

A POETICS OF PARADOX:
REALITY AND THE IMAGINATION
IN THE META-POETRY OF
LOUIS DUDEK

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the poetry and poetics of Louis Dudek, the prolific Canadian poet and critic, in order to elucidate the ways in which he balances competing realist and transcendentalist urges over the course of a career that spans more than sixty years. From his earliest “social-realist” poetry and polemics in the 1940s to his late “transcendental-realist” poems, Dudek displays a consistent interest in the poetic process. Through his self-reflexive poetry or “meta-poetry,” in particular, Dudek begins to unite the seemingly disparate elements of his poetic project into an imaginative, intelligent, and coherent vision of universal significance. In the 1940s, Dudek’s meta-poetry points most clearly to discrepancies between his early “social-realist” poems and *First Statement* polemics; in the 1950s and 1960s, Dudek’s meta-poetry continues to identify and embrace the paradoxes or tensions that permeate much of his *oeuvre*; and in his late poetry, Dudek achieves an extraordinary balance between reality and the imagination by transforming *Continuation*, his final long poem, into a metaphor for the mind of the poet and for the poetic process. Ultimately, Dudek’s poetics of paradox allows him to reaffirm poetry’s ability to create order out of the “chaos” of reality and to draw ever closer to his transcendental vision of “Atlantis,” the “hidden reality” beyond the known and knowable world.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 9, 2001, as he lay dying in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, Louis Dudek dictated what would be his final poem to Aileen Collins, his wife of over thirty years:

The cloud-filled heavens
 crashed down on us
But we cultivate
 our greens and asparagus
 as we did before (“Last Poem” 1-5)

In five frugal lines, Dudek effectively alludes to a theme that dominates his literary corpus: the interrelations between the reality of “greens and asparagus” and the ideal or transcendental reality of “cloud-filled heavens.” From his earliest “social-realist” and Romantic effusions to his later philosophical meditations and “academic” prose poems, Dudek displays a consistent interest in the creative process according to which poets inexplicably transform the world around them into imaginative, intelligent, and coherent visions of universal significance. This thesis seeks to elucidate the tensions between the necessarily provisional categories of “reality” and “the imagination” in Dudek’s poetry and poetics in general, and in his self-reflexive, self-aware, and increasingly autobiographical poetry in particular.

The artist’s struggle to reconcile reality and the imagination, or to strike a balance between the world of experience and the world of art, is by no means an exclusively Canadian phenomenon. Lord Alfred Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott,” which was published in the first half of the nineteenth century, is commonly understood by critics to dramatize the dilemma faced by artists who delight in weaving “the mirror’s magic sights” and yet who are “half-sick of shadows” (161). During Dudek’s time, the tension between experience and art was rendered

more broadly in terms of the artist's struggle to balance subjective and objective realities or the real and the ideal in studies such as *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1951) by the American Modernist poet Wallace Stevens, Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964), and J. Hillis Miller's *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (1965). In *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, Beebe argues that artists can be caught between two competing traditions: the "Sacred Fount" tradition, in which art is derived directly from nature and experience, and the "Ivory Tower" tradition, in which art is inspired by ritualized reflections on philosophy and the abstract as artists sequester themselves from the outside world. Although Beebe's study focuses on this tension only as it is manifested in the *Künstlerroman* tradition, critics such as Stevens and Hillis Miller have made it clear that poets, too, have been constantly forced to negotiate the boundary dividing the world of art from the world of experience.

Born in 1918, Louis Dudek—the prolific Montreal modernist poet, critic, publisher, and professor—was fascinated with the poetic process and the ways in which it was informed both by the poet's encounters with physical reality and by the poet's attempts to transform that reality through the imagination. As his 1940s polemics against *Preview* poets such as Patrick Anderson and P.K. Page demonstrate, Dudek believed that poetry should be accessible and intimately connected to everyday life—although he also believed in its ability to convey complex philosophical truths, and, as can be seen in his long poems, he often shrouded his own poetry in obscure terms or esoteric allusions. Indeed, his poetics is one of paradoxes. Nevertheless, Dudek's self-proclaimed "transcendental-realist" approach would allow him to accommodate these and other paradoxes, as well as to achieve a hard-earned, if delicate, balance both in his poetry and in his life as a public intellectual. As Stewart Donovan writes, "Part of Louis

Dudek's great critical achievement has been his ability to move between the campus and the street, between the classroom and the pressroom" ("The Lessons of the Master" 66). But in 1943, as Dudek became increasingly involved with John Sutherland and Irving Layton in the publication of *First Statement* magazine, his poetry and polemics seemed to indicate that he was committed to a social-realist program according to which a new generation of Canadian poets worked to remedy what Sutherland called "the close air and the literary smell of our poetry—our sensation of being on the inside of a jar of preserves" (Introduction 14). Dudek dutifully continued the work of first-wave Canadian modernists who had attempted to emulate their British and American contemporaries in order to "overthrow an effete and decadent diction, and to bring the subject matter of poetry out of the library and the afternoon-tea salon into the open air, dealing in the language of present-day speech with subjects of living interest" (Smith, "Contemporary Poetry" 29). However, as critics such as Frank Davey and Brian Trehearne have noted, Dudek's widely publicized polemics against *Preview* and its "academic" poets read rather ironically in light of his most important contributions to Canadian poetry, all of which articulate a much more nuanced understanding of reality and imagination's role in poetry than his earliest "poetics" suggest. Despite Dudek's purported desire to become a revolutionary poet of the people ("Poets of Revolt" 5) and to write only of "the real currents of life" ("Academic Literature" 106), Dudek's earliest self-reflexive poems and privately recorded musings reveal a remarkably profound and nuanced understanding of reality and of the role of the intellect and imagination in art.

The way in which Dudek situated himself within and against Canadian modernism in the 1950s is indicative of the complex and paradoxical nature of his poetics. Ken Norris asserts that Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, and Louis Dudek "began the second wave of Canadian

Modernism,” and that these *First Statement* poets would collectively “point the way to the fifties and sixties” (41). But for Dudek, the 1950s and 1960s signal a dramatic shift in his poetics away from the tenets of an ill-defined social-realist movement and towards an increasingly intellectual, introspective, and philosophical brand of poetry. In 1951, Dudek returned to Montreal from New York—where he had recently obtained a doctoral degree in literature at Columbia University—in order to accept a teaching position at McGill University, and he soon became involved in the publication of *Contact* magazine with Raymond Souster. In 1956 he created the McGill Poetry Series in order to publish Leonard Cohen’s first book of poetry, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, at his own expense; and, as Tony Tremblay notes, through *Contact*’s “small-press counterpart, Contact Press (1952-1967),” Dudek would publish “the major Canadian poets of the 1960s—Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan, John Newlove, Phyllis Webb, Eli Mandel, Doug Jones, Gwen MacEwan, R.G. Everson, George Bowering, Milton Acorn, and Margaret Atwood” (“Git Yr/ Eye” 37-38). In terms of his own poetry, Dudek’s style and form evolved rapidly in the years following his appointment at McGill. Dudek’s meditative long poem *Europe* (1954) marked the advent of a new era in Canadian modernist poetry, and in many of his subsequent poems it would become clear not only that Dudek’s position in relation to the phenomenal world was more complex than his *First Statement* polemics implied, but also that his earliest statements regarding the role of the intellect and imagination in poetry needed to be re-evaluated in order to explain how the author of *East of the City* (1946) could also be the author of a poem like *Atlantis* (1967) or *Continuation I* (1981).

While Dudek’s interest in poetry’s relation to reality and the imagination was one of his lifelong obsessions, terms such as “reality” and “imagination” can be defined precisely only with great difficulty. In 1956, Vladimir Nabokov claimed that “reality” is “one of the few words

which mean nothing without quotes” (312), and Dudek’s own struggle to understand “reality” and “the imagination” is immediately apparent when one considers that he offered numerous, sometimes contradictory definitions of both terms in his poetry and poetics. Nevertheless, this thesis proceeds on the assumption that the tension between “reality” and “the imagination” can still be fruitfully explored. Unlike the polarized relationship between Beebe’s “Sacred Fount” and “Ivory Tower,” the relationship between reality and the imagination is not an inherently oppositional one. In this thesis, the first of these terms, “reality,” will be used to refer to that which can be experienced or perceived through the senses. Obviously, such a definition is necessarily limited and provisional; the categories of reality and the imagination naturally overlap, intersect, and collide. For the purposes of this study, however, “reality” will be used interchangeably with the terms that Dudek himself employed most frequently in his writing, an array of synonyms that includes “the actual,” “actuality,” “physical reality,” “the real,” “the everyday occurrence,” and “objective reality.” Such terms are perhaps most closely affiliated with Beebe’s “Sacred Fount” tradition of art, but in the context of Canadian poetry they appear most commonly in reference to the “accessible” poetry of the “social-realist” movement that flourished in Montreal in the 1940s.

The second term, “imagination,” is equally difficult to define. Nevertheless, in “The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry” (1981), Dudek would discuss the etymological origins of “imagination” and conclude that “[i]magination is clearly the power of forming images” (266). Elsewhere, in both his poetry and poetics, he readily offers alternate definitions of the same term, as well as synonyms or related terms such as “the ideal,” “the unreal,” “the transcendental,” and “subjective reality.” Collectively, these definitions suggest that, in Dudek’s understanding, the imagination is neither an exclusively positive nor exclusively negative faculty. In *The First*

Person in Literature (1967), for instance, he explicitly states that the imagination is capable of releasing “a great freedom” as well as “raging aspiration” (21), and in “Poetry as a Way of Life” (1968) he writes,

There are many poems, and many kinds of poems; but in general the imagination handles its materials with great subjective freedom; it exaggerates reality to make it correspond to emotional needs; it colours everything, transforms it with the tints of heaven or of hell, polarizes good and evil as fear and desire, accentuates the good and magnifies ugliness; it carries all possibilities, all appetencies and conceptions, to their most extravagant extremes. (13)

Like Stevens, who defined poetry as “a violence from within that protects us from a violence without” (34), Dudek believed that poetry could provide respite from, and even imaginatively transform, reality. But he was also mindful of the fact that, when misused, the imagination could transform poetry into an arcane or purely “academic” pursuit.

The tension between reality and the imagination permeates all of Dudek’s poetry, and it is perhaps in Dudek’s poems about poems, or in his poems about the poetic process, that this tension is explored most productively. Indeed, these “meta-poems” usefully provide critics with a key to understanding his life’s work. Meta-poetry belongs to the broader categories of meta-fiction and *Ars Poetica*, but it has its own long-established tradition ranging from the second section of Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), Keats’s “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket” (1816), and the fourteenth canto of Byron’s epic *Don Juan* (published posthumously in 1823) to modernist meta-poems such as “The Uses of Poetry” by William Carlos Williams (1909), Marianne Moore’s “Poetry” (1919), Archibald MacLeish’s celebrated “Ars Poetica” (1926), and Wallace Stevens’s “Of Modern Poetry” (1940). Among Canadian modernist poets, too, a meta-

poetic tradition also began to develop and flourish in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1948 A.M. Klein published his canonical poem, “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape,” and in 1959 Layton announced in the foreword to *A Red Carpet For the Sun* that “all poetry, in the final analysis, is about poetry itself” (176). Davey contends that each of Dudek’s long poems is “a chronicle and a record of its own composition” (“Louis Dudek” 48), and Dudek himself would later remark, “the subject of my poetry now, I would say, as always, is the process of poetry itself, to ask what it is that the mind is doing to experience and to reality, what we are, and what the whole context of life is between eternity and the present” (“An Interview” 42). While all of Dudek’s poetry can therefore be said to be “meta-poetic” to a certain extent, for the sake of concision this thesis will use the term in a more restricted sense to refer primarily to those poems or poetic fragments in which poetry and the poetic process are explicit rather than implied subjects. Dudek’s interest in this kind of “explicit” meta-poetry—as a means of exploring poetry’s relationship to reality and the imagination—is evident even in early poems such as “Ars Poetica” (1943) and “Making Poems” (1946), the latter of which opens *East of the City*, his first solo publication.

In Dudek’s meta-poems, the convergence of his poetry and poetics often reveals dramatic insights by highlighting the tensions and paradoxes that characterize much of his *oeuvre*. An examination of Dudek’s meta-poetry from the 1940s and 1950s foregrounds his struggles to bring his *First Statement* “poetics” and his own poetry into closer alignment, but it also provides readers with a rare foreshadowing of his later poetic achievements. Similarly, an examination of meta-poetic fragments from his first three long poems, *Europe* (1954), *En México* (1958), and *Atlantis* (1967), or of his other meta-poems from the 1950s and 1960s, sheds light both on his present poetic concerns and on his future accomplishments as a transcendental-realist poet. In *Continuation I* (1981), *Continuation II* (1990), “Continuation III [Fragment]” (1997), “Bits and

Pieces [A Recitation]" (1997), and "Sequence from 'Continuation III'" (2000), Dudek explores the relationship between reality and the imagination with admirable results, and it is perhaps in these meta-poetic fragments that he is able to discuss this relationship in the most natural and effective manner. Jay Parini posits that, "With the help of poetry, we begin to fathom the relations between nature and mind, between matter and spirit" (41-42); in *Continuation*, Dudek's "infinite" poem, these relations are unmistakably clear, since the poem is meant as a metaphor for the mind's processes, thus serving as an interface between mind and matter, between objective and subjective realities, and between the real and the transcendental.

Although Tremblay has called Louis Dudek Canada's "greatest cultural worker" ("In Memoriam" 7) and although Robin Blaser has referred to him as "Canada's most important—that is to say, consequential—modern voice" (9), Dudek remains a surprisingly understudied figure in Canadian literature. While he was a prolific and well-published poet, an outspoken, incisive critic, and a passionate teacher, recent anthologies of Canadian poetry have all but silenced Montreal's enigmatic man of letters. Terry Goldie points out that Dudek repeatedly "continued the call for the free individual poet commenting on reality," but he goes on to observe that, "for the main part of the Canadian readership, he has not been that poet" (51).

Nevertheless, the work of scholars such as Trehearne—whose recent anthology, *Canadian Poetry: 1920 to 1960* (2010), includes ten contributions from Dudek—has begun to re-establish Dudek as a major, even canonical Canadian poet. Admittedly, much has been published on Dudek's long poems, his relationship with Ezra Pound, and his lasting influence as an editor and publisher; but, as Trehearne notes, "Dudek has received—this lamentation is a commonplace, though nothing changes—a fraction of the attention his output, both poetic and critical, would seem to require. It is unconscionable that a lifelong poet who showed such dedication and

received such acclaim from confrères should be accorded the kind of scholarly attention reserved for the most minor of poets” (*Montreal Forties* 5). Moreover, Davey remarks that “Dudek’s work has not been intelligently or sympathetically received” (*Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* 81), a comment which suggests that the little scholarship that does exist requires further attention and, in some cases, substantive corrections.

Obviously, much work remains to be done in regard to the explication and detailed literary analysis of Dudek’s impressive poetic *oeuvre*, and this thesis attempts to carry out a small part of that work while keeping in mind Trehearne’s comment that “any attempt to improve the critical fortunes of Canadian modernist poets will have to separate three discourses from one another: (1) what we have habitually said about them; (2) what they said about themselves and one another; and (3) the poems they actually wrote” (*Montreal Forties* 10). By considering Dudek’s writing in its historical, literary, and literary-critical contexts, the following chapters seek to illuminate the ways in which Dudek effectively reconciles reality and the imagination through the paradoxes he evinces in his meta-poetry and poetics.

CHAPTER 1

REALITY AND THE IMAGINATION IN DUDEK'S EARLY POETRY AND POLEMICS

"We would find it very boring or simply useless to read literary works which represented things as they are and nothing more. The very end of imaginative presentation is to show things as better or worse than they are so that we ourselves and our readers will be moved in an emotional way to take sides, to involve ourselves in some mode of action, or imagined action, as regards reality."

– Dudek, "Interface: Reality and Literature"

While most of Dudek's critics have been content to refer to his early poetry as "social realist" in spirit if not in kind, any close examination of this poetry apart from Dudek's polemics of the same period makes it abundantly clear that such a label is unequal to the task of elucidating his complex position in relation to society or to "reality." An examination of Dudek's meta-poetry from the 1940s and early 1950s, in particular, is useful not only because it allows readers to trace a path of poetic development from which the political and the needlessly biographical elements of much Dudek criticism have largely been excised, but because it posits a poetics that both foregrounds his initial struggles to accommodate reality and anticipates his later poetic achievement. Dudek's earliest published poems, which appear in *The McGill Daily* and in *First Statement*, belie—or, perhaps more likely, fail to consistently articulate—his true poetic concerns. As such, a majority of these poems can be said to belong to what Trehearne repeatedly refers to in *The Montreal Forties* as a period of "apprenticeship." Even so, the importance of Dudek's meta-poems from this period cannot be overstated, as they look forward to a mature and unified poetic style which is hinted at only rarely in the rest of his early work. Despite his various experiments and derivative forays into Romantic, Imagist, and Aestheticist forms of expression, Dudek's meta-poems display an acute awareness of the paradox that, apart from any

political program, “realist” poetry requires intellect and imagination if it is to transform the natural, physical world into art of any kind.

In “Critical Episodes in Montreal Poetry of the 1940s,” Trehearne insists that “the basis for a reconstitution of ’forties studies would seem to be a return to documents” (35). Not surprisingly, then, any accurate re-reading of Dudek’s accommodation of reality and the creative imagination during this early period must take his poetry into careful consideration. The unique socio-political and biographical context in which Dudek was writing cannot be ignored completely, of course, but an overemphasis on biographical details or on political and personal antagonisms is symptomatic of the “shabby criticism” (“Critical Episodes” 25) that created the need for a “return to documents” in the first place. Again, Dudek’s meta-poetry marks an especially practical starting point for this return: it points to discrepancies between his polemic treatises in *First Statement* and his own early poetry, and it most clearly identifies and embraces the paradoxes and tensions that permeate much of his later work.

Dudek’s ambivalence about the nature of “reality” in his early poetry speaks more generally to the struggles faced by Canadian modernist poets to expand Romantic definitions of reality to include urban as well as natural landscapes, to consider the world of cities, skyscrapers, and parking lots without denying forests, ferns, and babbling brooks their equal place in reality. Concerning “The Romantic Legacy” in modernist poetry, David Perkins writes, “Nature is almost omnipresent in this poetry, and, despite the more depressing pronouncements of nineteenth-century science, it is almost always favorably regarded: it is refreshing, aesthetically appealing, sympathetic, wise or a source of wisdom, occasionally even divine” (4). Trehearne correctly identifies a “resurgent Romanticism” in Dudek’s poetry during the 1940s (*Montreal Forties* 287), but it should be noted that Dudek’s measured responses to nature were not likely to

be confused with the exudations of Canadian poets such as Bliss Carman, whom Dudek accuses of “superficial lyrics” and a “message of spontaneous joy” repeated “to the point of nausea” (“The Significance of Lampman” 65). In 1928, almost two decades before Dudek published his first volume of poetry, A.J.M. Smith raised similar complaints not only against his poetic predecessors, but against a Canadian public that allowed such poets to thrive:

If you write, apparently, of the far north and the wild west and the picturesque east, seasoning well with allusions to the Canada goose [*sic*], fir trees, maple leaves, snowshoes, northern lights, etc., the public grasp the fact that you are a Canadian [*sic*] poet, whose works are to be bought from the same patriotic motive that prompts the purchaser of Eddy’s matches or a Massey-Harris farm implement, and read along with Ralph Connor and Eaton’s catalogue. (“Wanted—Canadian Criticism” 600)¹

Like other Canadian poets of the 1940s, Dudek borrowed from the “nature” poets in his use of rhyming quatrains and pastoral imagery in order to distil the wonders of the physical world into verse; however, his conception of reality was coloured equally by the influences of the city and of modern civilization. Indeed, the youthful Dudek seemed well aware that, as Parini observes, “poets who wilfully ignore the world around them risk marginality” (xii). The calls for relevant, “real,” and visceral poetry that were issued in *First Statement*’s editorials from 1942 to 1945 and that helped carry the social-realist cause into the next decade distinguished between Romantic poetry’s use of nature as a stand-in for all reality and modern poetry’s more inclusive approach.

In his “Brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and

¹ Cf. Brown 21. See also Dudek’s polemic essay “Academic Literature,” in which he complains that “Canada is essentially commercial and dead to anything like literature; it is a conventional, narrow, and materialistic country; and in such a country, where there is no public, there can be no people’s poets or artists. The lack must be found in both the people and the poets, and for the same sociological reasons: those conditions which produce readers of poetry produce poets also” (105).

Sciences” (1949), John Sutherland contends that modern Canadian poetry “has ranged further for its themes than the nature poetry and has never sought to ignore but instead has sought to interpret its social environment. While not indifferent to the Canadian landscape, it has shown less interest in nature itself than in nature as related to people” (67). However, E.K. Brown’s assertion in 1943 that “Canadian poets have not dealt movingly or naturally with human relationships” (51), considered together with Sutherland’s later statement of Canadian modernist poets’ supposed “interests” and intentions, suggests that new attempts to address reality in any sort of comprehensive, consistent way were still necessary in the latter half of the 1940s.

Brown’s assessment of Canadian poetry’s failure to incorporate modern society into its conception of reality is particularly telling in relation to a number of Dudek’s contributions to *Unit of Five* (1944) and *East of the City* (1946), despite the fact that most of the meta-poems from the same collections begin to offer a more complex picture of reality. For all of its merit, Dudek’s first solo publication, *East of the City*, is filled with examples of this kind of “failure.” As Davey writes,

In the majority of poems in *East of the City*, the poet’s consciousness was engaged with nature rather than with society. In many of these poems, the range of the poet’s response to nature, and therefore the range of the language, was limited by romantic conventions: the poet as isolated, solitary observer (‘A Store-House,’ ‘Making Poems’), the poet as solitary night-walker (‘Moon,’ ‘A Shadow’), the poet as sensitive observer of trees, ferns, the moon, clouds, leaves, stars, attractive women, blossoms. (*LD&RS* 47)

Davey’s analysis draws several striking parallels between Dudek and the Canadian Romantic poets of the 1920s and 1930s, the “Sweet singers of the Canadian out-of-doors” who “insisted upon being seen and overheard in poetic postures” (Beattie, “Poetry: 1920-1935” 724). In these

early poems, Dudek's response to nature aligns him with a kind of Sacred Fount tradition according to which "the true artist" is assumed to be "one who lives not less, but more fully and intensely than others" (Beebe 13). For modernist critics such as Smith, however, the "true artist" Canada required would be concerned not only with "the most intense of experiences," but with "the world situation in which, whether he likes it or not, he finds himself" ("A Rejected Preface" xxxi). Smith's remarks, which were meant to appear in a preface for *New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors* (1936), prefigure *First Statement's* social-realist pronouncements of the 1940s, and both Smith and the social realists share a belief in the poet's ability to bring about social change by focusing on his or her experience of the modern world. Smith maintains that the modern poet "must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system" ("A Rejected Preface" xxxi). Unfortunately, the poetic techniques necessary to bring about this kind of widespread reform remained undefined, as did the role of intelligence in transforming art, as a record of one's experiences of reality, into an instrument of social change. Davey notes that Dudek's contributions to *Unit of Five* are "strongly coloured by leftist convictions, not only about social injustice but about the role of art as an instrument in bringing about social change" (*LD&RS* 39); but again, the precise role of intelligence and the artistic imagination in highly politicized poems such as "A Factory on Sunday" is unclear.

In Dudek's meta-poems, by comparison, the unbalanced and ill-defined approaches to reality adopted by poets of the Sacred Fount and social-realist traditions are quickly abandoned in favour of an approach that seeks to define reality and its relation to the imagination in increasingly precise terms. One of his earliest meta-poems, "Ars Poetica," which was published

in *The McGill Daily* in 1943, seems surprisingly straightforward, especially when one considers the complex understanding of reality that Dudek displays in a diary entry dated August 9, 1941: he sees “a duality in the realm of experience,” which is influenced by the imagination or one’s subjective interpretation of reality, and a similar duality in “the world of ultimate reality, which is the sub-stratum of the known world” (1941 *Diary* 24). Nevertheless, “Ars Poetica” is not as straightforward as it first appears, even if it is read simply as a call for a return to nature or as a rejection of both Romantic idealists, on the one hand, and stuffy philosophizers, on the other.² At first, Dudek’s title seems an odd choice, since he states a preference for “The red lips of a laughing girl” (1) and “The articulate branches of dark / Tree-tops skirting a sky” (5-6), rather than for any kind of formal, self-reflexive, or philosophical meditation on a subject—which is precisely what one would expect in a poem entitled “Ars Poetica.” But the title also points to the crux of the poem: the discrepancy between the speaker’s imperative to “Go smell a genuine rose!” (12) in the final line and the poem’s tacit acknowledgement of the act of its own creation, the act of writing that makes such an imperative possible in the first place. The poem claims that objects in the natural world make “more delicious poesy / Than all the world’s philosophy, / Metaphysics, or studies chemical” (2-4), and that the branches of tall trees are capable of writing “sonnets at times just as high / As Shakespeare or Petrarch” (7-8); yet these claims are crafted, ironically, in the language of poetry, in second-hand responses to a reality that Dudek implies can only be approximated in a “sticky treatise” (10) or “lovelorn lyric” (11). Surprisingly, the “red lips” of the first stanza and the “articulate branches of dark / Tree-tops” of the second serve only as a point of departure for poets and philosophers alike who rely on “a sensitive nose” (9) in order to successfully capture nature’s essence in writing.

² Dudek’s apparent rejection of Keats and his “lovelorn lyric[s]” is particularly interesting here, since Dudek adored Keats and Juliusz Słowacki—“a kind of Polish Keats”—in his youth (Stromberg-Stein 9).

In “Ars Poetica,” then, reality becomes what Eva Seidner calls a necessary “starting point of the poet’s quest for meaning” (21-22), but this quest does not culminate in a simple “realist” or “social-realist” approach to the objective world. In an interview with Michael Darling, Dudek remarks,

It’s true that I’ve often written criticism that would put me down as simply a realist—that was part of the programme—but it’s also true that the way I’ve developed would seem to be something that masked this or moved away from that simple position. Well, in fact it never was a simple position of social realism; it was the desire to get closer to reality as a springboard for poetry. (2)

This “desire to get closer to reality as a springboard for poetry” is not expressed in a direct manner in “Ars Poetica,” although Dudek’s objections to the academic poets or authors of “sticky treatise[s]” against whom he wrote in his *First Statement* polemics are unambiguous enough. As Goldie observes, Dudek’s aversion to poets of an “Ivory Tower” tradition, “which Dudek deemed to be aridly intellectual, formal, impersonal, and academic,” had a strong impact on his writing (5). However, while most critics attempt to explain this aversion in terms of Dudek’s affiliation with social-realist poets such as Layton and Souster, a majority of Dudek’s poetry was not really “social-realist” at all, an incongruity which suggests that the label has been applied too generously in Canadian scholarship.³ Trehearne admits that social realism “has meant many things to critics of Canadian forties poetry, from vague expressions of sympathy with working-class life to the more doctrinaire expression of revolutionary responses” (*Montreal Forties* 289). Too often, Canadian poets of the 1940s have been yoked together under a general social-realist umbrella, and specific references to individual poets’ actual work have frequently

³ In an interview with Laurence Hutchman in 1992, Dudek would later reflect, “Am I a social realist? Hardly at all. I’m more or less a transcendentalist in poetry. It’s hard to say” (155).

been limited to small, self-serving selections.⁴ While Dudek, Layton, and Souster were celebrated for their accomplishments as social-realist poets by Sutherland in his *First Statement* editorials, Norris argues that, “Reading the poems themselves, one finds that Sutherland’s enthusiasm is, perhaps, more for a premonition of what they will write in the future than what they were writing at this time” (36). Davey agrees, noting that, in *East of the City*, “lyrics to moon and tree appear to be from a different pen than those poems which attack the materialism of society and its callousness towards the working class. . . . None of the technical means used in *East of the City* is, however, adequate to combine these contradictory elements” (*LD&RS* 48). Poems such as “A Factory on Sunday,” “Garcia Lorca,” and “East of the City” are among the few Dudek poems from *East of the City* that are clearly “social-realist,” if one agrees with Trehearne’s provisional definition of social realism as “a primarily aesthetic orientation, in which the description of a particular kind of urban scene (or, less commonly, action) is arranged around an accumulation of visual details in an attempt to evoke class-poignancy in the reader” (*Montreal Forties* 289). While Norris contends that “[t]he effort to bring poetry out of the ivory tower and down into the street, which had begun with the McGill group, was realized in the forties” (82), Dudek’s inability to reconcile the “contradictory elements” in his own poetry suggests otherwise. In 1952, Dudek himself wrote that the poetry of the forties was “old and yellow: it was a good beginning, but not yet the real thing” (“Où sont les jeunes?” 24).

Dudek’s ostensible dislike of Patrick Anderson, P.K. Page, and other “*Preview* poets” can be explained easily with reference to his politically charged essays; however, Dudek’s attraction to the idea of the “proletarian” poet is explained best not in terms of his political or personal

⁴ In Wynne Francis’s “Montreal Poets of the Forties,” for example, “social realism” is used rather indiscriminately to describe “the poetry of ‘proletarian’ poets like Dudek, Layton and Souster” (30), although no attempt is made to differentiate between the three poets or to define “social realism” with specific references to their poetry.

affiliations, but in terms of his growing commitment to poetry that deals directly with reality in its various forms. An exclusively social-realist interpretation of Dudek's early poetry makes little sense, despite Dudek's grandiloquent claims in "Poets of Revolt: Or Reaction?" (1943) that "a revolution is being accomplished, in which all white shirts are soiled" and in which "real poets of the people" are willingly "dragged into the streets" (5). In *Unit of Five* and *East of the City*, Dudek seems just as likely to soil his shirt fornicating or having a nap at the base of a tree than to lead any kind of social revolution. Trehearne notes, too, that "social realism is not of much interest to Dudek in the *First Statement* period: he offers at best one or two poems that open with precise urban detail but veer away from it quickly into more fantastic or satiric modes of expression" (*Montreal Forties* 289-290). In "Geography, Politics and Poetry" (1943), Dudek's warning against "a pedantic absorption in the second-hand universe of books, literature and erudition" (2-3) reveals as much about his desire to discuss the "real" world with intelligence and vigour as it does about his superficial, politically motivated repudiation of a generalized *Preview* aesthetic. Even so, Dudek's hypocritical disapproval of *Preview*'s "polyglot displays" and "poetry about poets and poetry" (3) in the same essay is perplexing, indicating the extent to which his puerile machinations had been allowed to infect his "poetics."

As Dudek's own writing demonstrates, the young Montreal poet was certainly not afraid to compose intelligent, imaginative reflections on the nature of poetry, and many of his later poems or collections are littered with "polyglot displays." Indeed, Dudek was not opposed to the use of the intellect in poetry, nor was he ignorant of the role played by the imagination in preventing that intellectual component from turning poetry into an arcane or "academic" pursuit. In "Academic Literature" (1944), Dudek's distaste for poetry that displays "a lack of liveliness" is obvious (105). However, Dudek's acerbic commentary fails as an accurate gauge of his true

poetic concerns by presenting an intentionally skewed picture of the Canadian literary scene for propagandistic purposes. Promoting *First Statement* poets at the expense of their *Preview* “rivals,” Dudek was forced to overstate his case in a series of generalizations that directly contradict his private musings and meta-poetic reflections about the complex relationship between reality and the imagination: “University writers may be good,” he concedes, “but they are usually not much alive. There is usually a certain lack of liveliness, of the sense of reality, the human touch, a content of common sense. It is the difference between understanding through emotion and experience and through the book and the mind alone” (106). By suggesting that a causal relationship exists between “the style of our latest poetry and the retreat into the ivy-wreathed tower, the university” (105), Dudek was not expressing a genuine and “overwhelming concern to avoid rarefied university verse” (Goldie 6) so much as he was attempting to distance himself from *Preview*’s “meticulous moderns.” As Trehearne wisely observes, however, such a polarized view of the poets of this decade does not “translate usefully into a reading of the poetry” (“Critical Episodes” 28), and he notes further in *The Montreal Forties* that such antagonisms were “posturing and superficial” in any case (6). A similarly antagonistic view is perpetuated in *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (1967), which was edited by Dudek and one of his former students, Michael Gnarowski: in contrast to the *Preview* poets, the *First Statement* poets’ work is described as having been “more visceral, their convictions hotter and more truly expressive of the pressures of life: they were working-class poets” (209). Unfortunately, in the absence of textual evidence, such noble claims do little to advance critical scholarship, for, as Trehearne explains, “*First Statement* was not printing criticism but polemic” (“Critical Episodes” 46).

If Dudek's trajectory as a poet serves as any indication, his true poetic beliefs are more accurately recorded in his meta-poems than in his early polemic essays. In "Academic Literature," for example, Dudek writes that "the tendency of our civilization in the past . . . has often been to move away from its relation to the real currents of life; where by 'real' I mean purposeful, related to the physical basis of life, work for sustenance, economic necessity, et cetera" (106). While Dudek provides a working definition of reality, of "the real currents of life," his definition is both vague and incomplete, as the concluding "et cetera" suggests. Furthermore, the provisional definition that Dudek provides is much narrower, and much more limited, than any definitions that can be gathered from readings of his actual poetry. Beauty is denied a place in Dudek's purely utilitarian summary of physical reality, for instance, despite Dudek's earlier insistence on the "delicious poesy" of a girl's lips or a tree's branches in "Ars Poetica" and his later tendency towards Romantic panegyric in *East of the City*. As well, Dudek's rudimentary definition does not even begin to consider the role of the imagination and intellect in writing poetry that is "real" yet still relevant to one's position in society. Considered in light of Dudek's later meta-poetry, it seems that Dudek's complaint against "academic" poets may have stemmed from an awareness that "when the artist denies his own humanity and rejects the need for social engagement, he loses the ability to produce" (Beebe 16). While Wynne Francis contends that the *First Statement* poets "eschewed all abstractions and swore that 'words' would not come between their poetry and life" ("Montreal Poets" 27), her assessment underscores an important irony: like those of artists who sequester themselves in an Ivory Tower, the creative fires of artists who align themselves exclusively with the Sacred Fount tradition of "intense experiences" are equally prone to be extinguished. In his own poetry, Dudek shows

repeatedly that he is willing to “look upon the surface” of reality as well as to move “mountains of knowledge” in his quest for meaning (“Flowers on Windows” 24-25).

“From a Library Window” is one of Dudek’s most provocative poems in *East of the City*, and it points to a much more complex view of reality than most of the other poems in the same collection. The central dilemma it introduces—that of the poet’s need for real-world experience as well as for an artistic space or enclosure in which to write about that experience—produces a productive and sustained tension that brings each of its three parts into harmony. Although reality informs the poem, the poet’s reflections on physical objects are illuminated by “the play of intellect” (7). Davey insists that Dudek rejected Romantic, Surrealist, Aestheticist, and Mythopoeic theories of literature “as culturally escapist and irresponsible” on the grounds that they “were products of a mental laziness which blurs the hard, substantial nature of poetry” (*LD&RS* 41). “From a Library Window” is all the more ironic, then, since it renders reality as a kind of aesthetic composition from which the speaker has willingly distanced himself. If the poem is an attempt to answer Leo Kennedy’s plea for poets to “hustle down from the twenty fifth floor of their steam-heated janitor-service Ivory Tower, and stand on the pavement and find out and take part in what is happening today, before the whole chaste edifice is blasted about their ears and laid waste” (12-13), it is remarkably unsuccessful. Dudek is torn by competing desires or obligations, and the poem ends with the speaker at the window, despite his violent longings to experience the physical world:

At this distance, closed in glass shelves,
leaning against each other, the realities
past and present are easy,
dispersed on a level plane, in an order of line, under the

rule of play:

but we miss the muscle wrenched from the thigh,

the eye slit by the sun racing the pin ball,

and the active brain broken by fight and defeat. (15-21)

Dudek's dissatisfaction, as well as his longing for physical reality and sensory experience, is foreshadowed in the previous poem, "Night Train," by his reference to girls who are "unsatisfied" merely to read, though they read from "the pages of love" (16). In "From a Library Window," however, the poet reflects on reality in a highly aestheticized manner. While one might argue that Dudek adopts this style satirically, as if to confirm the need for poets to return to "the streets" and to the concrete "realities / past and present," traces of Romanticism and Aestheticism are evident even in the poem "In Spring," which contains stark, poignant images of conditions in the slums. The efficacy of its social message is undermined when "A warm wind erases the rising vapour of the city from view, / and even the refuse in the streets / looks romantic" (19-21). In "From a Library Window," the poet maintains a similar detachment from his subject matter, and it is important to keep in mind that the speaker of this latter poem has cloistered himself in a library, a symbolic site of retreat and erudition, despite whatever he says about his desire to return to the world outside.

As Susan Stromberg-Stein notes, Dudek, who composed "From a Library Window" while attending Columbia University in New York, was "no longer employed and engaged as he was in Montreal, but [saw] himself cut off from life, in contemplative isolation" (30).⁵ "From a Library Window" contains a strange commixture of Romantic posturing and an Aestheticized,

⁵ In this regard, Dudek seems to have followed the lead of the English Aesthetes of the 1880s and 1890s who, as Perkins observes, "caught from France the concept of the poet as intrinsically alienated from society [T]he poet withdrew to cultivate peculiarities of impression or sensation, or to worship Beauty, or sometimes to study in the library" (7).

detached rendering of the natural world into a two-dimensional, “paper-thin” landscape. But Dudek reinstates the division between nature and art in typical *l’art pour l’art* fashion, according to which “Nature could not suggest a process of composition, for organic form and emotional spontaneity were distrusted and abjured. Above all, nature could supply no criterion of the beautiful, and art was the opposite of nature—formal, conventional, traditional, artificial, and studied” (Perkins 35-36). Dudek’s eye perceives the “scene” as an object of aesthetic contemplation. At the end of the first stanza, he presents his thesis for the entire poem, using initial stresses and an introductory colon in the previous line to emphasize the importance of his statement: “this is a platform, for the play of intellect” (7). Although he sees order in nature, it is an order that he imposes on the landscape: the tennis court is reduced to “horizontally smooth” lines (2-3), “the field tilt[ed] to an experimental plane” (5), and reality “dispersed on a level plane, in an order of line” (18).

East of the City concludes with “On Poetry,” a meta-poem that anticipates the dramatic shift in Dudek’s poetics that was announced in his introduction to *Cerberus* (1952), a joint publication containing contributions from Dudek, Layton, and Souster. “On Poetry” focuses primarily on poets’ attempts to reconcile their imaginative “visions” with reality throughout history, and although the poem introduces a number of apparent contradictions or confusing claims, its definition of poetry as “action unrealized” (6) connects it to Dudek’s later poetry and poetics. The juxtaposition of “East of the City,” the collection’s eponymous social-realist anthem, with “On Poetry,” the collection’s final poem, is surprisingly provocative: the former’s closing imperative—“Walk out tomorrow, talk to the world and people” (49)—is quickly replaced in the latter with musings on the poet’s inability to effect change in the world. Dudek writes,

The poet should have been a king,
Shakespeare should have been all his monarch, ruling England,
Homer should have been Achilles
frowning for Briseis, or fighting for his friend. (26-29)

But Dudek goes on instead to describe the poet “in our time” not as a ruler of nations or as a fierce warrior, but as someone who “wrestles / with the maiden, his wild dream, in his sleep” (32, 35-36). Dudek declines further comment on the outcome of this contest, although he does acknowledge that the poet’s imagination can sustain the mortal bodies of “great men” (30). The notion of pure poetry, which exists in the mind as “action unrealized,” is carried on in Dudek’s introduction to *Cerberus*. The “true poem,” which uses language to capture the poet’s “wild dream,” is referred to as “the great, saving first poem” that is “always being written” (13). In the first line of “On Poetry,” Dudek claims that “[t]he flame of a man’s imagination should be organic with his body,” implying that poetry must achieve a natural synthesis of reality and the imagination; and yet, in his introduction to *Cerberus*, poetry is aligned with the imagination in opposition to reality: “Actuality itself is a metaphor made of iron, the diseased poem which man has erected out of mass frustration, out of centuries of evil. Poetry, therefore, opposed to this, has power, immense power for good” (14). Although Dudek’s statement seems to constitute a rejection of reality in all of its forms—therefore moving him one step further from a balanced synthesis of “flame” and “body”—an earlier statement in the same introduction makes it clear that Dudek was only rejecting a world of “industrial, commercial, and political machinery” in which the importance of the artistic imagination had been forgotten or ignored (13).

While Dudek continued to write social-realist poetry and polemic during his years in New York, his experiences in that city would have a profound impact on his development as a

modernist poet. When Dudek returned to Montreal in 1951 to accept a position at McGill University, his political views had changed considerably, as had his views on academia and its relation to the arts. In her essay “A Critic of Life: Louis Dudek as Man of Letters,” Francis describes these changes with reference to Lionel Trilling, one of Dudek’s professors at Columbia:

Trilling’s liberal ideas served to wrench Dudek from his rather narrow political base and to expose for him the superficiality of the brand of socialism which he had favoured while in Montreal. The ensuing change in his political thinking, and the increasing though grudging respect he was gaining for academic intellectuals, were reflected in his letters at the time, and were at least in part responsible for the eventual break in his relations with Layton, who remained committed to more or less doctrinaire Marxism and who thoroughly detested academicians of any kind. (10)

Similarly, Seidner writes that Dudek’s “great respect for the scholar [Trilling] caused him to be more kindly disposed toward the academic community in general and toward academics as writers especially” (16). Of course, the irony of Dudek’s appointment at McGill cannot be missed. As the author of “Academic Literature,” Dudek had attempted to establish himself as a poet concerned with “real everyday contact with the main currents of contemporary life” (105) at the expense of the so-called “sheltered poets” of the Ivory Tower, whose poetry was spoiled from an excess of “library logic” (106). For those who would consider Dudek’s *First Statement* polemics to be the most accurate record of his poetic beliefs, Dudek’s entry into the academic world can only be described as a great shock; for those who would consider Dudek’s meta-poems to be a more accurate indicator of the path he would take, however, his smooth transition into the academic world is hardly surprising.

Francis avers that, between 1944 and 1951, Dudek's respect for professors increased significantly, to the extent that "it no longer seemed to him quite so inevitable that vigorous poetry could not survive in the atmosphere of the university" ("Critic of Life" 13); the "flame" of the poet's imagination could survive, even flourish, within the walls of the Ivory Tower.⁶ Trehearne interprets this apparent about-face in terms of Dudek's increasing interest in the poetry of F.R. Scott and other *Preview* poets, noting that Dudek's acceptance of an academic position "after passing through a period in his own poetics of obscurity and formalism . . . really underscores the degree to which he had been projecting his own aesthetic anxieties in his noteworthy contributions to the devaluation of *Preview*" (*Montreal Forties* 6). Trehearne later adds, "At a distance it appears likely that Dudek's formalist and Imagist practice of the early 1950s was consonant with, if not furthered by, new creative friendships" (298). It is interesting to note, moreover, that this shift in poetics also coincides neatly with the decline of social realism in Canada. Munroe Beattie asserts that "poetry of social protest was going out of fashion" already in the late 1940s ("Poetry: 1935-1950" 768), and Norris explains that the "failure" of social-realist poetry was connected, in a general sense, to failure on a political level: "The politics that had fired the social-realist movement began to cool down in the post-war period; it soon became apparent that, despite high hopes, socialism was not coming to Canada" (44). Although Dudek did still publish one or two poems in *The Searching Image* (1952) that might be seen as carrying on a "social-realist" tradition in a very loose sense, this "(perhaps) last gasp of

⁶ Writing more than fifteen years later, Dudek and Gnarowski claim in *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* that "the real issue was poetry and the vitality of the poet's imagination. . . . Poets in the university are just as likely in the long run to transform the academy in the interests of creative scholarship and good writing as they are to be influenced by the academic routines. The only question is whether good poetry results" (85). Although this claim must be considered as having been written in hindsight, from a necessarily subjective and self-interested position, its emphasis on the importance of the imagination resonates with the poetics espoused in Dudek's meta-poetry written prior to his appointment at McGill.

Dudek's social realism" (*Montreal Forties* 300) must not have been too painful, since only Dudek's polemics were ever thoroughly and consistently committed to a "social-realist" agenda for any length of time.⁷ Too many critics, in attempting to focus on the social-realist elements of a small handful of Dudek's early poems, have treated much of the rest of his poetry as exceptions to a general rule, rather than reading his social-realist poems as anomalies within a rapidly shifting and heterogeneous body of poetry.

In *The Searching Image*, Dudek resorts to poetic conventions and figures of speech that are derived not from "real life" as he would have defined it in his earlier polemics, but from what he once called the "second-hand universe of books, literature and erudition" ("Geography, Politics and Poetry" 3). More importantly, it is in this collection that Dudek published "The Pomegranate" and "Line and Form," his most successful experiments using what Trehearne refers to as a "forties period style." Trehearne defines this style, which was predominant in Canadian poetry from 1942 to 1954, as one "in which brevity, density, and difficulty of metaphor are central to a poem's soundness of structure, or lack of it" (*Montreal Forties* 33). Dudek's unique rendition of this style is characterized by its density and use of difficult metaphors, as well as by its philosophical and aesthetic reflections—despite his recommendation, in the first issue of *Contact* in January of 1952, for "the young poet [to] keep away from abstractions, the prime ailing of Canadian amateur verse" ("Où sont les jeunes?" 25). Instead of inviting the poet to "talk to the world and people," Dudek urges the poet to "read the books and mags," spending "every possible cent on books, on the living poets, on criticism, on the knowledge that alone can bring this country forty years forward into the present" (25). Dudek emphasizes the paradoxical

⁷ A few pages earlier, Trehearne remarks that, in both *The Searching Image* and *Twenty-Four Poems*, "Social realism is invisible" (*Montreal Forties* 297). This initial statement implies that if any residual "social realism" can indeed be traced in *The Searching Image* or later poetry, it is hardly worth noting—hence the suspicious "(perhaps)" in the second, seemingly contradictory claim.

importance of knowledge and of the imagination in “making the major integration of life” (25); and, as poems such as “The Pomegranate” illustrate, he did not seem to believe that his new “forties period style” prevented him in any way from making this “integration” possible. Objects in the physical world still served as the poet’s raw materials, even if they were transformed into objects of aesthetic contemplation.

Trehearne provides an excellent reading of “The Pomegranate,” concluding that its “instability is not, obviously, profound; it forecasts Dudek’s need for a coordinating perceptive consciousness in which the aesthetic object, the social perspective, and the philosopher’s conclusions might all be integrated” (*Montreal Forties* 301). In “Line and Form,” the lack of “a coordinating perceptive consciousness” is less obvious, although three distinct personae do inhabit the poem: the poet, who describes how “an ocean arrested / by sudden solid / ripples out in the sand” (32-34); the scientist, who studies “parabola[s]” (26), “deflected particle[s]” (28), and physical objects “generated within a three-dimensional space / efficiently” (8-9); and the philosopher, who concludes that

this world of forms, having no scope for eternity,
is created
in the limitation of what would be complete and
perfect,
achieving virtue only
by the justness of its compromises. (35-40)

In his later meta-poetry—and especially in *Continuation*—Dudek would attempt to bridge the gap between the “complete and / perfect” realm of the imagination and the “world of forms”; the

idea of compromise, of attempting to capture the “perfect poem”⁸ of one’s imagination in poetic language even when “perfection” can never be attained, is repeated in *Europe*, Dudek’s first long poem. As Goldie writes, in “Line and Form” Dudek “suggests the necessity of finding the compromise form in which to represent that which can have no form” (29), and this search for a new form results in the undulating, wave-like lines that shape many of his later poems. Unlike “The Bee of Words,” “Old Music,” and even “The Pomegranate,” “Line and Form” is not arranged in rhyming quatrains; instead, it embraces a more conversational idiom and is grouped in the looser, free-verse stanzas of varying lengths that serve as the basic building blocks of his long poems.

In *Twenty-Four Poems*, which was also published in 1952, Dudek embraces the Imagist elements of the “forties period style” in an attempt to produce intelligent, imaginative poetry that remains in contact with “the real currents of life.” Trehearne observes that “Dudek’s Imagism is (apparently suddenly) prominent and highly skilled” (*Montreal Forties* 297). Dudek had suddenly published twenty-four short, sculpted Imagist poems, binding them together in a single volume. In *East of the City*, Dudek showed that he was capable of producing effective Imagist lyric poems, and “Night Piece” is perhaps the best of these. Its subtle metaphors cohere in a unified, consistent vision, and its images are simple, not strained or overwrought. In an interview with John Nause and J. Michael Heenan, Dudek would describe the importance of the Imagists to the *First Statement* poets (32), and in an interview with Louise Schrier, he would claim, “all my poetic development begins, in a most fundamental way, with the Imagist movement” (43). Trehearne claims, however, that Dudek “found little to develop in the Imagist method,” perhaps because he realized “how readily the Imagist impulse can lead to the

⁸ Cf. “The Moment” (*The Transparent Sea* 51). In this poem, Dudek depicts a poet who is confronted by a piece of blank paper; the poet—presumably Dudek himself—is “reluctant to end, in decision, this perfect thing” (10-15).

peculiarities of form and style that had once been—in Dudek’s view—so prominent and so vitiating in the *Preview* poets” (*Montreal Forties* 289, 299). In “Pure Science,” which appears mid-way through *Twenty-Four Poems*, Dudek sets aside all “peculiarities of form and style” in order to voice his concerns about the nature of poetry in plain and unpretentious language.⁹ Significantly, poetry is compared metaphorically in the first stanza to “a man-made kite / skating on an imaginary sky” (1-2); it is a product of the imagination that the poet, with feet planted firmly on the earth, must reel in from time to time. Dudek draws another line between reality and poetry, as a product of the imagination, in the second stanza, comparing poetry to “grandmother’s idea of heaven” (5) and complaining that it does not have enough to do with reality: “nobody cooks there, / sleeps with girls, or mints money” (7-8). In the final stanza, Dudek describes poetry as “a whirling / spark in a vacuum” (9-10), emphasizing again its failure in “making the major integration of life.” Again, Dudek’s implicit comparison of poets to “scientists,” whose experiments are conducted in isolation, reads ironically in relation to the sentiments that he expressed in “Academic Literature,” but the metaphor is hardly surprising if read in relation to his earlier meta-poems. The complaints registered in each stanza suggest that poetry is ineffectual, as well as undesirable, if it has no connection to reality and remains only “Pure Science” or “a whirling / spark in a vacuum.”

Throughout his early period of apprenticeship, Dudek struggled to bring his disparate poetic styles into alignment with a poetics that had not yet been consistently or adequately expressed except in a limited selection of meta-poems. Beattie comments, for example, that readers of *East of the City* “can fancy the poet endeavouring by various sorts of composition to

⁹ Davey writes that, in *Twenty-Four Poems*, “A single image presented without comment often make [*sic*] up the whole of the poem” (49). In “Pure Science,” however, Dudek presents one central image or idea in the first couplet of each quatrain before explaining its significance in the second.

circumvent the limitations of his poetics” (“Poetry: 1935-1950” 777), and Trehearne argues that Dudek’s insouciance in the 1940s “is a sign, as Davey says, of an immature poet who had yet found no style or voice of his own” (*Montreal Forties* 287).¹⁰ The period between the release of *The Searching Image*, *Cerberus*, and *Twenty-Four Poems* in 1952 and *Europe* in 1954 appears to have been a crucial one for Dudek, as it allowed him to consolidate his poetics as well as to develop complementary forms of poetic expression. Trehearne accurately observes that “Dudek’s growth into a profound and important poet, to say the least, coincided with an extended consideration of the questions of poetic structure and voice that had been critical to his first decade of publication” (*Montreal Forties* 243). In a sense, Dudek seemed to be accepting the challenge that he himself had issued in “Où sont les jeunes?”: “Canada needs poets now who will have learned from the experimental and realistic writing of the last ten years and who will go on from there. Let them learn at least what to avoid: certainly not to repeat” (24). In *Europe*, Dudek repeats very little. His innovations include a “new meditative and denotative mode” (*LD&RS* 44) or “discursive manner” (*Montreal Forties* 297) and a “new” metrical form according to which lines appeared to be arranged, à la Pound, Aldington, and H.D., “in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (“A Retrospect” 3). Although *Europe* incorporated certain elements from his earlier poetry, such as the conversational idiom and philosophical meditations of “Line and Form,” the long poem required Dudek to apply his talents as never before. Trehearne sees “East of the City” and some of Dudek’s other “social-realist” poems as being indicative of an unfulfilled desire for “longer poetic structures” (*Montreal Forties* 264), but even these did not require him to adapt his methods significantly.

¹⁰ In “Critical Episodes in Montreal Poetry of the 1940s,” Trehearne remarks further that “the *First Statement* poetry of the ’forties was largely fledgling, only the *Preview* poets having emerged with their best and characteristic work before the decade was over” (22).

Nevertheless, Trehearne's claim that "the search for an aesthetics adequate to nature and to the natural man was at least latent in his creative imagination very early on" (*Montreal Forties* 288-289) is a provocative one, suggesting as it does the need for a comprehensive style that would be able to address the tensions, paradoxes, and anxieties that were already the focus of Dudek's meta-poems prior to 1954.

Written as a kind of poetic journal of Dudek's European travels in 1953, *Europe* is both ambitious and wide-ranging in scope. However, despite the poem's apparent lack of a unifying theme, its meta-poetic fragments display a consistent concern with the role of the imagination in art. In two of these fragments, sections 56 and 64, Dudek undergoes a kind of crisis which begins with an expression of doubt about the validity or power of poetry in relation both to reality and to other forms of art:

Who would want to create beauty
where the mountains rise almost perpendicularly
and bow in a huge landscape
of domes and arches? Why write
the grand reflective poem, or the epic,
when songs and castanets
are as good a music? (89)¹¹

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all citations from *Europe* in this paper refer to the 1991 revised edition, which restores the text to its intended and original manuscript form. In the preface, Dudek explains this edition's particular significance:

I have always been disappointed with the printed text of the original book, because I had neglected in the proofreading to insist on having the book largely reset and made to conform to my exact layout of the poems, particularly to the indentation of the lines . . . But this edition brings the entire poem back to its true form. A great satisfaction, because arrangement on the page is part of the aesthetic of poetry; and the technique of indentation in this poem, which is a delicate modulation of voice and meaning, was the beginning of a development which has continued in my poetry to the present. (18-19)

creative imagination. As Dudek's early poetry and polemics demonstrate, Dudek was well aware that poetry is ineffectual if it does not attach itself to the "real currents of life"; however, as his meta-poetic reflections in *Europe* demonstrate, he was equally aware that, in poetry, the natural world exists only as a product of the poet's imagination. Recalling "a row of comfortable Duplex houses / on the outskirts of Montreal," Dudek writes,

We are a principle in ourselves,
a foreign body in those suburbs;
building something in the mind only, whose shape, dim
and white, trembles and becomes solid sometimes—
the one good line in a poem. (102)

Instead of focusing merely on the ways in which reality informs the imagination, Dudek describes a process in which the imagination informs reality. As before, the "after-image" still "trembles," as the poet is unable to recall the Duplex houses exactly. Yet the image that Dudek builds "in the mind only" occasionally achieves its own kind of "fixity" and "becomes solid," a product both of reality and of the imagination that becomes "the one good line in a poem." The "flame" of the poet's imagination intersects with the physical objects he encounters or has encountered in the past, and the movement from line to line, from reality to imaginative renderings of reality, re-enacts the poet's back-and-forth struggle to write just "one good line." Assessing *Europe* in the preface to the 1991 revised edition, Dudek alludes to this struggle in slightly different terms: "The in-and-out of abstraction is what the poem demonstrates. And this problem leads to the strains of organization and disorganization, of idea and pure perception, that continue through my later poetry. What matters is the emotion that carries the poem along, emotion generated by perceptions and ideas flowing together" (15). More important than reality

itself is the poet's perception of that reality; the imagination influences this perception, and the two crystallize into an "idea." Gradually, each "pure perception" becomes an "idea" to form poetry. Here Dudek describes the process in which the "Duplex houses" are appropriated by the mind, infused with imagination, and gradually take on new shapes in the poem.

In his earlier meta-poetry, Dudek acknowledged—if only tacitly, at times—the limitations of poetry that was committed too exclusively either to a simple "realist" or "academic" stance, but in *Europe* this awareness is articulated in increasingly profound ways. More importantly, however, Dudek's reflections in *Europe* demonstrate an increasing awareness that no poetry can accommodate reality effectively without transforming the particular into the universal. Paradoxically, this transformation is achieved through a retreat into oneself. As Dudek would later explain, the complex nature of this process is connected to the complex nature of literature itself, which "involves the life of a particular man, the times in which he lived, the ideas imbedded in the work. It involves the nature of imagination, and the question of how the particular reality or fiction presented in a poem becomes universalized and becomes significant for other people, on other grounds" ("An Interview" 38).¹² In *Europe*, Dudek's search for an image or method of presentation that would best allow him to achieve this kind of universality led him to the sea, as a metaphor for the human imagination that "makes and unmakes all reality like its own dissolving waves" (Preface 14). In section 95, Dudek waxes meta-poetic in an implicit comparison of mind and sea:

The sea retains such images
in her ever-unchanging waves;

¹² Similarly, Stromberg-Stein—paraphrasing a conversation with Dudek in 1976—writes that "he feels that the intimate details of life are not satisfactory subject matter for poetry unless they can be raised to universal significance" (88). In *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada*, Dudek and Gnarowski had also claimed that "all true literature aims at universality" (233).

for all her infinite variety, and the forms,
inexhaustible, of her loves,
she is constant always in beauty,
which to us need be nothing more

than a harmony with the wave on which we move. (141)

Both the sea and the mind serve as repositories of images that are combined and recombined constantly in “ever-unchanging waves,” an up-and-down movement that Dudek re-enacts in iambic sequences such as “The sea retains such images” or “the wave on which we move.” However, the sea does not merely contain a catalogue of images or physical objects. In *Modernist Literature: An Introduction*, Mary Ann Gillies and Aurelea Mahood argue, quite reasonably, that it is up to the poet “to revive language and to restore its communicative power through the infusion of new images” (70); like Dudek’s own project, however, this kind of renewal requires more than a glut of images. In the fifth issue of *CIV/n* magazine, which was published in the same year as *Europe*, Dudek wrote, “A vivid picture of the city dump, or of the private dump of one’s own conscious or unconscious, makes no poem” (qtd. in Norris 67).¹³ As the meta-poetic fragments in Dudek’s first long poem suggest, poetry’s return to reality must also be a return to the ideas that have attached themselves to “such images” of life and love. In the previous section, Dudek reflects on his experiences, as well as on the people and places he has seen during his travels, and concludes that in poetry, as in life, “all these are remembered / in the first effort to return, to relive in memory / what was too little comprehended” (140). Playing the central role of traveller-poet, Dudek is able to reflect on his experiences in a more focused

¹³ While discussing the general trend towards realism in modern poetry with Darling, Dudek makes similar remarks, insisting that realism in poetry “doesn’t mean that the poetry becomes like a photograph, depicting an actual realistic world; no, that’s just a beginning of the emotive, imaginative, verbal and every other kind of experiment . . . but reality is the beginning, still is in my poetry, so in that sense it is the core” (2).

and personal way; he arranges the world around him into a cogent, intelligent, and imaginative poem by means of a “coordinating perceptive consciousness” whose processes mirror those of the sea, with its “infinite variety” and “inexhaustible” forms.

The poetic process that informs *Europe* is prefigured in his earlier meta-poems, made explicit in its meta-poetic fragments, and refined in his subsequent poetry. Even so, Dudek’s use of the sea and its movements as a metaphor for this complex process is only the first of several attempts he would make to balance reality and the imagination in a way that transformed the particulars of his life into details of universal significance. In his preface to *Europe*, Dudek implies that, in section 95, his perceptions and ideas flow together to produce poetry that is given neither to Romantic effusions nor to “academic” obscurities: “The passage gives examples of particular objects and realities, which then become ‘such images’ of meaning, the touchstones of recurrent beauty. There can be no more emotional passage in the poem than this one, and yet it is also the most intellectual” (16). Although Dudek’s most poetry of the mid-1950s was certainly more accomplished than his early Romantic, “social-realist,” Imagist, and Aesthetic experiments, the anxieties and paradoxes introduced even in his earliest meta-poems had not yet been “resolved” in any definite sense, nor had his formal innovations in *Europe* led him to the kind of “coordinating perceptive consciousness” that could sufficiently combine the disparate fragments of his ambitious poetic project.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS THE “INFINITE” POEM: DUDEK IN THE 1950s AND 1960s

“The greatest sin against art, and against life, is to say that there is nothing ‘other than this,’ no glory under the surface of things, hid in the process of nature.”

– Dudek, “Ken Norris on the Twentieth Century”

More than any other critic, perhaps, Trehearne has sought to provide a narrative of Dudek’s development that examines possible affinities between Dudek’s early and later poetry. In *The Montreal Forties*, he writes, “Few, Davey included, have sought to bridge the gap in Dudek’s practice from the poetry of the forties to his sudden discovery of vocation in the long poem, and the present context invites a closer scrutiny of that lacuna, once the terms of poetic transition from the young post-Poundian *Europe* to the originator of *Atlantis* are clearer” (262). This chapter begins with an alternate, but not necessarily contradictory, explanation of Dudek’s “poetic transition.”

In 1954, Dudek’s period of “apprenticeship” seemed to come to a sudden end with the publication of *Europe*, despite the fact that his next two long poems, *En México* (1958) and *Atlantis* (1967), would continue to wrestle with many of the formal and thematic issues that the first had merely introduced. Understandably, many critics have diligently discussed the ways in which *Europe*, with its unique form and its remarkable synthesis of philosophical thought, signals a new beginning, of sorts, in Dudek’s poetic search for truth. But the division of Dudek’s *oeuvre* into distinct and clearly delineated periods is an arbitrary—and potentially damaging—critical exercise. In the same way that Dudek’s early poetry has been aligned too readily with an ill-defined “social-realist” tradition in Canadian poetry, Dudek’s long travel poems of the 1950s and 1960s have been aligned too readily with what is thought to be an arcane, didactic, and elitist tradition of “academic” poetry. An examination of Dudek’s meta-poetry from this later period

reveals not only a continued interest in the transformational role of the imagination and the intellect in the poetic process, but also a more complex understanding of reality and the poet's fundamental relation to the phenomenal world than his detractors have supposed. As in his earliest meta-poetry, his meta-poetry from the 1950s and 1960s again charts the course of his future work while addressing his deepest poetic concerns in the present. In *Europe, En México*, and *Atlantis*, Dudek's meta-poetic fragments focus the itinerant philosopher's meditations and begin to unite the seemingly disparate elements of his poetic project into an increasingly cohesive structure. Indeed, it is in these fragments that he is able to explore most productively the points of intersection between reality and the imagination in his quest for Atlantis, the "hidden reality" beyond the known and knowable world.

Before he had even published his first collection of poetry, Dudek was well aware of the complex relation between reality and the imagination, as well as of the impossibility of approaching objective reality except through subjective experience. Writing about "the world of ultimate reality" in 1941, he remarks that "what we know about that world is what is manifested in terms of knowledge in the realm of experience" (*1941 Diary* 24). This same belief is echoed in an aphorism from *Europe*—"I suppose that what you see / depends on who you are" (70)—and described more fully in "Theory of Art." In this meta-poem from *The Transparent Sea* (1956), "the physiological eye is part of a complex metaphor" for the poetic process (Stromberg-Stein 65), as well as a synecdochic representation of the poet's mind, the site of intersection between reality and the imagination or between objective and subjective realities:

In the wide circle of an eyeball

at any moment

the mind, or imagination, combines and recombines

windows and heads, a leaf and a cathedral,
with unfailing unity,
with a centre of interest, with an artist's iron will.

.....

'The poem is vision'—but think of that diagram
of light coming to focus
from all quarters, to the miniature in a pupil—

the whole world, there in compendium, all
its huge fragments
a silent landscape, in the perfect O of the eye! (1-6, 22-27)

As in "Line and Form," the voice of the philosopher describes the process in which the poet perceives "the whole world." In "Theory of Art," however, it is the excited poet, rather than the detached philosopher, who provides the poem with its concluding metaphor. The world is "a silent landscape" reconstituted in the mind of the poet and then refashioned in lines of verse. Yet Dudek's poem, which is itself the result of a personal and subjective "vision" of the world, is highly impersonal; written in the language of a general "theory," it explains how "an artist's iron will"—not Dudek's iron will in particular—shapes the constituent elements of the poem into a unified whole. In addition, the poem's nine tercets follow an identical, unchanging pattern of indentation, shaped and polished according to the philosopher-poet's mathematically precise "*techne*" (7) instead of the ecstatic poet's "vision." Rather than attempting to replicate the ebb and flow of the poet's mind, "Theory of Art" limits itself to an explanation of the physical

processes involved in the transformation of the raw materials of art as natural and artificial objects alike are taken in and absorbed into the body of the poem with “unfailing unity” (4-5). Inspiration comes “from all quarters” (24), although the poem itself offers only a meagre catalogue of “windows and heads, a leaf and a cathedral” (4), a microcosm in lieu of the world “in compendium” (25). Dudek’s interest in the poetic reconfiguration of “the whole world” in “all / its huge fragments” (25-26) forms the basis of what would later become an explicit “poetics of accumulation” in his “infinite poems,” *Atlantis* and *Continuation* (Trehearne, *Montreal Forties* 244); but in “Theory of Art,” the “infinite poem” is curtailed as “the poem condenses or compacts the world” (Stromberg-Stein 65) into a closed and finite structure.

The process of “perceptions and ideas flowing together” that Dudek identified in his Preface to the 1991 edition of *Europe* is recreated, in a rudimentary way, even in “Ars Poetica” and Dudek’s earliest meta-poetry. In *The Transparent Sea*’s “Keewaydin Poems,” however, the role of the imagination as a counterpoint and guide to the natural world is reinstated in increasingly unambiguous terms. Davey argues that “*The Transparent Sea* implies a shift in Dudek’s sense of the poet’s identity from one who *sees* more clearly than other people to one who dares to *think* more deeply and dangerously” (*LD&RS* 50), but in the meta-poetic cycle “Keewaydin Poems,” the mind of the poet “comes to nature / to swell slowly among the trees” (1-2), forging a symbiotic relationship in which neither reality nor the imagination is allowed to completely overwhelm the other. In other poems, such as “Hot Time” (46), the voice of the ratiocinative and philosophical poet is completely absent. In the meta-poems from this collection, however, the poet is presented both as “one who *sees* more clearly” and “one who dares to *think* more deeply and dangerously”; the two identities are inextricably linked, and

Dudek is careful to emphasize the importance of perception as a function of subjectivity and of poetry's ineluctable ties to the phenomenal world:

The world I see (this poem)
I make out of the fragments of my pain
and out of the pleasures of my trembling senses.

Not all have, or see the same. ("Keewaydin Poems" 102)

Dudek creates order in the poem by reassembling "the fragments of [his] pain" and "the pleasures of [his] trembling senses," balancing perception and ideas in order to transform his various *aperçus* into a coherent, meaningful vision. As in his earlier meta-poems, Dudek attempts here to strike a balance between what Coleridge referred to as the "primary" and the "secondary" imagination. Parini defines the former, which corresponds to Dudek's understanding of "perception," as "initial perception: how we assemble the world at a glance," and he defines the latter, which corresponds to Dudek's understanding of "ideas," as a process in which "the poet takes what is given by the senses, dissolves it, then reconstitutes this reality to form a counterreality" (13). For Dudek, "The world I see (this poem)" results from the complex movement of "perceptions and ideas flowing together." Fragments of the poet's experiences coalesce in the poem as they are interpreted and organized naturally in the creative imagination, a process which Parini describes as "an elaborate dialectic, an interplay of reality and the imagination" (13).

In Dudek's second long poem, *En México*, the result of this balancing act—the poem itself—is a celebration of diverse perspectives and experiences, as well as a declaration of the order inherent both in man and in nature. Dudek writes,

Our point of perspective shows us

the natural way of survival
and poetry's natural way:
the stumbling speech of children,
the relaxation of the palm,
the look on a tired woman,
the grin of the happy man.

And where all roads come together
to a place of storm, or sun,
the poem begins proclaiming:

'I-am-that-I-am.' (53)

As in "Theory of Art," the poet's "centre of interest" is one of several "point[s] of perspective," a meeting point where fragments of experiences or images—catalogued here in a list denoted by anaphoric repetition of the definite article "the"—converge as "all roads come together." Even so, the poem is also "a place of storm," and the jungle depicted in *En México* represents the centrifugal forces that threaten to pull apart Dudek's carefully ordered logic. Trehearne argues that "[a] world of such startling disorder . . . appears to have provoked his consideration, for the first time, of the kinds of coherence and meaningfulness that might inhere in a random structure" (*Montreal Forties* 271). For once, however, Trehearne seems to be mistaken, for Dudek had already begun to consider, in *Europe* and perhaps in earlier poems as well, how "nature, uncultivated, precedes us / not without form" (54).¹⁴ Davey acknowledges Dudek's interest in

¹⁴ Writing in retrospect in the 1991 Preface to *Europe*, Dudek also attempts to explain the organization of the poem into some kind of "abstract order" by remarking that *Europe* is, in fact, "a search for the order that really inheres in things" (15).

natural forms and agrees that, in both *Europe* and *En México*, “Dudek challenges a landscape to reveal meaning” (*LD&RS* 66). In *En México*, order in the natural world can be measured empirically, since it is manifested in visible, tangible ways. Nevertheless, the order that exists in man, or in the mind of the poet, can also be detected. Dudek observes that “small leaves are perfect in detail,” but he then goes on to write, “Order remains unimpaired / in man and in matter” (71). Drawing upon both imagination and intellect, Dudek transforms the jungle, with “its inimical insects, flies, / and the chaos of growing / everything at once” (34), into an image of order—all without detaching himself from his physical surroundings.

Davey and Norris identify in *En México* a “proprioceptive method” according to which the inner order of the poet’s mind is projected onto the natural world, but a proprioceptive reading of this text does not accurately mirror Dudek’s own understanding of the mutually informing roles of reality and the imagination in the poetic process—nor does it offer any insights into Dudek’s poetics that had not already been provided in his earlier meta-poetry. Norris explains how, in the 1960s, *Tish* poets such as George Bowering, Frank Davey, Fred Wah, and Daphne Marlatt followed the lead of Charles Olson and the proprioceptive Black Mountain poets by “concentrat[ing] on stimuli that were internal, inside the poet” (107). Norris also quotes Warren Tallman, who later maintained that poetry should begin not with perception of the outside world, but with the self, the true subject of proprioceptive poetry (107). Although Dudek would become increasingly interested in the role and representation of the self in his long poems, his philosophical meditations and poetic self-portraits were never purely solipsistic. Even in *Atlantis* and *Continuation*, his most “difficult” poems, such reflections continue to proceed from an emphatic interest in the phenomenal world. Interestingly, Norris describes the average *Tish* poet as someone who “does not relate to language as an artisan or craftsman, but as

a disciple or priest” (107). In *En México*, Dudek relates to language not as a priest in possession of deep and mysterious truths or divine revelations, but as a curious explorer mediating between an unknown, larger order and the order that is revealed to him through his “trembling senses.” In a meta-poetic fragment that appears to support a proprioceptive reading of *En México*, Dudek actually affirms the role of the imagination in transforming perceptions of the physical world into polished, orderly visions of reality:

Imagination makes
the organ cactus,
the autocar,
and a poem with six feet in every line. (32)

The poet’s imagination constitutes his reality as he reflects on the order that inheres “in man and in matter.” But even here, where the imagination seems to take sole responsibility for the recreation of different objects in the poem, Dudek’s subjective vision relies on a knowledge of objective and physical realities—including an “organ cactus” and an “autocar,” two objects that Dudek was very likely to have encountered during his trip to Mexico. Davey argues instead that, “While the images appear superficially to be from an objective world, the rhythm reveals them to be thoroughly internalized: the objective is located within the subjective. The process of apprehension is now as much proprioceptive as perceptive; the poet attends to his own breath and mental rhythms as objective measures of the phenomenal world” (*LD&RS* 63-64). Davey’s analysis is convincing, but in stating that “the objective is located within the subjective” he implies that, in Dudek’s poetry, the subjective subsumes the objective entirely instead of merely influencing one’s experience of objective forms of reality. In his *1941 Diary*, Dudek wrote that “what we know about [the world of ultimate reality] is what is manifested in terms of knowledge

in the realm of experience” (24); in *Europe* he wrote, “I suppose that what you see / depends on who you are” (56); and in “Keewaydin Poems” he wrote, “Not all have, or see the same” (102). Furthermore, Davey’s comment that “the poet attends to his own breath and mental rhythms as objective measures of the phenomenal world” suggestively implies that Dudek’s own rendition of poetry composed “in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (Pound 3) borrowed heavily from Olson’s “Projective Verse” (1950), both in its general tenor and in its emphasis on “the laws and possibilities of the breath” (3).

Whatever *En México*’s methods, and whatever its particular successes, Dudek’s second long poem nevertheless echoes *Europe* in expressing doubts about the power of the imagination to “fix” or transform reality into poetry with its own unique order and brilliance. Dudek detects a sense of order even in the jungle, and it is an order that he claims is responsible for “the necessary magnificence of all reality” (35). This affirmation is then juxtaposed with what appears to be a renunciation of artists’ creative and intellectual faculties: “(Where an artist is only a pipsqueak / in a forest of mocking birds.)” (35). Dudek’s artist seems a much-diminished figure, and his art is that of “a forest of mocking birds,” a parenthetical echo of the beauty and magnificence of “all reality.” Yet this passage can also be read as a call for artists to open themselves to “the necessary magnificence of all reality” without failing to transform what they see, hear, taste, smell, and touch into an intelligent and imaginative vision. Seidner testifies to Dudek’s own creative powers as a poet, stating that “[h]e uses his own consciousness to demonstrate how the human being, mustering all of his intellectual and sensual powers, can penetrate chaotic appearances and perceive the essential order of reality” (26). Dudek’s faith in the order that informs the natural world as well as the creative imagination is accompanied by what seems to be an incipient faith in the poet’s ability to replicate, and even refashion, that

order in art. “At Lac En Coeur” (1959) expresses similar doubts to those expressed in *Europe* and *En México*, but it also continues to affirm the order present both “in man and in matter.” While Dudek admits that “the greater part, all life, was there / united when we came,” his appreciation of nature’s “copious language of forms” is communicated in a poem whose mere existence confirms its own worth as “a part of being” (218). In “At Lac En Coeur,” Dudek reaffirms the significance of the poet’s subjective imagination by describing the poetic process of “shaping a world already made / to a form that [he] require[s]” (215). Like the “hidden bios,” Dudek sculpts the world around him into “multiform shapes of desire” (214), and his meditations on order in nature provoke a meta-poetic monologue on the process by which such order is engendered in poetry and blossoms into a magnificent “tree / of many thoughts” (218). Once again, the act of writing may be seen as imitative insofar as the poet’s “multiform shapes of desire” mimic the natural world, but the poet is nevertheless able to achieve a stirring vision of “all reality.” Both *En México* and “At Lac En Coeur” culminate in such a vision, and critics such as Douglas Barbour have suggested that “*En México* stands as Dudek’s most successful poem: an organic, unified whole” (25).

In “Beyond Autobiography” (1985), Dudek claims that “At Lac En Coeur” marks “the beginning of all [his] later poetry,” presumably on the basis of its “quiet and introspective bent” (81). Although “At Lac En Coeur” does prepare readers for *Atlantis* in this respect, and although it may in fact mark a general shift in the content of his poetry, it can hardly be said to mark a distinct shift in his poetics, since even Dudek’s earliest meta-poetry is characterized by the same quiet, introspective, and philosophical style that predominates “Keewaydin Poems,” *En México*, and much of his later work. In “Lac En Coeur” (1959), Dudek describes the supposed significance of “At Lac En Coeur” in the evolution of his poetics not by outlining the new

direction he feels his poetry is taking, but by defining the poetic process he had previously embraced:

I had so far made it my concern
not to be aware
of writing a poem, thought of it
as irrelevant,
as in this case anyhow contrary
to my real concern,

that I wrote nothing
I did not first think
complete, as it stands.

Not a poem, but a meditation—
they make themselves, are also natural forms,

kernels that come whole to the hand. (1-12)

The process of “thinking the poem out” is presented as a kind of corrective to a process in which the poet was not “aware / of writing a poem” (2-3), and Dudek’s repeated use of the past tense in describing the latter, outmoded approach further emphasizes this difference. As Dudek would later explain, “Lac En Coeur” is significant because “the process of writing the poem, thinking the poem out, is now the important fact – I’m not arguing with the world anymore” (qtd. in Stromberg-Stein 71). One might be surprised to read, then, that Stromberg-Stein believes that “Lac En Coeur” “marks the turning point where Dudek’s writing becomes a true meditation, and

therefore something like an automatic process” (72). The very phrase “automatic process” denotes a poetic process fundamentally opposed to a process that involves “thinking the poem out” or consciously crafting a subjective vision into an intelligent, meaningful, and permanent piece of art. The poet’s “meditations” may indeed “come whole to the hand,” but Dudek does not fail to distinguish between a “meditation” that is “complete, as it stands,” and “a poem,” which he is able to create only when he is “aware / of writing a poem.” While the meaning of the awkwardly phrased adjectival clause “in this case anyhow” (5) remains elusive, and while Dudek does not identify his “real concern” (6), the poem is nevertheless important simply as a reinstatement of his belief in the importance of the imagination and intellect. Contrary to Stromberg-Stein, Davey observes that, in Dudek’s poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, “Dudek came more and more to look upon poetry as a conscious, rational art that employed preconscious process merely as raw material” (*LD&RS* 33), and this increasingly self-conscious approach would lead to an increase in meta-poetry as well as a proliferation of manifestoes on the form, content, and function of poetry.

One of the most important of these manifestoes is “A Note on Metrics,” which Dudek published in the fifth issue of *Delta* in 1958.¹⁵ As Goldie points out, the importance of documents such as “A Note on Metrics” and “Functional Poetry: A Proposal” stems largely from the fact that, through them, “Dudek established the mode which he has continued to support and within which he has continued to write until the present” (30-31). Concerning the publication of *Cerberus* in 1952, Dorothy Livesay would remark, “as yet the poems do not match the theory”

¹⁵ Dudek founded *Delta* magazine in 1957, operating it single-handedly until 1966. Norris neatly summarizes the significance of the magazine itself by noting that “*Delta* was a personal magazine, run under the editorship of one man and serving as an extension of the editor’s intellectual concerns and literary tastes” (74). Because Dudek used the magazine to promulgate his ideas and opinions on a wide variety of subjects, it provides a wealth of information about the thought processes that inform *Atlantis* and some of his earlier poems.

(76). But in the pages of *Delta*, Dudek's poetics would become increasingly aligned with his poetry as many of the ideas explored in his meta-poetry were formalized and explored in greater detail. In "A Note on Metrics," for example, Dudek borrows from poems such as "Line and Form," *Europe*, and *En México* in a discussion of rhythm and form. He insists that "the rhythms and forms of poetry are potentially unlimited, like the forms of leaves, driftwood, or animal bodies. They tend to become formalized and rigid: they decay with over-formalization. At their origin they are fluid, creative, and constantly changing—searching for new forms of beauty" (15).¹⁶ The idea of "unlimited" and organic forms posited here is reminiscent of the "essential form" (20) or "Eternal forms" (24) mentioned in "Line and Form"; the "infinite variety" and "inexhaustible" forms of the sea in *Europe* (141); and "the poem / as mysterious as these trees, / of various texture" in *En México* (69). Dudek reaffirms his faith in the poetic process, as well as in the poet's ability to transform the order that exists "in man and in matter" into an imaginative and unique reinterpretation of reality: "Just as forms are manifold, the ways to produce forms may be manifold. . . . A poem, after all, is not something poured into prepared muffin tins; each poem—each verse—should be carved as an individual sculpture" ("Metrics" 15-16). In regard to rhythm and metre, Dudek describes a similar process in which the poet, recreating "the essential music" of a poem, composes "an original piece of music, a form that cannot be borrowed or counterfeited" (17). Here Dudek seems to rely heavily on Pound's idea of an "absolute rhythm"

¹⁶ Three decades later, in "'The Breathless Adventure': An Interview with Louis Dudek on the Long Poem," Dudek avers that "poetry should generate new forms just as nature generates the different forms of grasses and leaves" (47), and in his interview with Hutchman in 1992, Dudek would restate this belief yet again:

I think that literature, poetry or the human mind itself, have always had a very dangerous failing, a tendency to slip into the rut of mathematical counting, of lines, syllables, lengths, and thinking it has got a form when it has measured it out with a ruler or counting device, ten syllables to the line. So you have the heroic couplet, you have the French couplet and so on. This is really a perversion of artistic form, since the mathematics should be invisible, like that of flowing water or clouds. The twentieth century discovery is that form in the arts is more like modern dance, that it has an infinite number of forms that are made by free movement actually, with language and words. (160)

that “corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed,” a rhythm that is “uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable” (9).¹⁷ Like Pound’s “Retrospect,” Dudek’s “Note” calls for more than *vers libre*; it calls for poetry that conforms to an inimitable and invisible order, to metrical patterns and rhythms that constantly invent themselves in nature as well as in the mind of the poet. In *Europe*, Dudek had already reflected, “It must be that the kinds of beauty are infinite; / though we have tried only a few” (100). In a meta-poetic fragment from *Atlantis*, however, Dudek builds on this idea, as well as similar ideas espoused in “A Note on Metrics,” claiming that “it would be far more difficult, almost impossible, / to write a poem in the rhythm of another, earlier, poem / than to write a new one, in the rhythm of a new one” (7). Although even “Keewaydin Poems” and *En México* contain the occasional couplet or alternating rhyme, such features are almost entirely absent from *Atlantis*, which Dudek began to write in 1961.¹⁸ Dudek’s increasing interest in “absolute rhythm” and “essential music” in his long poems corresponds to an increasingly critical view of strictly regulated rhythmic or metrical patterns, and both of these general tendencies are reflected in the poetry he published after 1959.

Karis Shearer observes that Dudek felt metre “was stale and constraining, preventing poetry from adapting to effectively perform its cultural work” (x). In doing so, she provides a concise summary of two of Dudek’s overlapping concerns, addressed in “A Note on Metrics” and “Functional Poetry,” respectively: the modern poet’s struggle to bring rhythm and form together to create “a beautiful shape” (“Metrics” 17), and poetry’s inability to engage with reality or to address “our real concerns” (“Functional Poetry” 6). In “A Note on Metrics,” Dudek

¹⁷ Dudek’s “essential music” and Pound’s “absolute rhythm” correspond, and are perhaps synonymous, with what Beattie calls “fidelity to the essential rhythm of the poem” (“Poetry: 1920-1935” 727), as well as with what Harriet Monroe referred to as “an individual, unstereotyped rhythm” in her Introduction to *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917).

¹⁸ According to Dudek, the first draft of *Atlantis* was written in 1961, although the poem was not published until 1967 (“Questions [Some Answers]” 10; “Beyond Autobiography” 81; “Louis Dudek” 139).

championed the aesthetic importance of personal, unique forms of expression, but in “Functional Poetry,” a provocative “poem-essay,” Dudek reminds poets and critics alike that poetry is called to perform a crucial public function as well.¹⁹ Again, many of his poem-essay’s salient points are adumbrated in fragments of earlier meta-poetry, such as those found in “Line and Form,” *Europe*, and *En México*.²⁰ In section seventy-two of *Europe*, for instance, he writes that “[t]he arts have been important / because their fiction worked upon / the needs of people” (115). Nevertheless, Seidner quite accurately observes that “Functional Poetry” “represents a union of theory and practice” (20), since it gathers together the ideas expressed in Dudek’s meta-poetry. Specifically, “Functional Poetry” concerns itself with two problems: “the loss of ground to prose over the centuries / in the subject matter of poetry” and “the loss of freshness in method / as the residue of ‘poetic’ substance / became fossilized in decadent metre and form” (1). Dudek had already begun to address the latter of these problems in “A Note on Metrics,” but he had not yet discussed at length the problem of “the recapturing of the timely subject areas that were ceded to prose at the end of the last century” (Seidner 19). Although Dudek’s early “poetics” had called for a revolutionary return to “the actual” in poetry, his new poetry and writings emphasized the need for intelligent, imaginative, and “functional” poetry—not just philosophical treatises masquerading as poetry or abstract, intellectually tough poetry. Dudek bemoans poetry’s lack of

¹⁹ In the Afterword to *All These Roads*, Davey discusses Dudek’s preoccupation with poetry’s ability to effect change in both the private and public spheres: “Poetry for Dudek should be a genre in which the major issues of the time are engaged, a genre that encourages reflection among influential readers, and has a determinative effect on both private life and public policy. He worked to increase both the intellectual focus of poetry and its public circulation” (57). Although Davey’s comments are intended as a general summary of Dudek’s poetic concerns and core beliefs, they also function as a helpful *précis* of “Functional Poetry.”

²⁰ Shearer also provides evidence to support the claim that the ideas behind “Functional Poetry” had been expressed elsewhere prior to 1959. She writes, “While critics have attributed Dudek’s ‘functional poetry’ thesis to the late fifties (Blaser 22; Goldie 31), when it was published, evidence from his correspondence with the American poet Ezra Pound shows that, in fact, the concerns that inform the essay ‘Functional Poetry’ were expressed on paper nearly a decade earlier” (xi). The evidence to which Shearer refers is a personal letter Dudek wrote to Pound on November 12, 1952—the same year that “Line and Form” was published in *The Searching Image*.

emotion and imagination (2), but he also celebrates at least two potential solutions to the present quandary, including “poetry of exposition and discourse” (6) and an increased focus on reality through “the senses,” which offer “a good beginning / with which to breach the wall / of prose” (5). In order to “breach the wall / of prose” in his own poetry, Dudek would search for a form that achieved a balance between form and function, emotion and intellect, and reality and the imagination. But in “Functional Poetry,” Dudek seems cognizant of the difficulties associated with writing poetry that strikes a balance in each of these areas and that is “as relevant and immediate as prose matter” without becoming too prosaic itself. Cleanth Brooks asserts, “The successful use of prosaic or unpleasant materials and the union of the intellectual with the emotional are symptoms of imaginative power—not . . . symptoms of the death of poetry” (53), and his assessment effectively underscores the connections between “Functional Poetry” and Dudek’s repeated attempts to produce balanced poetry as an “intelligent, imaginative man” (7).

In “Functional Poetry,” Dudek restates his belief in poetry’s necessary connections to reality, as well as its critical and cultural importance. Dudek disagreed vehemently with Northrop Frye on this subject, since Frye “contended that literature exists as a self-enclosed medium, a frame in which it is continually relating to itself, and that it bears no relation to life” (Norris 75). Instead, Dudek believed, as Francis duly notes, that poetry “has a moral function to perform—moral in the Arnoldian sense of ‘a criticism of life’” (“Critic of Life” 5).²¹ Although Dudek would continue to explore ways in which the order “in man and in matter” could illuminate his poetry and thus help him to share with the world a remarkable vision of civilization, he begins in “Functional Poetry” to delimit the means by which such goals could be

²¹ Similarly, Seidner writes, “The ‘powerful application of ideas to Life’ which Arnold saw as fundamental to the greatness of a poet is one of Dudek’s basic preoccupations” (17), and Davey observes, “Dudek’s conviction that poetry must have a cultural role, that it must participate effectively in the intellectual and cultural issues of its time, also became dominant in his poetry and criticism from the 1950s onward” (“Louis Dudek” 47).

accomplished. He writes,

. . . I go back always to the first free moderns

Lawrence, Aldington, Eliot (then), Pound (1915)

Lee Masters (yes! Sandburg too)

for the beginning of what we need: straight language

and relevance to our real concerns[.] (6)

Dudek does not provide more substantial or specific definitions of “straight language” or “real concerns,” and in the next issue of *Delta*, Eli Mandel would pose a series of questions to Dudek in order to challenge him to elucidate the poem-essay’s central arguments: “what matter do you offer, to what will you give permanent shape, what shape will it be, what ideas, what subject matter, what?” (“Functional Poetry Etc.” 13). As demonstrated above, Dudek had already begun to provide answers to these questions—in his meta-poetry as well as in “Functional Poetry” itself—and it is important to keep in mind that “Functional Poetry” was written as “A Proposal.” Even so, “Functional Poetry” affirms poetry’s value as a “functional art,” and it addresses a number of questions raised by John Sutherland in *Other Canadians: An Anthology of New Poetry in Canada, 1940-46*:

[The poet] has something to say which frequently has meaning for the ordinary man. We accept the value of this idea where prose is concerned, and often judge it with regard to its relevance to reality. Why then, do we regard poetry in a totally different way? May it not be that the actual environment is even more essential in the case of poetry? Does not the poet work upon everyday things so as to extract their essence and give them back to us in more concentrated, meaningful form? (14)

Throughout Dudek’s meta-poetry, and increasingly in his writings of the 1950s and 1960s,

Dudek's answer to Sutherland's final question was, of course, a resounding "yes." In poems such as *Europe*, "Theory of Art," and "Keewaydin Poems," the process of "perceptions and ideas flowing together" simultaneously affirms the poet's ability to "work upon" the reality of "everyday things" as well as to "extract" and imaginatively reassemble "their essence" in writing. Shearer argues that "Dudek's is very much a poetry of ideas," but she also explains that his body of work "reflects a consistent belief in purposeful art (as opposed to art for art's sake) and a persistent inquiry into the conditions of contemporary culture" (ix). This idea of art's purposefulness and "relevance to our real concerns" was not, perhaps, fully fleshed out in Dudek's poetry until the publication of *Atlantis*, although claims such as "[a]rt is really the way of life" (*En México* 76), which predate "Functional Poetry," would be repeated constantly by Dudek until his death in 2001.²² Unlike Frye, who took for granted the fact that "the poet is not only very seldom a person one would turn to for insight into the state of the world, but often seems even more gullible and simple-minded than the rest of us" (180), Dudek took poetry, and the responsibilities of the poet, very seriously. In an interview with Tremblay, Dudek stresses, "poetry for me is not just some delightful sentimental stuff on the side. It's a great, central civilizing force" ("Ideogram" 134). Dudek's focus on "civilization instead of society" (*Montreal Forties* 305) would become increasingly apparent as he abandoned the rhetoric of social realism in favour of more comprehensive and philosophical forms of "functional" poetry.

Early critics of *Europe*, *En México*, and *Atlantis* often produced contradictory valuations of what would become three of Dudek's most "popular" publications, and this ambivalence is especially evident in regard to Dudek's supposed status as an "academic" or "intellectual" poet.

Those critics who disliked *Europe*, for example, were quick to establish affinities between

²² In 1968, for example, Dudek delivered a lecture entitled "Poetry as a Way of Life," and in 1970 he echoed his earlier remarks by writing, "Poetry today is not an art, it is a way of life" ("The Poetry of Reason" 201).

Dudek's poem and Pound's *Cantos*, but few provided evidence of any kind to support the theory that Dudek was merely an imitator of Pound, and those who attacked *Europe* on other grounds rarely bothered to sustain a close or rigorous analysis worthy of critical consideration.²³

Adjectives such as “abstract,” “intellectual,” and “academic” were constantly applied to Dudek's poetry, despite the fact that none of these terms were defined—even by those who used them most disparagingly. According to Dudek, “intellectual” was hardly a pejorative label, and the “bohemian intellectuals” he identifies by name in “Academic Literature”—Pound, Aldington, and Lawrence—followed the lead of Whitman, Sandburg, and Frost, poets who “[came] out of, and returned again to the cave of common men” (105) after they had received their education. For Dudek, the difference between the “intellectual” and “academic” poet is tantamount to “the difference between understanding through emotion and experience and through the book and the mind alone” (“Academic Literature” 106). Among Dudek's critics, the lack of such a definition is the source of much confusion. In reference to Dudek's long poems of the 1950s and 1960s, at least, Goldie is mistaken when he writes, “The lack of agreement among various critics of Dudek's work reflects the often amorphous nature of that work” (20); instead, this lack of agreement reflects a lack of clarity regarding the terms that critics have used both to celebrate and to censure Dudek's poetry.

In private letters sent to Dudek following *Europe*'s release, Layton light-heartedly praised the poem for its “intelligibility and passion”; E.J. Pratt admired the way it “combine[d] the cerebral and the visceral”; and William Carlos Williams said that “[t]he language of it is so simply put down, without pretence, that I am all admiration” (qtd. in Gnarowski, “Afterword”

²³ For examples and analyses of these kinds of claims, see Smith's introduction to Dudek's poems in the third edition of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (478); Dudek's Preface to the 1991 edition of *Europe* (17); Gnarowski's Afterword to the 1991 edition of *Europe* (153-155); and Dudek's autobiographical “Louis Dudek” (131).

151-153). As if preparing Dudek for the decades of critical neglect that would follow, Layton provided Dudek with a warning as well as some consolation: “The kind of concern you have isn’t fashionable today; and since you’re not an intellectual you take ideas seriously and they are good ideas, but not the kind the world just now wishes to hear about” (qtd. in Gnarowski, “Afterword” 152). In a much less diplomatic review, sent in a letter from Cid Corman to Layton in August of 1955, Corman dismisses *Europe* as “bad journalism, bad poetry, and bad thinking” (qtd. in *LD&RS* 34).²⁴ Soon after, and as Dudek’s friendship with Layton began to deteriorate, Layton’s opinion about Dudek’s poetry changed drastically.²⁵ In 1960, Layton published “Mexico as Seen by Looie the Lip,” a shameless parody of *En México*, and in 1962 he published his calumnious “Open Letter to Louis Dudek” in *Cataract* magazine. Layton aligns Dudek with “intellectuals, cosy and buttock-padded, [who] are reluctant to engage in open argument,” but he also accuses Dudek of being “too far gone with academic rot to recognize a real live issue” (“Open Letter”). Layton uses “intellectuals” interchangeably with “academics,” and he criticizes both for failing to “recognize a real live issue”—although, like Dudek and other former “social-realist” propagandists, he fails to explain what constitutes “a real live issue,” let alone how one might “recognize a real live issue” and thus avoid being labelled an “intellectual” or “academic.” In *Atlantis*, Dudek seems to have anticipated a similarly cool reception from critics, and he attempts to prepare himself—and perhaps invite the sympathy of his readers—by writing his doubts into the poem itself: “Already I hear / the creatures are laughing at my words. No one understands. It does not interest them” (149). Such doubts were certainly warranted, as Dudek was rejected both by those he had identified earlier in his polemics as “academic” critics and by

²⁴ As Davey notes, “Corman’s remarks about Dudek’s work occur mainly in the context of his struggle with Dudek for influence over Souster and to some extent over Layton” (*LD&RS* 34).

²⁵ For further information about Dudek’s well-documented feud with Layton, see Trehearne 238-239; Norris 155; or Elspeth Cameron’s comprehensive study, *Irving Layton: A Portrait*.

so-called “social-realist” or “proletarian” poets who recognized that his poetry had moved in what they deemed to be a radically new direction.

Even before Dudek’s departure from New York in 1951 to accept what would quickly become a permanent teaching position at McGill University in Montreal, Dudek had reconciled himself to the idea of working within the academy. However, Dudek never reconciled himself to the idea of becoming an “academic” poet, although he had found reason to admire—and embrace—the life of the intellectual. Goldie writes, “while Dudek felt anti-academic in many ways, he was by no means anti-intellectual” (7). To Dudek, the “intellectual” poet was someone who balanced intelligence and a supple imagination in an effort to make “the major integration of life,” whereas the “academic” poet was intelligent but ultimately favoured learning about the phenomenal world at a remove, rather than through any kind of actual immersion in that world. Although he ridicules “intellectuals” in *Laughing Stalks*, he would eventually abandon the term in favour of “academics,” a term which captured more precisely his disdain for poets who leaned too heavily on the crutches of abstract thought or totalizing and dogmatic theories of literature.²⁶ For the intellectual poet, imagination is creativity, and in this sense he resembles the passionate young poet whom Dudek describes as wanting “the pith of knowledge, and the fire of literature, not the curator’s collection of dead shells” (“Symposium” 8). Even though Dudek himself was a professor at an educational institution and strove for “an intellectually tough poetry” (Barbour 18), he actively opposed those who sought to impose order on reality arbitrarily, as well as those who would turn the poet’s subjective visions into an esoteric “collection of dead shells.” Ron Everson asserts that Dudek’s penchant for the intellectual element in poetry “reigns through all his books; even through the different styles” (qtd. in Stromberg-Stein 104). Yet, as Gnarowski

²⁶ In “Poetry for Intellectuals” (4), Dudek satirizes “intellectuals”; but already in “On Your Own” (72), his focus shifts to “scholars” who “improve their scholarship / until they are pure fools” (1-2).

remarks, Dudek embraced the intellect and the imagination in order to get closer to reality and “to establish a meaningful connection with that which belongs to the order of universal culture. He has tried to prove the relevance of our own time, and of his presence in our environment, to the tradition and the artistry of man” (“Louis Dudek: A Note”). Dudek wanted to effect change in the real world to cultivate civilization, and he envisioned “the university working in direct cooperation with the community to foster understanding and enjoyment of the arts” (Collins, *In Defence* 6). In Dudek’s “Autobiographical Sketch,” he would argue that “this work (teaching) is not necessarily antithetical to the writing of poetry; that under the best conditions, if teaching institutions were what they should be, the university is the most natural place for the literary artist as well as the literary scholar” (qtd. in Stromberg-Stein 43).²⁷ As a prolific poet and as a long-serving professor, Dudek was well aware of the need for artists to strike a balance between immersion in and temporary detachment from “reality.” In “Further Thoughts on the Long Poem” (1989), Dudek maintains that “poetry today is a private act, though one still of ultimate social importance” (89). Because of the nature of the creative process, the poet’s withdrawal from the world is paradoxically both a necessary and inevitable step towards the reconstitution of reality in art.²⁸ As Dudek explains, “the aspect of contemplation means nothing more than a certain distancing perspective, a postponement for the individual, so that he or she can reach a superior integration with the reality of things” (“Interface” 238). Although Dudek physically inhabited the “Ivory Tower” of McGill for many years, he never allowed himself to become what

²⁷ In “Louis Dudek—A Radical Reformer,” Collins quotes one of Dudek’s unpublished notebook entries, dated from November 9, 1988, which reveals more of Dudek’s thoughts on the subject of the university and his relation to it; he writes, “I am a poet who at one time infiltrated the university—to see if I could somehow transform the teaching profession. To make it relevant to the concerns of life and of living poetry. And then, perhaps, I infiltrated the newspapers, for the same reasons. I have been a radical reformer in this way—but the radicalism is not destructive, it is to bring back the values of our civilization” (245).

²⁸ Cf. Beebe 309.

Layton at one time believed him to be: “an exhausted poet fallen among pedants, with all the fires gone out” (“Open Letter”).

“Functional Poetry” formalized many of Dudek’s concerns about poetry’s ability to make “the major integration of life,” but in *Europe*, *En México*, and *Atlantis*, these concerns occasionally manifest themselves in verse that is overbearing, elitist, or overly didactic.²⁹ Nevertheless, Dudek’s most outspoken opponents attacked him for his “didacticism” in the same way that they had attacked him for being an “academic” poet—that is, with very little precision, and perhaps even less understanding of what Dudek meant by the term when he embraced it so willingly in his prefatory note to *Europe*.³⁰ Collins defends Dudek’s didacticism, claiming that “Dudek’s purpose as a critic of culture is overtly didactic in the highest and most positive sense of the word: to present the central and crucial issues of art, literature, and civilization to the general public in such a way that the issues are made important and that the public understands how these issues touch our lives” (5). While Collins’s definition usefully illuminates points of intersection between Dudek’s poetics and poetry, Dudek was quite aware that his detractors used “didacticism” in a different sense: “to trumpet too explicitly the given truth and wisdom of a society” (“Beyond Autobiography” 85).³¹ Perhaps Dudek would agree with Horace, who

²⁹ Although a discussion of Dudek’s elitism falls outside of the scope of this study, it is interesting to note that, as with the term “intellectual,” Dudek’s understanding of what it means to be an “elitist” seems to differ greatly from that of his detractors. While Dudek admits that he is an elitist (“An Interview” 12; *LD&RS* 167; Dudek, “Louis Dudek” 124; Trehearne, *Montreal Forties* 239), he explains, “I’m elitist in the same way that all serious thinkers in the past, who had to make distinctions between what is better and worse, were elitists” (“Ideogram” 147). See also “Questions (Some Answers)” (17), Dudek’s *Notebooks: 1960-1994* (143), and Blaser (8).

³⁰ This “Note,” which appears in the 1954 edition of *Europe*, reads as follows: “References to persons and events in this journal are at times coloured to suit the poem’s purpose. For the relation of inaccuracy to truth in poetry the reader is referred to Aristotle’s [*sic*] Poetics. As for being didactic, Plato teaches, at the end of the Republic, that we had better be, if we want a place in utopia” (4).

³¹ Like his critics, Dudek rejected this second kind of didacticism. In “The Psychology of Literature” (1977), for example, he states that “didacticism is poor stuff in literature” (375). However, even in 1991, Dudek did not find any fault with *Europe* on this, or on any other, account: he writes, “I stand behind every word of it, behind every

suggested that poetry could “both teach and delight at the same time” (Parini 5), since his own “Functional Poetry” attempted to fuse the utilitarian aspects of prose with the pleasing and natural rhythms of poetry’s “essential music.” However, Dudek still struggled to incorporate didacticism—in its “highest and most positive sense”—into his long poems without irritating or alienating his readers. As Stromberg-Stein observes, “[Dudek] fluctuates between a personal purpose and a highly didactic one” (88), and this fluctuation may explain why Blaser would have reason to conclude that *Europe* “is, by turns, irritating, expedient, and strangely moving” (17). By comparison, *En México*’s overall approach is much less didactic than *Europe*’s, and this sense of humility and openness is indicated by references to “a groping fallible mind” (33) and “advances / toward humility” (25). In *Europe*, Dudek had also seen himself as complicit in the “crimes” of a society he actively condemned,³² although such moments are all but cancelled out by moments of condescension, as when he remarks that “[t]he intellectual calibre (high on this voyage) / is about that of the *Sat. Eve. Post*” (43), or when he indiscriminately attacks “the young, the hostellers,” calling their lifestyle “dirty” and “stupid” (87).³³ Following the publication of *En México*, Dudek’s disappointment with his poetry’s reception—and critics’ misunderstanding of his didactic project—turned to a bitterness that is reflected in *Laughing Stalks* in poems such as “To the Reader” (3), “The Layman Turned Critic” (5), and “To Beat the Racket” (6). Dudek’s bitterness and frustration culminate in “Canada: Interim Report” (1971), but the poem’s tone is less didactic than it is dejected, haughty, and cantankerous. In 1965, Dudek claimed, “I ceased to be didactic when I realized I couldn’t even convince myself”

line, as I read what that young man has written – despite the arrogance and vehemence which were then reproved as ‘didacticism’” (Preface 9).

³² In one such instance, Dudek identifies himself with travellers who come to Europe “cerebrating, / wrangling, with all our novel western habits, / washing continually, paying cash for everything, / demanding clean accommodation” (89).

³³ The word “stupid,” which appears in the 1954 edition of *Europe* (78), is omitted from the 1991 edition of the text.

("Jottings"), but *Atlantis*, published only two years later, is still highly didactic according to the definition given by Collins, if not according to the exclusively pejorative definition levelled at Dudek by his harshest critics. Whatever the case, Dudek's struggle to balance form and content as part of his overarching desire to effect change through art is enacted in each of his long poems. As Barbour remarks, "The philosopher ranting can provide little pleasure or stimulation, for he is using language in a manner, for him, meretricious" (27-28). Dudek is at his best when he is "searching for new forms of beauty," not when he closes his eyes to the "infinite variety" and "inexhaustible forms" of reality that he explores so effectively in his meta-poetry.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Dudek's search for new, balanced forms of poetry commensurate with his ambitious cultural and literary goals would result in an increasingly epigrammatic or prosaic style of "functional" verse. Critics such as Barbour, Beattie, and Davey argue that this kind of epigrammatic poetry is deficient not only because it is excessively didactic, but also because it is lacking in emotional force. Dudek himself concedes that *Europe* is "somewhat oratorical and overdidactic in style," but he believes, nevertheless, that it is "lifted by the rhythms of the sea running through it and the great scope of its subject" ("Louis Dudek" 137). In the preface to the 1991 edition of *Europe*, he also declares that "what [he] discovered in writing *Europe* was the great wave of emotion, the cumulative energy of a sea-like rhythm, that gathers in a long poem" (17).³⁴ Conversely, Davey posits that *Europe*'s "first fifty pages lack either intellectual profundity or passionate feeling" (*LD&RS* 57), although he does not provide a set of criteria according to which such a contentious claim can be ratified or refuted. One might argue that Dudek's emotions overflow at numerous points in each of his long poems, as a brief

³⁴ Dudek defends *Europe* on similar grounds in his interview with Schrier: "*Europe* is a serial poem, made essentially of short lyrical poems, the big wind of prose-meaning running through it. You see, that's what makes it so good—the big wind" (45).

example from *En México* demonstrates. Following his meta-poetic portrait of the poet as “a pipsqueak / in a forest of mocking birds” (35), Dudek seems speechless, once again, when confronted with “the necessary magnificence of all reality” in its various guises:

All the green blanketing the hills,
the braided streams,
and the brown sands bleaching;
horses with heads akimbo,
small lambs that leap,
children with huge eyes,
and lovers shy in their look:
praise these to the bewildering heavens,
knowing no other tongue
but praise. (37)

Although Dudek professes “no other tongue / but praise,” his enumeration of people, animals, and features of the landscape is itself an awe-filled—as well as exquisitely poetic—reflection upon the phenomenal world reminiscent of Hopkins’s “Pied Beauty.” The poet’s instinctive response is one of profound joy, and his words tumble out in an alliterative stream of images set in motion to the jaunty rhythms of “horses with heads akimbo” or “small lambs that leap.”

A number of critics contend that, in *Atlantis*, such displays of emotion seem most out of place, since Dudek juxtaposes lyric, Imagist fragments with long strings of epigrams or sections of “functional” prose-poetry. Barbour explains that “if you merely make your own poetry too prosaic in places, the obviously ‘poetic’ parts of your poem will clash with the rest. This is what happens in *Atlantis*, and it is a definite fault in the poem” (25-26). Because Barbour’s statement

places the “obviously poetic” in direct opposition to the “too prosaic,” however, it seems to imply that comparatively “prosaic” forms of poetry—such as “functional” poetry or the epigram—cannot, in fact, be “poetic” to the same extent as a Villanelle, a Petrarchan sonnet, or haiku. Nevertheless, as Stromberg-Stein notes, “Dudek’s fascination with ‘irreconcilable ideas’ [resulted] in an epigrammatic quality in his poetry that becomes apparent from *En Mexico*, 1958, and culminates in *Epigrams*, 1975” (20). Dudek embraced epigrams as a kind of “functional” poetry in which he could explore his philosophical and intellectual concerns, although his epigrams rarely engage with reality at the same personal, subjective, and emotional level as his meta-poetry.³⁵ Instead, Dudek’s epigrams often lack concrete images of any kind, so that the poetic process becomes an exercise in wit or pedantry rather than an exploration of reality and of details pertaining to the poet’s personal context. Davey writes that “the consistent use of epigrams limits the scope of a poem; the poem becomes ‘functional’ only in terms of the achievement of a small objective: the presentation of an idea in a clever or arresting manner” (*LD&RS* 69-70). Yet, “although the language may sometimes be flat and the ideas banal,” as Beattie contends, “we are listening to the voice of a poet who can be depended on to sound always like a decent and honest human being” (“Poetry: 1935-1950” 778). Despite his poetry’s flaws, then, Dudek’s poetic vision remains, overall, one of authenticity, openness, and curiosity. This sense of openness and warmth spills over from the pages of *En México* to *Atlantis*, where Dudek quietly urges his readers “Always everywhere / to treat everyone as a person / worthy and serious, and vulnerable to love” (17). If *Atlantis* is truly meant to be an “infinite poem” (*Atlantis*

³⁵ In *Epigrams*, Dudek insists that “[e]pigrams are one-line poems. A lot of them together are like a long poem” (38). However, most of Dudek’s epigrams seem to fail as poems, or at least as the kind of poems he wants to produce: poems that balance reality and the imagination. Instead, many of his epigrams seem to be mere display-pieces of his wit and intellect, a fact which begins to explain—if not excuse—his detractors’ attempts to label him an “academic” or Ivory Tower poet.

5), one should hardly be surprised if it contains disparate fragments and poetic forms or styles. Even so, Dudek was not yet able to maintain a consistent balance between the emotional and the intellectual except in his meta-poetry.

In *Atlantis*, Dudek attempts to address the formal as well as thematic issues introduced in his earlier poetry not only by pursuing more comprehensive, imaginative, and intelligent modes of expression, but also by consciously returning to discussions of reality and its role in the poetic process. Three years before *Atlantis* was published, Francis commented on Dudek's seemingly incongruent poetic styles and interests by observing that he was "still seeking a way to successfully relate the diaphanous wings of his lyric gift to the clay feet of his empirical philosophy" ("Critic of Life" 7). Dudek seemed well aware of this need for balance, and indeed, much of *Atlantis*'s "intellectual" poetry speaks directly to the poet's dependence on reality as a source for inspiration and for the raw materials of art. In his poetics, too, Dudek continually reminds himself and his readers that "the way things are, in a sense—the common ground of experience—is the context from which we have to begin, and to which in the end we return" ("Educating the Critics" 297).³⁶ What Davey calls "lapses into commonplace" (*LD&RS* 68) are really part of a constant dialectic between perception and reflection, or reality and the imagination. Some of these "lapses" may be more or less "poetic," or more or less "successful" as poetry, but they are nevertheless part of the fabric of Dudek's poem, and without them the evanescent moments of ineffable joy and insight would somehow appear less remarkable. Near the beginning of his voyage in *Atlantis*, Dudek notes,

That nature is the prime artist does not mean that

³⁶ Eighteen years later, Dudek would return once again to "the question of why poetry must turn away from the world, only to come back to it with a vision of a higher kind—to a world renewed" ("Ken Norris on the Twentieth Century" 35).

all nature is art.

The means are wasteful, but the occasional fragment
may be a masterpiece, a poem, or even a man. (7)

Although nature may be “the prime artist,” the poet is a kind of secondary artist who borrows from the first for inspiration. Moreover, in the same way that not all nature constitutes a “masterpiece,” not every line of a long poem can be expected to operate at the same level of intensity. Davey opines that *Atlantis* “consciously risks boring the reader in order that the writer’s portrait of the self and the world will have the greatest possible accuracy and integrity” (*LD&RS* 80), and Trehearne similarly asserts that “if authenticity of self-portraiture is a good, then the inclusion of commonplaces—authentic to Dudek’s mind as to anyone’s—must be a good as well” (*Montreal Forties* 277).³⁷ Regardless of whether Dudek’s attempts to accommodate reality result in “boring” or “flat” or “banal” verse, the poem’s frequent shifts from impressionist travel narrative to interior monologue to philosophical exposition reflect the poet’s fascination not only with ideas, but with the people, places, and things that regularly flood his vision. Dudek himself writes, “land is delightful / After an interval of dreaming, of vertigo, / of suspension” (13). Without renouncing the importance of the imagination, and without denying the possibility that he will find himself in a state “of dreaming, of vertigo, / of suspension” in the future, Dudek willingly cuts his reverie short in order “to walk again on soil” and to enjoy “[t]he touch of land, solid under sea-legs” (13).

Despite Dudek’s firm attachment to the shores of reality, he clearly recognized the importance of the imagination in art as an instrument of transformative power. Building on

³⁷ Goldie mocks Davey’s reading of *Atlantis*, which seems to him “like a cunning justification of banal verse: boring poetry is acceptable if its purpose is to depict boredom” (18). In addition, he later comments, in reference to *Europe*, that “[w]hen Dudek is at his worst, his observations are facile and even banal” (31). The same could be said about any poet, of course, but Goldie’s criticism is nevertheless worthy of consideration.

several of the ideas he had introduced earlier in his meta-poetry, Dudek began in *Atlantis* to embody his belief that the imagination provided the poet with a means of reaching beyond the visible or known world to an ideal or “hidden” reality. As he would later explain in *Reality Games* (1998), “Realism or naturalism falter when they descend simply to depict what is there, or what they think is there. The imagined reality is always something more; it is what we instill of the human spirit, of hope and desire, into the reality that turns it into art” (“A Final Definition” 82). In several meta-poetic fragments from *Atlantis*, Dudek cogently discusses the imagination’s effect on reality while introducing the concept of Atlantis as a metaphor for the ideal in civilization, in art, and in nature. He describes Atlantis as “our true home,” contrasting it with our current home, “Here,” which contains “only a few / actions, or words, bits of Atlantis” (10-11).³⁸ Similarly, Dudek later places the poet’s subjective reality or “private truth” in direct opposition to an objective reality that he calls “the open garden of God” and that he understands to belong equally to an all-encompassing category of reality:

Reality is mostly what you like. Each man clings to his own
like a gimlet-eyed poet, seeing his private truth.

But there is also the open garden of God
(a very great man)
in which all things grow. (118)

Dudek further contrasts the categories of the subjective and the objective, which he also refers to as “the imagined real” and “the real” (“Fallacy” 183). On one hand, the poet’s subjective reality is described colloquially as being “mostly what you like,” and neither line in the first stanza

³⁸ In “Questions (Some Answers),” Dudek adds, “the only way that we can know Atlantis is through the fragments and the appearances that lie before us, one sample of which is a piece of art” (25).

seems to contain any of the “essential music” necessary to break open the poet’s self-contained, “private” vision, whose scope and power is diminished significantly by the adverb “mostly” in the preceding line. On the other hand, however, the stanza that describes objective reality is strung together in a comparatively loose, open, and organic assemblage of alliteration, assonance, and metaphor. The poet’s subjective vision is not allowed to subsume objective reality, and in this way Dudek avoids—in Nietzsche’s words—“[drinking] up the sea” or “[wiping] away the whole horizon” (167).³⁹ Even so, Dudek’s refusal to champion the imagination at the expense of reality in no way weakens his belief in the ability of the poet; instead, he simply posits objective reality—in the form of Atlantis, God, or any other concept of the ideal—as a necessary and desirable counterpoint to the “private truth” of the individual.

In his autobiographical essay “Louis Dudek,” Dudek recalls the circumstances in which, as a professor at McGill, he was driven to write about the concept of Atlantis:

I became convinced that there must be another side to the Nothingness (so-called *le Néant*) and the existential absurdism in which modern literature was embroiled; and that this missing element was perhaps the source of the grandeur and the glory of all past literature and art. It could not be wiped out by the skeptical tradition that had taken hold of western man. For the moment, in my long poem, I called this idea ‘Atlantis.’ (139)⁴⁰

Ironically, Dudek’s intensely private and philosophical musings would lead to a search for an objective, rather than a purely subjective, vision of “truth,” order, and meaning. The concept of

³⁹ Hillis Miller, alluding to this same passage from Nietzsche, provides a useful gloss on the importance of maintaining a line of demarcation between the subjective and the objective: “When everything exists only as reflected in the ego, then man has drunk up the sea. This includes God, who now becomes merely the highest object of man’s knowledge. God, once the creative sun, the power establishing the horizon where heaven and earth come together, becomes an object of thought like any other. When man drinks up the sea he also drinks up God, the creator of the sea” (3).

⁴⁰ See also Dudek’s “Ideogram” 152 and “Questions (Some Answers)” 25.

Atlantis is prefigured in meta-poems such as “On Poetry,” with its portrait of a poet who is “cursed by his vision” of perfection (5) and who fervently desires “something he does not have” (34), or “Line and Form,” which enacts the poet’s struggle to replicate nature’s “essential” or “eternal” forms. In his interview with Michael Darling, Dudek would ask, “What is the reality that is buried under reality?” (13), and this question is repeated incessantly in all of his writing. After experimenting with various poetic forms in the 1940s and early 1950s, Dudek eagerly adopted the long poem in order to provide more detailed and satisfying answers to the issues his earlier poetry introduced. He explains to Darling that *Atlantis* “is such a meticulous, on-going, and perhaps boring poem, because it’s constantly testing and seeking and trying to justify, and document, this particular kind of search” (14). As Davey also notes, “the principal focus of the poem seems to be a quest for the underlying principle of life which would explain its vagaries, joys and brutalities. The poet becomes increasingly insistent that this principle can be found, like beauty, in the commonplace and in the present moment” (*LD&RS* 75). In many ways, Dudek’s quest for “the underlying principle of life” begins in his earliest meta-poetry, but it is in *Atlantis* that he first gives this principle a name and thereby begins to consolidate all of his earlier, varied attempts “to understand what it is that has value and meaning, to rebuild the other half of possible existence” (“An Interview” 14).

Dudek’s search for Atlantis coincides with, and was perhaps partly the result of, his search for more permanent, meaningful, and “universal” poetic forms. In *The First Person in Literature* (1967), Dudek outlines the theory behind his own attempts to follow a “transcendental-realist” tradition that balances three things: (1) the subjective and the objective; (2) the noumenal and the phenomenal; and (3) ontological dichotomies, such as universals and particulars or abstract and concrete objects. Dudek explains that transcendental realism “is

realism, with all its reductive and negative descent into the particulars of life, but at the same time eternalized by flashes of transcendent experience” (45). Given this definition, Dudek’s attraction to this literary approach is quite understandable, for he was constantly searching for enduring forms for a poetry that could persuade others to join him as “citizens of Atlantis” (*Atlantis* 10). *The First Person in Literature* serves as a kind of poetics in this regard, since it details the paradoxical process by which “the subjective transforms itself into the universal” and by which the artist must share his “private truths” in order to convey “the universal truth of life” (41). As Brooks notes, “privacy and obscurity, to some degree, are inevitable in all poetry” (60); and yet the poet must be able to strike a balance between the private and the obscure in order to make a meaningful impression on the reader. Almost immediately in *The First Person in Literature*, Dudek identifies his own goal for poetry when he announces, “I really want a balance between the subjective and the objective” (2). Shortly after, he justifies his decision by explaining that “[l]iterature moves from impersonality to personality, from universality to the completely private experience. All the problems of modern literature turn on this split between the universal and the particular or private” (6). In his meta-poetry, too, this same desire for balance and for a kind of “universal” literature can be seen quite clearly. In *Atlantis*, which was published in the same year as *The First Person in Literature*, he writes,

The great place of art
is halfway between this world, and some other:

.....

This is our gift, to extricate joy
from earthly things,
what is distilled of transcendence

out of the visible. (135)

Although it is somewhat unclear whether the possessive pronoun “our” is meant to refer to poets, artists, or to all human beings, his repeated references to Canaletto, Giotto, Turner, and a host of other painters in the surrounding lines indicate that he is, in fact, describing a process common to artists of various kinds. In all great art—including Dudek’s own poetry, presumably—artists employ their imaginative gifts in order to distil transcendence out of, and “extricate joy” from, the world of “earthly things.” Dudek’s search for the ideal or for universal truths does not completely supersede his fascination with subjectivity and mere “things”; physical reality is necessary but also desirable, if only because it contains “joy” and “bits of Atlantis.”

In *Atlantis*, Dudek’s need for a “coordinating perceptive consciousness” becomes increasingly obvious, and in *The First Person in Literature* he usefully restates this need in terms of his need to focus on the mind the poet as the locus of balance and artistic process. He expresses his desire to become “a writer whose consciousness of self is the key to the universe,” and, drawing on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Montaigne, he adds that this “search for the self, which is identified with the search for truth about the world, is the crux of the matter” (6). Seen in this context, his supposed “academicism” or withdrawal from the world can be interpreted, instead, as part of a much larger quest for truths about the phenomenal world. His unrelenting fascination with ontological as well as philosophical or “abstract” questions is quite evident in the following meta-poetic passage from *Atlantis*:

Marble is the cross-section of a cloud.

What, then, if the forms we know

are sections of a full body

whose dimensions are timeless

and bodiless, like poems,

whose unseen dimension is mind? (13)

The opening metaphor in this passage, which prepares the reader for his somewhat startling question, fuses the transcendental—represented here by a transient cloud—and the real—represented by a slab of marble. Nevertheless, Dudek’s conflation of the material and immaterial is tentative, as the ties between “poems” and “mind,” or between “the forms we know” and “a full body / whose dimensions are timeless,” are suggested in an interrogative rather than in a declarative statement. Throughout *Atlantis*, Dudek makes noticeable attempts at what Trehearne calls a “mimesis of consciousness” (*Montreal Forties* 275), but in the end, its various fragments—many of which constitute hauntingly beautiful and profound poems—often read as fragments, not as parts of a coherent or harmonious whole. Within the poem, Dudek even calls himself a “failed traducer,” a “vain idealizing peacock,” and an “empty realist” (83). His struggles to reconcile his faith in an ideal order with his awareness of humankind’s imperfections result in a poem that vacillates between highly personal and highly impersonal forms of expression. Trehearne remarks that “[t]he reduced representation of literal in favour of mental travel brings with it an efflorescence of intellectual material in the poem” (*Montreal Forties* 279). Because of this “efflorescence of intellectual material,” *Atlantis* may seem to deserve many of the labels it has been given. However, few critics point out the presence of highly personal and autobiographical passages in the poem, such as those found mid-way through Section II, and even fewer critics ground discussions of his “academicism,” “elitism,” or “didacticism” in the context of his search for balance between reality and the imagination. Whatever his actual results, Dudek’s objectives are stated quite clearly in his meta-poetry and in publications such as *The First Person in Literature*, where he reaffirms his view that the result of

an increased focus on the “unseen dimension” of mind is “the discovery of ‘our real selves’, and beyond that of a universal reality in experience that transcends the personal and subjective” (41).

As in *Europe*, Dudek’s challenge in *Atlantis* was to find a new form or method of presentation that could combine the disparate fragments of his poetry into the same kind of unified and “deeply personal view of reality” (Goldie 41) that he admired in the work of writers such as Whitman, Joyce, and Proust. Despite the remarkable convergence of Dudek’s poetics and poetry in the 1950s and 1960s, he still required a “coordinating perceptive consciousness” that would help him to achieve—or at least achieve more consistently—a balance between competing transcendentalist and realist urges. Nevertheless, in “Theory of Art,” in “Keewaydin Poems,” and in each of his long poems from this period, Dudek remains focused on “the forms we know” in reality even as he reaches beyond to the “full body” of the imagination, plumbing the depths of *Atlantis* to discover new forms, new ways of resolving the various tensions that his writings introduce, and new ways to write poetry that could be both “functional” and “poetic.”

CHAPTER 3

AN “ARCHITECTURE OF CONTRADICTIONS”: *CONTINUATION* AND LATE META-POETRY

*“Today the individual is at the heart of it.
You yourself.*

*You are the subject of poetry.”
– Dudek, “It Is An Art”*

Although *Continuation I* (1981), the first instalment of Dudek’s final long poem, was published a full fourteen years after *Atlantis*, it began to appear, in pieces, as early as 1971. In the interim and, indeed, until his death in 2001, Dudek continued to celebrate and promote Canadian poetry through his teaching, public lectures, and the publication of an incessant fusillade of his own poems, epigrams, essays, letters, and newspaper articles in addition to his active involvement in the publication of other poets’ work. In *Continuation I*, *Continuation II* (1990), “Continuation III [Fragment]” (1997), “Bits and Pieces [A Recitation]” (1997), and “Sequence from ‘Continuation III’” (2000)—which collectively comprise *Continuation*—Dudek transforms the long poem into a metaphor for the mind of the poet and for poetic process in particular.⁴¹ Translated onto the page, Dudek’s mind becomes the “coordinating perceptive consciousness” that his writing had lacked thus far, and it proves to be fully capable, like the mind of T.S. Eliot’s ideal poet, of “constantly amalgamating disparate experience” and “forming new wholes” (273) out of the seemingly inchoate fragments of his poetic project. By effectively mirroring the mind of the poet and the imaginative processes that inform its own genesis,

⁴¹ The first section of *Continuation I* (1981) first appeared in Dudek’s *Collected Poetry* (1971), and the second section first appeared in *Tamarack Review* in 1976. “Fragment of Continuum,” which was first published in *Cross-Section: Poems 1940-1980* (1980), was republished in *Continuation II* (1990) with minor revisions. The first four sections of *Continuation III* were published as “Continuation III [Fragment]” in *The Caged Tiger* (1997) along with part five, “Bits and Pieces [A Recitation].” The sixth and final section of *Continuation III*, “Sequence from ‘Continuation III,’” was published in *The Surface of Time* (2000).

Continuation achieves an extraordinary—and perhaps surprising—synthesis of subjective and objective realities. While *Continuation* is at times pedantic, caustic, and perhaps overly allusive, it skilfully distils the poet’s life into a curious amalgam of “functional” prose-poetry, philosophical ruminations, Imagist lyrics, quotidian laundry lists, and Joycean epiphanies. Through his so-called “transcendental-realist” approach, Dudek accommodates the paradoxes that his earlier meta-poetry had introduced and that his late poetics—as evinced in publications such as *Ideas for Poetry* (1983), *Paradise: Essays on Myth, Art and Reality* (1992), and *Reality Games* (1998)—continued to address. Even as Dudek’s physical body began to deteriorate, his remarkably cohesive body of writing reaffirmed poetry’s ability to create order out of the “chaos” of reality, drawing ever closer to the paradisaical vision that had buoyed his imagination and given both meaning and purpose to his art.

Well before he published *Continuation I*, Dudek’s efforts to balance the real and the ideal, the objective and the subjective, and various other ontological dichotomies, led him to adopt a paradoxical transcendental-realist poetics. Davey describes this transcendental-realist poetics by explaining how, in his later poetry, “Dudek has espoused an evolved modernism which seeks a transcendental vision expressed in temporal form and idiom and rooted in the here and now. . . . His modernism is humanist in its attachment to contemporary life but antihumanist in its belief in transcendent vision as the ultimate artistic goal” (*LD&RS* 162). But Dudek adopted this paradoxical approach to writing long before he gave it a name. Francis notes that Dudek “takes a serious view of life and poetry which embraces at once a shining idealism and a flat-footed realism” (“Critic of Life” 7); Seidner claims that Dudek “is urged upward by his idea—the desire to know transcendent reality—but obliged to devote himself to things—the earthly realities available to experience. His poetry is an attempt to reach a viable human

equilibrium” (23-24); and Dudek himself adds, more generally, that “the opposites are intricately related in my poetry” (“The Breathless Adventure” 43). His efforts to reconcile these opposites are especially evident in his meta-poetry, which, in *Atlantis*, heralds a gradual shift towards the prospect of an “infinite poem” (*Atlantis* 5), with its “architecture of contradictions”:

There, somewhere, at the horizon
you cannot tell the sea from the sky,
where the white cloud glimmers,
the only reality, in a sea of unreality,
out of that cloud come palaces, and domes,
and marble capitals,
and carvings of ivory and gold—
Atlantis
shines invisible, in that eternal cloud.

An architecture of contradictions and inexorable chances
reconciled at last,
in a single body. (148)

In the same vein as the metaphysical poet whom Brooks describes as one who is “constantly remaking his world by relating into an organic whole the amorphous and heterogeneous and contradictory” (43), Dudek attempts to reconcile a series of contradictory images and paradoxes in “a single body,” the large and complex body of the “infinite” poem. The horizon serves as the

meeting point between “the sea” and “the sky,” between the surface of visible reality and the “unreality” of an ideal and celestial realm that paradoxically “shines invisible” from an “eternal cloud.” In the introduction to *Poetry of our Time* (1965), Dudek had claimed that “some of the truest successes of modernism happen when the real and ideal meet in harmony and fusion” (17), and in *Atlantis*, Dudek once again combined the real and the ideal by courting a poetics of paradox according to which the long poem was transformed into what Dorothy Livesay calls “a consideration of possibilities” (79) rather than an embarrassing record of the poet’s capricious or inconsistent nature. In the same poem, Dudek tentatively remarks, “Perhaps the reason why we contradict ourselves / is that we want to be open to every truth” (*Atlantis* 121), and in *Continuation I*—which he subtitled “An Infinite Poem in Progress”—Dudek reaffirms the value of paradoxes while admitting that his new poetry nevertheless constitutes “an experiment in poetic process” (7). In his second “experiment,” Dudek challenges future poets to adopt a similar poetics of paradox in their own quests for “greater knowledge,” urging them to “Build bigger palaces / (even if you fail)” (*Continuation II* 109). Although Dudek’s parenthetical comment demonstrates an acute awareness of the possibilities of such a failure, his own brave—and repeated—attempts to construct an “architecture of contradictions” testify to his resolute belief in the value of “massive structures” and open forms in poetry. Steve Luxton applauds Dudek’s attempts by pointing out that “the best proof of Louis Dudek’s open-mindedness may have resided in his inconsistency” (104). Despite *Continuation*’s various flaws and supposed “inconsistencies,” Dudek’s open and “infinite” poem forms “a single body” in which manifestations of the real and the ideal effectively converge.

Dudek’s fascination with paradoxes is evident in his discussion of “eidolons,” which he defines in the 1991 preface to *Europe* as objects or events “distilled to their highest meaning” in

“‘the image of an ideal conception’ (from the Greek *eidos*, shape or form)” (16).⁴² He adds further that eidolons “can be seen directly in the sea and in the winds, in the workings of nature” (16), just as conceptions of the ideal insinuate themselves into his poetic depictions of physical objects or locales, revealing themselves “in moments of illumination” as “the things we love” (*Atlantis* 11). As all Dudek scholars have dutifully observed—and as Dudek himself has suggested on occasion—the sea seems to be his favourite muse and “eidolon” of choice, an incarnation of the ideal as well as a locus of historical, cultural, and scientific meaning. Nevertheless, Dudek’s fascination with paradoxes leads him to reflect upon other eidolons and metaphors, such as the jungle in *En México* or icebergs in *Atlantis*. Seidner explains, for example, that the jungle in *En México* “fulfills much the same function as the sea in *Europe*. Both are pastoral retreats which encourage meditation and both resolve conflicting forms of energy into a complex union” (27). It is important to note, however, that while such eidolons inspired some of Dudek’s best lyrical reflections as poetic subjects, they did not always provide him with the structural or coordinating metaphor he required in order to assimilate his everyday experiences into a balanced, personal, and convincing narrative. Even in *Europe*, a poem that celebrates the sea and its “immense imagination” (32), Dudek notes that the sea is a “destroyer of nations, of pantheons, / to whom Greece and Rome are only a row of white breakers” (32), and that the sea is “so easily bored” by, or “indifferent” to, human drama and suffering (33, 42). At the end of *Europe*, Dudek admits that poets “are not really interested in the ocean, / which for all its variety / is an empty desolation” (*Europe* 143), and in *Zembla’s Rocks* (1986), his first major collection of lyric poems since *The Transparent Sea* (1956), he dismisses the sea and other forms of water as being “incapable of a new creation” (“Snow Sequence” 47). Because the sea is an

⁴² Elsewhere, Dudek explains that eidolons “are ‘images of the ideal,’ symbols of the higher thing, . . . a conscious allusion to Whitman, as well as to Socrates and the Greeks” (“In a Nutshell” 114).

impersonal, “empty” landscape that “is no place for cities” (*Europe* 137), it fails to offer Dudek the necessarily personal and subjective coordinating perceptive consciousness or poetic framework that he requires. It is fitting, then, that in *Continuation II* he is resigned enough to remark, “I love the sea, as an image, / at a contemplative distance” (56). Similarly, the jungle serves as an excellent and effective focal point for Dudek’s poetic meditations, and he “finds in its paradoxes a subject for contemplation” (*LD&RS* 68), but the jungle is soon replaced by an iceberg and myriad other poetic subjects in *Atlantis*. Seidner contends that the iceberg, which “simultaneously extends far below and towers high above the sea’s surface,” is an effective image of balance between the real and the ideal or the visible and the invisible, not to mention “the most appropriate symbol for Atlantis” (33); as with the sea and the jungle, however, he maintains “a contemplative distance” between himself and the iceberg, an object which is equally impersonal and “incapable of a new creation.” In *Continuation*, Dudek abandons the sea, the jungle, and *Atlantis*’s iceberg, all of which fail to balance the objective and the subjective. Instead, he explores the mind not only as a personal coordinating perceptive consciousness, but as an all-encompassing, self-reflexive metaphor for the poetic processes by which such eidolons were formed and according to which the ideal becomes incarnate in the body of the poem.

Each of Dudek’s long poems contains personal or autobiographical elements, and Trehearne even asserts that “Dudek was a fundamentally subjective poet from the start” (*Montreal Forties* 304). But in *Continuation*, Dudek makes meta-poetry and “the structures of mentality” (*Montreal Forties* 245) his primary focus. As Davey notes, Dudek attempts in his final long poem to make his ideas appear as if they are “actual unreflected-upon phenomena in his mind” (*LD&RS* 71), rather than carefully premeditated and polished statements—even

though he was well aware that “there can be no poet’s voice, no mimesis of a man thinking, that can be the exact equivalent of a human voice, or an exact replica of someone thinking. We can only give an ever more convincing imitation of that kind of thing” (“Louis Dudek” 137). In an interview with Laurence Hutchman, Dudek thoughtfully describes the rationale of such an approach:

[LD:] What is poetry trying to do on the page? It’s trying to represent the poet’s thought. If that’s what it’s trying to do, then ultimately you have to create a fictitious form that is doing that. Not one that is spurious, but the actual thought with all its fragmentary wayward digressions. And yet, if you read *Continuation 1* and 2, you find that it’s really not digressing so very much. It’s actually obsessively concerned with only one kind of subject.

LH: Essentially, the poem is concerned with process, getting closer to process.

LD: The process is the internal monologue, only that part of it in the mind, which deals with this question, which is poetry. But it’s as if you were listening to me thinking as if it were recorded. (163)⁴³

In his preface to *Continuation I*, Dudek announces his decision to embrace the mind as an ideal image or metaphor for exploring the poetic process as well as the tenuous balance between reality and the imagination, although in the poem itself he concedes that attempting to replicate the processes of thought in literature is not a new concept: “As one student put it, ‘Yeats has said that his poems / reflect the ideas passing through his mind’” (42). Regardless, Dudek’s new approach would help him to resolve a number of the formal issues for which his previous long

⁴³ Shortly after *Continuation I* was published, Dudek wrote in *Ideas for Poetry* that “[p]oetry has to do with invented or actual states of consciousness. By the selection and arrangement of words we create an image of a state of mind which we consider interesting, precious, or useful. It is the state of consciousness which is the chief value in poetry, and like all art it is a fiction” (9). See also Dudek’s “The Breathless Adventure” 47 for similar remarks.

poems had been critiqued. Perhaps most importantly, Dudek's use of consciousness as an organizing principle helped him to unite his "fragmentary wayward digressions," or at least to provide some justification of their inclusion in his poems. In a sense, the mind itself is the perfect image of balance as the site of order in which the disparate fragments of perceptible reality continually, and inevitably, intersect the imagination. The poet successfully becomes "the link between transcendent and individual order" (Seidner 17) as fragments of reality are gathered "in the perfect O of the eye" to be refashioned by the subjective "I" of the poet. Dudek's focus on the process of "the mind making poems / hid in the texture of language" (*Continuation I* 11-12) enables him to accommodate paradoxes and achieve various kinds of balance without favouring too heavily the centrifugal forces that threaten to disrupt his poem's "narrative" or the centripetal forces that would stifle his imagination and superimpose traditional metrical patterns upon the "absolute rhythms" of his own verse. Gnarowski sanctions Dudek's use of the mind as an organizing principle or coordinating perceptive consciousness by insisting that, "while the emotional and the intellectual are in conflict in the mind of the poet, it is this very mind which resolves the conflict into a new harmony which becomes poetry" ("Louis Dudek: A Note"). While in *Atlantis* the reader encounters only an "implied" or "partial" representation of consciousness, as Davey has pointed out (*LD&RS* 71-72), in *Continuation I* Dudek's mimetic representation of the poem as mind is made explicit, and the poem proclaims, "I am the imagination that creates / an image of itself" (21).

Whereas the poet's presence or mediating role in *Europe*, *En México*, and *Atlantis* is often only implied, so that his observations are occasionally presented in a somewhat detached manner, the observations proceeding from the mind embodied in *Continuation* are necessarily personal, subjective, and emotional. Because the poem strives to present a complete picture of

the poet's mind, intellect and emotion co-exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship as reflections upon the phenomenal world keep the imagination firmly rooted in reality and as the imagination pushes against the boundaries of all that is known and reasonable; one cannot exist without the other. Despite the "academic" and "didactic" bent of poems such as *Europe* and *Atlantis*, Dudek was also keenly aware that "no poetry can be very good that is empty of feeling and emotional intensity" ("The Poetry of the City" 79). Antonio Ruiz Sánchez notes that "Dudek himself has promoted a poetry of reason that is intellectually demanding. Yet he has also warned us against the danger of lack of emotion in poetry" (70). In a poem such as *Continuation*, which purports to embrace mind as a constitutive and coordinating metaphor, some emotion would seem inevitable. In 1972, Barbour had written that "[w]hat one misses in so many of Dudek's poems are the 'passionate moments' that would lift us out of ourselves. What we find, however, are qualities of meditative vision and intense ratiocination that are seldom to be found in any other Canadian poet" (23). But in *Continuation*, Dudek strikes an admirable balance between emotion and intellect by counterbalancing his "academic" or ratiocinative tendencies with what Trehearne calls "a subjectivist reliance on the shifting boundaries of selfhood" (*Montreal Forties* 240). In a meta-poetic passage from "Sequence from 'Continuation III,'" Dudek underscores the importance of emotion as he describes his mind's careful search for order

amid the incomprehensible chaos,

looking for bits and pieces

of the amino acids

out of which poems might come.

One moves with the feeling, from line to line,

for poetry is feeling. (77)

Even here, however, intellect and reason are both necessary counterparts to emotion, for poetry is also a means of making sense of “the incomprehensible chaos” of reality. Dudek might have argued that successful poetry offers a simulacrum of the poet’s mind and its processes, and is therefore highly personal, subjective, and even emotional; but he does distinguish between genuine emotion and “passion” or “middle-class emotion” (“Further Thoughts on the Long Poem” 93), which are neither tempered nor elevated by intelligent thought. In addition, Dudek’s mention of “amino acids,” which might seem more appropriate in a scientific essay than in a poem, corresponds to his modernist belief in the poetic potential of everyday subjects or objects. Sánchez alleges that *Continuation I*’s various fragments “hardly offer any sensuous appeal or personal drama, and are settled in an abstract and self-sufficient dimension in which everyday reality seems to have been superseded” (64); however, the poem, as a representation of the poet’s mind, can hardly be said to lack “personal drama,” regardless of how that term might be defined. *Continuation I* contains plenty of “personal drama,” including a brief description of Dudek’s dreams (18) and an anecdote about how he “was so fascinated listening to Bartok / that [he] broke [his] egg in the garbage / while making an omelette” (37). In any case, Dudek acknowledges elsewhere that human thought “jumps about a little differently in every head and in every age” (“Interview with Louis Dudek” 163), so that each person’s subjective or “everyday” reality is unique. In *Continuation*, in particular, Dudek insists, “this is my voice, this is my true voice of poetry. It’s the personal voice that at the age of fifteen, or even earlier, I already had, and therefore I worked all my life to record on the page” (“The Breathless Adventure” 50).

While Dudek’s unique approach in *Continuation* is decidedly autobiographical, his focus

on the mind as a point of intersection between external or objective reality and his own internal, subjective reality does not prevent the poem's "meaning and emotional impact" from being "transferred from the particulars of the author's life, for whom it serves as a generalization, an attempt at self-understanding, to the particulars of the reader's life" (*Ideas for Poetry* 24).⁴⁴ Instead, Dudek repeatedly places meta-poetic *précis* of *Continuation*'s metaphorical premise in close proximity to fragments in which these and other paradoxes are explored. In the fourth section of *Continuation II*, for instance, he writes,

The real and the transcendental are one

The one laid on the other

As you said, 'A prolonged body orgasm for two'

All writing is a metaphor for someone talking[.] (23)⁴⁵

In the first fragment, Dudek affirms his transcendental-realist poetics while erasing difference between the two, supposedly incompatible, categories; in the second fragment, however, he recasts the first in more human terms, conflating an abstract ontological supposition with an image of supine lovers locked in an embrace. The coming together of the real and the transcendental is also recast as "prolonged body orgasm for two," and in the third fragment, Dudek again reminds his readers that a similar balance must be achieved, and such paradoxes must be continually resolved, in the mind of the poet. Elsewhere, Dudek suggests that "the real life is the life of the mind" ("Louis Dudek" 130), but he judiciously qualifies this statement in

⁴⁴ See also Dudek's interview with Schrier, in which he states, "A poem is not a solipsistic experience. It's got to communicate, and in the revising, that is what you try to do—make it speak for others also" (50).

⁴⁵ In *Continuation I*, Dudek foreshadows this later claim in an isolated fragment that reads, "The poem, a man talking to himself" (25).

The First Person in Literature by pointing out that neither the personal nor the universal alone “can really satisfy our conception of reality” (36-37). The poem mediates between the imaginative world within and the physical world without, and the poem-as-consciousness metaphor establishes the mind of the poet as an effective “interface”—to use Dudek’s term—between the two forms of reality.⁴⁶ In fact, because *Continuation* is framed as a metaphor for the mind and its processes, the whole poem functions as a kind of interface between reality and the imagination, the real and the ideal, the subjective and the objective, and particulars and universals. In “The Psychology of Literature” (1977), Dudek prepares readers for *Continuation I* by explaining that poetry “comes out of the tensions and dilemmas in the mind of the author, and it is therefore a concrete symbolic representation of these tensions and dilemmas” (374-375). In his later lyric poems, too, Dudek echoes *Continuation* as well as his earlier meta-poetry when he writes that “a poem tells us how a mind behaves like a mind” (“The Poem and the Crowd” 13). Like the mind, the poem is a site of various tensions and paradoxes in which reality and the imagination coalesce.

In “The Psychology of Literature,” Dudek maintains that “[t]he right proportion between abstract ideas, or intentions, and the concrete presentation of realities is what we expect in any successful work” (373), and critics such as George Hildebrand have observed that, in Dudek’s later poetry, “everywhere one finds the astute balance of logos, sounds, picture and voice—that concerned and intelligent human voice—true to the form demanded by the age, ‘disintegrated autobiography’ (*Paradise* 79)” (“Poet of the 1990s” 98). Even in the pedestrian details of Dudek’s autobiographical poetry, the reader is given glimpses of the transcendental with the occasional “flash of lightning” in the midst of “[t]he actual, the factual” (*Continuation II* 22).

⁴⁶ In “Interface: Reality and Literature” (1978), Dudek contends that an “interface” consists of “points where elements of the actual world enter directly as such into the context of the ‘imaginary world’” (238).

According to Dudek, these epiphanies occur in the mind of the poet, which forms an interface between the real and transcendental, as a kind of revelatory experience. Nevertheless, his provisional definition of the term “epiphany” seems to refer both to the epiphany’s antecedent cause as well as to the epiphanic experience itself:

The fact is that the true epiphany is anywhere and everywhere—‘You can get it any day.’ It is not exclusively to be found in objects of beauty, or fine works of art, or people of exceptional talent. It is in the abundance and variety of faces and gestures, clothing and behaviour, constantly around us, in any public place or in common experience. It is there in the actual reality of things, when it all seems to be luminous . . . The epiphany is that moment of ecstasy when all reality, even in the midst of death and suffering, can suddenly appear miraculous. (*Notebooks: 1960-1994* 103)

Dudek locates the “luminous” or the transcendental in “all reality,” and he makes it clear that epiphanies, like interfaces, exist “anywhere and everywhere.” In the same way that eidolons bridge the gap between the real and the ideal, epiphanies link the phenomenal world to an unknown and ineffable world of transcendental order. Nevertheless, such eidolons or epiphanies are meaningless unless they are observed or experienced, because, as Beebe notes, “they take on meaning only when they are unified by the consciousness of the individual observer” (312). In the poem “Atlantis” from *Zembla’s Rocks*, Dudek suggests that, without such epiphanies or glimpses of the transcendental,

life would be a vast train wreck,
with all its items of foolish baggage,
combs, nighties, make-up
scattered over the tracks—

and nothing in it. (6-10)

Similarly, Dudek believed that poetry without abstract thought was merely a “vast train wreck” or catalogue of empty, meaningless images. As he had observed in the introduction to *Poetry of Our Time*, “realism is obviously not an easy and natural way for poetry; the problem of poetry is to transform dross and despair and to raise them—or at least to contrast them—to something that the heart desires, the ideal that is equally true and necessary” (6). Like the eponymous protagonist of Joyce’s *Stephen Hero*, Dudek also seemed to believe that epiphanies provided a welcome relief from commonplace reality, and “that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments” (211). The poet’s job, in particular, is to capture and attempt to recreate these epiphanic moments for the reader by making fragments of reality “immobile and imperishable / fixed and formed / in the dead matter of ink and paper” (“An Epiphany” 5-7). Dudek’s interest in this mysterious process and its connections to his own transcendental-realist poetics is evident in much of his later writing, including his discussions of Joyce and the epiphany in *The First Person in Literature* (55) and “In the Footsteps of Leopold Bloom” (94), as well as in poems such as “The Epiphanies” from *Cross-Section: Poems 1940-1980* or “Atlantis” and “An Epiphany” from *Zembla’s Rocks*, to name only a few.

In *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*, Morris Beja argues that an epiphany or “sudden manifestation” of the sort Joyce describes must be “out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it” (18). It follows, therefore, that a long poem such as *Continuation*—which professes to imitate the ebb and flow of the poet’s mind—would naturally contain extraordinary manifestations as well as the ordinary moments, thoughts, or

actions from which they arose. “It is simply not possible to sustain the intensity of poetry for long,” Parini writes, “just as in life one could never operate at full throttle on a day-to-day basis without burning out” (36). For this reason, a delicate balance or back-and-forth movement between the ordinary and the extraordinary, or between reality and the imagination, must be maintained constantly. If Beja and Parini are correct, it would seem that Dudek’s long poems can be seen only in one of two ways: (1) as collections of individual poems, of which only a small number successfully and consistently “sustain the intensity of poetry,” or (2) as single poems that successfully re-enact the variously tedious and thrilling extremes of the human experience while failing, as a whole, to maintain the high “pitch of expression” that poetry supposedly requires (Parini 36). This bifurcation may explain, in part, the prevalence of what Goldie calls “the ambivalent critic” in Dudek scholarship and in studies of Dudek’s long poems in particular (15). Because of *Continuation*’s unique formal and conceptual approach—which Dudek elucidates in his poetics, in his preface to *Continuation I*, and in the meta-poetic fragments of the poem itself—it demands to be assessed according to a different set of criteria.

On more than one occasion, Dudek explains that the collected fragments of his “infinite” poem are meant to be read, and judged, as parts of a cohesive whole: “you are now seeing the whole picture, I think, and you cannot talk about anything *but* the whole picture. You cannot talk about little pieces as if they stood by themselves here and there—you just can’t. It’s all one whole” (“The Breathless Adventure” 52). Even in 1966, Livesay had remarked of Dudek’s poetry that, “as in sculpture, the whole must be visible at a glance, but the detail must be exact, and highlighted where essential. . . . Quite frequently the poems seem to lack drama and dramatic tension, but they are a true rhythmic mirror of the poet’s intention” (80). Unlike his previous long poems, *Continuation* deliberately embraces as its coordinating perceptive consciousness or

constitutive metaphor an object in which reflections upon reality and glimpses of some ideal reality or “Atlantis” are equally likely to occur. *Continuation*’s “failures”—its occasional tirades, vapidness, and esoteric allusions—are also, paradoxically, tokens of its success with respect to the premises according to which it was written and according to which it has repeatedly asked to be read. Furthermore, as Dudek wrote in *En México*, “Evil is in the weft of reality! / But the whole cloth is good, is good” (65). *Continuation* recreates the motion of the mind as it moves from personal details, from “the actual” or everyday, to abstract revelations of an ideal, objective order—and then back again to reality, engaging in what Dudek playfully refers to as “[t]he perpetual coitus interruptus of poetry” (*CII* 75). In *Continuation I*, he describes his constant search for epiphanic “patches of perfection” by borrowing a Yeatsian metaphor: he explains, “Sometimes I feel I’m really getting there / the words / little ladders” (*Continuation I* 37-38). Like Yeats, however, Dudek inevitably finds himself “where all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart” (Yeats 39-40). The same kind of tension between the real and the ideal that pervades *Continuation* is, according to Dudek, present in all good poetry: “good poetry is a mixture of the two,” he writes, “a mixture of the commonplace (the comic) and the redeeming idea of a possible perfection. The conflict between the two makes the poetry dance and sing” (*Notebooks: 1960-1994* 109). Paradoxically, Dudek also argues that *Continuation*’s focus on the commonplace details of his own life allow him to deliver a kind of universal vision of “everyman’s life” (“The Breathless Adventure” 53), despite the fact that “everyman’s” mind does not contain “polyglot displays” of Latin, Polish, German, French, and Spanish, nor is the average mind acquainted with obscure references to “Kresge’s jewels” or “the eviscerated chickens of De Kooning” (*Continuation II* 55, 101). Even so, *Continuation* paints an authentic picture of the ideas and images that drift through Dudek’s mind.

Although Sánchez and other critics have commented on the potentially “repetitive and monotonous” quality of such poetry, in *Zembla’s Rocks* Dudek anticipates such attacks when he writes, “What bores us in poetry is its untruthfulness. / Let poems be true, even if trivial, / like our dreary lives” (“Snow Sequence” 21-23).⁴⁷ Because Dudek locates the transcendental in the reality of “our dreary lives,” he displays a consistent interest in the “boring”—and even inane—details of his life for the deeper truths that they contain.

As Trehearne notes, *Continuation* is a complex “architecture of contradictions” in which the centripetal principle of “continuation” and the centrifugal principle of “accumulation” constantly threaten to disrupt the poem’s delicate balancing act between order and chaos. On one hand, the principle of continuation works to give an increasingly accurate representation of the mind and its processes in the body of the poem, as well as to create links between the “infinite” poem’s diverse fragments. *Continuation I* opens *in medias res* with “So let’s continue” (11), inviting the reader, in Trehearne’s words, “to contemplate projects or aesthetics of Dudek’s past that are to be carried on here, as well as to consider the work to hand as premised somehow upon the whole idea of ‘continuing’” (*Montreal Forties* 244). The lack of periods or other punctuation between the poem’s fragments further reinforces the idea of continuation—as well as accumulation—by refusing to provide the same sense of formal closure as a poem whose various sections are clearly marked with full stops. On the other hand, the principle of accumulation works to “get it all in,” since “the true mimesis [is] / a poem without direction,” as he announces early on in the first installation of his “infinite” poem (20). Because of this lack of direction, and because of the poem’s sense of cumulative energy and accretion,

⁴⁷ Commenting further on Dudek’s belief in “the criterion of authenticity” as a standard by which poetry must be judged, Seidner indirectly validates the poet’s approach in *Continuation* by positing that an “honest and lucid” depiction of one’s experiences will necessarily “bring about the union of the personal and universal spheres” (21).

Trehearne is quite justified in stating that *Continuation* is “the most highly fragmented and potentially incoherent of all Canadian long poems” (*Montreal Forties* 245). His remark that the principle of accumulation “quickly supersedes ‘continuation’ as the paradigm of poetic structure here” (*Montreal Forties* 244) is also quite justified. In one of the poem’s many autobiographical asides, even Dudek himself admits, “I worry I write too much . . . / Like some motorists that go ‘Pfrt! Pfrt-pfrt!’ / (Can’t hold it in)” (*Continuation I* 46). In other poems, too, Dudek endorses, or at least alludes to, this accumulative principle: in *Small Perfect Things* (1991), for example, Dudek suggests that poetry “ought to be” like “a robin’s nest, / full of skins, shells, mouths / and bits of worms” (“Poetry” 4, 1-3); and in *The Surface of Time*, he describes the poem as “a little universe” that “wants to contain / everything” (“The Discovery” 4, 5-6).

Dudek is equally emphatic, however, about poetry’s need to create some semblance of order out of reality, and in *Continuation* he posits the principle of continuation as a counterbalance to the chaos of accumulation. Trehearne argues that “Dudek affirms constantly the boundary between a text of pure accumulation and a work of art” (*Montreal Forties* 261), and in a meta-poetic fragment from *Continuation I*, he hints at the importance of balance between the two opposing principles in a pair of complementary rhetorical questions: “But to accumulate lines, is not that a pleasure? / To weave them into patterns, / is not that happiness?” (13). If poetry does not attempt to assimilate reality—which, according to Dudek, includes “everything observed and everything imagined” (“The Idea of Art” 31)—it risks failing in its depiction of human experience; but if poetry attempts to assimilate too much of reality, or, in the case of *Continuation*, if its representation of consciousness is too accurate, it risks failing as art.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Dudek comments on the distinction between true art and a mere accumulation of ideas, images, or observations in multiple texts, including “Où sont les jeunes?” (143), “A Brief Note on Poetry” (283), and the autobiographical “Louis Dudek” (140-141).

Goldie, for one, criticizes *Continuation I* for failing to provide the “continuation” it promises: “The lack of even a general focus makes it difficult to see the work as more than a series of sententious non sequiturs, but the Preface suggests that Dudek hopes the reader will be able to find more”(47). Nevertheless, if the reader accepts *Continuation*’s constitutive metaphor, the poem becomes coherent as a whole, even if its individual fragments are too thoroughly internalized to always take on universal meaning. As Trehearne writes, “The *Continuations* project is itself coherent—and only so—as a representation of the motion of content and phenomena in the poet’s mind” (*Montreal Forties* 250). While Sánchez maintains that the poem’s fragments “do not consolidate in any narrative or symbolic function” (63), *Continuation* makes no claims to be a “narrative” poem except to the extent that it embraces consciousness “as a principal of structural coherence” in order to provide balance, successfully “establishing singularity and *integritas*” without “imposing a reductive model of ‘unity’ on a long poem that very apparently wants to flout or at least go beyond established forms of modernist poetic unity” (Trehearne, *Montreal Forties* 250).

Although *Continuation*’s constitutive metaphor transforms the poem into a coherent whole, the poem’s individual fragments demonstrate Dudek’s continued interest in the image as a fundamental means of engaging physical reality. In “The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry,” Dudek discusses the etymology of “image” as well as that of “imagination,” and he concludes that “the literary tradition is correct in seeing imagery as standing at the heart of the poetic process. We may, in fact, say that the image—whatever it ultimately may be—is the molecular unit of poetry” (267).⁴⁹ In his interview with Schrier, Dudek would add further that

⁴⁹ In “The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry,” Dudek also discusses the etymology of “imagination” in relation to “image,” and he notes that “[t]he very word *imagination* is formed on the same Latin root: *imaginary*, to picture to one’s self. Imagination is clearly the power of forming images” (266).

the long poem “is really made of very sharp, Imagistic, quintessential poetic elements,” with the result that “the short poem becomes the principle of the long poem in a paradoxical way” (43). Even so, Dudek was also aware that these images or Imagistic units, as representations of physical reality, still need to be put together intelligently by the poet, whose imagination uncovers the connections that exist between all things in order to create meaningful wholes.⁵⁰ He declares that “the method of concrete presentation, once it has rejected the responsibility for coherent thinking, can only result in a poem without coherent meaning” (“The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry” 273).⁵¹ In the poem “This Actual”—as in “Ars Poetica” almost fifty years earlier—Dudek writes about his ostensible preference for physical reality over ideas and the unknown, although he seems much more willing to admit that, paradoxically, reality is all the more significant because of the “great mystery” that it contains:

There is no idea as pleasant as this face.

No home in heaven as sure

as this world of snow.

If it is incomplete, imperfect,

that is a signature

of a higher possibility.

Accept the given

⁵⁰ In “A Defence of Poetry,” Percy Bysshe Shelley remarks how, through metaphorical language, poets are able to mark the “unapprehended relations of things” (676); similarly, in *Why Poetry Matters*, Parini notes that poets such as Frost and Stevens believed that metaphor mediated the relationship between reality and the imagination (67).

⁵¹ Cf. “There must be abstract ideas and there must be ideas in things; it’s the proportion between them that remains the real issue for poetry” (Dudek “The Psychology of Literature” 372).

as an oracle of a great mystery—
the obscure, the unknown,
for its hidden message. (1-10)

The poem's exaltation of a "pleasant" face and of "this world of snow" is moderated by its implicit suggestion that reality has the potential to be "incomplete, imperfect"; moreover, "the given" is complemented, enlivened, and enriched by the ideal, since reality serves as a "signature / of a higher possibility," or as "an oracle of a great mystery." Instead of rejecting the intellect or the imagination, "This Actual" tacitly acknowledges its own value as part of an ongoing search for "the obscure, the unknown" in reflections upon everyday objects or images.

Although even Dudek's earliest meta-poetry reveals a keen interest in the invisible, unknown, and ideal order that gives form and meaning to the phenomenal world, his later poetry is focused almost exclusively on the relationship between reality and the imagination and on the effects of this relationship on art. In "Continuation III [Fragment]," Dudek remarks that, as a poet, his role is to "push into unknown infinite worlds" without severing his ties to reality: "I am an interloper," he writes, "even now as I push my pencil in the dark / and write this poem" (76-77). In an essay entitled "The Idea of Art," Dudek contends that this desire to "generate an expression beyond the real and the actual" or to explore the unknown in art "is irrepressible in man, it was born with him at the dawn of time, and it will continue until the race expires, or man becomes something other" (29-30). Dudek had no delusions about the imagination's ability to attain a perfect knowledge of the self, or of the universe and its secrets; but his poetry and poetics make it abundantly clear that, although "the world within is just as much beyond us / as the world without has always been" ("Between Worlds" 1-2), it is nevertheless important to strive towards perfection and to refashion the real in terms of its ideal potential: he writes, "if

you assume the ground of being is far greater than the actuality—that it is, but it is unimaginable—you heighten and ennoble the actual and the knowable, and you conceive an unimaginable perfection toward which you can strive” (“Questions [Some Answers]” 26). Dudek’s desire to “heighten and ennoble the actual and the knowable” and his emphasis on the role of reason in bringing about a new civilization seem to align him with a modern or secular form of humanism, but his fascination with the unknown or the ideal complicates his stance.

Bernhard Beutler contends that it is “perfectly appropriate to call [Dudek] a ‘humanist’ although he would have shunned such labels” (72). Because of Dudek’s interest in reason, justice, and the cause of civilization, Beutler is certainly not mistaken to identify Dudek as a poet with “humanist” leanings. However, it is perhaps most appropriate to refer to Dudek as a transcendental-realist rather than a humanist, since only a transcendental-realist poetics explains his paradoxical, simultaneous interest in both the humanistic and the transcendental. Goldie writes that “Dudek himself presents the most clear working out of these conflicts in ‘The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry,’ in which he concludes, ‘A poem, of course, is partly about experience and existence as we know it. But its greatest power, if it is a true poem, derives from the faint hint or suggestion it gives of that other, unknown world of being’” (19). While Dudek’s emphasis on reason can also easily be interpreted as a kind of empiricist belief in the truths and primacy of phenomenal world, he boldly proclaims that the imagination “forever outreaches the facts” (*Continuation I* 43) and that the imagination “has always been far more important than any exact or true perception of reality” (*Ideas for Poetry* 21)—although he mitigates such claims by observing that “the nature of imagination in its deeper levels is utterly unknown to us” (“The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry” 267). Because the unknown can be understood only in terms of what is known, just as Dudek claims that the “true invisible” or the ideal “can only be

intuited in poetic images” (*Ideas for Poetry* 78), Dudek relies upon words such as “Atlantis,” “the sea,” and “God” in order to discuss the notion of an ideal order. In his poetics he refers to these words as “searchlights scanning for a definition of the eternal” (“In a Nutshell” 117).⁵² As in earlier meta-poems such as “Pure Science,” Dudek’s search for an ideal vision or “Atlantis” in *Continuation* and in other poems of the same period is ultimately grounded in reality, since “God’s glory was built into the molecules” (*Continuation II* 21); the real contains the transcendental, and it furnishes the imagination with the “poetic images” it requires in order to manifest itself in art.

While Dudek would continue to celebrate the value of art and to explore the connections between reality and the imagination in the poems and essays that he published in the 1980s and 1990s, a number of meta-poetic fragments from texts such as *Continuation II* make it clear, as Blaser argues, that “Dudek never confuses poetry with reality” (21). On paper, Dudek dedicated his life to the cause of civilization not only by promoting the arts—including literature, music, film, and the visual arts—but by speaking out against Frye and other critics who, in Dudek’s opinion, believed literature to have little or no relation to “real life.” Although he is mindful of the differences between reality and art, and although he occasionally seems to champion “the real” or “the actual” at the expense of his own poetry, Dudek affirms constantly the ways in which art creates order out of the chaos of reality:

If it were experience (Mr Leavis)

If plain living were the better poetry

why make it of words

⁵² In the preface to the 1991 edition of *Europe*, Dudek similarly explains that he uses the concept of Atlantis in his poetry to represent a “never-realized ideal world, to which all reality must somehow be referred” (18).

There is always the living

Why make the emotion out of words

Better the real thing

But the poem is not the real thing

is not made of the real

It is another thing

‘Variations and inflections of the naked self’

Like nature’s doughnut machine

making the atoms

The key to identity and order (*Continuation II* 27-28)⁵³

Dudek draws a clear line of demarcation between art and reality by providing a comprehensive list of synonyms that establishes what the poem is not: it is not “experience,” “plain living,” “living,” “emotion,” “the real thing,” or “the real.” Instead, the poem is an enigma; it is “another thing,” a reflection “of the naked self,” and a new creation. Bolstered by the same kind of “confidence in the kinds of order implicit in the nature of things” of which he writes in the preface to *Continuation I* (7), Dudek asserts that the poem is ultimately “[t]he key to identity and

⁵³ This passage was published first in “Fragment of Continuum” (*Cross-Section* 90-93), but was later published in *Continuation II* with a few minor omissions and revisions.

order,” a means of offsetting the chaos of reality through an act of the imagination. In “Chaos,” a short poem published only one year after *Continuation II*, Dudek would write again of his belief in art’s ability to make sense of a world teeming with people, plants, animals, and ideas: “In the collapse of all order, of all ‘values,’” he writes, the poet’s appropriate response is to pen “the first poem / with some order in it” (1-2, 4). Although Dudek was aware that not everyone would appreciate his poetic attempts to transform “this liquid life” into “a crystal / that preserves ‘The Forms of Water’” (*Continuation II* 76), he still invites his readers to join with him in the ongoing act of writing out one’s life in verse: “There are as many poems as there are days / Turn your days into poems, / witty and alive” (*Continuation II* 41).⁵⁴ Dudek believed that, by engaging continually in the dynamic process of writing, one could crystallize an epiphanic experience, arrest an emotion, or approach incrementally, through the intellect and the imagination, “that greater total existence of which we know only a small part” (“The Theory of the Image in Modern Poetry” 280-281).

In the first instalment of his “infinite” poem, Dudek identifies himself with all artists “who try but do not hope to achieve perfection,” and he notes that “[t]he ideal is only the touchstone, / it is not the goal” (*Continuation I* 32). Instead of claiming to present a complete and flawless picture of reality in a truly infinite poem, Dudek readily admits in the preface of *Continuation I* that the “chances and opportunities” that have given shape to his poem “are by nature inexhaustible, as well as terminable” (7). In *Continuation II*, Dudek reflects continuously on the past, and the poem’s lyric ending focuses on the epiphanies that have illumined and enriched both his life and his art, rather than on the inevitable limits of his poetics:

⁵⁴ In *Continuation I*, Dudek seemed to anticipate the same lack of positive critical feedback that he had received after the publication of *Atlantis*: for instance, he asks himself—or else he imagines someone else asking—the following question: “Who cares, does anybody care / about your precious mind and what goes on in it?” (13).

But when it's over, we know, don't we

 this life has been magical

that we were lifted once

 out of ourselves

writing those poems

and looking at people

 in distant places—

the magic of the voyage

 to other worlds (114-115)

While Sánchez avers that “there is a formal closure in the final passages of this book” (68), the second instalment of Dudek’s “infinite” poem is ultimately concerned with “the magic of the voyage,” not with the poem’s—or the poet’s—apparent success in having achieved a kind of “closure.” As Dudek had remarked in *Continuation I*, “the poem is never finished / Death puts on the finishing touches” (30). Like *Atlantis*, *Continuation* documents an impossible journey towards infinity and objective truth, but in many respects the poem is successful—not because the poet reaches “Atlantis” or creates a truly “infinite” poem, but because his journey has enabled him to gradually refine his poetics and to address more fully the formal and thematic problems that his earlier poetry had introduced. Even in 1942, Dudek appears eager to embark on a protracted—and perhaps infinite—voyage towards the same kinds of ideals that he would later seek in his long poems when he observes that “truth is not a static thing but a search. It is a progress and a constant development of thought. The personality which has the quality to propel

the process onward, to make truth, is the creative personality” (1941 *Diary* 41). Fifty-five years later, Dudek would again accept the challenge of “the hunt, the chase / the trials and torment / of an infinite pursuit” in favour of “a settled truth” (“Bits and Pieces [A Recitation]” 104), relishing the opportunity simply to immerse himself in the poetic process.

In Dudek’s late poetry, he successfully reconciles his work to his transcendental-realist poetics, assimilates a tremendous range of possible materials into a surprisingly coherent “narrative,” and continues his meta-poetry’s earlier attempts to balance reality and the imagination. In *The Surface of Time* (2000), Dudek’s final collection of poems, he also carries on his mission of writing “functional” poetry by discussing a universal subject that was of particular interest to him at the time: human mortality and the prospect of death. Earlier, he had described himself as “a stumbling mortal / knocking about on feet of clay, / with a heart of amber” (“Love Words” 21-23), and in the 1980s he also began to write more frequently of “Death, interesting as a postman, / . . . walking down my street of days” (“The Retired Professor” 3-4). In *The Surface of Time* nearly every poem alludes to the process of aging or to the poet’s inevitable death, but, with only a few morbid exceptions, the process is discussed primarily in positive terms. Tremblay places Dudek’s meditations upon the theme of death in the larger context of what he calls a “movement toward the luminous” (“Still Burning” 60), or what Dudek himself calls “a kind of groping through the semi-darkness toward luminosity” (“Ideogram” 140). Dudek’s supposed “groping” results in collections of poetry such as *Continuation II* and *The Caged Tiger*, which Hildebrand calls “two of the strongest and most intelligent books published this decade,” as well as *The Surface of Time*—all of which successfully “re-capitulate everything he has thought and understood” (“Poet of the 1990s” 97). In *The Surface of Time*’s “Sequence from ‘Continuation III,’” Dudek provides as much closure to *Continuation* as is

possible, and the poem's final passage functions as a concise yet comprehensive record of the paradoxes with which the majority of his previous writings dealt:

Go out in the sun
 some Sunday morning
when the clouds are melting
 over St. Joseph's,
look down from Mount Royal
 to that other world.

It is far off and glorious—
 at the heart of creation—
no tin-can world
 of savage modernity,
but the everlasting
 world of a present
where you stand
 in the pale light of allness.

Stand there and remember
 the paltriness of worldly claims,
and the immensity
 that is always now. (83-84)

In this single passage, Dudek accommodates an astonishing number of paradoxes: particulars such as “Sunday morning” or Montreal’s St. Joseph’s Oratory melt into the universal “allness” of “that other world,” which transcends both time and space; the transcendental is described as “far off and glorious” but also as being “at the heart of creation”; “allness” and “immensity” easily eclipse “the paltriness of worldly claims”; and eternity is located in the “always now.” The passage’s references to “Sunday,” “clouds,” and “St. Joseph’s,” in connection with its use of terms such as “glorious,” “everlasting,” and “allness,” lend it an unmistakably religious or spiritual tone; as the transcendental reveals itself to Dudek, his sense of awe increases.⁵⁵

Through its philosophical content, the passage also restores to poetry the ground Dudek once claimed that it had lost to prose—and it does this without becoming prose itself. Dudek artfully combines concrete images, wordplay, and metaphors such as “tin-can world,” and his pun on “sun” and “Sunday” relates to the poem’s larger themes by implicitly juxtaposing the light provided by the sun with the figurative “light” provided by one’s imagination and intellect. Like the rest of *Continuation*, this passage relies on an “absolute rhythm” or an “essential music,” not on a prescribed or artificially superimposed metrical pattern. The sibilance of “sun / some Sunday” mimics the hiss of scorching heat, and the spondee “Go out” adds emphasis to Dudek’s imperative command for readers to immerse themselves in reality, which is reminiscent of his earlier call for the reader to “Go smell a genuine rose!” (“Ars Poetica” 12) and of his more revolutionary calls for poets to return to “the streets” (“Poets of Revolt” 5) or to “Walk out

⁵⁵ This passage is reminiscent of earlier passages in *Continuation* in which Dudek invokes “God” or the “Lord” in a number of brief “prayers” and religious discussions. In *Continuation II*, for example, Dudek prays, “Lord, let me have wings / in my late years, when baldness comes / Open my skull to heaven like a mirror” (13). As Dudek explains elsewhere, however, such passages are demonstrative of his belief in the transcendental—as part of his transcendental-realist poetics—rather than of his adherence to any particular religion or faith group. “The residue of religion in my work,” says Dudek, “appears as a modified transcendentalism, and the positivist side of my thought appears as concreteness and realism. The effort to reconcile the two is at the core of all my poetry” (qtd. in Francis “Critic of Life” 6).

tomorrow, talk to the world and people” (“East of the City” 49). As Dudek draws *Continuation* to a provisional close for the final time, its coordinating metaphor disintegrates; Dudek addresses the reader directly, and the particulars of Dudek’s mind give way to a series of universal maxims, allowing him to pass off his “infinite” poem to others before he dies.

In the end, Dudek is able to embrace the various paradoxes his poetics and earlier meta-poems introduce in a productive, meaningful manner, rather than allowing himself to be suspended between reality and his imagination in a state of paralysis. In poems such as *Continuation*, Dudek’s fascination with the poetic process leads him to adopt a metaphor and coordinating perceptive consciousness through which he effectively accommodates the paradoxes that energize and inform his entire body of work. By adopting mind as an “interface” between the chaos of reality and an ideal, transcendental order, Dudek successfully begins to transform *Continuation* into what every poet desires his crowning achievement to be: a microcosmic record of all that was, is, and will be; a condensed and compelling archive of all that he has ever known or ever written; a life in verse.

CONCLUSION

A single statement in Dudek's 1941 diary serves to explain his motivation and future accomplishments as a poet, publisher, critic, teacher, and man of letters: "I need to find a purpose for art" (1941 *Diary* 18). As his meta-poetry from 1941 to 2001 demonstrates, Dudek finds a purpose for art in the articulation of his own life as a poet, as well as in the exploration of the tensions between his own personal reality and an ideal, universal, and ultimately inexplicable order. While Dudek's interest in the transcendental occasionally amounts to a kind of religious fervour and seems to preclude him from being classified as a "humanist" in the modern sense of the word, his "faith" is hardly an orthodox one. Instead, art provides for Dudek the perfect antidote to twentieth-century "theories of Nothingness—*le Néant*" and to the view "that nature is composed of dead particles of matter, which combine and recombine at random, without purpose, in an infinite space, and that anything else is mere human illusion" ("In a Nutshell" 116). By creating order out of chaos, and by attempting to elevate and enhance reality through acts of the imagination, Dudek's poetry enabled him not only "to think through to 'the other side' that had been abandoned in modern nihilism" ("In a Nutshell" 116), but to "[add] something to the positive structure of human value and understanding" by "seeking for what there is in actuality and in our brief lives, what there is in the actual that is not mere nothingness and emptiness" ("An Interview" 13). As Dudek had claimed in the Introduction to *Cerberus* in 1952, those who read poetry and engage in the act of writing poetry "[create] an order" in themselves, which is perhaps why he dedicated his life to "[t]he defence of art" (Collins, *In Defence of Art* 5), why he "continued to champion the values of an embattled elite struggling against ignorance and mass taste" (*LD&RS* 85), and why he responded to what Tremblay calls "the highest and most noble civic calling: the moral responsibility of the artist to work tirelessly

toward the building of civilization” (“In Memoriam” 10). Through his meta-poetry, in particular, Dudek was able to come to terms both with the realities of his physical existence and with his imagination, which continually conceived ideal realities and possibilities towards which he could strive.

Dudek’s importance as a Canadian modernist poet and critic can hardly be overstated. In *Europe*, Dudek helped to pioneer the Canadian modernist long poem, and Davey maintains that Dudek’s next long poem, *En México*, “was easily the most impressive and original long poem yet written by a Canadian” (*LD&RS* 67). Dudek’s contributions as a professor, poet, and critic have been recognized in a number of different ways: in 1969, for example, he was the Greenshields Professor of English at McGill; in 1984, he became an Elected Member of the Order of Canada; and in 1990, a group of fellow poets and friends presented him with The Canadian Writers Award, securing him a place in the poet’s corner at Ben’s Delicatessen in Montreal. In terms of Dudek’s lasting impact and influence, Tremblay also predicts that “Dudek and [Hugh] Kenner’s contributions will distinguish Canada as a serious participant in the cultural discourse of the twentieth century” when “the intellectual energies of the twentieth century are finally considered with the distance that informs clear judgment” (“Still Burning” 58). Nevertheless, Dudek’s increasingly paradoxical, transcendental-realist poetics is difficult to map in relation to his contemporaries’ poetry and to the state of Canadian poetry in general, although Davey’s *Louis Dudek & Raymond Souster* (1980), Norris’s *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80: Its Role in the Development of Modernism and Postmodernism in Canadian Poetry* (1984), and Trehearne’s *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition* (1999) have laid a solid foundation for future work in this area.

While Dudek is known widely as a modernist poet, his publications span seven decades and are often difficult to categorize either individually or collectively. As far as Dudek was concerned, his poetic stance was quite clear: in an exchange of letters with Frank Davey, bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, and George Bowering, Dudek announces, “I’m a modernist through and through” (“Questions [Some Answers]” 9). Poems such as *Atlantis* and *Continuation* can certainly be considered “successful” modernist works on the basis of their formal fragmentation, thematic juxtaposition, and dense allusion alone; yet Dudek often borrowed from other poets in order to refine, reinvent, and respond to established modernist traditions or techniques. As Trehearne points out, Dudek’s poetry thus “suggests most clearly a trajectory from the troubled poetic generation of Page and Klein to the late modernism and postmodernism of George Bowering, [Frank Davey], and Robert Kroetsch” (*Montreal Forties* 243). Similarly, Shearer notes that, in addition to Trehearne, Davey, Norris, and Stromberg-Stein also identify Dudek as “a significant bridge between two generations of Canadian poets: modernist and postmodern writers” (ix). The majority of these critics identify Dudek merely as a link or “bridge” between two distinct poetic traditions, but Davey goes so far as to suggest that Dudek’s poetry is, itself, “postmodernist.” Trehearne questions Davey’s “alignment of Dudek’s late poetics with (what he calls) ‘the expansions and affirmations which characterize postmodernism’ (p.101)” in an endnote to *The Montreal Forties* (354), and Norris—following the lead of Frank Kermode—confesses that he is “inclined to consider Post-Modernism as part of the Modernist tradition. The evolution of modern Canadian poetry is one of continued and continuing Modernist innovation, elaborations rather than radical departures from the Modernist tradition” (5). Rather than departing from the modernist tradition, Dudek seems to have willingly embraced it—although,

when it failed to resonate with his own poetic beliefs, he was not afraid to “correct” it or to “make it new” in his own way.

In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), Andreas Huyssen repeatedly defines postmodernism in terms of its rejection of the distinction between high modernist art and mass culture. On the basis of this definition alone, it would seem that Dudek was certainly a modernist poet; indeed, it was precisely because he sought to maintain the distinction between popular art and “true” art that he reacted so strongly against Marshall McLuhan, a critic who “deliberately obfuscated issues by confusing such terms as art and entertainment, media and meaning, communications and response, tactile and visual experience, and by introducing such kitsch words as ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ as would-be serious concepts” (“The Misuses of Imagination” 314). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Dudek also rejected a number of modernist tenets, including its occasionally dogmatic emphasis on objective reality or “things.” In “The Psychology of Literature,” for example, he rejects Williams—as a representative of the Imagist movement—on the basis of poetry’s need for abstract ideas in equal measure to concrete imagery:

The relation between concrete imagery and abstraction has been a very confusing problem in twentieth-century modern poetry, and it has not yet been properly solved. William Carlos Williams’ dictum ‘No ideas but in things’ is only a half-truth, or maybe even less. We can no longer have ideas *only* in things; that would be a regression to pre-history. There must be abstract ideas and there must be ideas in things; it’s the proportion between them that remains the real issue for poetry. (372)

Furthermore, while Dudek shared Pound’s belief in the importance of the image as a kind of “molecular unit” in poetry, he criticized Pound’s inability to balance the concrete and the

abstract in *The Cantos*, a poem which, according to Dudek, “lacks the proportion between connecting ideas and multifaceted realities that communication now demands” (“The Psychology of Literature” 372). Dudek found much to admire in both Pound and Williams, but, as his own poetry and meta-poetry demonstrates, his desire to reconcile reality and the imagination superseded his desire to align himself with any single movement or tenet. Trehearne observes that Dudek “was by turns social realist, Imagist, aphorist, didacticist, prose poet, and pioneer of the Canadian modernist long poem, which he took to its extreme form in the deliberate unfinished of *Continuation*, his last major project” (*Canadian Poetry* 289). Instead of deliberating over Dudek’s commitment to any single poetic movement—whether it be modernism, social realism, postmodernism, or something else entirely—future critics would perhaps do best to focus on the ways in which Dudek successfully embraced paradoxical styles, forms, and ideas in order to transform his life’s work into a meaningful statement about the nature of reality and the artistic imagination.

Although Dudek’s accomplishments as a critic have already been recognized, the full extent of his accomplishments as a poet has yet to be determined. Donovan writes that, “despite his impressive creative output, Dudek’s place in the pantheon of our literature is extraordinarily high because he is simply our greatest literary critic” (65). But Dudek surely deserves to be remembered as one of Canada’s most innovative, intelligent, and influential poets. In 1984, Goldie acknowledged Dudek’s importance as a critic with the following comment:

Perhaps in the future, Dudek’s poetry will be more highly valued than it is today. But even at present, when many question his achievements in verse, and when many find his élitist and progressivist critical stance to be anathema, his importance must be accepted.

Without his work, in all directions, it might be too easy, particularly in the Canadian context, to accept literature as a drawing-room activity of little concern. (52)

As demonstrated in this thesis, Dudek's so-called "elitism," like his "didacticism" and "academicism," needs to be discussed in the context of his critical and poetic search for balance between reality and the imagination. For if Dudek's poems continue to be read outside of the broader context of Dudek's life—or at least without reference to the rest of his *oeuvre*—his most impressive contribution to Canadian poetry will continue to be underappreciated and misunderstood. Trehearne suggests that "[t]he critic's task in these primordial days of Dudek scholarship is partly descriptive, few having read his *Continuations* volumes, fewer still having written about them, and most of those the original reviewers" (*Montreal Forties* 243). As the previous chapters suggest, part of this daunting, descriptive task necessitates the discussion of individual parts of each of Dudek's long poems in reference to the whole—a necessity which, in the case of *Continuation*, is exceedingly difficult. Perhaps for this very reason, the brilliance and complexity of Dudek's poetics of paradox has often been mistaken for inconsistency, incompetency, or unintentional obscurity. With Dudek's increasingly autobiographical meta-poetry as a guide, one can see how Dudek's poetics of paradox really works in a poem such as *Continuation*; indeed, "We begin to understand at last," as Dudek explains, "why and how the process of the continuing poem contains certain contradictions, certain unresolved elements coming together, and certain ups and downs, for that is what the whole thing is. The whole thing is the process and the kinds of things it has in it—*that is your life!*" ("The Breathless Adventure" 52).

Any study dedicated to a poet as prolific as Louis Dudek can only begin to mine the depths of that poet's life, writings, or thought. This particular study has proceeded, nevertheless,

with the hope of “finding the gold in the dross” (“The Breathless Adventure” 53), of continuing to unearth a poet whose words “challenge the reader by everywhere claiming the largest possible significance of poetry and the creative mind for human culture” (Hildebrand, “Poet of the 1990s” 88). In his relentless search for balance between reality and the imagination—a search which finds extraordinary expression in *Continuation*—Dudek unwittingly affirms Walt Whitman’s claim that “[a] great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning” (xi). While death may have put the finishing touches on his “infinite” poem, Dudek’s brief tribute to the Italian poet Ceccardo Ceccardi speaks equally well to the potential impact of his own poems on future generations: “A poet may seem to have vanished into oblivion; and yet somewhere, perhaps in a far foreign country, someone may have read his poem, and have lived with it through the years. This is what is called futurity, even if it be in only one reader’s memory—immortality, to be reborn in another poet’s lines” (“Louis Dudek” 125). While Dudek may have “vanished into oblivion,” his poetry waits patiently to be read, to pass on its wisdom to those who have yet to discover both its quiet and its brazen charms, or to be reborn in the lines of poets and fellow citizens of Atlantis in the years to come.

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