THE POETRY OF RAYMOND SOUSTER

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite Raymond Souster's acknowledged stature as major Canadian poet, no in-depth study of his poetry has been made. Consequently, basic misconceptions exist, the most fundamental one being the tendency to consider Souster's poetry as being static.[1] This thesis is intended to fill partially the void of criticism, thereby erasing the above misconception.

The Introduction contains a brief biographical note and description of the literary climate existing when Souster began writing. Chapter II traces the development of Souster's poetic style and examines the influences upon his poetry. Through time, these influences have been the poetry of Kenneth Fearing, Kenneth Patchen, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. The third chapter deals with the full range of Souster's poetry, discussing the interplay of both fear and joy operative in Souster's treatment of the city, nature, woman, and youth.

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[1]Munro Beattie, for instance, in his Literary History Of Canada (p. 780), states that the form of Souster's poetry has changed scarcely at all since 1943. Desmond Pacey in Creative Writing in Canada (p. 174), asserts that although the poems have not deteriorated, there has been no significant development in Souster's poetry since the early 1940's.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

If the frequency with which a poet's books were read depended upon how interesting the man's biography happened to be, then the books of Raymond Souster would forever gather dust on the shelves of bookstores and libraries. Simply, Raymond H. Souster was born on January 15, 1921, in Toronto; he grew up in that city, attended University of Toronto Schools and Humberside Collegiate, and after graduating at the age of eighteen, started work in a Toronto bank (probably because his father had similar employment). Except for a four year stint in the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1940 to 1944, Souster has lived in Toronto and has worked at his bank job until the present day.

This is hardly an exciting biography, and yet twenty-five years of continuous, consistent poetic activity are concealed in it. During that time, Souster has published thirteen books of poetry, has shared in two others,[1] has edited three poetry magazines,[2] and has been one of the directors of a successful and important publishing venture, Contact Press.

The poetic career of Raymond Souster started in the early 1940's. Fortunately for him, it was a decade of heightened and sometimes frantic poetic activity, centering around the rivalry between the two Montreal literary magazines, Preview, edited by

Patrick Anderson, and First Statement, edited by John Sutherland. In order to understand the poetic and political milieu in which Souster found himself, we should look briefly at the rivalry between these two literary magazines.

Preview had been started in 1941 by Patrick Anderson, who the previous year had come to Montreal from England. The magazine had a sophisticated, confident air about it, partly because its list of contributors included established and respected Canadian writers; besides Patrick Anderson, other writers appearing in the pages of Preview were F.R. Scott, P.K. Page, A.M. Klein, Neufville Shaw, Bruce Ruddick, and Ralph Gustafson. Most of these were well-educated persons holding responsible and prestigious positions in the fields of law, politics, teaching, and medicine.

Basically, Preview poets carried on the English poetic tradition. That is, much of the poetry showed influences of T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and the Seventeenth Century Metaphysical poets. John Sutherland said in 1943 of the Preview poets, "Their metaphors may be drawn from everyday things, but they are grouped together in an intense word pattern to produce a novel effect."[3]

Patrick Anderson, for instance, the leader of the group, had come over from England steeped in the ideas of W.H. Auden and the verbal and poetic pyrotechnics of Dylan Thomas. P.K. Page, who contributed frequently to Preview, was a disciple of Patrick Anderson. She also wrote propagandist, left-wing poems. These poems are not Miss Page's finest; she is at her best when she writes sympathetically of other people, when she writes of love, beauty, and innocence.

Preview never let its readers lose sight of its stand against colonialism and isolationism. "We have lived long enough in Montreal to realize the frustrating and inhibiting effects of isolation," stated the first issue.

Patrick Anderson, writing in February, 1943, makes an emotional appeal for national unity:

> Must it not be plain that the interests of all of us -- as individuals, as workers, artists, scientists, whatever we are -- demand that we put to one side all immediate, selfish consideration and unite our energies for the defeat of the fascist imperialists whose victory would thrust history back hundreds of years?

The one reality constantly lurking in the background of the magazine, sometimes spilling out explosively, was the Second World War. Preview, as Anderson's quotation above shows, was decidedly left-wing, anti-Fascist. Anderson's was not a mere game of parlour-politics; Preview took the war earnestly. "Two events of great importance to the Writer have occurred in recent weeks," Anderson wrote gravely in February of 1943. "One is the Russian offensive, the other the conference at Casablanca."

On the question of the role of the writer in the war, some of Anderson's strongest ideas came out. The first issue of Preview printed the following manifesto: "All anti-fascists, we feel that the existence of a war between democratic culture and the paralysing force of dictatorship only intensifies the writer's obligation to work. Now, more than ever, creative and experimental writing must be kept alive...." Patrick Anderson

was by far the most forthright writer in Preview on the subject of war. In February of 1943 he wrote,

> Our task is clear not only to help in the winning of the war by our literary work and our vivid enthusiastic embodiment of the issues for which it is being fought, but also to supply something of the personal, the graceful and the heroic to the atmosphere of this half-empty Dominion.

Anderson was to support his patriotic statements by printing four war poems in a special supplement to Preview called The Victory Broadsheet.[4] The poems were a vivid embodiment of Anderson's chauvinistic statement above. Desmond Pacey sums up the whole matter well:

> Much of the poetry of the war period, undoubtedly, was ephemeral, and much of it already seems dated. To re-read Preview now, with its naive talk of making poetry a weapon, is a disillusioning process. There was so much solemn cant about it: one would have thought the whole Canadian war effort, the very defeat of Fascism, depended on the existence of this little mimeographed monthly.[5]

In short, Preview was a magazine operated by a small clique of established writers fighting colonialism, isolationism, and fascism, while championing national unity, cosmopolitanism, Marxist socialism, and poetry as a social weapon, or as Patrick Anderson said, "the capacity to 'sing' with social content and criticism."[6]

First Statement differed in many ways from Preview. The personalities involved were vastly different, Preview poets being,

for the most part, older and more established than those of First Statement. The latter were in some cases even students of the former. This difference was pointed out by First Statement itself, for its sub-title stated, "A Magazine for Young Canadian Writers." Whereas the backdrop for Preview was the campus of McGill University, for First Statement it was only the slum section of war-time Stanley Street.

Perhaps it could be said of First Statement that it was not so much pro something as contra Preview. First Statement objected to Preview's assertions that poetry should be the handmaiden of politics. Louis Dudek wrote,

> First Statement does not deny that poetry may express matters which are not in themselves poetry: matters geographical, sociological, etc. It even encourages literature which will reflect the atmosphere and currents of Canadian life... But it underlines the "reacting honestly...first hand," as the chief concern of the poet.[7]

Dudek went on to assert that much of modern poetry, including that in Preview, had the following faults:

> (1) a clever aptitude for exploiting the unreal universe of language; (2) a pedantic absorption in the second-hand universe of books, literature and erudition; and (3) a falsified devotion to a special universe of ideas, chiefly sociological and political ones....
>
> By way of correctives, First Statement can suggest three slogans for the poet's masthead. No polyglot displays. No poetry about poets and poetry. No high party politics.[8]

This statement by Dudek is a direct criticism of Preview. In fact, further on in the same article Dudek brings the matter in the open

by saying, "We have in Montreal a magazine, Preview, in which much of the work illustrates exactly this point."[9]

The statement "No polyglot displays. No poetry about poets and poetry" is a criticism of Preview's display of scholarly, technical poetry, and its adherence to the British tradition of poetry. Irving Layton, forgetting for a moment Dudek's statement "No poetry about poets and poetry," continues the onslaught of Preview in the same issue with a poem called "The Modern Poet":

> Since Auden set the fashion,
> Our poets grow tame;
> They are quite without passion,
> They live without blame...
>
> His pedigree? Uncertain.
> But come now agree,
> He's the one to entertain
> Your guests after tea.
> A wit and scholar is he.

Whereas the Preview poets chose the British for their mentors, First Statement poets looked to the Americans, to Whitman, Crane, Frost, Fearing, and Sandburg. They wrote poetry from their own experience, shunning metaphor and symbol for the sake of forthright statement. As Wynne Francis says,"...they preferred to shout huzzahs and hurl insults, to fight, spit, sweat, urinate and make love in their poems, and did so in deliberate defiance of Preview...'Celebration, not cerebration' as Layton was later to phrase it."[10] This deliberate defiance was especially true after Irving Layton and Louis Dudek joined the magazine's editorial board, and after Raymond Souster began contributing to the magazine.

First Statement, although itself being socialistically oriented, objected to Preview's doctrinaire approach.[11] In the

editorial of First Statement's first issue, for example, John Sutherland attacks a Preview writer's strong socialist stand in the following manner: "This man uses words in the way one uses fists to clip people on the jaw. He is a socialist aching for a revolution, and he has found the perfect art."

The end of World War II concluded the conflict between the two magazines, which merged to form Northern Review. This feud was very much alive, however, when Raymond Souster first met the Montreal poets, and it must be regarded as an important part of the poetic and political milieu in which he began to produce his poetry.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Unit of Five in 1944 with Louis Dudek, Ronald Hambleton, P.K. Page, and James Wreford; and Cerberus in 1952 with Louis Dudek and Irving Layton.

[2] Direction (1943-1945), Contact (1952-1954), and Combustion (1957-1960).

[3] John Sutherland, "P.K. Page and Preview," First Statement, vol. 1, no. 6. p.7.

[4] Readers were exhorted to hang up these poems in their kitchens and bathrooms.

[5] Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1964. pp. 154-155.

[6] Preview, no. 1, March 1942. p.1.

[7] Louis Dudek, "Geography, Politics, and Poetry." First Statement, vol. 1, no. 16. pp. 2-3.

[8]Loc. cit.

[9]Loc. cit.

[10]Wynne Frances, "Montreal Poets of the Forties." Canadian Literature, no. 14 (Autumn 1962), p.27.

[11]This was Dudek's target when he said, "No high party politics."

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE IN THE POETRY OF RAYMOND SOUSTER

Raymond Souster's first poem in First Statement appeared in 1942, in the eleventh number of the magazine. Although he was in the Air Force during this time, Souster was very much aware of both Preview and First Statement. On leave in the summer of 1942, he travelled to Montreal to spend a short time with John Sutherland and Louis Dudek. Souster must have taken some of First Statement's fire with him to his base in New Brunswick, for in November of 1943 he, together with David Mullen and William Goldberg, decided to edit a literary magazine. The three editors were all Air Force men stationed at the same base, and all were equally disgruntled at the state of Canadian literature. Goldberg tells of the birth of the magazine on the first page of the first issue:

> Two evenings ago I was lying in my bunk, minding my own business; as a matter of fact I was reading an article on Post-War by Bruce Hutchinson in Liberty, when Dave and Ray rushed in like two madmen, seized me by the arms and legs, and like two boisterous and fun-loving kids carried me into the shower-room. Bolting the door, they fired a salve, [sic] "Let's get a magazine out". "Let us make a fighting declaration of our fighting faith." "Let us denounce the Canadian Author's Association, including Sir Charles G.D. Tradition. God, they're all dying on their feet....Dave on

> painting...." "We want something fresh... give us new ideas...."
>
> Ray says: "This has to be a blast. It doesn't have to be logical or sensible.... We must attack, attack and attack. Let us call the Mag, the Attack or Sperm, anything that will shock the dull-witted Canadian imagination out of its lethargy....Well, we may feel sorry if we say some nasty and shocking things, but sometimes an enema is better than a gentle laxative."

And so the magazine was born. The editors had enough sense not to call it Attack, or Sperm, but called it Direction instead, taking the title, as they explained, from Henry Miller's statement,

> Everything that lives, that has being, whether it be a star, a plant, an animal or a human being, 'Even God Almighty' has direction..... Along the road which each of us is travelling there is no turning back. It is forward or dead stop, which is living death.

In the first issue (the magazine listed no dates), Souster in a brief article, "The Present State of Canadian Literature", writes that reaction [which Souster leaves unspecified] is too strong, and that "the few bayonet attacks of the young and the fresh and the bold could make very little impression" against its stone wall. Even the three little magazines, which Souster had seen previously as "hopeful signs," had disappointed him: Contemporary Verse of British Columbia, edited by Alan Crawley, had published, according to Souster, "much good, but little fresh and vital poetry." Preview of Montreal, Souster felt, served "a rehash of Stephen Spender, Auden and MacNeice brought up to date with a Canadian setting." Its main virtue was that it published Patrick Anderson, for whom Souster held much respect.[1] Souster was less

severe towards First Statement, which had, until that time, published ten of Souster's own poems. At least, Souster had an admiration for the magazine's healthy experimentation.[2]

Souster's own contribution to the first issue of Direction includes two prose selections which are excerpts from longer pieces on the subject of war, and four poems, three of lasting quality: "Night Watch," "Air Raid," and "Apple Blow" all appear later in Souster books.

Basically, Direction's first issue is an attempt to deal with a realistic theme in a realistic manner. The poets write in the language of everyday speech in an attempt to create meaningful and concrete poetry, and this approach accounts for both the strong and weak points of their work. The strong points of the poetry lie in original imagery and in an avoidance of archaic, over-used poetic forms. The poetry, however, sometimes degenerates into didactic prose, and the "fresh and vital" is often confused with an obvious attempt to startle and shock. Souster, for instance, is strong and convincing in the wistful tenderness of "Apple Blow":

> I remember
> How the orchards would stretch row after row
> Back from the oil-oovered roads, white and red
> and still
> With the blow heavy on them, weighing down the
> branches, and how we would stand
> And watch a petal shake itself loose in the
> spring wind,
> And drift so evenly and lightly down to the
> petal-strewn grass
> As soft as the touch of death across the fore-
> head of a child.[3]

However, Souster is less convincing when he rails at the emptiness and brutality of society in a poem like "Nada."

Souster's contribution to the second number of Direction, "Place of Meeting: Prologue," and "From 'The Carousel of Madness,'" are two long poems dealing with the insincerity, hypocrisy, and impersonality of man. The poems are a blatant attempt to prod people from their lethargy, and to jolt them from their complacency. In his later editorial wisdom, Souster excluded both poems from his collections.[4]

In the third number of Direction, Souster again prints some strong poems. "False Spring," "Old Men," "Deception," and "Dreams Were Always Cheap" forsake an attempt to shock for an honest use of fresh imagery. For example, a passage such as

> And the world is the beautiful body of a young girl
> With the inflamed sores on her body
> Well-hidden behind her scarlet-flowing cape

strikes one as much more convincing and vital than

> Madmen
> Baby Killers
> Pimps of this Christ,

even though the feeling generating both of these selections is probably the same.

Souster's poems in numbers four and five again display, for the most part, either a nostalgic sentimentality or an unpoetic outburst at the injustice of brutality. Being essentially weak, they seem to betray the promise shown by poems in the earlier issues.

After a run of ten issues, one of which was devoted entirely to the work of Henry Miller,[5] Souster brought publication of Direction to an end. What then was the magazine's role in Souster's

poetic career? To begin with, it reaffirmed Souster's conviction that Canadian poetry was in a state of torpor, and that what was needed was a "fresh," "vital", and if necessary, shocking poetry. Direction had provided this kind of poetry. Second, the magazine provided Souster a place to publish his work just when he was beginning to be published, which is important in the early development of any poet. The magazine had side effects also. Though printing the work of only a few writers, it provided a market for writers when markets were few. There were not many literary magazines in Canada at that time other than the ones Souster mentioned in Direction number one. Irving Layton and Miriam Waddington were among the more prominent writers whose work appeared in Direction. Furthermore, the magazine followed the lead of First Statement in publishing the poetry of social realism in reaction to the poetry then being written in Canada which was exemplified by the work still appearing in Preview.

Souster's poetry of the war period appeared in Unit of Five[6] (1944), a book of five poets "under thirty", edited by Ronald Hambleton, and When We Are Young (1945), the fourth in a series of books published by First Statement Press. The poetry is clearly of the war period -- besides the numerous references to the war, Souster continues the tradition set by the First Statement poets: poetry of forthright statement, scant in metaphor and imagery; language of everyday.

During the war, Souster had been reading much of Kenneth Fearing's poetry, and many parallels, both in form and content,

can be seen in these two poets' work. The similarity, for instance, can readily be recognized between Fearing's "Andy and Jerry and Joe" and Souster's "Yonge Street Saturday Night":

> We watched the crowd, there was a murder in the
> papers, the wind blew hard, it was dark,
> We didn't know what to do,
> There was no place to go and we had nothing to say,
> We listened to the bells, and voices, and whistles,
> and cars,
> We moved on,
> We weren't dull, or wise, or afraid,
> We didn't feel tired, or restless, or happy, or sad.[7]
>
> (Fearing)

> and there are some like us,
> just walking, making our feet move ahead of us,
> a little bored, a little lost, a little angry,
> walking as though we were really going somewhere,
> walking as if there was something to see at
> Adelaide or maybe on King,
> something that will give a fair return for this use
> of shoeleather,
> something that will make us smile with a strange
> new happiness, a lost but recovered joy.[8]
>
> (Souster)

Both poems treat the boredom and meaninglessness of the war period; both poems use line for the same purpose, each line containing one idea; both poems use repetitious openings, Fearing with the word "we", and Souster with the words "walking" and "something."

Besides the subject of war, there are many other Fearing influences present in Souster's work. Both poets feel the same sympathy for the common, downtrodden man who is trapped by society and whose individual freedom is violated. "Tell them all you are innocent, innocent of this," says Fearing in "Winner Take All,"[9] while Souster describes the people that are "haunted by the glassy,

ghostly smile of unknown, countless eyes that stare and stare and stare,/ Bewildered, accusing."[10]

Both poets have the same defiant attitude towards death; it is ugly, inevitable. "You won't even die like a dog," says Souster, "Most of the dogs I've ever seen died fast and clean/ With their guts spread over the pavement in a neat little pile,/ But you'll die slowly..."[11] and Fearing states, "Take him away, he's dead as they die.../ Look at the fingers growing stiff, touch the face already cold, see the stars in the sky, look at the stains on the street."[12]

Both poets talk of the difficulty of finding one's way in life, of doing right.[13] Both poets deal with the antithesis between the desired dream and what actually happens. "Dreams were always cheap,"[14] says Souster in the poem with the same title. "Perhaps the empire of credit was not, after all, so shrewd or bold,"[15] says Fearing in "Class Reunion."

Besides theme, Fearing has also influenced Souster in form and style. Both poets like to use the anaphora, a device which they learned from Whitman. Both poets often write in a satiric, cynical vein, directly addressing the reader or an imaginary "you" (the most recurring pronoun in both Fearing and Souster).[16] Both poets use the long line which also, perhaps, stems from Whitman. Each line contains an idea, a statement in itself; each line is a self-contained unit. It can thus be either long or short, although the long lines by far predominate. A fusion between form and content is thus achieved. Later, when Souster begins to rely more on metaphor and imagery, his lines become shorter and more

finely-sculptured; but while he is writing poetry of outright statement written in everyday language (even, sometimes, slang), the longer lines suit him better.

The danger in comparing one poet to another is that both may lose their own identity, their own uniqueness. One can say of Souster, however, that despite his various influences, he has always retained his own voice, his own craft, his own identity. To grasp some of Souster's individual capability evident at this period, we might consider the last half of the poem "Ten P.M.", which is still one of Souster's finest:

> O westward the lights stretch
> Like paling diamonds far and farther into the darkness,
> And the lake beside them shudders softly in the moontouch.
> But the stars are colder and are crueler here
> Where the pavement's hollow when the streetcars rumble over,
> Where the flares of neon flick their fiery anger
> At the idiot postures of black-hearted buildings,
> And where the rancid smoke downcurls and settles
> In nose, in mouth, in fissures of the heart.[17]

Souster is a poet who seldom writes in end-rhyme. He substitutes instead an intricate system of alliteration and internal rhyme, or assonance. In this stanza of "Ten P.M.", the unvoiced labio-dental fricative /f/ sound runs throughout, in "far," "farther," "softly," "flares," "flick," "fiery," and "fissures." The /f/ sound is especially predominant in the line "Where the flares of neon flick their fiery anger," the sound reinforcing the sense of the line. A series of various retroflex vowel sounds runs through the stanza to create a definite effect. The pattern is set in the words "westward," "far," "farther", and "stars."

It then changes to "here" and shifts in "where," and continues to fluctuate through "streetcars," "where," "flares," "fiery," "black-hearted," "where," "downcurls," "fissures," and ends in the original sound, "heart." Other sets of like-sounds can be heard in groups such as "lights-like-lake," "stretch-touch," and "colder-crueler." The stanza at first sight looks very casual and spontaneous, which it is, but at the same time it is structurally reinforced by this subtle pattern of sounds. Furthermore, the cadence seems deliberately structured, as it is possible to read a regular five beats into each line.

To further illustrate Souster's handling of sound effects, we might look at his poem "Request", whose subject is jazz in a nightspot, where in the space of ten lines the high front tense vowel /i/ is repeated twenty times, though here again the textual effect is subtle enough to go unnoticed by the casual reader. And yet when the reader studies the obvious surface with some attention, he finds a wealth of detail in both sound and meaning.

Souster's early poetry of the war period is very much a product of its time. It is first of all poetry of social concern greatly determined by the political and social situation of this period. Second, the form and style of the poetry is a direct reaction to both Preview and early Twentieth Century poetry. Souster states his reaction in "To The Canadian Poets":

> Come my little eunuchs, my little virgins,
> It is time you were home and in bed;
> The wind is strong and cold on the streets
> And it is almost eleven o'clock.
>
> Soon the whores will be obvious at the corners
> And I would not have you accosted or given the eye:

Soon the drunks will be turned out of the
beverage rooms
And I would not have you raped in a dark lane.

Go, find your house and insert the key and put
down the night-lock.
Undress with the blinds down and touch the pillows,
and dream
Of Pickthall walking hand in hand with her fairies
And Lampman turning his back on Ottawa.[18]

Souster's reaction to what he then considered artificial and affected poetry determined the style of his own poetry of the war period. His poetry is the communication of experience expressed in realistic language, containing no artificiality, no romanticizing.

At the end of the Second World War, Souster, discharged from the Air Force, returned to his native Toronto. His poetry written immediately after the war period appeared in John Sutherland's anthology Other Canadians,[19] published by First Statement Press, in 1947, and Go To Sleep, World, by Ryerson Press, also in 1947. Many of the contained poems show the influence of Kenneth Patchen, whom Souster had begun reading several years before.

In Direction number three Souster had written the following tribute to Patchen:

> Of Kenneth Patchen I can only say that he alone of all the poets writing at this hour has not compromised his art and sold out his personal beliefs for a much greater and surer place that would have been his had he taken the easy path as so many have elected to take.
> ...his poetry....has been called formless, chaotic, and all the rest of those slick literary labels, but only occasionally rich and gushing like blood from the wound of a giant, seldom as quietly beautiful as a snowflake falling, rarely savagely snarling as

> a tiger in the last jungle of the world; no, there has been too much of the other, too little of the truth. When Patchen tells us "This is a man. You are not to kill him" he is merely paraphrasing the Bible and if we attack one we must be fair and attack the other. And he is only going one step further than Auden and the others who pictured for us the decaying ruins of our civilization when he shows us the warm blood flowing among them and the guns pointed straight at the memorials to our late dead.
>
> But Patchen has hope, he is able to look beyond a world of falling bombs and tanks stumbling forward in blind counter-attack, he is able to point ahead to a world where love is the bomb falling on the human heart, where tanks are replaced by the bodies of two drawing closer together for the act of love. But first, he shouts and screams again and again, the filthy smell of our money must go, the lust of our power-crazy statesmen must go, the desire to kill and destroy must go; only then can we enter into the other kingdom.

The last paragraph is significant, for what Souster says of Patchen is true also of himself. The greatest effect of Patchen's influence is evident not only in Souster's style, but especially in his attitude towards his subject matter. Souster admired Patchen's hate of war, of death, and of power. Furthermore, both Patchen and Souster often juxtapose man's violence and nature's serenity in their poems. The spirit of defiance, the assertion of the need for love and the search for truth which Patchen expressed in his poems Souster also incorporates into his,[20] and like Patchen, Souster reflects hope for a post-war generation as he points "ahead to a world where love is the bomb falling on the human heart", though the prerequisite must be the abolition of the smell of money, the power lust of statemen, and the general desire to kill and destroy.

Of Souster's poems written immediately after the war, begin-

ning with "Together Again," the predominant subject is the celebration of love: "The crooked, crawling world can writhe in its slime/ Without a blink from either eyelash." What matters is that "the long dark century of winter is over/ Because we are together again."[21] In "Dominion Square" and "After Dark" lovers take on an almost mystical appearance:

> They seem almost part of the rain...
> ...they seem part of the night,
> these lovers,
> With their slow lingering steps and total unawareness
> Of everything in this city but their love and
> the strength, the lust in their bodies touching
> As they walk across the Square...[22]

"Night Watch" is also an important poem on the theme of love. In this poem, the two lovers are "Not at Angelo's with wine and spaghetti,/ Not at the Oak Room, not at Joe's, Mabel's, or Tim's Place",

> But here with the lean cold pushing the dim
> light from the stars,
> Here under ghost buildings, here with the silence
> grown too silent;
>
> You and I in the doorway like part of a tomb,
> Kissing the night with bitter cigarettes.[23]

The whole poem suggests eeriness: even the doorway becomes a tomb. Souster's imagination is at its best here; the poem flows evenly, almost off-handedly; the language is plain, yet once again we notice the formal excellence of the poem. The last line of the poem, for instance, contains a repetition of the high front lax vowel /I/ in the words "kissing", "bitter", "with", and "cigarettes", forming a semantic paradigm which is pregnant with erotic suggestion. The clipped sound expresses well the bitterness of the situation.

So it is that the poem's form and sound determine an additional level of interpretation.

As the poem shows, Souster is realistic enough not to idealize love, nor does he treat it sentimentally. The two lovers are placed in juxtaposition to a world of "lean cold," of death, where even the buildings take on a ghost-like, deathly appearance.

Souster asserts the need for love because he realizes that "the filthy smell of money," "the lust of...power-crazy statesmen," and "the desire to kill and destroy" are very much present. Souster is quite aware that a long, six-year war has just occurred. Although expressing a hope for the future, he expresses it warily: "I also have my dreams," he says, "but they're too tender/ to risk being maimed and broken by this time." Souster would like very much to pretend

> for a minute, for an hour, for several hours,
> that hate, that anger and violence,
> hunger and pain, hiding and revenge
> are gone forever.[24]

The bombers also, returning from a blood-red Europe, instill a fear in Souster as he watches them "dive with their every boyish pass/ over these fields, these runways, silent now--/ and O God please forever...."[25]

And so all the poet can do in a world of hate and violence is reassert the message of love. This Souster does in his post-war poetry, showing a much more romantic approach than he does in the "proletarian" war poems.

More must be said about Souster's poetic technique of this

period. Since his poetry of the war had been most intent in conveying a social message, it was written in long lines bare in metaphor and imagery. It was poetry of assertion, of declarative statement. His poetry immediately after the war, however, is not so much a communication of a message having social and political implications as it is a declaration, a celebration of love. In other words, the poetry of the post-war period is less didactic. As a result, the lines become more flexible, and in most cases, shorter. One idea is now not confined to one line since metaphor and imagery begin to take the place of bald statement. Perhaps the difference between Souster's war and post-war poetry can best be illustrated in comparing two selections, one from each period. Both describe bomber planes. These two lines are from "Air Raid":

> They hum with new life, the black wings gloss
> and shine in the morning air,
> As other droppings of murder fall from their
> stinking bowels.[26]

Several characteristics stamp these lines as war-period poetry. There is, first of all, the use of the long line, each line conveying one idea. Secondly, the tone of the second line is characteristic of Souster's war poetry. After the reader is lulled by the verbs of the first line, the second line falls like a brick. The angry, defiant, uncompromising tone is clearly of the war period. Although the second line takes the form of a metaphor, the metaphor is crushed by the weight of words such as "murder," "stinking," and "bowels."

The poem "June 1945" was written after the war. The first stanza also describes bomber planes:

There, O there, see how
suspended, how like gulls
of some fabulous age, side-slipping,
veering, O prancing like colts
let off the rope, whole fields
for them to romp in, kings
in their mane-shaking young strength.[27]

This stanza could not have been written during the war. First, the long lines are gone, being replaced by lines having three stressed syllables each. Souster shows much more control, much more concentration, then, in determining exactly how much a line should contain. Lines broken off in the middle of phrases suggest the "veering" and "prancing": the lines weave back and forth. Second, metaphor and simile, used sparingly in war-time poetry, are here abundant. In one short stanza, the planes are compared to gulls, colts, and kings. Obviously, here the use of imagery has replaced outright statement. Third, the poem displays an exuberance and a sense of surprise that are contrasted to the anger and defiance of the war poems.

Souster continues his use of repetition of internal sounds in the place of end-rhyme as a structural device. The "ing" endings of the participles pattern to unify the stanza, and are echoed by clusters of related vowels and consonants in words such as "kings," "young," and "strength." Other sound patterns contribute to the effect as well; for instance, the repeated vowels in the word-sets "there-there-suspended," "colts-whole-rope," "see-veering-fields," and "mane-shaking."

One other aspect of Souster's post-war poetry differentiates it from that of the war. In the latter, Souster was primarily pre-occupied in communicating a feeling, an idea, or a state of

mind; although the language used was plain and concrete, the ideas were often abstract, not tied down to concrete objects or persons. In the post-war poetry, however, a further development takes place: Souster begins to concentrate more on specific situations, things, or persons. That is, ideas, feelings, or states of mind are important only insofar as they are connected to a concrete person or thing. Thus Souster does not preach about love; rather, he peoples his poetry with lovers, and lets his description of these lovers speak for him. Souster now develops his poems by first presenting a situation, object, or person, and then stating something about it. "June 1945," for instance, opens with a description of bomber planes returning from Europe, and closes with a prayer that the runways, silent now, will remain silent forever. Once one detects this new pattern, one finds many poems developed similarly. "Shake Hands With The Hangman" opens with a description of the city, and closes with the accusation, "Notice how steady those hands are/ thick with the blood of this city." "Nocturnal" begins with a series of concrete images:

> Swoop the birds down in their trees,
> stop the merry-go-round, the sugar-candy mixer,
> relax arm and leg and head, let the night drop
> its curtain
> down the street where the moths hive the street-
> lights,
> let the wind blow, sing, steal into, circle round.[28]

The poem closes with the wish that hate, anger, violence, hunger, pain, hiding and revenge are gone forever.

"Print of the Sandpiper" opens with a description of the bird's trail on the beach sand; soon, Souster says, the tide will

erase the bird's mark. The poem continues with a denunciation of "the polishers/ of words and phrases, all the big/ little men slaving over the oil" and ends with

> The print of the sandpiper didn't stay--
> which one of you thinks he has fashioned
> a finer, more wonderful thing?[29]

Souster, then, shows less of a tendency to rail at the hate and violence existing in the world; instead, he personifies it in a description of a specific person, the girl in "The Hunter," for instance. Or Souster will contrast violence and pretentiousness with something more admirable, more beautiful; trees after rain, the falling of snow, or two lovers walking across a city square.

Souster's new habit displays a natural link between his war poetry and his imagist phase of the fifties and sixties. That is, beginning with his war poetry, continuing through his post-war poetry, and culminating in the poetry of the 1950's, Souster shows an increasing tendency to escape abstract poetry and to write only that poetry which finds its center in concrete objects. The location, of course, is Toronto, to which Souster returned after the war. Largely absent in the war poetry, Toronto now becomes the locus, the background, the field of action on which the battle between good and evil takes place.

Souster's poetry of the late 1940's was published in City Hall Street, an eight-page Ryerson chap-book published in 1951, and in Cerberus, the first of Contact books, published in 1952,

which also featured the poetry of Louis Dudek and Irving Layton. Souster's poetry of the late forties follows a direct line of development from his post-war poetry: the city Toronto becomes more and more the focal point of the poems. In the post-war poetry, Souster had been mainly intent on asserting the values that he felt had to be re-integrated into society if another war were to be averted; he began to use Toronto as the vehicle for expressing these values (the pre-occupation with lovers, for instance). The poetry of City Hall Street and Cerberus, however, deals almost exclusively with Toronto, showing the poet Souster getting re-acquainted with his city after a period of absence. Souster had left Toronto as a youth of nineteen, two years out of high school. The Souster of City Hall Street is in his late twenties; he is a different person, one who has taken part in a successful poetic revolution, and who has witnessed a bloody war. Because of Souster's return to Toronto, nostalgic pieces are included in the poetry of this period. In "Lagoons: Hanlan's Point," for instance, Souster re explores the Toronto he knew as a boy:

> And in one strange
> Dark, tree-hung entrance,
> I followed the sound
> Of my heart all the way
> To its reed-blocked ending,
> With the pads of the lily
> Thick as green shining film
> Covering the water.[30]

The reader is also introduced to the people and places of Toronto playing so prominent a role in Souster's later poetry: Columbus Circle, City Hall Street, Lambton Riding Woods, the River-

dale Zoo, the Court of General Sessions, Hanlan's Point, and Yonge Street; young girls, hospital patients, "pimps, whores, thieves, lovers, saints," and beggars that are "flotsam among the jetsam of this world." Souster's sympathy for the ordinary, the common, the down-trodden also begins to take shape.

In City Hall Street and Cerberus, Souster continues his post-war practice of presenting a person, thing, or scene and using the last lines of the poem to make a pronouncement. In the title poem "City Hall Street," for instance, Souster describes the scene:

> O this courtyard never changes,
> It is still the same dirt, same smells, same rot,
> The same squirming, crawling, tenement like a
> festered sore under God's sky.[31]

He finishes the poem saying, "Maybe a landlord owns that too."[32]

In "Speakers, Columbus Circle," Souster describes the people who stand "on their small raised platforms beside the Flag/ And drown us in their theories, irritations--". Their voices are lost in "the traffic's merciless bedlam," and their bodies are "puny beside the cold granite strength of buildings." Souster finishes the poem in a summarizing statement:

> And we turn quickly from them,
> Knowing too well that here is mirrored for us
> The farcical, tragic impotence of our world.[33]

Louis Dudek had sent a copy of Cerberus to William Carlos Williams who in a letter dated June 28, 1952, wrote to Souster a fitting tribute:

> ...somehow when I read you I am moved. I am moved

> by your subject matter and I am moved by the way that has induced you to conform to it as the very fountainhead of your art....You have a chance. Light and Shadow was the first thing that caught my eye. The Lilac Poem is also good. To An Antisemite has it also. There are others. Have confidence in yourself. You've got it.[34]

In Souster Williams recognized a poet with the same concern for the concrete, the ordinary, the mundane, that he himself had. When Souster received this letter, he had not as yet begun to read Williams' poetry. After receiving his letter, Souster began reading his poetry, and traces of Williams' influence gradually begin to show in Souster's poetry of the fifties.

Souster's poetic career of the fifties has been shaped largely by Louis Dudek's influence, the most open manifestations of which are Contact Press and Contact magazine. Dudek had left Montreal for New York in the early forties to study literature at Columbia University,[35] returning to Montreal in 1951. Dudek, Layton, and Souster met together in the summer of that year on the farm of Dudek's grandmother, near Charlemagne, Quebec. In this meeting, the first in many years for the three, they discussed the matter of publication. In the late 1940's, Canadian publishing houses had become more and more reluctant to print, at a financial loss, Canadian writing, especially poetry. The three men were convinced that Canadian poetry was waning primarily because of lack of publication, not only in magazines, but also in books. Dudek had become very interested in the matter of the press and publication while at Columbia University.

Soon after that meeting, Souster, Dudek, and Layton decided

to found Contact Press, hoping to publish their own poetry and the poetry of others. They decided that Souster's home in Toronto would be the base for Contact Press.

Before long, a rationale for printing Cerberus[36] was provided. Layton, in the fustian style that was to characterize later introductions to his books, states in the preface to his poems,

> We have one other reason for publishing Cerberus at the present time. Some editorial jackass -- the name is superfluous -- started a rumour flying that the poetic ferment which had begun with so much promise had petered out scandalously before the end of the decade. After that, several other Missouri canaries lumbered forward to announce the same heart-breaking discovery. How touching it was to see them shaking their well-proportioned asinine heads and to hear their woebegone cries. Since a good deal of that poetry was a protest against war and social inequality, the genteel at once took heart at the news and began to crawl out of their kennels. By the clever whachamacallit of returning manuscript after manuscript our editorial burro was able to pretend that the bright rebellious talents which had appeared during and after the war years had stopped writing and -- final touch of the macabre -- even to drop tears at the mysterious disease which had carried them off unfulfilled to an early literary grave.
>
> It is, in part, to help revise this mendacious account of an exciting period in the literary history of this country that we are publishing the present collection of poems. We intend, moreover, to drive the point home by publishing shortly the volumes of other 'dead' but now happily resurrected poets.[37]

Contact Press went on to become an important contributor to the Canadian poetry scene -- "contributor" because the press presented many books printed at a financial loss. After Cerberus, other poetry by Dudek, Layton and Souster printed by Contact Press

included Dudek's Twenty-four Poems and The Transparent Sea, Layton's Love the Conqueror Worm, and Souster's Selected Poems. Contact Press also remained true to its word by printing the work of others; established poets included F.R. Scott, George Walton, Eli Mandel, Phyllis Webb, Gael Turnbull, R.G. Everson, and W.W.E. Ross. Other poets encouraged by having their poetry published included, among others, Leonard Cohen, Alfred Purdy, Alden Nowlan, Daryl Hine, and D.G. Jones. All in all, the importance of Contact Press to Canadian poetry cannot be underestimated.[38]

The coming of the fifties also opens a new phase in the personal career of Raymond Souster, beginning with the publication of Contact Magazine. Once again, Louis Dudek figures prominently. To understand this new phase in Souster, one must focus on Dudek's stay in New York.

While at Columbia University, Dudek made new acquaintances in the literary circles, meeting the poets Paul Blackburn and Cid Corman, the latter editing Origin Magazine. In New York Dudek also earnestly began reading Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, coming under their poetic influence.[39] Thus, returning to Montreal from New York, Dudek introduced to Souster a new strain of writers.

The first introduction to that new strain took place during the farm meeting in the summer of 1951. There Dudek showed Souster and Layton the first issues of Corman's literary magazine Origin. Souster says,

> I'll always remember the day at the farm on the Little Jesus River, with Louis Dudek throwing the first two issues of Cid Corman's Origin on the picnic table and saying "this is typical of what the nuts in New York are doing these days." I remember casually flipping through both copies and then giving them back to him -- I was not yet ready for Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. But the next year something led me back to those two issues, and then Louis came to Toronto in May and left me as a gift The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams. From that time on my world of poetry assumed largely its present shape.[40]

On June 23, 1951, Souster wrote Dudek complaining about Contemporary Verse and Northern Review. Souster's comments show what he felt was wrong with these magazines: "We need an outlet for experiment and a franker discussion on the directions poetry is to take, not articles on lampman [sic] and the movies. What we need is in short a poetry mag with daring and a little less precious an attitude."[41] Dudek replied in a letter dated July 17, 1951, advising Souster to delay starting a new magazine. Dudek felt that the forming of one at this time would be a direct undercutting of John Sutherland, editor of Northern Review. Before outlining what he wanted the magazine to be, Souster waited several months, then wrote Dudek again:

> ...we plan to bring out the first issue of a mimeographed magazine of verse to be called Contact in February. We want to feature translations, experimental writing from Canada and the U.S.A., the odd poetry review, the emphasis on vigour and excitement. MAKE IT NEW is our unofficial slogan.[42]

Dudek answered Souster's letter, encouraging him to go ahead with the magazine. Notably, Souster wanted the magazine to be more than merely a Canadian one, no doubt having Dudek's American con-

tacts in mind.

In January of 1952, the first issue of Contact appeared. The content was primarily Canadian: included were five poems by Dudek, four poems by Layton, other poems by A.G. Bailey and George Nasir. But it was primarily Canadian only because Souster had not yet made contact with any of the American poets of whom he had been told by Dudek. The second issue was again mainly Canadian poetry. By the third issue, Souster had written Corman at Dudek's suggestion, also sending a copy of the first issue of Contact. Corman replied that he would push towards Souster those poets whose work he considered worthwhile, and that he would notify his regular contributors of Contact. As a result, future issues of the magazine were to feature the work of such writers as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Paul Blackburn, and Lawrence Ferling.

In the same letter, Corman urged Souster to search for more Canadian talent, though he was critical of the Canadian material appearing in Contact, since, to him, the poems seemed "amateurish." Because nothing good seemed to Corman to be coming out of Canada, he changed his former advice to Souster, now urging upon him the work of Olson and Creeley; he also supplied translations of poems by Gottfried Benn, George Forestier, Octavio Paz, Rene de Obaldia, and Guillaume Apollinaire. Later issues of Contact also printed translations of Jacques Prévert, George Seferis, Jean Cocteau, and Anna Akhmatova, giving the magazine a truly international flavour.

In June of 1952, Souster received a letter from Robert Creeley, who at the time was living in France. Creeley had heard of the

magazine from Corman, and wrote Souster asking for a copy of the third issue. In subsequent letters, Creeley was not so much interested in advising Souster what to print, like Corman and Dudek, as he was concerned over the format of the magazine. After moving from France to Mallorca in October 1952, Creeley wrote Souster urging him to have the magazine printed in Spain since printing costs were low there, but Souster rejected the idea, preferring that Contact remain a mimeographed magazine coming out of Toronto. From beginning to end, Contact was the work of Souster alone, even though he received strong advice from various sides as to what the magazine should do or be.

All the while, Souster maintained correspondence with Louis Dudek. Whereas Corman wanted Contact to become more international, impressing upon Souster the work of Williams, Olson, Creeley, and European poets, Dudek was more interested in the implications that the magazine had for Canadian poetry. Dudek, opposed to Corman, was always enthusiastic about the Canadian material appearing in Contact.

By 1953 the magazine had reached its high point, having become firmly established. After that date, the interest of some began to wane. Corman devoted more and more time to his own magazine Origin. By March of 1953, Creeley was preparing to return to the United States, and showed a decreasing interest in Contact. Dudek, also, had other interests. His idea of Contact was that it should be the publication of one of many poetry workshops across the country, an idea to which Souster could not agree. Dudek's idea of poetry workshops resulted in his association

with CIV/n magazine, to which he also gave his time. Furthermore, Souster rejected Dudek's suggestion that Layton and Dudek share more in editorial matters. There was still another factor in Dudek's loss of interest in Contact. His difficulty in publishing poetry in Canada prompted him to spend more and more time on Contact Press, and many of his letters to Souster during this time show him more interested in this publishing venture than in Contact magazine.

Because of this waning interest, Souster decided in February of 1954 to cease publication of Contact, writing to Dudek, Corman, and Creeley that it demanded too much of his time and energy. Both Dudek and Corman urged him to reconsider, but in March of 1954, after ten issues, Contact magazine was at an end.

As with Contact Press, the importance of Contact magazine to Canadian poetry was very great; it introduced to Canadian poets the work of contemporary Americans. The influence of Pound, Williams, Olson, and Creeley, heralded by Contact magazine, has been one of the principal influences on contemporary Canadian poetry.

Because Dudek in the early fifties introduced Souster to a new group of writers with whom he began to have close contact, one wonders to what extent Souster's poetry has been influenced by them; that is, how much of Souster's poetry, (beginning with the fifties), was shaped by the principal "Black Mountain" spokesmen Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, and their literary predecessors Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. To decide, one must look at some of their basic poetic practices and beliefs.

"Basic," because even among these poets there is divergence, and thus a common denominator must be found. Second, theses could be written about each of the poets, and therefore only their most basic ideas will be dealt with as they relate to the poetry of Raymond Souster.

Fundamentally, language and form are the main pre-occupations of the "Black Mountain" poets, and their ideas on these two aspects of poetry find their source in the Imagist revolt against the Georgian poets.

The three-point manifesto drawn up by Pound, printed in the March 1913 issue of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, contains in essence the "Black Mountain" theory of language:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Pound later added the following ideas: "go in fear of abstractions," "the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object," and "use no superfluous word." "Black Mountain" poets, as a result, generally mistrust metaphor and simile, for these devices define a thing in terms of something else, diverting the poet's and the reader's attention away from the original object. As Olson put it, "simile is only one bird who comes down, too easily." Similes cause slackness in the tautness of the line. "Black Mountain" poetry, as a result, is devoid of abstractions, generalizations, and idealism, although it is less concrete than the "hard"

type envisioned by Imagism. Williams' statement "No ideas/ but in things,"[43] for instance, has been toned down by Robert Duncan's counter-statement that words are things.

Regarding the form of the poem, Pound is again the first spokesman, saying in the same March 1913 issue of Poetry, "Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the line catch the rise of the rhythm wave..." This idea is reformulated in the 1915 anthology, Some Imagist Poets:

> We do not insist upon 'free verse' as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.

William Carlos Williams has redefined this idea in terms of the "variable foot":

> The foot not being fixed is only to be described as being variable. If the foot itself is variable it allows order in so-called free verse. Thus the verse becomes not free at all, but simply variable, as all things in life properly are.[44]

"Black Mountain" theory defines this as "form is never more than an extension of content."[45] Thus, each poem must develop itself; the poet may not start with a pre-determined form, for then form is imposed upon content. A new idea demands a new cadence and a new form.

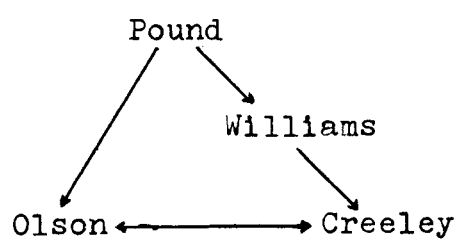
One other important concept must be dealt with in relating "Black Mountain" poets with Souster, and that is the concept which

Olson termed "locus", or "place". If one is going to write poetry of concrete objects, then a knowledge of these objects is necessary, and one best acquires this knowledge by getting acquainted with one place, learning all its nuances. The Canadian poet Frank Davey aptly explains it this way:

> ...if a man exists in an 'object-object' relationship with external nature, and if he admits the integrity and right of all members of external nature, then the only way in which this man can approach and know nature is by participating in an established 'field' of objects, by acquainting himself with one place intimately. For the place must master the man, not man master the place. Or as Edward Dorn puts it, 'Place is brought forward fully in form conceived entirely by the activation of a man who is under its spell....'[46]

This concept of "locus" has resulted in Williams' Paterson and Olson's Gloucester.

Until now, Pound, Williams, Olson, and Creeley have been grouped together as if no difference in theories and practice existed between them. Actually, this is not the case, and some differentiation must be made. Perhaps the difference may be illustrated by means of a diagram:



The common source, the prime mover, is Ezra Pound. His poetry and his ideas lie behind most of "Black Mountain" theory. Olson is Pound's direct successor. Both poets are expressors

of a personal imagination rooted in public myth. Both look to other cultures for the meaning of one's existence -- Pound to the Chinese, Olson to the Mayan, other American myths, and the Greek.

Williams, on the other hand, sticks close to "the American grain." His poems are filled with down-to-earth people and objects: a lady's eyes, a horse pulling a load, a woman in front of a bank, a red wheelbarrow. Williams' particulars are the here and now; those of Pound and Olson are the then and there.

Creeley stems directly from Williams in his honesty toward everyday experience and in the form of his poetry. By and large, Pound and Olson write longer poems; Williams and Creeley show short, finely-sculptured lyrics. Pound and Williams, however, carry on the use of specificity and concreteness -- Pound partly through the Chinese ideograms in the Cantos, Williams through his microscope-view of his environment in his lyrics.

The question again becomes to what extent Souster's poetry has become influenced by the poets to whom he was introduced by Dudek, and with whom he subsequently corresponded. Some critics see the influence as being quite deep. Frank Davey, for instance, calls Souster a "'Black-Mountain' oriented poet."[47] Other critics have failed altogether to take note of Souster's association with the Pound axis. Hayden Carruth, in a review of The Colour of the Times, misunderstands Souster completely when he chides him for writing only short poems. "You know what must be done, I'm sure," says Carruth to Souster in an open letter. "Quit horsing around

and get on with that big poem you've had in mind for fifteen years, isn't that it? Stretch it out; unify; say it all."[48] Carruth misses the point, for Souster's concrete approach, expressed in short, imagist poems, gives his poetry of the period its particular strength. To demand a long poem from Souster during the fifties is absurd, for a long poem would be antithetical to Souster's approach to his subject. Moreover, behind Carruth's statement lies the assumption that a long poem is necessarily of greater value than a short one. Many poets have built justified reputations on short poems only.

Basically, Souster has rejected some "Black Mountain" tenets, and accepted others. Souster does not share the "Black Mountain" mistrust of metaphor and simile, for instance, for he uses both devices in his poetry much as the Imagists used them. Neither does Souster share Olson's idea of "projective verse,"[49] which asserts that each poem must dictate its own form. Souster, while championing experimentation, has always been conservative in his own use of it. He is more dependent on Pound's statement that the beginning of a line must catch the rise of the rhythm wave:

> After the shrill
> Hysteria of cicadas
> Hopped up on the sharp
> Dry needle of the sun,
>
> Evening, the crickets'
> Shy stutter to the moon,
> Leaving long in the ear
> Echo's perfect loneliness.[50]

In his war poetry, Souster had started the poem with a preconceived form, and some of his lines did start with a heave, but he gradually broke away from this practice. The one "Black Mountain" poet who has influenced Souster in the form that his poetry takes

is Robert Creeley, from whom Souster says he has learned "compactness and I hope directness."[51] Souster's poetry of the fifties then, resembles much more closely the short, taut lyrics of Creeley than Olson's poems, although Souster, like Olson, often moves immediately from one perception to the next. Souster also shares Olson's dislike of the highly personal lyric as a private form. As he says in "The Cobra":

> Most of their poems
> Are about themselves--
> "I" this or "I" that,
> They can't get beyond
> The wonder of "I",
> It holds them,
> It fascinates them
> Like the swaying head
> of a cobra
>
> which plays a while with its victim
> Before it is merciful and kills.[52]

The main influence of the Pound-Williams-Olson-Creeley axis upon Souster's poetry is an Imagist one, which finds its source in Pound and is filtered through Williams. Souster began reading Pound in the early fifties, and by the middle fifties, Imagist influences appear. "The Negro Girl," a poem which first appeared in <u>For What Time Stays</u> (1955) opens with these lines:

> Black delicate face
> among a forest
> of white pasty faces.[53]

This opening almost resembles a haiku in form, and one immediately recognizes the similarity between it and Pound's famous Imagist poem, "In A Station Of The Metro":

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.[54]

Williams' statement "No ideas/ but in things" is really a continuation of the Imagist creed "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective." This statement Williams has embodied in poems about ordinary things and people, poems that examine with a closely-scrutinized vision the nature of reality. Williams in this way has carried on the Imagist tradition. His treatment of the localized and the concrete attracted Souster, and by 1958, in Crepe-Hanger's Carnival, Souster definitely shows Williams' influence in his poetry.

Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" is probably the one Imagist poem that stands out:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

besides the white
chickens.[55]

The poem can be seen to be the model for Souster's poem, "The Six Quart Basket":

The six quart basket
One side gone
Half the handle torn off

Sits in the centre of the lawn
And slowly fills up
With the white fruits of the snow.[56]

Both poems concentrate upon presenting one item and it only. No moral is drawn, no ideological statement is made; the object presents its own meaning, and is self-contained. Both poems are poetic formulations of "Direct treatment of the 'thing.'" Williams' statement "No ideas/ but in things" is again expressed in Souster's poem "The Child's Umbrella," in which the idea is valid only insofar as it is tied down to or expressed by, the object:

> What's it like to be homeless
> All alone in this world?
>
> Perhaps the jagged
> Ripped-open mouth
> Of the child's umbrella
> Lying inside out
> On the winter pavement
>
> Can give us the answer.[57]

The poem contains no description for description's sake. The umbrella is described only fully enough to evoke a mood. The phrase "winter pavement," for instance, lends weight to the poem because of all the connotations that winter has, especially when the word is placed in the context of "homeless" and "alone," helping to answer the question of "What's it like to be homeless/ All alone in this world?" The poem shows a concentration upon the localized, the concrete, as many of Williams' poems do, exemplified, for instance, by "The Red Wheelbarrow." And most often, the 'object' is an ordinary thing that a person encounters almost any day, as in Souster's poem "The Old Tin Kettle":

> So there it sits on the lawn,
> No helmet, no shining headpiece, just
> An ordinary kettle, very ordinary, old.[58]

Williams' influence, then, seems to have had the effect of changing Souster's attitude towards his environment. Souster begins to find meaning in seemingly insignificant things, meaning which he expresses in Imagist patterns. The specificity and concreteness in Souster's poetry becomes even greater, with the result that Toronto as city plays an even larger role in providing the material for poetry. Any idea, any emotion, is now important only insofar as it is evoked by or tied to a concrete person or thing. Thus, Souster's poetry of the period is devoid of generalization, of abstraction, which is an advancement from his war poetry. Now, instead of abstractly railing about the injustices of society, Souster presents the victims of injustice, and lets these objects speak for themselves.

Louis Dudek has said: "In my own poetry, Pound is present mainly in the theoretical presuppositions which I derived from his poetry, not in the actual imagery, or language, or rhythm of the poetry...."[59] and the same is true of Souster and his relationship with Pound and his followers. Dudek, since he was in such close contact with Souster during the time, is an authoritative voice, and in the same article he states, "...the specific influence of both Pound and Williams is clearer in my own writing than either in Layton[60] or Souster...."[61] Further on, still speaking of Layton and Souster, Dudek says, "My writing about Williams and Pound may in fact have led critics to assume that the Pound-Williams influence was deeper in some of the other poets than it actually was."[62] Frank Davey is one of these misled critics, for he asserts that "Dudek, Layton, and Sutherland edited

First Statement under a definite American influence, particularly of the 'Black Mountain' hero, Williams Carlos Williams"[63] whereas Dudek, Layton, and Sutherland had not yet even begun to read Williams at that time.

Souster was not so much influenced, then, by the "Black Mountain" poets as the critic Davey believes, for Souster was already practising the basic ideas that the "Black Mountain" poets brought to attention. In all probability Souster was writing of Toronto long before Olson wrote of Gloucester or Williams wrote of Paterson. The work of these two poets affirmed what Souster was already doing. The fact that Williams wrote the complimentary letter to Souster, which I quoted earlier, is an indication that Williams saw in Souster a poet having similar aims as his own.

Souster agreed with the broad principles that Pound, Williams, Olson, and Creeley set forth, namely, the need to purify the language of poetry and to rid it of Victorian archaisms, the need to experiment in new poetic forms, the direct treatment of the objects of one's environment, and the necessity of the poet's becoming totally familiar with one "place," but these broad principles he adapted to his own use. Despite the influence, Souster's voice is still his own.

Souster's poetry of the early sixties was published in A Local Pride (1962), and in The Colour of the Times (1964).[64] The title of the former book Souster derived from Williams' Paterson:

> ;a local pride; spring, summer, fall
> and the sea; a confession; a basket; a
> column...a gathering up; a celebration;[65]

The titles of both books indicate the content; Souster focusses his attention completely on the present as it is experienced in the city of Toronto, his "locus."

In these books, Souster continues writing Imagist-oriented poems. Prostitutes, for instance, become for Souster "pale butterflies of night."[66] A woman is described as:

> Porcelain-white
> squat jug
> of your body
>
> slowly uplifted
> and upturned....[67]

The imagist poem is also written about things, as in "Queen For A Day":

> Rain-soaked trunk
> of the Manitoba maple
> stands like a queen today
> wearing her tiara
> of softest wash-of-green
> leaf buds![68]

Or "The Cobweb":

> The cobweb
> hangs
> from a corner
> of our room
>
> waiting.[69]

Earlier, Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" was shown to be the model for some of Souster's poems of the fifties. In the sixties, the resemblance is continued. Consider Souster's poem "The Stone":

Rubbed by centuries
weed hidden
cool to touch
though under the sun

how easy you lie there
how permanent
useless yes
but so necessary![70]

The last two lines of the poem seem an obvious parallel of Williams' phrase "so much depends/ upon." Both poems use contrast to qualify the object; Williams' poem posits the red wheelbarrow beside red chickens, Souster's poem contains contrast of temperature: "cool to touch/ though under the sun."

In the above poems, Souster presents the image without overtly commenting upon it, a technique used in the poems "The Child's Umbrella" and "The Six Quart Basket" of his earlier collection Crepe-Hanger's Carnival. It is worth noting that both poems are reprinted in A Local Pride, indicating that Souster considers these latter two poems as being important and in keeping with the work of the later collections.

On the other hand, in some of the poems of the early sixties, Souster gives an added dimension in that he often presents the image and then states the idea that is attached to it. In this way he is still following Williams' statement "no ideas/ but in things," but he is adapting it to his own use. Many poems in A Local Pride follow this pattern: the presentation of the image is followed by the poet's interpretation. Consider the objective presentation of the image in the first stanza of the poem "Artificial Hand, War Veteran":

Hand the colour
of half-dead leaves
Hand slightly clenched
as if pain could be lingering.

The natural extension of the image follows, as the poet comments:

Useless hand
price of our wars
badge of our deceit
Useless hand
skeleton of our love![71]

"Badge" is an important word here, for the object has imprinted on it the meaning that it conveys. In other words, the object becomes an ideogram, an "icon."[72]

The same pattern is repeated in "Fruit-Seller, Adelaide and Bay."[73] In this poem, the presentation of the object is followed by the poet's personal comment:

Into the street
sun-glare of bananas
whore-red of apples
dried blood of plums

shaming forever
gray buildings
asphalt's black
but above all the hurrying
paste-and-painted faces![74]

The poem is also made up of contrasts; colour is set against colour, image against image, thought against thought.

The poem "Today At The Dawn" also obeys the dictum "no ideas/ but in things." The first stanza presents the object, the second stanza the idea contained in the object:

Today at the dawn
for an endless minute

I listened to a bird
fighting for its life
in the claws of a cat

and thought:
much the same way
death will take us all.[75]

The significance of Souster's poetry of the sixties, then, is that the form of the poem is determined by the approach the poet takes to the objects around him. The poems show a respect for these objects, for each object is equally important, and has its own place. As Souster says in "Skyscraper and Bird",

The skyscraper so large
the fallen bird so small

why the poet's eye
sees them equal
only he could say.[76]

Souster has always been called a "realist" poet, but no one has made an attempt to explain why his poetry takes the form it does. In fact, many poems fall into the category of fantasy rather than that of realism. In Souster's poetry of the sixties, the realistic element is important only insofar as the object concretely illustrates the idea the poet wants to convey. In other words, the object is described not for its own sake, nor because the poet wants to show fidelity to experience, but because the poet is convinced that an idea divorced from the object that illustrates it is mere abstraction. Calling Souster a realist, then, does not account for the form of his poetry. One must see him as the creator of his own poetic universe. Objects function not only on a merely realistic level; they are "badges" or "icons" embodying ideas, becoming more than they really are. Thus, inani-

mate objects begin to function with a life of their own even to the point of personification, as when, for example, "drab housewife trees" are transformed by a covering of ice, into "glittering call girls/ shamelessly arousingly naked."[77] The concreteness of the imagery suggests a literal interpretation of all the referents, and so we move past the bounds of metaphor into the realm of fantasy. Consider in this light: "The rain is only the river/ grown bored, risking everything/ on one big splash."[78] An Indian girl, suffering from "too many men/ buying time on her body," becomes a hunter, "still thirsting for the scalp/ of another white man, if there's a straggler fallen back/ too far from the rest of the others to fight through her ambush."[79] Skaters become dancers, "each suspended/ on invisible threads/ let down from the sky."[80] The fantasy is born, in every case, of Souster's imaginative interpretation of the real world around him, and together, the perceived and the imagined, the real and the interpreted, make up the dimensions of Souster's universe.

The fantasy can also be informed and even motivated by straight humour, as in the poem "Rainbow Over Lake Simcoe":

> Before the mayor could get to the phone
> to inform his councillors
> so all five could meet
> and declare it illegal
>
> the rainbow had said "why not?"
> and sucked up half of Lake Simcoe,
> then after once around the horseshow
> dropped it softly back in Lake Couchiching.[81]

Or "Old Horse":

> Old horse
> if you stand much longer

in the shade of that apple tree
looking at nothing

the well will brim over
the last tile slip
from the long-suffering roof,
the last rotted beam
sink to the barn floor

old horse
if you stand there much longer
under that tree
it too will give up
and straight away die.[82]

Obviously, poems such as these cannot be explained if Souster is regarded merely as a realist poet. Things are described as they strike the poet's imagination, not as they really are. A fantasy world results. Souster must be seen as the creator of his own poetic universe in which all objects are stamped with their particular meaning.

Souster's poetry of the middle sixties is contained in his latest books, Ten Elephants on Yonge Street,[83] and As Is.[84] Inside the dustjacket of the former, Souster states,

> Ten Elephants on Yonge Street is probably the most representative of the four or five independent volumes of short poems I've published. For those who think of me only as a poet of Toronto, there are poems of the Gestapo in Brussels, of Montreal's St. Catherine Street, a short In Memoriam to Dr. Williams of Rutherford, New Jersey, others on Georgian Bay, Laura Secord, the Bruce Peninsula, New York City and Serpent River. For those who urge me to try my hand at longer poems, there is William Lyon Mac-Kenzie's House.

It is true that there are poems of places other than Toronto, as Souster states, but he is still the poet of that city, a fact for which he does not have to be apologetic. Nor does he have to

answer his critics for writing primarily short poems, for once a poet has found his particular forte, there is no need for him to apologize for exploring all the possibilities of that form.

In Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, Souster is still preoccupied with the communication of poetry, a concern that he has held all through his poetic career, and which has been a determining factor in shaping his poetry. Back in 1952, Souster had stated in the preface to his poems in Cerberus:

> S. [ouster] has always believed (and still believes) that the primary function of poetry is to communicate something to somebody else. Not too important what that something is, the big thing is to get it across, "make contact".[85] If you fail here all that follows, everything else you throw in, is wasted, and you might as well start all over again. Ninety percent of all modern poetry fails here. And will go on failing until it learns this and puts the remedy into practice.[86]

In Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, Souster expresses the same concern:

> Whoever I write to, I want to make the substance of the poem so immediate, so real, so clear, that the reader feels the same exhilaration -- be it fear or joy -- that I derived from the experience, object or mood that triggered the poem in the first place.[87]

The desire to communicate has given Souster's poetry its peculiar character. Souster says, "I like to think I'm 'talking out' my poems rather than consciously dressing them up in the trappings of the academic tradition."[88] His poems are written in varying style. They display the subdued reverence of the short elegy on the death of William Carlos Williams,

We can't argue the right
of your body to be lowered
into peace:
but nothing else
can be allowed to rot,
mix with dust.
You belong
to so many of us.[89]

The language of love is evident in "Shy One, Cautious One":

I want to wound your white flesh,
cover it with the bruises
of my lips, lance it through and through
with the wild thrust of my love.

Shy one, cautious one,
this is no time for shyness,
no year for any caution.

From your slim waist to your thighs
curving like waterfalls, I read there
poems more wonderful than starlight
or moonlight stained by no war and the hate of men.[90]

The description of the prostitute "Jeannette" is done in colloquial language:

Jeannette in a fight
calling in boy friends
to wreck a cafe,
Jeannette dead drunk
swinging at a cop,
Jeannette on the habit
riding it up
riding it down,
Jeannette in jail
and out again,
Jeannette on the corner
of Dundas and Jarvis
with the old reliable
merchandise for sale.

Some day they'll find her
with a knife in the chest,
or choked to death
by one sheer stocking:

but tonight she's the queen
of this crawling street,

Jeannette with her sweater tight,
proud to show them off
to all the boys:

black hair, big smile,
that's Jeannette.[91]

These poems communicate because of their simple language, striking us as being deeply true.

A peculiar quality of Souster's verse is its ability to open our eyes to everyday things that we have seen many times, and yet not really seen. "Broken Bottle," for instance, displays Souster's capacity to recognize uniqueness and significance in a seemingly trivial incident:

As it was before--
utilitarian at best
really nothing--

now lying smashed
in jagged pieces
on the cellar floor

it takes on shapes
which could never happen
quite the same way again
anywhere
anytime

this suddenly become
unique
beer bottle.[92]

The poems of this period are the work of a sensitive poetic sensibility, making us newly aware of our environment.

In summary, Souster's poetry has undergone a marked and continuous development. From the cynical, argumentative, long-lined poems of the war period, Souster moved on in the late 1940's to write poems displaying the shorter line and an increased use

of imagery. The poetry of the 1950's began a new trend occasioned by Souster's acquaintance with the works of Ezra Pound and the "Black Mountain" poets. Souster's work of the fifties and sixties, then, concentrates on the concrete object, time, and place. The social protest poem of the war period has gradually transformed into the imagist lyric of the 1960's.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Souster felt at that time that Patrick Anderson and Morley Callaghan were Canada's foremost writers.

[2]One year later, Direction was to print a recommendation of First Statement, praising the "new vital work" that appeared in it.

[3]Direction 1, p.9.

[4]Again, in The Colour of the Times, Souster displays this ability to include only his better poems from the many he has written.

[5]In Direction number three, page one, Souster wrote a tribute to both Henry Miller and Kenneth Patchen.

[6]Ryerson Press had received five full-length manuscripts, but since it felt reluctant to spend the money on five separate volumes, it decided to put the best of each poet into a five-part collection, hence Unit of Five.

[7]Kenneth Fearing, New and Selected Poems, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1956. p. 4.

[8]The Colour of the Times, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1964, p. 11.

[9]Fearing, op. cit., p. 15.

[10]"The Evening Hour," When We Are Young, Montreal, First Statement Press, 1945. No page numbers given.

[11]"Postscript," ibid.

[12]Fearing, "Obituary," op. cit., p. 19.

[13]Compare the feelings expressed in Fearing's "Any Man's Advice to His Son" and Souster's "Ties."

[14]The Colour of the Times, p. 11.

[15]Fearing, op. cit., p. 83.

[16]This satiric, cynical vein is well expressed, for instance in Fearing's "Yes the Agency Can Handle That," and Souster's "Is Everybody Happy."

[17]The Colour of the Times, p. 2.

[18]Unit of Five, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1944. p. 62.

[19]The title Other Canadians is a reply to A.J.M. Smith's anthology, Book of Canadian Poetry, published in 1943. Sutherland felt that Smith had unjustly ignored younger Canadian poets. Other Canadians contains the poetry of not only Sutherland's First Statement group, but also such Preview poets like Patrick Anderson, Bruce Ruddick, Neufville Shaw, and Kate Smith.

[20]That echoes of Patchen still occur in Souster's later work is remarkable. Compare, for instance, Patchen's "Nice Day For A Lynching" with Souster's "Welcome to the South; Patchen's "Wolf of Winter" with Souster's "The Wild Wolves of Winter."

[21]Selected Poems, Toronto Contact Press, 1956. p. 37.

[22]The Colour of the Times, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1964. p. 8.

[23]Ibid., p. 9.

[24]"Nocturnal," ibid., p. 10.

[25]"June 1945," ibid., p. 11.

[26]Unit of Five, p. 64.

[27]The Colour of the Times, p. 7.

[28]Ibid., p. 10.

[29]Ibid., p. 12.

[30]Ibid., p. 19.

[31]Ibid., p. 15.

[32]Souster revised the ending of this poem for The Colour of the Times: "same squirming, crawling tenement, tin-roofed sweat-box on the lower slopes of Hell,/ open sore on the face of God." The revision deletes completely the original last line, which Souster later probably recognized as being inorganic to the poem.

[33]The Colour of the Times, p. 14.

[34]The full letter was printed in Island (Victor Coleman, ed.), Toronto, in the issue of Sept. 17, 1964. p. 47.

[35]For a discussion of Dudek's stay in New York, see Wynne Francis' article "A Critic of Life: Louis Dudek As Man of Letters," in Canadian Literature, no. 22 (Autumn 1964), pp. 5-23.

[36]Toronto, Contact Press, 1962.

[37]Ibid., p. 46.

[38]Souster told me in May of 1967 that he and Dudek (Layton had pulled out in 1956) had neither the time nor the money to continue Contact Press, so this important publishing enterprise regrettably seems at an end.

[39]See Dudek's articles "A Visit to Ezra Pound" in Contemporary Verse (Winter 1947-1948), pp. 20-22, and "Lunchtime Reflections on Frank Davey's Defence of the Black Mountain Fort" in Tamarack Review, no. 36 (Summer 1965), pp. 58-63.

[40]"Some Afterthoughts on Contact Magazine," printed in Michael Gnarowski's Contact 1952-1954, p. 1. Much of my information is derived from this excellent study.

[41]Ibid., p. 3.

[42]Ibid., p. 4. Souster's reference to "MAKE IT NEW" is an indication of his beginning to read Pound, at Dudek's urging.

[43]"A Sort of a Song," Selected Poems, New York, New Directions, 1949. p. 108.

[44]I Wanted to Write a Poem, Boston, Beacon Press, 1958. p. 82.

[45]Charles Olson, who gives credit to Robert Creeley for this statement in "Projective Verse," Human Universe and Other Essays, Donald Allen, ed. San Francisco, The Auerhahn Society, 1965. p. 52.

[46]"Black Days on Black Mountain," Tamarack Review, no. 35 (Spring 1965), p. 71.

[47]Ibid., p. 65.

[48]"To Souster From Vermont," Tamarack Review, no. 37 (Winter 1965), p. 94.

[49]Even though Souster says of Olson in his introduction to Cerberus (p. 75), "His basic idea, COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, may well start a revolution in English poetry. Worth studying; worth taking a personal crack at." Souster was right in that it would start a revolution, but he himself never experimented with projective verse. In conversation to me when I questioned his "putting in a plug" for Olson, Souster said, "I knew someone would eventually get me for that." (Or words to that effect).

[50]"Summer Evening," Crepe-Hanger's Carnival, Toronto, Contact Press, 1958. p. 34.

[51]In a letter to me, dated February 7, 1967, now in my possession.

[52]Crepe-Hanger's Carnival, p. 11.

[53]The Colour of the Times, p. 47.

[54]Selected Poems of Ezra Pound, New York, New Directions, 1947. p. 35.

[55]The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams, New York, New Directions, 1951. p. 277.

[56]The Colour of the Times, p. 56.

[57]Ibid., p. 55.

[58]Crepe-Hanger's Carnival, p. 19.

[59]Louis Dudek, "Lunchtime Reflections on Frank Davey's Defence of the Black Mountain Fort," Tamarack Review, no. 36 (Summer 1965), p. 61.

[60]This statement is corroborated by Irving Layton, who wrote in a letter to me dated February 3, 1967, and now in my possession: "I neither agreed nor diagreed [sic] with the 'Americans.' I was going my way, and if they waved to me from the sidelines I cheerfully acknowledged their greetings. I still do, from time to time."

[61]Dudek, op. cit., p. 59.

[62]Loc. cit.

[63]Davey, op. cit., p. 64.

[64]The new, unpublished poems are printed on pp. 91-121. The other poems are collected from earlier books.

[65]New York, New Directions. 1963. Epilogue to Book One.

[66]"Streetwalkers, Dundas East," A Local Pride, Toronto, Contact Press, 1962. p. 39.

[67]"The Pouring," ibid., p. 45.

[68]Ibid., p. 59

[69]Ibid., p. 74.

[70]The Colour of the Times, p. 107.

[71]Ibid., p. 22.

[72]Eli Mandel is one of the few critics who has understood properly Souster poetry of this period. In his review of A Local Pride, Mandel states, "It seems to me, then, that the greatest pleasure in reading Souster comes from one's sense of an unusual formalism. He works with patterns as stiffly stylized as the figures on an Oriental scroll: a rigid vision of society and nature as a demonic city inhabited by beast-man, harlot, and cripple, surrounded by a scarcely attainable garden where lovers become trees or budding leaves, and flowers turn into gypsies and sirens. Within this landscape, all things are icons or ideograms, so that the appropriate poetic form is the pun, riddle, or puzzle, or a curious version of imagism which defies description...Once we begin to look at Souster's formalism and stop worrying about his realism, we seem to be able to account for the internal resonance of his work, a resonance which seems to me the mark of genuine poetry." ("Internal Resonances," Canadian Literature, no. 17 ((Summer 1963)), p. 64).

[73]Souster often gives the exact location of his poems, another manifestation of his wanting to make the poem as concrete and localized as possible.

[74]The Colour of the Times, p. 24.

[75]Ibid., p. 77.

[76]Ibid., p. 18.

[77]"Transformation," Place of Meeting, Gallery Editions II, John Dyell Ltd., Lindsay, Ontario. 1962. p. 42.

[78]The Colour of the Times, p. 102.

[79]A Local Pride, p. 128.

[80]"The Problem of Skating," The Colour of the Times, p. 99.

[81]Ibid., p. 108.

[82]A Local Pride, p. 120. Other poems in this book showing the same sense of humour include "Bernard," (p. 23), "The White-Encased Wonder," (p. 41), and "Statue of Liberty," (p. 104).

[83]Ten Elephants On Yonge Street, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1965.

[84]As Is, Toronto, Oxford Press, 1967.

[85]One now understands the source of the titles Contact Magazine and Contact Press.

[86]p. 75.

[87]Inside dust jacket.

[88]Loc. cit.

[89]"A Death in Rutherford," ibid., p. 5.

[90]Ibid., p. 77.

[91]Ibid., p. 72.

[92]Ibid., p. 82.

CHAPTER III

MAIN THEMES IN THE POETRY OF RAYMOND SOUSTER

Although it was appropriate in the previous chapter for us to discuss the development of Souster's style by making a chronological survey of his work, in turning to Souster's basic themes we would be advised to change our approach and take a more overall view of his work, for his themes have remained basically unchanged during his span of writing years. Perhaps it is to this consistency of concern that the critics refer when they speak of Souster's lack of development or his tendency to remain static. In any case, we can designate the four dominating Souster themes as: the city, nature, woman, and youth.

Souster's treatment of these themes varies considerably, although it is possible to perceive two recurring characteristic responses of the poet. Souster himself sums up the situation in the third stanza of "Wedding Night":

> You hold yourself
> against me. Tears come
> and your body shakes,
> partly fear,
> partly joy,
> whatever draws two opposites
> together or apart.[1]

This dichotomy of response: "partly fear,/ partly joy,/ whatever draws two opposites/ together or apart/" is precisely the key

to the interpretation of Souster's poetic universe, for each of his main themes is controlled by this interplay of opposites. Things have both a fearful and a joyful aspect, resulting in a tension of emotional extremes so interrelated that at times they become difficult to separate.

In Chapter II we recognized the concept of "locus" as being a major feature of Souster's poetic stance. In this chapter we will look more closely at the city that is Souster's locus. Almost all of Souster's poems are written about Toronto. He says, "I suppose I am truly an unrepentant regionalist."[2]

> Toronto has a flavour all its own...My roots are here; this is the place that tugs at my heart when I leave it and fills me with quiet relief when I return to it.[3]

> I can't see how almost anyone can write without a feeling of belonging to some piece of earth so strongly that it can even become a major inspiration for his work, i.e., Baudelaire's Paris, Frost's New England, Jeffers [sic] Carmel coast, Robert Lowell's New England, etc. etc. etc. Any place can in effect become all the "world" anyone really needs -- Joyce's Dublin.[4]

Souster's Toronto becomes a microcosm of the world in which are played all of life's dramas. Basically, the city's fearful side is made up of cruelty, inhumanity, coldness, impersonality, and filth. The city squelches life, and Souster's poetry is filled with pity for beggars, old men and women, whores, drunks, derelicts, the blind and the lame.

> the woman who walks carrying all her belongings,
> talking to herself, cursing those she passes
> and this city that bore her
> and will watch her die
> with the same beautiful indifference

you'd show yourself
to a cat tearing at a mouse.[5]

And although the men, women, and children come and go,

O this courtyard never changes,
it's still the same dirt, same rot, same smell,
same squirming, crawling, tenement, tin-roofed
sweat-box on the lower slopes of Hell,

open sore on the face of God.[6]

The city becomes an expression of, an extension of, man's cruelty. The city is cruel only because man is cruel. Life, says Souster, is violent in nature, and the city mirrors man's inhumanity. A vicious cycle results, for the blackness of the buildings becomes imprinted in the heart:

But the stars are colder, are crueler here
where the pavement's hollow when the streetcars
rumble over,
where the flares of neon flick their fiery
anger
at the idiot postures of black-hearted buildings,
where the rancid smoke downcurls and settles
in nose, in mouth, in fissures of the heart.[7]

Significantly, however, Souster does not exempt himself from the guilt of cruelty. As in the poems "The Creeper Along the House Wall,"[8] or "I Want to Put It Down,"[9] Souster includes himself in this guilt. In these two poems Souster points an accusing finger at himself not for exercising violence on other human beings, but for ripping down a vine branch and for boarding up an animal under his back porch. Man is not the only one that suffers from human cruelty, man violates both himself and his surroundings. All things suffer when man practices cruelty.

This theme of violence in the city is an important one in Souster's poetry, for he believes violence to be the essence of reality. In "May 15th" Souster states, "kill or be killed,/ that's the law of nature, and the law/ of the lawlessness of the world."[10] In "The Tame Rabbit" Souster expresses sympathy for the animal for being kept in a cage, but he also realizes that in the city the animal would soon be dead, "a bug-crawling skin,"

> So the cage for you
> and the swinging by the ears,
> that's all there is
> for you, little one,
>
> and come to think of it
> why should you, rabbit,
> be any better off
> than the rest of us?[11]

The rabbit introduces an important symbol in the poetry of Souster. The poet puts himself on the same level as the animal. The fate that awaits the rabbit is also in store for man. And so man, too, has his own cage, and the "swinging by the ears."

Rabbits, squirrels, groundhogs, and ferrets all symbolize man caught in the trap of the city, the trap of cruelty. They get shot at, killed by neighbourhood dogs, caught in traps, boarded up, or lured by lye.

> Nothing ever quite so dead
> as this squirrel who crawled yesterday
> the length of the drive on his belly
> before dying in a flower bed.[12]

The victims of man's cruelty and ingenious viciousness (the man spreading lye in "The Trap") take on the characteristics of these beleaguered animals, as in "The Quarry":

The terrified look
on the groundhog's face
looking from his hole
one instant ahead
of the trap's deadly spring,

I saw today
in the ferret stare
of the old lady lush
up Bay Street somewhere
wandering like a child
bewildered, crushed,
in and out of the crowds,

waiting, waiting,
for that blow to fall.[13]

One method of escape from this cruelty of the city is for the rabbit-squirrel-ferret-groundhog to hole up for the winter, to wait for the spring, when he can again lift a cautious head out of the ground.

Deep in the middle
of this forest a cave
made for only one
where I often go
to escape from man
his cruelty
his desolation.[14]

Or, even more succinctly,

Groundhog's my nature:*
hole up deep in winter,
walk cautious above ground
in spring and summer:
leave a piece
of arm or leg
and a smear of blood
in the crafty hunter's trap
just to hold his interest.[15]

The ambivalence of the poet's fear-joy response is evident if we turn from his picture of the city as a source of cruelty to the city as a source of pleasure. For example, many of the

poems express a delight in the nightspots of the city which provide an escape, a hide-out from man's inhumanity. Jazz concerts, all night restaurants, burlesques, and bars are sources of warmth, company, and sympathy to counter-balance the city's impersonality and cruelty. "Search" expresses well the juxtaposition of nightspot and cruel city:

> Not another bite, not another cigarette,
> not a final coffee from the coffee-urn before
> you leave
> the warmth steaming at the windows
> of the hamburger joint where the Wurlitzer
> booms all night without a stop, where the
> onions are thick between the buns.
>
> Wrap yourself well in that cheap coat that
> holds back the wind like a sieve,
> you have a long way to go, and the streets
> are dark, you may have to walk all night
> before you find
> another heart as lonely, so nearly mad with
> boredom, so filled with such strength,
> such tenderness of love.[16]

Here the "hamburger joint" provides a temporary reprieve from the inevitable loneliness and boredom one experiences in the city.

But the city also has its own peculiar beauty. An orange-painted shed, "set down right in the middle/ of old houses waiting their turn/ to be torn down," "nestled under the protective arm/ of the Russian Orthodox Church" becomes

> a burning bush ready
> with its revelation.[17]

Souster can find pleasure in a dandelion growing through cement, in children playing among piles of junk, in an evergreen holding its head high over a "wasteland of the snow." The unexpected,

the startling, the incongruous arouses Souster: a tree growing from an old stump, a hobo wearing a top-hat in the middle of downtown, a newspaper wheeled abruptly round a corner by the wind.

The poems dealing with the joyful aspect of the city, however, are by far outweighed by the poems expressing fearful cruelty. Human deprivation and loss are much more prevalent than the affirmation of beauty in the city.

Just as the city is the source of both fear and joy, so nature is also. Nature is both blessing and curse, manifesting beauty. But also subject to the law of "kill or be killed."

Nature is beautiful and tranquil, being everything man is not:

> Because there is so much made of strength and
> wealth and power,
> because the little things are lost in the world,
> I write this poem about lilacs knowing that both
> are this day's only: tomorrow they will lie
> forgotten.[18]

Two ideas are contained in this poem: that man over-emphasizes "strength and wealth and power," and that nature, though beautiful, is fleeting and transitory. All things are under the ruthless subjection of time. Both these ideas are reiterated in the poem "Print of the Sandpiper," in which Souster describes the bird's print in the sand, and then goes on to say,

> In an hour the tide will be in,
> and after it's gone the sand will be unmarked
> and fresh, only sea's touch on it,
> even the tread of the sandpiper
> smoothed away by that effortless hand.

Souster then laughs at all "the important ones, the polishers/

of words and phrases, all the big/ little men slaving over the oil."

> the print of the sandpiper didn't stay--
> which one of you thinks he has fashioned
> a finer, more wonderful thing?[19]

In this poem the fleeting beauty of nature is again contrasted with man's boastful strength and power.

The closing lines of "The Falling of the Snow" again juxtapose nature's purity and man's "cruelty/ his desolation":

> Look up, taste its whiteness
> breathe its stainless purity
>
> falling all without favour
> on the head of the magnate
> and the bum with his head in the garbage,
> falling on the graves of our young, late,
> foolish dead,
> and the strangely silent killer's lips of
> the guns.[20]

Whereas man is discriminatory, nature is not: it favors no man. The poem is striking in that the quiet beauty of nature is contrasted to the "strangely silent killer's lips of the guns," immediately incorporating several of Souster's main themes. The setting off of man's violence against the calm beauty of nature is a pattern that is often repeated.[21]

Nature thus has a joyful aspect which provides relief from the cruelty of the city. But nature also has its fearful aspect. At times it has awesome destructive power, as in "This Wind." But Souster remains consistent in his tension of fear and joy when he says in the same poem, that this wind, which now is "like a creature unchained," bruising "tree branches past endurance,"

later in the spring will seem "soft as girl's touch on our face, warmer/ than her embrace, and coming with the scent/ of just-opened lilacs sweeter than all/ but her most mysterious, never-dreamt-of/ long-past-midnight places!"[22] Again, a fearful and a joyful aspect make two different sides of the same coin.

Nature can also pose a threat to man's security, as in "Walking River Ice":

> Six inches of ice
> between me and the gurgle
> of unseen water.
>
> Still I walk with care,
> a small nagging fear
> herd on my heels.
> No secret,
> this river would like me
> six inches under
> not over its frozen pride.[23]

In "Shake Hands With the Hangman," the wind of a cold Ontario winter becomes a "white whip," waiting "to be swung with a crack/ in our stupid, grinning faces."[24] The heat of the summer is equally severe, as in "This Lizard of Summer":

> Heat
> forked in its tongue
>
> this lizard
> of summer
>
> licks
> almost lovingly
>
> each inch
> of our bodies.[25]

The ambivalence of fear and joy is operative also in this poem. The lizard "licks/ almost lovingly." Its seeming kindness is actually deceit, heightening its cruelty.

Nature is hostile not only to man, but is also self-destructive:

> An icicle tall as a man
> hangs outside our window
> with the killer's point
> of our dirty war,
>
> waiting the first
> warm day to leap
> and sever the white soft
> breasts of the snow.[26]

Several notable things appear in this short poem. Significantly, the simile "an icicle tall as a man," foreshadows the last lines of that stanza. Again, Souster includes the reference to "the killer's point/ of our dirty war." As in "The Falling of the Snow," Souster is concerned with more than only one theme; in both poems, he associates violence with the brutality of war. The poem quoted above is seemingly insignificant or slight, but when one studies Souster's work closely, many patterns begin to appear, giving added meaning to seemingly slight poems. Souster's poetry is more than the mere sum of its parts: it has to be seen as a whole, for one poem will often lend weight to another, each poem expressing a subtle variation of the same theme.

Souster considers love the only antidote to man's cruelty. The compassion and love that he expresses for ordinary people, animals, and objects is all-pervasive in his poetry. For example, many of Souster's poems express envy and compassion for young lovers:

> they seem almost part of the
> night, these two lovers,

with their slow lingering steps, their total
unawareness
of everything in this city but their love, the
strength, the honest lust in their bodies
touching
as they walk across the Square....[27]

Whenever Souster sees a pair of lovers, he silently wishes them well, knowing that youth is soon lost, and that life is antagonistic towards young lovers because man has forgotten the meaning of the word "love." What little love is left has been romanticized or dirtied: "Love is something in the movies/ Or the shaded hotel room."[28] For that reason Souster expresses admiration for "the honest lust" of two lovers.[29]

In many poems, obstacles hinder people from expressing their love. In "After Dark" the obstacle is the "peeping-tom public eye," in "In the Barn" it is other people who perhaps will

go away and leave us
grain-covered, breathing
dust, the trickling
sweat on our bodies
one rivulet of joy.[30]

In "Night on the Uplands" the mosquitoes "wanted our flesh/ as much as we wanted each other."[31] Even strangeness between the two lovers themselves can hinder love, as in "The First Thin Ice":

Tonight
our love-making

ducks
walking warily
the first thin ice
of winter.[32]

The emotional extremes of fear and joy are operative also

in Souster's attitude towards Woman. On the one hand, he sees her as being dangerous and cunning. On the other hand, woman is also beautiful, a partner in a love-relationship that gives much joy..

If the rabbit or groundhog is the symbol for man in the trap of the city, so the cat becomes Souster's symbol for woman in all her trickery and cunning:

> Yes, she's quiet now,
> motionless, curled
> like a cat in the big
> over-awkward chair.
>
> But watch her, see
> how one slit of the eye
> seems almost to move,
>
> while the body lies coiled,
> a taut-stretched spring,
> waiting for that moment
> to come alive, strike
> at the unsuspecting one.[33]

The "unsuspecting one" is the poet himself.

"The Hunter" is one of Souster's most significant poems, being explicit in expressing the theme of woman as cat-predator. Although the cat image is not present in the poem, the cat-like qualities are, also being implied in the title. "The Hunter" is an early poem, one of Souster's best:

> I carry the groundhog along by the tail
> All the way back to the farm, with the blood
> dripping from his mouth a couple of drops at
> a time,
> leaving a perfect trail for anyone to follow.
>
> The half-wit hired man is blasting imaginary
> rabbits
> somewhere on our left. We walk through fields
> steaming after rain,

jumping the mud: and watching the swing of your
girl's hips
ahead of me, the proud way your hand holds the gun,
and remembering how you held it
up to the hog caught in the trap and blew his
head in

wonder what fate you have in store for me.[34]

This poem expresses many of Souster's main themes. The violence and cruelty, firstly, are obvious in the girl's blowing in the head of the groundhog and in the half-wit's blasting imaginary rabbits. The hired man exists in the poem for more than description's sake. Indeed, he becomes a vehicle for a metaphoric definition of human value.

Second, the poem contains subtle paradox and irony: the poet carries the groundhog along by the tail, implicating himself in the cruelty; yet knowing Souster's symbol for groundhog, we sense throughout the poem that the animal is Souster himself, and at the end of the poem our suspicion is confirmed. Both are caught in her trap.

The ambivalent emotions of fear and joy operate also in this poem. The poet is sexually attracted to the girl ("and watching the swing of your girl's hips/ ahead of me"), yet he is afraid of her ("wonder what fate you have in store for me"). The groundhog is the girl's victim as animal; Souster is her victim as lover.

Many poems continue the cat-woman theme; consider, for instance, "Calamity the Cat":

Though nothing stirs
but breathing's rise and fall,
her nerves stay trigger-ready,
bent-spring alert,
can rouse her

with a wrong foot's move,
a threatening gesture, to claw's ready,
lightning's pounce,
straight at our foolish
undefended throats.[35]

The poem is full of potential, violent action ready to explode any time, attacking the poet's "foolish, undefended throat."

Once we know Souster's system of symbols, even a "little" poem begins to carry extra meaning:

Today at the dawn
for an endless minute
I listened to a bird
fighting for its life
in the claws of a cat,

and thought:
much the same way
death will take us all.[36]

One suspects immediately that Souster himself is the bird.[37] The last three lines express the idea contained in the object, as we saw last chapter, making the particular universal. The poem can also be read on the purely animal level: nature as being self-destructive, the "law of kill or be killed." Even this short poem, then, can be read on several levels, giving Souster's poetry its particular richness.

"The Cat at Currie's" expresses a rare occasion when the poet triumphs over the cat-woman, but the analogy between the animal and the woman is obvious, perhaps a little too much so at the end of the poem:

The cat comes at me
slowly, cautiously, one pad before the other,
lifting springing muscles over,

then strikes--to find me ready
and she unready-rolls over on her back,
fighting the losing battle with my hands
which soon pin her down:
and as I hold her
I remember your body, more soft, more pulsating
than this sleek animal's, your arms more deadly,
lips more engulfing
and I let the cat go....[38]

The sexual overtones obvious in "fighting the losing battle with my hands/ which soon pin her down," prepare us for the last lines of the poem. Souster triumphs over the cat-woman in one way, and in another he does not, for he realizes that the woman's arms are "more deadly," and her lips "more engulfing," and he has to let the cat go. The fear/joy juxtaposition is again present in "soft" and "pulsating," and "deadly" and "engulfing."

"The Quarrel" provides a bridge between the fearful and joyful aspects of the woman:

No wonder I can't sleep
on this downstairs sofa,
it's made only for
her curled cat's body,
that now
in the middle of the night
tosses troubled
in our upstairs bed:

while my body
even more troubled
tosses here.[39]

The woman becomes a cat when she poses a threat to man, as she does here, which the title implies. The poet tosses troubled on the sofa; the woman, in "her curled cat's body," tosses troubled upstairs. The poem introduces an important aspect of Souster's poetry: the bed. Woman is like the city: she is cruel, but as

the city has hide-outs in which one can find companionship and love, so the woman provides a hide-out where one finds security, happiness, beauty, and joy. The marriage-bed is the highest expression of joy.

The fearful side of woman can best be contrasted by the poem "A Bed Without A Woman," and we see immediately how closely "The Quarrel" is related to it:

> A bed without a woman
> is a thing of wood and springs, a pit
> to roll in with the Devil.
> But let
> her body touch its length and it becomes
> a place of singing wonders, eager springboard
> to heaven and higher.
> And you may join her there
> in those hours between sleeping and the dawn.[40]

Souster had often used the word "spring" to describe the tensed muscles of the cat-woman; he now uses it in a new sense in "springboard/ to heaven and higher," to describe the ecstacy of the sexual act. To sleep in the lair of the cat is lovely, for then she ceases to be cat, and commences to be lover, partner in the joy of sex. In fact, the love-relationship becomes a hideout, a shelter from the cruelty of the rest of the world. As the cave in the forest, or the groundhog's hole, the bed also becomes a haven:

> Every night a poem is made
> when our bodies fit themselves
> in the swaying bucket
> of that mysterious well,
> bottomless and dark,
> where time hangs suspended
> on its flimsy cord,
> and the noise of the world
> is a falling echo.[41]

Only love can transcend the tyranny of time.

"Night Watch" expresses the same theme. The poem talks of the night people at "Angelo's with wine or spaghetti," or at the Oak Room, or at Joe's, Mabel's, or Tim's place. Apart from them are the two lovers, knowing the agony of love and desire:

> But here with the lean cold pushing the dim
> light from the stars,
> Here under ghost buildings, here with silence
> grown too silent;
>
> You and I in the doorway like part of a tomb,
> Kissing the night with bitter cigarettes.[42]

The poem again expresses the tension of fear and joy: to experience love is also to experience the night, cold, silence, and death. Or, as Souster says in "Point Duchene,"

> O the little cottages are all asleep,
> the bus with the last passenger is gone,
> the ocean licks in slowly over the misty flats,
> and the present is drawn
>
> shut and the past invades, invades
> the all-too-silent silence of this room,
> and the warm night at the window is just the night,
> and the bed without you colder than the tomb.[43]

To be without one's love is death. Loneliness is death. "The great poem is a hymn to loneliness,/ a crying out in the night with no ear bent to."[44]

Souster's theme of woman, then, is also expressed in terms of fear and joy. Women are a threat, but they are also a vehicle to ecstacy. Man cannot do without the warmth that the satisfying sex relationship provides.

The love and compassion expressed in Souster's poetry, however, go beyond his fellow-man, being extended also to animals and objects. "Broken Day" is a good example:

> I don't care
> how high the clouds are,
> how white they curdle
> in the whey of the sky,
> or if the sun
> is kind to the flowers,
> or why the wind
> plays at storms in the trees.
>
> The robin hiding
> in the garden bushes
> has a broken wing.[45]

One may debate whether the poem is a significant one; nevertheless, here is Souster as man appearing in his poetry. The last two stanzas of "The Old Tin Kettle" exemplify Souster's feeling towards neglected people, animals, and objects:

> So there it sits on the lawn,
> no helmet, no shining headpiece, just
> an ordinary kettle, very ordinary, old,
>
> with <u>that</u> discarded look which moves me to pity
> in people, animals, things: and I go outside,
>
> pick it up
> almost tenderly, bring it inside with me.[46]

And so with compassion, pity, and love, Souster counters the cruelty that pervades his world.

Souster's poems written on the theme of youth also exhibit the ambivalence of fear and joy. Youth is the time of gaiety, energy, carefreeness and promise, but it is also a time of boredom, of disillusionment and unfulfillment. Youth is tragic because society's wrong values intrude upon it and squelch it

when youth itself by nature wants to be free and void of care.

The awkward promise of youth Souster often sees in young girls:

> Like flowers they are whose fragrance has not
> sprung
> or awakened, whose bodies dimly feel
> the flooding upward welling of the trees;[47]

For the child, the world is the source of endless delight; it is a "palace of wonder" with "a beauty so simple."[48] Upon remembering rowing across a lagoon in the early morning, Souster says of himself in "Lagoons, Hanlan's Point":

> A small boy
> with a flat-bottomed punt
> and an old pair of oars
> moving with wonder
> through the antechamber
> of a waking world.[49]

The world is full of surprises for the child. Souster describes an amusement park, for instance; he shows how the candy floss, the ferris wheel, the shooting-gallery, and the fish-pond provide openeyed fascination, "and so much/ in the warm darkness around me tingled/ with the unknown, the adventurous."[50] Youth is a time for making mudballs, for lighting fireworks, for raising pigeons, and for making love. For all these acts Souster expresses admiration, envy, and nostalgia.

But society not only intrudes upon the young, it also destroys youth's freshness. For some, youth is the time of boredom:

> and there are some like us,
> just walking, making our feet move ahead of us,
> a little bored, a little lost, a little angry,
> walking as though we were really going somewhere,
> walking as if there were something to see at

> Adelaide or maybe on King,
> something that will give a fair return for this
> use of shoe-leather,
> something that will make us smile with a strange
> new happiness, a lost but recovered joy.[51]

In "On a Dock In Saint John" Souster tells of a time when he and several others, in uniform, watched "a freighter go through/ the slow routine of clearing port./ A gang of boys leaned on her rails,/ dirty-clothed, loud talkers."

> Did they envy us? Did they wish they were in
> the uniform
> of their country? We doubted <u>that</u>.
>
> But we envied them. They were careless, free,
> and they were going somewhere.[52]

Perhaps the life of the young in the life-squelching city can best be seen in one of the inhabitants:

> ...all the years
> of street-gangs, pool-rooms heavy
> with smoke and bravado, dance-hall Saturday nights
> with bottles in hip, girls ready for sex
> in the borrowed car. Read there the crap games,
> farce of school, hatred of cops, strait-laced home
> so dull, so respectable.[53]

In Souster's Toronto, the Law "...must condemn lest it condemn itself."[54] So youth, too, is a tension of fear and joy.

Since the presence of cruelty is so all-pervasive in the poetry of Raymond Souster, one should note how the poet copes with it. To trace Souster's reaction to the presence of cruelty is partly to trace the thematic development. As we saw in the last chapter, Souster's early poems are ones of outcry, of rebellion, of cynicism.[55] When not resorting to cynicism or vindic-

tiveness, Souster expresses an outcry of anger. In "The Fond Desire" this outcry takes the form of a prayer, when the poet says, "let pain's jagged puncturing needle be shattered/ forever in a thousand pieces; and let love/ let peace, though unearned, though foreign in these gates,/ wing back and over the city sky with a roar of gladness/ no squadron of bombers could match shaking her iron heart."[56] The outcry of anger takes another form in "Shake Hands With the Hangman":

> Notice how steady those hands are
> thick with the blood of this city.[57]

As Souster grows older, rebellion is slowly replaced by non-committal acquiescence. Souster does not fully accept the violence, but he finds a means to live with it, to reconcile himself to it. This reconciliation can be seen in the poem "Old Man Leaning On a Fence," in which the fence holds up not only "the withered, shrivelled-up/ ready-for-death body," but also "the weight of all/ the wasted bitter years."[58] The same reconciliation[59] is expressed in "Old Man on Bay Street," which depicts a man "rotting slowly with age/ lost to human warmth/ and the sound of a voice."[60]

The poem most exemplifying Souster's reluctant acceptance of ugliness is "Girl With The Face of Sores":

> One could get used to this face
> by looking long enough at it.
>
> Each separate oozing sore
> would develop its own character,
> each red valley or irritation,
> each rounded hill-top of pus.

> Even the white skin fighting
> a losing battle beneath--one could find here
> the eternal parallel-beauty slowly crushed
> by relentless ugliness. . . .
>
> But the eyes are chicken
> and partly betray you. And so it's much easier
> to turn away, your shame greater than her shame.[61]

"Beauty slowly crushed/ by relentless ugliness" is the essence of Souster's world. The end of the poem is also significant; one can hide his face from ugliness and slow death, but, says Souster, this is escapism resulting in nothing but shame. More courage is needed to face the inevitable, to learn to live with it by "looking long enough at it," to find meaning in life despite the ugliness invading everything; this vision Souster slowly achieves as his poetry develops.

In his latest work, therefore, tacit acceptance of violence is slowly replaced by the occasional outburst of joy; Souster's is a vision matured by a lifetime of fighting against relentless ugliness. Souster expresses that vision in another set of symbols running through his later poetry. If Souster as man in the oppressive city is the rabbit or groundhog, if woman as cunning female is the cat, Souster as poet becomes bird, butterfly, or ant.

Souster admires the bird's ability to sing "when there's really no reason/ why it should sing at all."[62] Sometimes, as in "Sparrow," Souster makes the analogy quite explicit:

> Sparrow, when I watch you
> summer, winter, sunstroked,
> frozen stiff, eating less
> than would keep a bird alive,
> nothing to look at, coat scruffy,

pushed around by starlings,

always the fall guy
big mark of birdland:

sparrow, knowing this
we are suddenly brothers,
both of us singing
the best way we can
crazy poems of living.[63]

Poet is like bird, sunstroked in summer, "frozen stiff" in winter, yet singing "crazy poems of living."

Other times, Souster makes the analogy more implicit, and the image does become a symbol, as in "I Watched A Bird":

I watched a bird tossed down the wind
that never fought or uttered cry,
surrendered to that boundless air,
caught up in that great mystery.[64]

This stanza is significant, for it incorporates several themes. Souster now sees the limited usefulness of fighting or uttering cry; at any rate, suffering is surpassed by the "great mystery" of life and by the creative poetic moment.

The close affinity existing between poet and bird Souster describes best in

You are the one bird singing
in a dead tree toward nightfall,
I am the lonely man
standing in the wings of the evening
listening to impeccable arias
rise from your prima donna throat.[65]

The poem is reminiscent of Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in its almost mystical affinity between poet and bird.

The butterfly Souster admires for its noiseless, effortless simplicity:

no screaming engine
leaving a madman's whistle behind it,
a show-off trail of vapour.
Instead
noiselessly, effortlessly it fluttered
on its aimless, summer-easy way.[66]

The ant Souster admires for its industry:

Black ant, if I had
but one grain of your energy
your patience your devotion
I would long ago
have become immortal.[67]

In "Summer Afternoon," Souster merges the three symbols in describing the poet's reaction to beauty:

To zig-zag with the ant
through grass-topped jungles, sway
in many-masted trees with birds, hang fluttering
over the tiger-lilies with the lone
white butterfly,
anything, anything
but sitting here sheltered from the sun

while all around me the summer
burns, beats, and blazes
from sun to sky to green--

hot, naked, unashamed beauty![68]

This joyful response on Souster's part to the call of being poet one meets often in his later poetry. Invoking the muse, he says:

...desiring nothing,
and expecting little, living only
for your secret, inner praise,
I give thanks
that you, goddess, from so many
should have chosen me
for your cursed and singular blessing.[69]

Significantly, Souster applies the ambivalence of fear and joy to his poetic craft as well as his subject matter.

With this "cursed and singular" blessing, the poet becomes a special person with superhuman powers who can, in the brilliance of the creative moment, shape reality:

> With a snap of the fingers
> I can focus the sun
> with the turn of the head
> bring warm winds on
>
> So the whole world waits
> eyes me patiently
> for something to stir
> to burst inside me
>
> like the push of a root
> or the swoop of a bird![70]

"The Toy, The Game," which Souster omitted from his collected poems, is nevertheless a significant poem relating to the same theme. Watching a boy polishing his car, the sun's reflection blinding the sun itself, Souster turns inward and begins to wonder if he

> Can somehow polish this poem, make
> Its words gleam and sparkle, so one day
> It too may catch the sun, may even
> Blind in a second's chance the eye of the world.
>
> (This poetry, sweet curse, bread of my living,
> Wine of my caring...) that boy and I
> Each with our toy, so fragile, capricious both![71]

In this poem, "sweet curse" is a reformulation of "cursed and singular blessing."

Finally, describing the role of the poet, Souster changes from groundhog, from bird, to weedcutter:

> Be the weedcutter
> steaming slowly the lagoons
> working quietly, well,

your blades searching out
a clearer, deeper channel
than has been before.[72]

In his poetry, Souster has taken his own advice.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Ten Elephants On Yonge Street, p. 48.

[2]Ibid., inside back dustjacket.

[3]Loc. cit.

[4]Raymond Souster. In a letter to me dated March 21, 1967, and now in my possession.

[5]"Bad Luck," Ten Elephants On Yonge Street, p. 30.

[6]"City Hall Street," The Colour of the Times, p. 15.

[7]Ibid., p. 2. See also last chapter, pp. 16-17.

[8]The Colour of the Times, p. 55.

[9]Ibid., p. 53.

[10]Place of Meeting, p. 38.

[11]The Colour of the Times, p. 80.

[12]"The Dead Squirrel," Ten Elephants On Yonge Street, p. 36.

[13]The Colour of the Times, p. 59.

[14]Ibid., p. 98.

[15]"Groundhog's My Nature," ibid., p. 28. "The Hunter," which will be dealt with later, is also a very important poem in this connection.

[16]Ibid., p. 2.

[17]Ibid., p. 58.

[18]"The Lilac Poem," ibid., p. 20.

[19]Ibid., p. 12. See also last chapter, p. 24-25.

[20]Ibid., p. 5. Earlier on p. 61, I made note of Souster's mention of James Joyce. The ending of this poem bears affinity to the ending of Joyce's story "The Dead."

[21]See poems such as "North of Toronto," "Dream of Henlan's, Southern England," "Bridge Over the Don," and "The Old Prospector."

[22]The Colour of the Times, p. 106.

[23]Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 35.

[24]The Colour of the Times, p. 18.

[25]Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 18.

[26]"Icycle Outside the Barracks," The Colour of the Times, p. 24.

[27]Ibid., p. 8.

[28]"Dirge," Selected Poems, p. 72.

[29]Significantly, the word "honest" was not in the original version of the poem, but entered in a revision.

[30]The Colour of the Times, p. 118.

[31]Ibid., p. 65.

[32]Ibid., p. 71.

[33]Ibid., p. 63.

[34]Ibid., p. 3.

[35]Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 62.

[36]"Today at the Dawn," A Local Pride, p. 77. See also last chapter, p. 48.

[37]Later the bird-poet symbol is discussed.

[38]The Colour of the Times, p. 67.

[39]Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 51.

[40]The Colour of the Times, p. 48.

[41]"Every Night a Poem is Made," ibid., p. 31.

[42]Ibid., p. 9. See also last chapter, p. 20.

[43]Ibid., p. 7.

[44]"In Praise of Loneliness," ibid., p. 18.

[45]Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 65.

[46]The Colour of the Times, p. 53. See also last chapter, p. 43.

[47]Ibid., p. 4.

[48]"Lambton Riding Woods," ibid., p. 16.

[49]Ibid., p. 19.

[50]"Amusement Park," ibid., p. 41.

[51]"Yonge Street Saturday Night," ibid., p. 11. See also last chapter, p. 15.

[52]Ibid., p. 8.

[53]"Court of General Sessions," ibid., p. 18.

[54]Loc cit.

[55]For other poems expressing the same cynicism, see "Hunger," "The Mother," "The Bougeois Child," "My First School," and "Welcome to the South."

[56]The Colour of the Times, p. 1.

[57]Ibid., p. 10.

[58]Ibid., p. 33.

[59]Poems conveying the same idea are "Indian," "Lilac Was the Colour," and "Like the Last Patch of Snow." Souster can even inject a tinge of humour into this acceptance of violence and death, as he does in "Rebirth" and "I Wanted to Smash."

[60]The Colour of the Times, p. 52.

[61]Ibid., p. 37.

[62]"Good Fortune," ibid., p. 115.

[63]A Local Pride, p. 65.

[64]The Colour of the Times, p. 25.

[65]"You Are the One Bird Singing," Ten Elephants on Yonge Street, p. 23.

[66]The Colour of the Times, p. 61.

[67]"Black Ant," ibid., p. 109.

[68]Ibid., p. 78.

[69]Ibid., p. 113.

[70]"Spring Waits For Me," ibid., p. 114.

[71]The Selected Poems, p. 105.

[72]"Be the Weedcutter," The Colour of the Times, p. 121.

CHAPTER IV

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