sup>2</sup>S.G. Mullins, "Poems for All the Annettes", Culture (July, 1963), 196.

Names if you like:  
 Illecillewaet and Medicine Hat,  
 Winnipeg's prairie sound -

...  
 History if you like:  
 Verendrye-Moses glimpsing something wonderful,  
 mountains in the sky he thought were legendary

...  
 Legends? oh, they're here alright,  
 ready to shine from the tv screen  
 for sweet profit's sake.

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 47)

But these elements mean nothing. Neither are labels such as "The high school land", "a dull people", or "a bridge between old land and new" any better. What then is "Canadian identity"? Realistically, Purdy never answers the question because it is irrelevant to begin with. Identity is expressed in several ways, as Purdy himself expresses it in his poetry, but it cannot be defined because it is an inherent and intuitive part of every human being living in the country;

The worth of life being not necessarily noise  
 we kept unusual silence, and then cried out  
 one word which has never yet been said -

(Poems for All the Annettes, p. 47)

It is according to the amount of expression given one's sense of place and history as a Canadian that one can be "identified" as such. Purdy's consideration of the question of Canadian <sup>identity</sup> seems to indicate conclusively that such a sense of place and history is an immutable part of his poet consciousness. "On Canadian Identity" juxtaposes past and present, but ends in the latter time. Purdy implies that there is "one word which has never yet been said". In the transitional poetry, but more especially in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer, he draws nearer to the expression of that word.

In his concern with the contemporary in the transitional poetry, Purdy makes only occasional references to cultural history. This aspect of his sense of place and history is more developed in subsequent poetry. However, there are a few poems in the transitional poetry which indicate his conception of this history, "Scholarly Disagreements", (The Blur in Between), and "Jade Stag", (Poems for All the Annettes), being the most significant.

The first poem is similar to "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'", (The Crafted so Long to Lerne), in its satire of archaeological pedantry.

Menes founded the 1st dynasty of Egypt  
in 3000 B.C. - first civilization  
in the world, an archaeologist says.  
Another denies heatedly:  
The first Sumerian dynasty was 3400 B.C.

(The Blur in Between, p. 15)

"Leave them to their quarrel", Purdy advises. He proposes that instead of being distracted by the pedantic, one should be aware of the continuity in which man exists. There is a "way of looking at time in the face" so that "not a moment seems to have passed". The statue of a priestess brandishing a snake is as much an expression to Purdy of the affirmation of life as it was in the age when the statue was created. Similarly in "Jade Stag", the sculpture of the stag, representing "piled dimensions of time" through which the stage has bounded "... from month to month/ and into another century", affirms life in the present as well as in the past. In the present, Purdy says of the stag and its sculptor, "We join them... for the remainder of the journey". He goes beyond the rancor of the archaeologists' world, beyond even "nebular time and space". Thus, as in "On the Decipherment of 'Linear B'", by referring to the past in contemporary terms, Purdy incorporates it into his contemporary awareness.

As works of art perpetuate the affirmation of life and of human continuity, so The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer perpetuate the affirmation of life which is expressed in The Blur in Between and Poems for All the Annettes. The ambiguity and superfluity which mars these books is, on the whole, absent in the other two books. In them, Purdy seems to have followed the advice he gave in the review on Leonard Cohen referred to earlier. Towards the end of the review, he says,

What am I going to do with my awareness, the mixed curse and blessing of sentience. Yes, live - but it includes things I haven't even thought of yet. It also includes the various dictionary emotions, including a negligible amount of guilt. What then is important?

Perhaps to take a new and searching look at people, re-defining what they are as against what they were previously thought to be. Man himself is the unknown animal. We know more about nuclear physics, crop rotation and fertilizers than we do about our own nature and

potentialities. As well, we might look for a new road on which mankind can travel. The one he's on now appears to be heading straight for the Bomb. Science, politics, philosophy, and something like religion are all mixed up with the new poetry.<sup>1</sup>

What Purdy does with his "awareness" is to refine it and apply it to the "re-definition" of people which he proposes in the above statement. Actually, it is not so much a re-definition which is apparent in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer as it is a deeper understanding of the role of place and history in human existence.

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, ibid., 16.

The Cariboo Horses, for which Purdy won the 1965 Governor General's Award for poetry, has little of the ambiguity and superfluity which marred the transitional poetry. It reveals a deeper understanding of place and history than his preceding poetry. Edward A. Lacey is correct, I think, in commenting that this book is not Purdy's breakthrough to greatness, but it is one in which he has found a suitable and natural way to express himself.<sup>1</sup> With the publication of The Cariboo Horses in 1965, Purdy joined the ranks of the major poets writing in Canada today. One poem, "The Country North of Belleville", won the President's Medal from the University of Western Ontario for the best single poem ~~written by a Canadian~~ <sup>submitted for the competition</sup> in 1964. It is only one of many excellent poems in The Cariboo Horses. Purdy knows exactly who he is, where he is, and how he is related to both past and present history. As Robert Weaver says, "Purdy is an intensely native poet in the sense that Pratt and Birney were native poets, but allied with the wide range of experience of his own country is a poetic temperament that is contemporary, idiomatic, and North American ....."<sup>2</sup> Like the "rainbow tribes of sunfish", "Cro-Magnon impressarios" in "Sunday Swim", Purdy is "gasping through snorkel centuries in/ drunken dreams and' mirages of timeless lakes", but he is simultaneously "racing" in the "dazzling water" of the present.

Purdy is not as "aggressive and pro-Canadian" as the garrulous hunter from New York in "Homo Canadensis", but he is more candidly Canadian in The Cariboo Horses than in all his previous poetry. Almost every poem reveals this identity. There are some poems, such as "Necropsy of Love" and "Optimist", which are cosmopolitan and universal in theme, but in general The Cariboo Horses is a distinctively Canadian book by a distinctively Canadian poet. One can see this first of all in Purdy's reference to and description of specific places in Canada, particularly Ameliasburg and Roblin Lake, both of which are situated in Ameliasburg Township in Ontario. His reference to this area is so extensive in The Cariboo Horses that it prompted Earle Birney to write an ironic poem entitled "In Purdy's Ameliasburg", in which he

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<sup>1</sup>Edward A. Lacey, "Poetry Chronicle", Edge (Fall, 1966), 105.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Weaver, "North of Summer. A 'Festival II' Centennial Program Proposal", Box 11 MSS.

attempts to understand what it is that is Ameliasburg to Purdy.<sup>1</sup>

Purdy alludes to Ameliasburg Township physically, as in "Snow at Roblin Lake"; recalls specific impressions or experiences he has had while living in the area, as in "I Think It Was Wednesday"; and even provides historical background, as in "Music on a Tombstone". Whatever his approach, he is always aware of the remoteness of the area. As he says in "One Rural Winter", "what could be more remote than a burg/ named after someone/ named Amelia?" (p. 67) Because of this remoteness and the opportunity for reflection that it provides, Purdy's sense of place and history is intensified. He senses the connection between modern Ameliasburg and the past from which it developed. In a discarded poem entitled "Camelot in Ameliasburg" Purdy expresses his sense of historical progression in Ameliasburg Township. This poem is similar in theme to the Ameliasburg poems in The Cariboo Horses. Such lines as the following, which describe the architecture of the houses in Ameliasburg, indicate Purdy's sense of past history in the town;

But they're nondescript  
                   mongrels with building permits  
 leashed to now in triplicate  
 And yet I see in each one the vestigial  
                   peeled logs of the past<sup>2</sup>

A fugitive from the cities, Purdy is "leashed to now" in Ameliasburg Township, like the very houses there.

He has a sense of place and history in a city, but it is not as intense as it is in Ameliasburg Township. Although he has spent much of his life in such cities as Montreal and Vancouver, Purdy's poetry and the fact that from 1941 until this spring he has owned a home at Ameliasburg, suggest that he is happier in a rural environment than in an urban one. He has a sense of place and history in urban centres, as in such centres as those in "Towns", (The Blur in Between), but he also has the attitude referred to in a poem by Gwendolyn MacEwan. In "The Winemaker", she mentions that when Purdy comes to a city such as Toronto from "a little rural cottage", he has a "can't stand the place, just passing through" attitude.<sup>3</sup>

Purdy seems repelled by the isolation experienced in a city. In the postscript to North of Summer, he remarks that he has felt lonelier in such

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<sup>1</sup>Earle Birney, "In Purdy's Ameliasburg", The Tamarack Review (Spring, 1966), 36. ff. appendix.

<sup>2</sup>Purdy, Box 8 MSS 4/8. ff. appendix.

<sup>3</sup>Gwendolyn MacEwan, A Breakfast for Barbarians (Toronto, 1966), 38.



cities as Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, "where people feel sheer desperation at times, both economic and personal", than he felt in the Arctic, or than, presumably, he feels in Ameliasburg Township.<sup>1</sup> There he is at one with his environment, as he suggests in these lines from "Camelot in Ameliasburg",

I see myself in mirrors and cities  
Come here to find moss growing on  
shingled roofs (bryophyta) and trilliums  
(lilliaceae) each an identity in which  
my own is lost but  
                    our etymology is all green<sup>2</sup>

In an urban environment, as Purdy suggests in "Potter", (The Cariboo Horses), people are too worried about such mundane affairs as hurrying home before the stores close, "in this century or another one", to feel at one with their environment.

One way in which Purdy establishes his sense of communion with Ameliasburg Township is by associating himself with both its past and its present history. In "Music on a Tombstone", for example, he gives a condensed, laconic version of the origin and growth of Ameliasburg. The note he attaches to the end of the poem spoils it slightly because, although it adds relevant biographical detail, the poem is complete without it. "Roblin's Mills" accomplishes more effectively what this note attempts to do. In that poem, Purdy brings the history of Ameliasburg, formerly known as "Roblin's Mills", up to date. The grist mill built by Owen Roblin in 1842 and rented in 1914 to a man named Taylor, eleven years after Roblin's death, was, Purdy relates, "torn down last year". The mill was a material reminder to Purdy of frontier days in the settlement on Roblin Lake, but its removal does not destroy his sense of the past's influence on the present. He imagines old Owen Roblin, for example, and how he would have stood

sturdily arrogant  
                    and spat on the ground  
and stamped away so hard the flour  
dust floated out of his clothes  
like a white nimbus round his body  
beneath the red scorn -

(p. 71)

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, North of Summer (Toronto, 1967), 82.

<sup>2</sup>Appendix.

This thought brings Purdy to the present, and to the "old ones" now in Ameliastburg, descendants of Roblin and the Marthas and Tabithas, Hiram and Josephs "stemmed in the valley graveyard", (p. 70). Their conversations, and Purdy's own, float by on the village party line, seeming suspended in time, "lost in the 4th concession/ or dimension of whatever", (p. 71).

This same sensation of time's being suspended is expressed in poems which describe the physical appearance of Ameliastburg Township. In "Snow at Roblin Lake", for example, after thirty minutes of snowfall ". . . the world is lost/ on a lazy nebular dead end street", (p. 41). Simultaneously, Roblin Lake takes on cosmic proportions independent of all boundaries, regional, provincial, or national, or even archaeological and mythological.

My little lake is not a lake  
but endless ocean where I'll fish  
some cosmic Tonga Trench and take  
Leviathan on a bent pin -

(p. 41)

Despite this time suspension, Purdy knows that his place is in the present. When the "wind grabs the world around the equator", he says in "Winter at Roblin Lake", "I am most thankful then for knowing about/ the little gold hairs on your belly", (p. 59). In "I Think It Was Wednesday", he imagines that instead of walking the two dusty miles to Ameliastburg, he is walking to Alexandria and being jostled en route by Euclid and Ptolemy. Yet, "we're here", he realizes,

pinned down by the definite  
held like a bug in the finite  
chased by points and limits and dimensions  
walking the long road to a village

(p. 100)

Purdy lives in "the world of now", as he says in the review of Leonard Cohen's writings to which I referred in Chapter 2. This world is the real one where people "go to work on a streetcar, say, and eat jam sandwiches for lunch in a quiet factory-corner away from the machines".<sup>1</sup> While he enjoys contemplating Ameliastburg's past, Purdy acknowledges that he is "pinned down by the definite", the world of here and now with which he is personally familiar.

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "Leonard Cohen. A Personal Look", Canadian Literature (Winter, 1965), 7-8.

Besides his experiences in and impressions of Ameliasburg Township, Purdy recalls many others in The Cariboo Horses which he has had in Canada. "Transient" and "Bums and Brakies (1937)", for example, concern his experiences in riding C.P.R. freights, travelling with the "dozens and hundreds" of jobless men who are "never where they want to be" and so alone that they wonder "if they're even very human". Purdy suffers from neither disturbance because he knows where he is and knows all too well that he is human, but he can still sympathize with the bums and brakies. His familiarity with places and things Canadian inevitably shows through in such a poem as "Bums and Brakies". It includes the following lines:

Now plodding the cinders  
 . . .  
 in Sioux Lookout and Blind River  
 and Piapot Saskatchewan and  
 Summerland Medicine Hat and  
 Tulameen and Stoney Lonesome...  
 (p. 82)

This reference to places is not artificial as it was in Purdy's early poetry, because in the poems in The Cariboo Horses such reference is an integral part of the experience recreated, not extraneous material.

Neither is his sympathy with and understanding of people in The Cariboo Horses artificial or extraneous, whether Purdy is concerned with the bums and brakies, or an attempted suicide, a madwoman, or the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors. "In the Wilderness", for example, which concerns the latter people and which is the only poem in the book which indicates Purdy's interest in another cultural group, is a sympathetic account of the 1962-63 physical and moral struggle between the "Spirit Wrestlers of the Kootenay" and the federal and provincial governments in British Columbia. Although he knows that he is "not one of these people" and asserts that "I do not wish to be", Purdy's sympathetic interest in them indicates his willingness and ability to place himself within another cultural context. He may not believe in the Sons of Freedom's "bright illusions of extraordinary freedom", but he cannot help being impressed by their determination to speak and act freely as bona fide Canadian citizens.

As he sympathizes with the Doukhobors and their difficulty in enjoying life according to the dictates of their own custom and belief, so Purdy

sympathizes with people like the attempted suicide who are suffering from the "long humiliation of living". They have neither custom nor belief in which to find the moral strength to go on living. Purdy recognizes the resulting feeling of futility and loneliness, the "humiliation of living", which seems to face such people;

- thrown away cigarette butts  
picked up by bums and  
people's lives nobody  
picks up -

("To an Attempted Suicide", p. 92)

Yet, although he may be momentarily shaken by his encounter with the attempted suicide or with a madwoman on a train, Purdy himself does not lose his sense of place in the contemporary everyday world. Others may be marooned and overwhelmed by life, but he enjoys it thoroughly and overcomes its occasional disillusionments and disappointments. There is a tone of irrepressible liveliness throughout The Cariboo Horses in such poems as "Thank God I'm Normal" and "John". Purdy's inherent, down-to-earth zest for life despite setbacks is aptly expressed in "Optimist".

In a black mood  
there seems little reason to live  
after a quarrel at least  
a rejection of some kind  
or when ennui fogs the lens  
you look at the world with  
and even sex dies down  
into proof of the virility  
of a habit  
But it passes  
(one hemlock for the road)  
it passes  
Shall we dance?

(p. 55)

This reaction, however ironic, is natural for Purdy, and is discernible in every poem in The Cariboo Horses.

The specifically cultural and biographical poems in the book are good illustrations of how Purdy expresses this reaction and in so doing expresses his sense of place and history. In "Notes on Painting", for example, he translates the classical art that he sees into his own irreverent terms. A

painting such as that of Cardinal Nino de Guevara, by El Greco, preserves the memory and appearance of a seventeenth century man. Purdy, however, while he is aware of this fact, sees in the cardinal's image a reproduction of a man he once knew in Trenton, Ontario.

El Greco's Cardinal, Nino de Guevara, well  
 I just don't believe in that face.  
 As a kid in Trenton tho I remember  
 the town idiot, old Joe Barr,  
 about 40, with a week's beard,  
 his mind made of cloud-candy,  
 a small-town christ minus the miracles,  
 turning to face the tormenting children:  
 his face in that instant could have been a cardinal's,  
 knowing everything life was for him -

(p. 20)

Similarly, Velasquez' "Innocent X", "wise and cunning/ with a piggishness to his nose", reminds Purdy of "some sergeants could've been popes" that he knew during the War at Trenton R.C.A.F. base, while Delacroix' "Liberty" he imagines leading the Grey Cup parade.

Although he thus domesticates great art, Purdy is again demonstrating his ability to make the past a coherent part of present awareness. "Potter" and "Lu Yu" are examples of biographical poems in The Cariboo Horses which fulfil a similar function. Whereas these two poems recall ancient civilizations, most of the biographies in the book are of Purdy's contemporaries. This is another indication of his predilection for the present. There are a dozen or so "contemporary" biographies, of which four concern poets, a logical topic for Purdy. Two of these are Malcolm Lowry and Dylan Thomas, poets Purdy seems particularly to admire. Throughout his manuscripts, in reviews, articles, or poetry, he refers to these men. In The Cariboo Horses, "Malcolm Lowry" and "Dylan" reveal his nostalgic admiration of them. The other two poets characterized may be facsimiles of Purdy's contemporaries, but they are not identified. The poet of "Portrait" is simply a "second hand poet",

the glass man with swinging metronome appendix,  
 genitalia wired for sound and  
 howling catgut intestines with  
 prose secretions in bile and clacking bones -

(p. 29)

Alec, too, the poet in "A Very Light Sort of Blue Faded from Washing", is simply identified as a "bad poet".

Even though they may seem "not much to remember", as Purdy says of Lowry, these four poets are one means by which he establishes himself mentally as a contemporary poet. There is an aura of decadence and disappointment about each poet he portrays which Purdy himself seems to feel as a poet in such a poem as "A Power", where he says:

[A power] . . . to say things and  
 they come out of the blank  
 grey desert mind onto paper  
 trudging the heat haze then they  
 get away from you tho -

(p. 53)

The poetic craft can be tedious and frustrating and yet Purdy senses that from the "blank grey desert mind" may emerge poetry which is like the arrow "marking off the photographed past/ and a cartoon future", (p. 53). The poet is compelled to struggle to express himself, despite his personal handicaps. Purdy knows what such a struggle involves and so senses a kinship with the four poets that he portrays.

In other biographies in The Cariboo Horses, Purdy may establish his sense of place and history by referring to a man such as Percy Lawson, with whom he had a confrontation regarding wage rates when he worked in a mattress factory in Vancouver in 1954. He may also refer to a fictional man such as the one in "Policeman", who is the epitome of a modern Canadian policeman; or to men who may or may not be taken from real life, such as the old man in "Cronos at the Quinte Hotel"; or to public figures such as Fidel Castro in "Fidel Castro in Revolutionary Square". In all such biographies, Purdy is commemorating men who are important to him because they represent the contemporary society of which he is a very conscious part. They also represent the continuity of the human race because through them Purdy has a view of past and present. He remarks in "Method of Calling up Ghosts" that

Walking sometimes in the streets of the town  
 I live in and thinking of all the people who  
 lived here once and fill the space I fill -  
 If they'd painted white trails on the sidewalk  
 everywhere they went, it would be possible  
 to see them now.

(p. 111)

These white trails on the sidewalk are what Purdy paints in the biographies and in all the other poems in The Cariboo Horses, both his own trail and those of the people he meets.

In North of Summer, originally entitled "Dogsong", Purdy's sense of place and history is more sharply defined than in any of his previous poetry. Purdy, who has "a strong sense of Canadian identity and his own relation to it", as David Helwig proclaims in a review called "Canadian Poetry: Seven Recent Books", expands this identity to make the Arctic an intrinsic part of his awareness.<sup>1</sup> The poems in which he expresses this awareness are intensely personal and carefully worked out poems which, according to Robert Fulford, create in a reader "a new sense of the Arctic as well as a deeper sense of Purdy".<sup>2</sup> The Arctic comes alive through Purdy's depiction of its geographical and anthropological landscape. He vividly recreates his own impressions and experiences there during his six-week visit.

In a poem such as "Dogsong", for example, the unearthly, mournful howl of the sled dogs which periodically awakened Purdy at dawn, can be heard "running down the scale" as if the reader himself were in the Arctic. Each poem in North of Summer is capable of evoking such a sensation. Purdy's personality informs every poem in the book, his characteristic bluntness, irony, and sensitivity clearly showing through each one. He attempts, <sup>to suggest, and</sup> ~~and,~~ I think, <sup>he</sup> succeeds in suggesting the diversity which he discovered in the Arctic. As he remarks in the article he wrote for The Beaver in 1966:

Like any other region in 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.<sup>3</sup>

Purdy obviously has looked for himself and in North of Summer has captured the colours and friendliness of the Arctic so that others can also see.

While North of Summer concerns a completely alien environment from that to which Purdy is accustomed, it expresses his sense of place and history more vividly than does any of his previous poetry. As the remoteness of Ameliasburg Township, for example, prompted the evocation of place and history in the Ameliasburg poems in The Cariboo Horses, so the remoteness

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<sup>1</sup>David Helwig, "Canadian Poetry: Seven Recent Books", Queen's Quarterly (Winter, 1967), 754.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Fulford, "Two Poets: Purdy and MacEwan", Toronto Daily Star (March 2, 1966) 32.

<sup>3</sup>Purdy, "North of Summer. Arctic Poems and Prose". The Beaver (Summer, 1966), 26

and vastness of the Arctic intensified Purdy's sense of place and history there. Worksheets of the North of Summer poems which are included in the manuscript collection indicate that Purdy consciously manipulated his ideas and his form of expression in the book so as to express this sense as succinctly as possible. One such assortment of worksheets in which this manipulation is evident is that which concerns "The Turning Point", the first poem in North of Summer. This poem was one over which Purdy himself was most enthusiastic. In a letter dated July 15, 1965, which he wrote to his wife from the Arctic, Purdy told her,

I'm very high on my TURNING POINT poem, as you might gather. It took both the landscape of the Arctic, flying and religion and a particular situation into account, blended them naturally, which I think is quite a feat, EVEN for ME, I hasten to assure you.<sup>1</sup>

The blend he achieved in "The Turning Point" cost Purdy a great deal of effort. At one stage in its development, the poem was called "Suzanne", while "the turning point" served as its first line. However, he soon decided on "The Turning Point" as his title, a more appropriate and suggestive choice than "Suzanne". The D.C. 4 stewardess is not, after all, the subject of the poem, but rather the enigmatic and vast Arctic panorama over which the D.C. 4 passes. The more significant changes which Purdy made in the poem occur in three of the last four stanzas. There are incidental changes besides that of title in the first four stanzas, but they are minor. At one time, for example, the first stanza read as follows:

Over northern Canada  
daylight ahead and growing  
behind only darkness,  
while the D.C. 4's engines drone

(Box 11 MSS)

Purdy altered this stanza slightly by inserting the line "at 2:30 in the morning" between the third and fourth lines of the above version. Originally, this line had been inserted in the sixth stanza instead of "a few minutes later", which appears in the final and most other versions. The versions of the four or six lines of the eighth stanza, depending on which version is being considered, reveal no significant differences. Purdy does not date his worksheets, but there are two published versions of "The Turning

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, Letters from the Arctic (July 15, 1965), Box 11 MSS.



Point" which roughly indicate the time at which these versions evolved. There is, of course, the final version which appeared in ~~NS~~ <sup>North of Summer</sup> in 1967, but there is also the version of the Summer 1966 issue of The Beaver.<sup>1</sup>

It is the fifth stanza of "The Turning Point" in which Purdy's manipulation of words and ideas becomes important for his sense of place and history. There are four versions of this stanza. In the North of Summer version, the stanza reads as follows:

The full shape of the Arctic moves  
under us and flows  
into quiet islands and swinging coastlines  
blue seas reflecting our tiny aeroplane  
the runaway world upside down  
and no god of chaos to lift one hand  
and make the place behave

(p. 18)

At various times, those coastlines were "tilted" or "strange", and instead of the last four lines there were these:

the world's axis turning and turning  
like a planet inside your hand

(The Beaver, p. 19)

or: like a planet you've never seen;

or: like a planet no man knows.

(Box 11 MSS)

The North of Summer version is much more effective than these earlier ones because it contrasts dramatically the past and the present. Beneath the plane, a symbol of modern civilization, is a land mass reminding Purdy of an uncivilized, prehistoric world ruled by "a god of chaos". This is a world dissociated from the present, or at least from the world as Purdy is used to it.

The final version of the sixth stanza is almost completely revised from the four versions preceding it.

It reads:

Then it's gone completely  
we're lost  
entombed in wool blankets  
and go whispering thru nothingness  
without sun or moon  
human instruments haywire  
But we find another world  
a few minutes later  
with snow-streaked hills down there  
that must be Baffin Island.

(p. 19)

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<sup>1</sup>Both versions are included in the appendix.

A minor difference in one early version occurs in the fourth line of this stanza, which is changed to "and go drifting thru a white limbo". The most repeated version of the stanza before the publication of "The Turning Point" in North of Summer is that which appeared in The Beaver:

Then it's lost in white mist  
the sun and moon change places  
but we find the world again  
a few minutes later  
with snow-streaked hills down there  
that must be Baffin Island.

(p. 19)

The reference to "human instruments haywire" and the finding of "another world" in the North of Summer version of this stanza again contrasts the two environments between which Purdy is suspended. The line in the earlier version, "but we find the world again", implies that Purdy would be relieved to return to that familiar urban world, whereas "we find another world" implies that his sense of adventure has been provoked and that he is anxious to explore the unfamiliar world of the Arctic.

The seventh stanza of "The Turning Point" is alike in North of Summer and The Beaver, but there is one earlier version which seems significant to Purdy's sense of place and history. In this version, Purdy refers to Baffin Island as/ a place the birds return to/[a name] I've remembered since childhood/ lost and found all in one lifetime (Box 11 MSS). This line is eliminated in all other worksheet versions and in North of Summer and The Beaver. The latter two versions are more effective than that quoted above:

a name I've remembered since childhood  
in the first books I read  
a warm kind of wonder in myself [now - The Beaver, p. 19]  
I used to be ashamed of

(North of Summer, p. 19)

This version reveals Purdy's sense of belonging in this apparently alien world. Formerly, he was "ashamed" of the appeal the Arctic had for him, perhaps because he had never done anything before to end his ignorance of it. As he said in an interview with Sheila Stone prior to his departure for the Arctic,

This [Pangnirtung and Baffin Island] is one part of Canada  
I'm totally unfamiliar with. I'd like to see just how the  
Eskimo lives, get away from the rest of the country, perhaps  
get a new perspective on life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sheila Stone, "Paris Not for Purdy. Baffin Island Bid by Bard", Montreal Star (July 10, 1965), 22.

Now he is thrilled by "a warm kind of wonder" which unites him with the Arctic. "Lost and found all in one lifetime" suggests this thrill of discovery which he experienced, but it does not contrast his former and present awareness of this area as well as does the North of Summer version of the seventh stanza.

Purdy flew north to Baffin Island to begin his visit there on July 10, 1965. He soon made up for his former unfamiliarity with the Arctic. His first four days were spent at Frobisher Bay, "a kind of modern frontier town of 1800 people, government administrative centre of the District of Franklin".<sup>1</sup> The next ten were spent at Pangnirtung, a settlement on the eastern shore of Cumberland Sound, which Purdy described in a letter to his wife as

. . . a small settlement of around 250 people, 34 white men and the rest Eskimos. . . The whole place looks like the setting for a western movie, except you'd never get it on any Hollywood sound stage . . . .<sup>2</sup>

However, these two weeks were preliminary steps towards what became Purdy's real objective, the isolated Eskimo settlement on the Kikastan Islands, approximately fifteen miles ~~north~~<sup>south-east</sup> of Pangnirtung in Cumberland Sound itself. There he spent another two weeks and there he had

. . . 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.<sup>3</sup>

He did spend a few more days at Pangnirtung after his return from the Kikastan Islands, but it was his experience there that gave rise to most of the poems in North of Summer.

Because he was the only English-speaking person among the dozen or so Eskimos in the Kikastan settlement, Purdy was forced to "improvise brilliantly", as he says in "Kikastan Communications", in order to make himself understood. One Eskimo hunter, ~~Monesee~~<sup>J</sup>, did speak a little English, but since this amounted to only six or seven words, his knowledge was negligible and not too helpful. Purdy had to do his own translating. In "What Can't Be Said", for example, he tells how the daily tea-time visit to his tent by two Eskimo wives, Leah and Regally, the "Ladies Auxiliary of Baffin Island (Kikastan Eskimo Chapter)", was conducted. There being no common verbal language, Purdy and the two

<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "North of Summer. Arctic Poems and Prose", The Beaver (Summer, 1966), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Purdy, Letters from the Arctic, (July 18, 1965), Box 11 MSS.

<sup>3</sup>Purdy, The Beaver, p. 20.

women communicated by pantomime, singing "in English and Eskimo at once", and by speaking in their own language regardless of the communications barrier. In The Beaver article, Purdy remarks that he "read them [Leah and Regally] poems, talked about anything that came into my head, chattered away like a compulsive idiot".<sup>1</sup> Conversely, he imagines what the women might say as they chatter:

They gossip about what's exciting  
killer whales out in the harbour  
rumoured exodus of penguins from Toronto  
whether mother love prevents child neurosis  
relatives at Ungava having to learn French  
and ice exploding bad language in Eskimo.

(p. 46)

Purdy's translation of this Eskimo conversation into the jargon of any modern women's group is amusing and also indicative of his instinctive association of his own familiar environment with that of the Eskimos. As he says in "Kikastan Communications", the "happy grunting language" of the Eskimos is "subversive to commonsense", that is, to the commonsense of his native culture. Purdy, however, "jerked directly from modern cities to a hunting culture",<sup>2</sup> enjoys breaking this commonsense shackle and reverting to the child-like simplicity of behavior of the Eskimo:

. . . I am a child  
hunting for other children  
. . .  
and I remain a puzzle to myself  
a grey-haired child

(p. 67)

He may be a puzzle to himself, but Purdy proves in North of Summer that he does not therefore become puzzled about his sense of place and history. In the Arctic, he adapts easily and happily to the Eskimo culture and environment, as indicated by his ability and willingness to communicate with the Eskimos by improvisation. If anything, his sense of place and history is intensified by this involvement. The fact that he even determined upon Baffin Island as the place in which to use his Canada Council grant is proof of his sense of place as a Canadian. He could easily have chosen to go outside Canada again, as he did in the summer of 1964 when he visited Cuba or as he is to do this fall when he makes a second visit to Europe. (The first was in 1960.) In 1965, though, the Arctic was the one part of

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<sup>1</sup> Purdy, The Beaver, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Purdy, ibid., 21.

Canada with which he was "totally" unfamiliar. North of Summer is thus an irrefutable expression of Purdy's identification with Canada, as well as the book in which his sense of place and history in relation to a narrow geographical area and to another culture is most explicit. ✓

This is not to suggest that it is only through this relation to a specific area and culture that Purdy's sense of place and history is expressed. As in his previous poetry, he also expresses this sense by relating himself or the culture concerned with both past Canadian history and with the cultural history in general. Past Canadian history is recalled, for example, in such poems as "The Country of the Young", "What do the Birds Think?", "The North West Passage", and "Arctic River". Since it is the Arctic with which he is concerned, it is its historical background which Purdy recalls, rather than more general aspects of Canadian history. The Arctic explorations of men such as Luke Foxe or the "crews of homesick seamen" moored to a China vision/ hunting the North West Passage", ("The Country of the Young"), did of course ultimately affect the whole of Canada, but this historical background is the Arctic's in particular.

"The North West Passage" is the North of Summer poem in which this particular history is most extensively recalled. Waiting to leave Frobisher Bay for Pangnirtung, Purdy goes "rocking thru history/ in search of dead sailors" and finds them "at the precise point where the meter registers 'alive'/ when a living man remembers them". A twentieth century man, Purdy invokes the ghosts of men of four or more centuries earlier, making the Arctic's past history a living part of the present. The hardships endured by such adventurers as Franklin or James are contrasted with the ease of travel of a modern "adventurer" like Purdy:

. . . 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

("North West Passage", p. 21)

Such convenience and comfort is a far cry from the times when "Luke Foxe's cook/ served 'beer in small cans' to the sailors/ and it didn't last one nautical mile", or when Franklin's "Terror" and "Erebus" sank, "ships pre-

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served in ice", or when Frobisher was "hurte. . . in the Buttock with an Arrowe" while trying to escape the "blood-mad Skraelings". Purdy himself obviously enjoys living in the century of the big jets "skimming over the top of the world", but in recalling early Arctic explorers and their adventures, he is again indicating that he is not so involved in modern life that he is unaware of the past.

Neither is Purdy unaware of the Eskimos' anthropological background. In such a poem as "Innuït", for example, he sees beyond the old man carving soapstone, a representative of contemporary Eskimo culture, to the Dorset and pre-Dorset cultures of 5,000 years ago, having a vision of these ancient people

after the last ice age  
moving eastward from Siberia  
without dogs or equipment  
toward the new country

(p. 33)

In the old man's eyes, "flying generations' leap and converge. . .", the "race-soul of The People/ THE PEOPLE/ moving somewhere/ behind his eyes". Purdy relates the Eskimos not only to their own ancient past but also to that of all men. In "South", for example, he juxtaposes "the million names of god", names which are aspects of the religious instinct common to all men. Baalbek, Enlil, Ben-Marduk, Vishna, Shiva, Ishtar, Osiris, Horus, Quetzacoatl, and Lyndon B. Johnson are all of the same nature as the Eskimos' "Sedna the One-Eyed".

In his explanation of "Unfamiliar Terms and References" following the poems in North of Summer, and in the Arctic notes in the manuscripts, <sup>Purdy reveals his interest in</sup> myths such as that of Sedna and his awareness of the interpolation of the primitive into the contemporary. According to the information he compiled, Sedna is queen of all the mammals in the sea. At one time, she was an Eskimo girl. Unfortunately, she refused to marry the man her father chose for her. While the father and daughter were out alone in a boat one day, a fierce storm broke, which the father interpreted to be punishment by the gods for his daughter's disobedience. Panic-stricken, he pushed Sedna into the sea. She clung to the boat, whereupon her father chopped off her fingers, the first joints of which became whales and the second joints of which became seals. Eventually, Sedna's father hit her with a paddle and put out one of her eyes. She then sank to the sea bottom and lives there still. Whether it is a

Sedna to whom one prays, or an Osiris, or a Lyndon B. Johnson, such mythologizing is correlative to religious belief and therefore a common denominator among all men throughout all history. Purdy, an "Odysseus in Kikastan", incorporates the Eskimos and their beliefs into this common inheritance.

However, it is Purdy's sense of place and history in relation to a narrow geographical area and to a particular culture that is significant in North of Summer. What first impressed him about this area, the Arctic, as he flew into it, was its immensity and solitary grandeur. In "The Turning Point", he calls it "a runaway world upside down" and "a land most unlike Cathay or Paradise/ but a place the birds return to", (pp. 18-9). The elation and exuberance which this fascinating part of Canada excited in Purdy is tempered by a close personal relation with the people, places, and things of the Arctic, <sup>and</sup> is expressed in almost every poem in North of Summer, particularly in such poems as "South", "The Country of the Young", "Listening", "Tent Rings", and "What do the Birds Think?". In these poems, Purdy attempts to explain the enigma of the Arctic as it seems to him. In "South", for example, he imagines it as "the sheer top of the world". He feels severed from the familiar world and from all the place-names and boundaries that it implies. Time is meaningless. Sitting in a boat with an Eskimo hunter, Purdy feels as if he were in a limbo "which has no east or west of anything/ to do with roads lakes oceans deserts/ et cetera". In relation to the Arctic, the familiar world is merely "et cetera". Experiencing this illusion of being in another world, Purdy is so elated that he stands up in the boat and recites a poem to the hunter, who naturally does not understand it. Purdy recognizes his own absurdity, comparing himself to

Laurence Olivier feeling his oatmeal  
Alec Guinness unsober at Stratford  
Henry Irving rambunctious on Broadway  
and ad nauseam

(p. 61)

Such names are irrelevant in the Arctic, having meaning only to Purdy himself as a member of the culture they represent.

The Arctic is a vast silence <sup>whose</sup> ~~in which the only meaning it has~~ for Purdy comes from "the dull singing of my own ears", as he says in "Listening", that is, from his personal reaction and relation to this country. He recognizes

that he is a mere atom in the Arctic, an insignificant part of a "pink precambrian granite" world which is rooted in:

. . . . the earth-stone  
beneath the sea bottom and on  
into another silence  
where any impossible sound might be  
interpreted as God's voice

("Listening", p. 50)

He is occasionally awed, and even shaken, by the Arctic's vast emptiness, as when the "black scream" of a gull "shatters silence" in "Listening", but he is never afraid of it. As he says in the postscript at the end of North of Summer, "You'd have a helluva time shoving vast lonely distance into poems".<sup>1</sup> He does so in spite of himself, even if he does not therefore feel afraid or lonely. Purdy is, like the birds, "an exile from the rest of the world", ("What do the Birds Think?"), but he is an exhilarated exile. Like A.Y. Jackson, who also made an excursion to the Arctic in 1965, and eight of whose sketches from that excursion are reproduced in North of Summer, Purdy is inspired to exhort the world from which he is exiled to

"Look here  
You've never seen this country  
it's not the way you thought it was  
Look again"

(p. 79)

Such verses proclaim Purdy's exhilaration about the Arctic.

Although it may seem a vast silence, the Arctic is much more than that to Purdy. It is through this silence and the consequent sense of timelessness it evokes that his sense of the continuity of the human race is simultaneously evoked. "Tent Rings" is perhaps the best example of a poem in which this latter sense is expressed. The tent rings are relics of past Eskimo settlements whose caribou skin tents were held down by rings of stones. As Purdy says, these rings go back thousands of years, "in the land where nothing changes", marking the mass migrations of numerous cultural groups:

The Dorset People of Baffin  
nomads down the centuries  
in hustling seawind  
left them and journied on  
Thule people of Greenland  
and the wild Skraelings  
of Norse legend  
wanderers among the islands  
in the Beaufort Sea

(p. 68)

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "Postscript", North of Summer (Toronto, 1967), 83.



Seeing these stones now, imagining the past history they represent, Purdy anticipates that of their future. The following lines aptly express that particular vision of human continuity which Purdy possesses:

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 come from white traders  
 and some visitor  
 in the far future  
 (probably non-human)  
 will notice them  
 and not know whether  
 they belong to the Innuits  
 the "men pre-eminently"  
 or white men  
 who were also visitors  
 and thought to be human

(p. 69)

Whenever he describes the Arctic's physical landscape, as in "Tent Rings", Purdy's sense of timelessness there is evoked. In such poems as "Arctic River", "Trees at the Arctic Circle", "Postscript to 'Trees at the Arctic Circle'", and "Arctic Rhododendrons", this sense is evident. The Sylvia Grinnell River on Baffin Island, for example, impresses Purdy as being "old as gods as old/ when they've forgotten/ their last worshipper", older than the ephemeral wild flowers which color the Arctic, older than "tent rings", older than North America as represented by the river's namesake or by a city such as Boston, "older than memories". Even his own memory of the river will not affect it, as his visit to it will change neither its course nor its character. When Purdy is "less than a memory", the river will still be there on Baffin Island. Its seemingly timeless endurance is like that of the ground willow which Purdy describes in "Trees at the Arctic Circle" and "Postscript to 'Trees at the Arctic Circle'". These trees, one to two inches in diameter at base, seem too frail to survive. Yet they defy extinction and ensure the survival of the species by "just digging in here and now" and using the permafrost for nourishment. Purdy calls this a use of death to remain alive. Even the "Arctic Rhododendrons", although they live for only two weeks in August, suggest the Arctic's timelessness to him. These

flowers are a silence within the silence of the whole Arctic.

. . . their silence seems  
related to river-thunder  
you think of them as 'noisy flowers'

(p. 36)

Beyond them, Purdy sees lovers of "years ago" who may have "stopped in the outdoor hotel" "to watch the water floorshow". Like the river or the trees, the flowers cannot be fixed in time, 1965 or any other time.

More than all else in the Arctic though, tent rings, rivers, trees, flowers, or whatever else he singled out, Purdy was interested in the Eskimos themselves, "The Innuits" or "The People". As he remarks in the North of Summer postscript, "I looked at things close up, flowers, rivers and people: above all, people".<sup>1</sup> The result of this close-up study is expressed in terms of the relation between the Eskimo culture and Purdy's own. This expression is not due solely to the fact that Purdy usually speaks in contemporary "white" man's jargon, but also to the fact that, as Purdy sees it, the white man's influence is an unavoidable but in many ways unfortunate, condition of Eskimo existence. In a review of a book called Eskimo Sculpture, by George Swinton, Purdy says that the Eskimos "are a race in transition", which he can not help seeing "in relation to white men. And there is nothing massive or heroic about them when placed in that context".<sup>2</sup> Purdy is even more deprecatory about the white man's influence in some Arctic notes he made on September 10, 1965, following his return to Toronto:

The Eskimo has a tremendous flaw in his character: he appears to like and is friendly with white men.

. . .  
The Eskimo has lived in the Arctic approximately 5,000 years, survived all the hardships Nature and subzero temperatures had to throw at him. He tamed wolves to domestic beasts of burden, built snow houses, and learned to carve bone and ivory into shapes that express his particular genius. But a greater danger than any thus far is closing in on him: the white man's culture.<sup>3</sup>

In the biographical North of Summer poem called "Girl", Purdy epitomizes the tragic result of this situation. The girl he describes is a half-breed, "neither brown nor white". Only sixteen years old and beautiful, the girl works as a typist in an office in Frobisher Bay, although she still "sits in the tents of her people". The tragedy of her mixed blood is that she does not belong in either the white or the Eskimo world. As Purdy says,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Purdy, "Eskimo Sculpture: George Swinton", Box 5, MSS 4/6.

<sup>3</sup>Purdy, Arctic Notes, (September 10, 1965), Box 11 MSS.

"The People wonder about her". Inevitably, so would white people wonder if the girl were to move further south in order to evade her own people's wondering. She would be forced to as lonely and undeserved an existence there as she may come to have among the Eskimos.

Although he does regret the degeneration of the Eskimo culture through the influence of the white man, Purdy himself appreciated the fact that the Eskimo "appears to like and is friendly with" white men, because as he says in his postscript, "if the Eskimos hadn't been there I wouldn't have existed, but within their framework I was comfortable".<sup>1</sup> He enjoyed living among the Eskimos and transposed himself easily from the white man's culture to the transitional Eskimo-white culture he found in the Arctic. In such poems as "At the Movies", "Track Meet at Pangnirtung", "H.B.C. Post", "Washday", "Eskimo Hunter (New Style)", and "Two Hunters", he recreates various aspects of the Eskimos' daily life and reveals his sensitivity to them as a people and as individuals.

In "At the Movies", for example, Purdy is scornful of the "technicolour western shootemup" in which "the forces of evil are finally defeated" as "is standard for American westerns". Yet he understands the appeal the movie has to the Eskimos, who are thrilled by the action and charge the very atmosphere of the theatre with their sense that "something tremendously important is happening" when good and evil, in the persons of Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster, engage in battle. Purdy is critical of the movie but compassionate toward the Eskimos. Even such a routine facet of life in an Eskimo settlement as washday engages his attention and reveals the bond he was able to establish between himself and the Eskimos. At first he stands by and watches Leah and Regally perform the chore of washing, but soon he too joins the scrubbing "for no reason or any/ I can think of". He is not averse to sharing even this menial task with the Eskimos in order to get to know them. Such participation amuses Leah and Regally, but it also earns their confidence and respect for this unconventional white man.

To maintain this confidence and respect, Purdy remained unassumingly in the background most of the time during his Arctic visit. As he recognizes in "Two Hunters", he is the outsider, "a kind of witness,/ but not exactly

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, "Postscript", North of Summer (Toronto, 1967), 82.

a reporter" among the Eskimos. Being unable to speak their language, he cannot expect to become acquainted with their thoughts, but he can learn much about them simply through observation. Thus when the two hunters arrive home after a three-day expedition, Purdy stands aside and simply notes their gestures and the reception given them, knowing he can only sense "the continuity of their lives". Even the new style Eskimo hunter, whose terylene shirt and suspenders, sun glasses and binoculars, Peterborough boat and Evinrude motor, and Remington rifle with telescopic sight are familiar trademarks of Purdy's culture, is a subject for observation, not intimacy. Purdy feels that all else that is needed to complete the incongruity of the hunter's apparatus and his environment is "a sexy blonde in a bikini" and "maybe a gaggle of Hollywood photographers"; nevertheless, he senses the traditional, centuries-old nature of the hunter's occupation. There is "death for someone or some thing" beneath the hunter's boat, just as was signified by his forebears' boats. To Purdy, this link between the traditional Eskimo culture and the transitional one as represented by the new style hunter is "reassuringly old-fashioned". He is slightly disconcerted by the incongruity he sees, but his disconcertedness is offset by his recognition of the link between past and present.

Whether he is sitting in a cold boat or in one of many other situations referred to in North of Summer, Purdy's Arctic experience is made vivid in every poem of the book. Although the Arctic may have been no more than a collection of statistics or a memory of story-book pictures when he began his visit, Purdy proves conclusively in North of Summer that he did "throw away the preconceptions" and "see the colour of things, the look of land and people".<sup>1</sup> As Douglas Barbour concludes in his review of North of Summer,

Alfred Purdy has been finding his own place during the past decade. He now knows, I think, exactly the kind of poems through which he can best express his vision. They are consciously un-"Poetic", but they provide through the seeing eye and mind of a sharply outlined personality a special view of life in which honesty of perception is always prime.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Purdy, The Beaver, 26.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Barbour, "Alfred Purdy's North of Summer", Quarry (Fall, 1967), 47.

## EPILOGUE

Purdy has come a long way from his poetry of the thirties and forties. Whereas his sense of place and history in those days may have been an obscure and insignificant element in his poetry, it is clear that this is no longer true. As Barbour remarks in his review of North of Summer, Purdy now knows the kind of poems through which he can best express his vision. His spontaneous, original reporting of his personal experiences, particularly evident in The Cariboo Horses and North of Summer, but indicated in the exploratory and transitional poetry as well, establishes both his identity as a Canadian and his sense of past and present history, Canadian or otherwise. Like that of most Canadian poets, one of Purdy's characteristics is what A.J.M. Smith calls "eclectic detachment". This is the condition which results from the Canadian poet's position of separateness and semi-isolation within the literary world. As Smith remarks,

He [the Canadian poet] can draw upon French, British, and American sources in language and literary convention; at the same time he enjoys a measure of detachment that enables him to select and adapt what is relevant and useful.<sup>1</sup>

What Purdy selects and adapts is material which is related to Canadian experience and history. As pointed out by the editors of The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, it is precisely this relationship which is becoming "the real relevance" of modern Canadian poetry.<sup>2</sup> Purdy, who is to have two more books published this year, one a reprint of Poems for All the Annettes and the other a book of selected poems entitled Wild Grape Wine, is at the forefront in establishing this relevance in Canadian poetry.

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<sup>1</sup>A.J.M. Smith, ed., The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, (Toronto, 1965), 11.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, eds., The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada (Toronto, 1967), 270.

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## APPENDIX

THE LAND OF OVER YONDER - "JUG-O-RUM"

Deep among the lily pads  
A throaty chuckle sounds  
Where the reeds are thick and green  
Upon his drum he pounds.

You rascal I can hear you  
The music of the night  
That wakes the earth to beauty  
Is hidden from our sight.

The orchestra of Elfland  
The fife and beating drum  
It echoes from the swampland  
Jug-o-rum jug-o-rum.

Along the mossy shallows  
The chorus of the spring  
Of hearts so overflowing  
They needs must swell and sing.

Is not old earth rejoicing  
And gladness reigns supreme  
To hear the woodland chorus  
To see her children dream.

THE LAND OF OVER YONDER - "PRESTER JOHN"

Pope Prester John of Asia lived in  
uncounted years ago  
With his cities and his horsemen from  
the tundra steppes below.  
In his palely purple palace there were  
many wondrous things  
With the cloth of gold and booty that  
a desert nomad brings.  
There were dainty scented gardens and  
the peacock in his pride  
There were swords with sawtooth edges  
where a thousand men had died.

There were Persian slaves and captives  
that the Mongol did not slay  
And a warrior might marvel at the  
lacquer from Cathay.  
There were throne and marble benches  
for a king to sit upon  
There was welcome for the visitor and  
wine for Prester John.  
There was filigree of silver and goblets  
from the west.  
And heads were quickly stricken for a  
lightly spoken jest.  
There were chambers filled with treasure  
and the maids were passing fair  
And the men from Greece and Persia and  
old Zanadu were there.  
All the trees would gobble humans like  
a tiger on a spree  
In the woods were laughing jackals that  
would chuckle in their glee.  
And the bears were something fearful  
with their shaggy scarlet fur  
With their eyes like double headlamps  
when they held you like a burr.  
There were parrots from the tropics  
who were spies of Genghis Khan  
And when he quarrelled with Prester John  
the blood red rivers ran.  
There were caverns near the palace  
with the ghosts of vanished men  
Where they lived their little moment  
to obscurity again.  
There were learned men and poets from  
the gates of Samarcand  
They were flocking there by thousands  
in this Asiatic land.  
Marco Polo came from Europe and he  
saw the wonders grow  
Neath the vaulted silken shelters on  
the mountains garbed in snow.  
But all the good things were finished  
when the bloody war began  
And the Mongol horde came riding with  
their leader Genghis Khan.  
Prester John was killed in battle and  
his empire fell in rust.  
But his skull was set in silver where all  
other men are dust.  
For his brain is warm and throbbing  
and his magic knows no end  
While the broken bones of others with  
the dreaming desert blend.

Prester John will live forever till  
 the setting sun is pearled  
 With the guarding gates of heaven at  
 the ending of the world.  
 Prester John will dream forever in the  
 century clouded way  
 From the far frontiers of Europe to the  
 borders of Cathay.

SONGS OF TWILIGHT LAND - "THE ESKIMO CHIEFTAIN"

In midnight land the stars are green  
 No other land I've ever seen  
 No broader greater skyline lends  
 Its arch to church that God attends  
 They say beyond the curving seas  
 Are many lands outside of these  
 And many wonders yet unknown  
 Spires of red brick and spears of stone  
 With smoking cities veiled in snow  
 Like marching moons the seasons go  
 Where roaring trains in mist go by  
 But still these men find time to die  
 In haste the city wakes at dawn  
 And thinks that time was made and gone  
 But here are wonders none may know  
 Upon the blind eternal snow  
 The hunter leaves his hut by day  
 And all the world has gone away  
 To hunt with him the timid seal  
 To find a nation's midday meal  
 Oh here are wonders in the sky  
 That gold and silver cannot buy  
 To some blind end the world spins round  
 And spews her children on the ground  
 God of that faroff distant land  
 Who lifts at night a burning hand  
 Oh altar of the midnight sky  
 Thy children still find time to die  
 And live contented greater than  
 This stranger southern creature. . . man.

SONGS OF TWILIGHT LAND - "LOUIS DE BUADE. COUNT FRONTENAC, GOVERNOR  
OF NEW FRANCE"

Their lives and ours are linked by time  
Upon the path of years  
Some links are made of flawless steel  
And some are flawed with fears.

But one there was who knew not fear  
A strong link of the chain  
That God pulls at the farthest end  
With Lucifer to strain.

Wild turbulence time could not quell  
To wield a despot's power  
He knew his moment chose it well  
In France's fateful hour.

Though Canada is English now  
We hear his name with pride  
Cape Diamond where the lilies flew  
Were flying when he died.

THE ROAD TO BARBARY - "TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS"

They've gathered to sharpen their  
batting eye  
And everywhere the pucks whizz  
by.

The season has opened the cheques  
are down.  
And the Maple Leafs are "goin to  
town".

Jackson Clancy and Horner too  
Are ready and now they're comin  
thru.

Primeau Kelly and Happy Day  
And the Toronto Maple Leafs are on their  
way.

They've camped on the trail of the  
Stanley Cup  
And clung like the teeth of a bulldog  
pup.



And Smythe is going with them too  
 For he is the brains of this fighting  
 crew.

The score is tied with a minute to go  
 The team is tired and hope is low.

Primeau and Jackson break away  
 And the ice is clear from a winning  
 play.

He shoots! he scores! the game is done  
 The whistle blows the Leafs have  
 won.

Boll has buzzed his way along  
 And Day is happy the whole day long.

Scotch and sherry coming up  
 For the Leafs have won the Stanley  
 Cup.

SONG OF THE RESTLESS ONES - "THE SHINING MOUNTAINS, SIEUR DE  
 LA VERENDRYE, PATHFINDER OF THE WEST"

Their star is set their day is done  
 The world has overpassed  
 Pathfinders of the wilderness  
 For them the die is cast.

What wondrous undiscovered germ  
 Surged in their blood and veins  
 To bid them dare an unknown land  
 Across the shadowed plains.

The shining mountains far and dim  
 Uplift oh vagabond  
 And always in the dreamer's eyes  
 Are rising just beyond.

THE DREAM THAT COMES NO MORE - "BY LAKE LOUISE"

By Lake Louise three years ago  
We sat my love and I  
While early fall that warred with dawn  
Made magic in the sky.

The still dark water caught the gleam  
As night's dark robe unfurled  
Her hand was warm her shining eyes  
Made faraway the world.

The mirrored peaks majestic piled  
Brought something precious near  
And though you left me in a day  
You left your beauty dear.

The stars may rise the sun go down  
The velvet valley sleep  
But every dawn I see your smile  
A mountain tryst you keep.

The water sprites the mountain elves  
All lend their dreams to me  
And I watch visions with my eyes  
That mortals never see.

Who never knew a soft white hand  
Or blue eyes brimming flow  
Or saw that dewy happiness  
Has never lived I know.

I may not see that lake again  
Where dawn in splendor runs  
Across the shining vault of space  
To whisper with the guns.

I have one thought the mountains gave  
As thru the firs I strayed  
I met my love and I can face  
The future unafraid.

THE DREAM THAT COMES NO MORE - "DUNKIRK"

I saw their pictures when the British  
landed

At a port somewhere in England  
Some gay some grim but spirit still  
commanded  
At a port somewhere in England.

Such a simple phrase, somewhere in England  
It might be in historic Plymouth  
This port somewhere in England.

And there were tragic stories too  
Where sodden arms were red  
Though a few were proudly limping  
With high and tilting head.

The papers told a gallant tale  
Of victory in defeat  
And told how dearly lives were sold  
In that blood filled retreat.

How a great flotilla summoned  
By England's common need  
To take the weary soldiers home  
With warships there to lead.

With barges from the river Thames  
And fishing sloops and yawls  
Some lowly craft of oar and sail  
When England's army calls.

Dive bombers combed the sea with lead  
And Archie's blossom bloomed  
And climbing in the aery blue  
The Nazi fighters zoomed.

A losing rearguard action fought  
The stragglers were cut down  
That living comrades still might reach  
The guns of Dunkirk town.

And then the embarkation still  
Thru solid walls of steel  
With bursting shell and shrieking whine  
(How much those snaps reveal)

And then the strange flotilla passed  
Into the channel foam  
And oh how dear the Dover cliffs  
Must look when going home.

To me the one outstanding fact  
Of all that lost campaign  
A little band of French poilus  
At Dunkirk in the rain.  
When two such countries that were foes  
The one can stay behind  
To guard against his friend's retreat  
Death warrant all but signed.

When two such foes that now are friends  
Are fighting side by side  
Such gallantry is more than love  
Such friendship more than pride.

At Crecy and far off Poitiers  
And then at Waterloo  
The cannon roared the broadsword flashed  
The cloth yard arrow flew.

The British ferried safely home  
And one small English band  
Saw little groups of French poilus  
That were about to land.

"CAMELOT IN AMELIASBURG"

Walking in the village I try to identify  
 Georgian and Tudor architecture  
 as if  
 stones and wooden planks were cousins once  
 removed of all England and  
 that mongrel house with the gable  
 roof here stems from stone castles  
 and battlements some princess screamed love  
 and sang hate from once  
 in Scotland -

But they're nondescript  
           mongrels with building permits  
 leashed to now in triplicate  
 And yet I see in each one the vestigial  
           peeled logs like emblems  
 and armorial markings of the past  
 traces of burned over forest and faint  
           axe marks of the settler  
                   pioneer  
 and squatters with families raising four  
       log walls and a roof in which  
           a woman by the white fire  
               could be loved  
               a child sleep naked -

Walking in the village  
I see myself in every mirror now middle  
aged now lean enough to endure hardship  
again but soon to be a lumbering gut over  
flowing the belted roads searching the last  
dirty patch of snow  
in April  
maybe  
under a deadfall nourishing new green -

I see myself in mirrors and cities  
come here to find moss growing on  
shingled roofs (bryophta) and trilliums  
(lilliaceae) each an identity in which  
my own is lost but  
    our etymology is all green -

## EARLE BIRNEY - "IN PURDY'S AMELIASBURG"

But Al this round pond man. . .  
     where's Roblin Lake     I mean     the real one?  
     where's the great omphalos I know  
     corpsegray below apocalyptic skies?  
     this cosy girl's belly button  
     brims with rosewater  
     from one of those frilly May sunsets

Don't get me wrong    I'm grateful to be here  
     after Toronto  
         still hairy from a long winter  
     after Trenton  
         that raped that hustled town  
     it's good here it's peace the blackbirds  
     are setting off their own springs in the air  
     but the air's too bright  
     It could be I've come the wrong time  
     too soon for those horsecrap-fattened peonies  
     you reddened the shores with  
     too late for skulldeep snow  
     stubborn in the fence zags  
     man there's only dandelions  
     barring the way to the privy.

But no what's wrong is place as well  
     it's anybody's church across the lake  
         the spire shrank  
         and that carpenter who fixed it once  
         against the sky is off to Trenton  
         banging thumbnails and wallboards  
         is you in fact  
     and you're not here your mouse is hiding  
     quote representative of an equally powerful race unquote  
     that heron the cosmic crying rays  
         where in Roblin are they?

In this Ameliasburg a backyard of stones  
     is where the trucked off Roblin Mill  
         declared historical enough  
         for reassembly in Toronto  
     by God they'll whisk your own shack away  
     if you don't stop writing  
         (and Eurithe too     the ferocious wife)  
         and the very cowpads before your eyes  
     man I think they have  
     I think Somebody's cleaned up  
         after your picnicking glaciers  
     They've raised the roof on the shack

ringed it with Summer Homes  
 told Ptolemy to leave town  
 turned your spouse young and patient again  
 it's the Same People of course  
 who took the wolves away  
 from Malcolm Lowry's woods  
 repaired Eliot's London Bridge  
 turned Jeffers' headlands back  
 into California hills  
 So though it's fine here of course  
 it's not Ameliaburg.

But wait  
 What's turning up when I sweep the kitchen?  
 half an envelope  
 with half a poem scribbled  
 and from behind the battered wood-heater  
 yet another empty bottle  
 smelling absolutely of wild grape

Next morning I drift down a nebulous way  
 to the village hardware  
 like a madman's tiny museum  
 Can-opener    yep    got one  
 got one all right    You in a hurry?  
 yeah    well it got mislaid some time back  
 I'd have to look drop in next week

I return under the ancient clouds  
 The Lake is hazy and endless  
 What bird is flapping away?  
 The shack's doorknob turns cosmic in my hand -  
 man that's your mouse on the floor bowing!

"THE TURNING POINT" - NORTH OF SUMMER VERSION

Over northern Canada  
daylight ahead and growing  
behind only darkness  
at 2:30 in the morning  
while the D.C.4's engines drone

Suzanne the stewardess  
is a French Canadian agnostic  
which surprises me a little

Then she says most of her friends  
feel the same way about god  
and points where the last  
darkness lingers  
with the moon's silver image  
on the silver aircraft

"But I see angels out there sometimes"  
"Human angels?" I say  
She laughs and talks about going  
back to U. of M. to get her M.A.  
but I must have said the wrong thing

The full shape of the Arctic moves  
under us and flows  
into quiet islands and swinging coastlines  
blue seas reflecting our tiny aeroplane  
the runaway world upside down  
and no god of chaos to lift one hand  
and make the place behave

Then it's gone completely  
we're lost  
entombed in wool blankets  
and go whispering thru nothingness  
without sun or moon  
human instruments haywire  
But we find another world  
a few minutes later  
with snow-streaked hills down there  
that must be Baffin Island

A club-shaped word  
a land most unlike Cathay or Paradise  
but a place the birds return to



a name I've remembered since childhood  
in the first books I read  
a warm kind of wonder in myself  
I used to be ashamed of

It's getting cold as hell here  
I guess  
the Arctic is no place for shirtsleeves  
The stewardess serves coffee before we land  
and looks out the window absentmindedly  
"What's your thesis, Suzanne?"

"THE TURNING POINT" - BEAVER VERSION

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daylight ahead and growing  
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at 2:30 in the morning  
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"Human angels?" I say  
She laughs and talks about going  
back to U. of M. to get her M.A.  
and I must have said the wrong thing

The full shape of the Arctic moves  
under us and flows  
into quiet islands and tilted coastlines  
the world's axis turning and turning  
like a planet inside your hand

Then it's lost in white mist  
the sun and moon change places  
but we find the world again  
a few minutes later  
with snow-streaked hills down there  
that must be Baffin Island

A club-shaped word  
a land most unlike Cathay and Paradise  
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