

mm

Vol. 3 MARTLET MAGAZINE No. 15

the magical and the absurd:

five poems for burning

by cyril m'colgan

the bird at my shoulder

I

see how they move these passers-by
silouhetted in my fantasies
how i envy them appearing always
as if life were at their fingertips
as if death
or whatever might resemble death
were far behind

II

where i write
a sweet bird shuttles back
and forth searching out somewhere
to perch and o

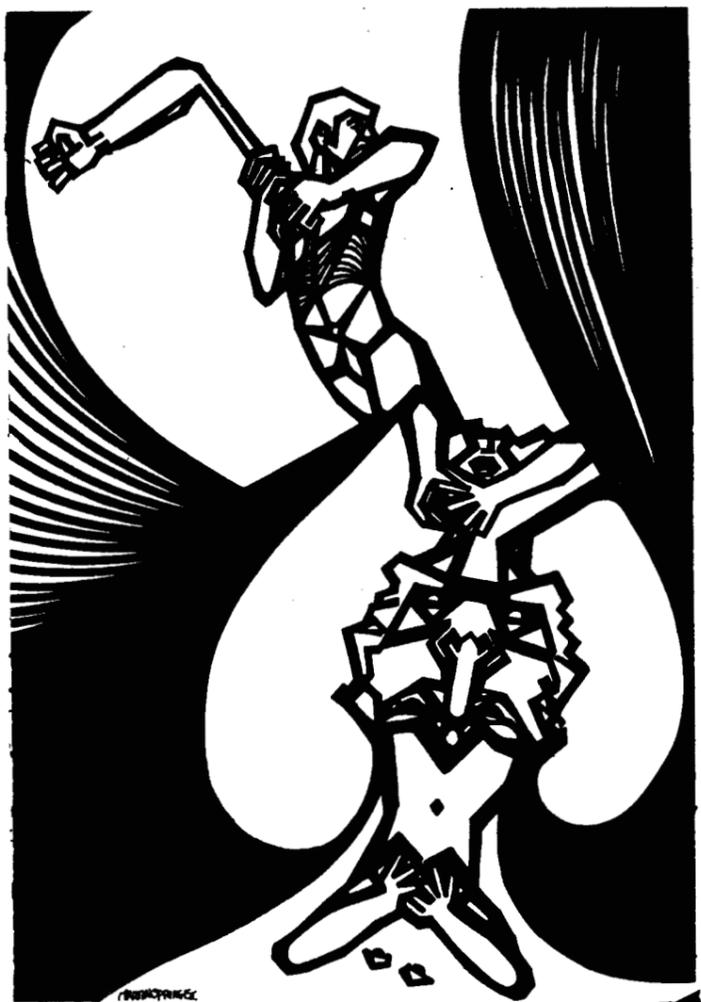
how sorry i am
i say and i promise to find
a place for it in one of my poems
or if not

upon my shoulder
as i go

MARTIN

SERENGETI

the mag



masque: slow motion

the spinning dancer descends
 into an uncertain stillness
 vibrant star at the tail of the spine
 assuming in the descent
 a face of flowers

impulsive in their mobility
 and the imminence
 of further illusion
 hornets dart afire
 into the foliage
 of his eyes

with two hands suddenly like
 lilies the dancer conjures apocalypse
 in a gesture that appears finally
 incomplete and slumps to the floor
 like a hanged man cut down

there is no panic
 no one is surprised
 or concerned
 it is simply that we can now
 afford all this



two magicians

out of your root-infested bag of tricks
 comes a white horse prancing
 (hoping to travel light and fast
 you left me to guard your things
 while you searched out happiness
 some fabled conjunction of time and space)
 out of the moonlit landscape
 swirling you come calling
 bones jutting out of the skin
 resentful as if you had been
 singled out to tell the truth
 your death was magical
 as if thru some sleight-of-hand
 unconsciously performed



sorcerer's apprentice

I

your words were charms
 against being
 carefully sustained in pitch
 brushing against friends
 of the same darkness
 the same longing

you'd hoped to come out of it all
 something of an enigma
 when you went to your knees
 you did so as if it were a gesture
 you were well used to
 as if you knew the secret of kneeling
 that was not kneeling
 but a manner of bringing about
 some chosen denouement
 thru a daily fondling of your
 innocence

you had hoped to survive
 your inventions

the wind passed and you heard only
 the leaves as they scraped the ground
 your eyes lost to a drifting feather
 saw not the falcon falling before

the words you uttered
 were scattered in their impotence
 or turned merely
 into bitter-sweet diction
 of aftermath

gical and the absurd

dream figures

always on the brink of sanity
 i pursue those split-hooved darlings
 the last survivors of my schemes
 fallen thru
 grinning at them from fast cars
 as if to say i'd knock them down
 if i were driving
 i prey on them with my presence
 crossing the street abruptly
 if they appear
 in the loftiness of my vacuity
 i allow them a strange assurance
 they cannot account for
 and then dropping a word here and there
 i undermine their gracious mimicry
 until i have left their faces
 crusted and drained
 for so much miraculous perfidia
 one by one
 they harden into flesh
 and turn away into cameras

McCOLGAN: YOUTH, DEATH AND POET

By Jim Hoffman

Parallel magazine once attempted to explain current Canadian poetry writing as 'unpolitical revolt.' That since the Second World War, the young, active poets discarded ideology and focussed on moral values, love and death, etc.

Like other activist products of the 'Beat' generation, and even of the Hippie clan, they had more emotion than idea, and more iconoclasm than belief. There was, and is, an unmistakable undertone of rage directed at the status quo. Read George Jonas or Dennis Lee, both of Toronto.

Cyril McColgan, a twenty-one year-old Victoria man, is in these five poems, neither iconoclast nor idealist. He is, above all, the emerging, developing young poet with an uncluttered, almost fascinated view of life — and death.

He approaches his subject with no prejudgment and, inevitably, no rage. Thematically, his poems concern the simple, if sometimes dazzling, images of death, and human shortcomings.

Possibly the most successful is the first, "The Bird On My Shoulder," in which there is a perfectly controlled union of image and feeling. A soft tone, measured in even emphasis throughout, works to effect an ironic lightness, as does the easy repetition of "i" sounds, which culminate in the final ambiguous "i go" remark. For the young, death is real, but lightly considered.

"Masques: Slow Motion" is generally effective and shows the poet moving into the area of social concern by his final, ironical comment in the last stanza. It does seem, however, a bit cluttered with images, especially in the mid-stanza, that don't always seem to work.

"Two Magicians" shows the poet as onlooker and participant in a strange death — resurrection scene, quickly imagined and briefly executed. Death is still faraway and mysterious; but the question is implied: is death a reality? It is a successful poem in that all elements — image, rhythm and diction are fittingly subordinated in a seemingly device-less tone of simplicity and apprehension.

"Sorcerer's Apprentice" and "Dream Figures" both concern the poet's attitude toward an object that could well be a reflection of the poet himself. A complaint could be made that both tend to be esoterically bound up in personal idiosyncracies incomprehensible to the reader. What, for example, is behind the "mask" or the "split-hooved darlings?"

Mr. McColgan rates as a poet with much potential. Except for the odd twist of irony, his work is without much device or modulation. He is successful because he doesn't attempt too much and carries off what he does attempt. He has already published the well-received book *A Spoonful of Ashes*, in 1966, and is worth watching.

II

the mask becomes apparent
 unable to meet demands
 of suffering your features
 simply distort
 as if an angry hand
 had twisted them grotesquely
 impatient for response
 your eyes accumulate
 the driving shadows
 your crown of thorns
 hordes leaves and old newspapers
 blown in the harvesting wind
 you think to arrange
 for a fire-sale to take place
 posthumously in your honour
 how you must grieve
 to settle accounts
 the lover within you is loose
 and goes about naked
 greedy for guilt
 approaching the inaccessible
 with some strange gift
 shaped like the heart
 of the matter



"She's leaving home . . ."

reprinted from Toronto Globe and Mail, November 23, 1967.

Sixteen-year-old Mabel left home by offering to go to the coin laundry for her mother. She packed jeans, a jacket and underwear in the laundry bag as though she were going to wash them and went straight to Yorkville.

Nearly two years later, her younger sister, who had just turned 17, left a note on the kitchen table saying she was going to Expo. And she went to Yorkville.

Her parents, who still have one child at home — a 15-year-boy — keep saying "Why? Why should they do this?"

Her mother blames publicity about Yorkville, about its charm, for their departure.

"Even though I know one of my daughters is living there," the mother said, "I would like to bomb the place. Just blow it up."

When she looks back on the period before Mabel (the name has been changed to protect the family) left home, she can see no incident that triggered the girl's departure.

"She was quiet, never said much. She worked a lot at the Polish church. She was active in young people's groups there. But I found out later she had been asking the priest if a kid could leave home at 16 without being forced to come back. He never told us until afterward.

"She had money she got at Christmas. I wondered at the time why she was disappointed that I got her skates that she wanted instead of giving her money.

"Her sister knew she was going but she wouldn't tell us where she was. Jane thought Mabel was a heroine. I found out later that Jane lent Mabel her money and the boy gave her his too. She paid them back later."

The parents didn't find it hard to trace Mabel. She was in Grade 11 and she kept on attending her West Toronto Collegiate Institute. She earned money by working part time as a waitress in a University of Toronto dining room.

Six weeks after she went to Yorkville, her mother brought her back home — forcibly.

"I took a strap and I went down to where she and this other girl were living in the roominghouse. I tore off her clothes — and I mean tore, I didn't unbutton them — and I strapped her."

When she came home, she was quiet again. "She was resentful. She didn't talk much," her father said.

"She was lazy. She wouldn't do any work around the house," her mother said. Both said the three teen-agers exchanged confidences among themselves but not with the parents.

At Easter, after Mabel had been home for two months, she quit school, lounged around home for six weeks and took a filing clerk job.

She tried to leave again for New York. "I wouldn't let her," her father said. "I grabbed her, sort of pushed her around, broke her glasses, scared her."

She kept working, rarely going out in the evenings, saved her money and went to London. "We didn't like it," her father said, "but what can you do? She's opened up to us in her letters. She sees our view. She's got hardly any friends there. She'll be back."

"No. She'll stay there. She won't come back," said her mother.

The middle daughter, her father said, kept counting the days until she was 16 and could leave home. But when her 16th birthday came and went, she didn't leave.

In October she visited her mother, who was in hospital for an operation as a result of a heart condition, and told her she wanted to finish school and go to university.

Three days later, she left the note about Expo and went to Yorkville. Her parents have not reported her disappearance to the police.

"She was always creative. She told me not to throw out her art things after she was gone," her mother said.

"She was always stubborn. She didn't care. I wanted to buy her some shoes and dresses when school started in September but she would not let me. It was as though she didn't want me to buy anything for her," the father said.

She came back with another Yorkville girl, a week after she left, to get some clothes and wash her hair.

"Sure there's hot water where she's staying but they can't afford soap. It makes you mad. You get their teeth straightened and then they go off without even a toothbrush. Her doctor says if she doesn't wear her glasses, she will go blind in one eye. But someone tells her she looks better without them so she says she lost them.

"Every time the newspapers reported a parent being arrested for beating up a child, the three of them would point it out to me. We don't beat them up. They tell people they are afraid of me. I don't know why.

"You know, thinking back, maybe we kept the lid on too tight. But it might be because my wife had too much love for them. She made clothes for them. She didn't make them do the housework. She was a child in the Depression and she wanted things better for them." (The parents, of Polish backgrounds, have a small retail shop in the West End.)

He pointed to a TV set. "I got it for the kids. The girls did well at school. The boy is coming along. You do your best. I just don't know why. I can see a pattern. The oldest broke off from her friends — some story about walking to school. When one goes, the others go. I tried hard, I wanted to keep the middle one at home. But when that pattern starts . . ."

"It doesn't bother the boy. He says nothing about them," the mother said.

"And that's what worries me," said the father.

TO MR. BENNETT AND MR. HAVELAAR

Evohé, Evohé, chorus the reviewers,
The Bacchae, a play old and serious,
Sports drums and things that repel us.
Dionysus (the twit) fits hardly at all,
His ungodly ranting (such unGreek drawl)
Spoils the drama, frightens our revels
To focus on him, instead of the levels
The maidens so mannerist dance divine
Until when they jive (looped on the wine)
Old myth go-goes crumbling, in modern age,
All round that famed Carl Hare stage.
When young Pentheus was peeping
We were in prayer weeping:
Oh, Euripides, poet save us
From theatre that shakes us!

Jim Hoffman

NOTICE

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THE RECORD GALLERY

MARTLET MAGAZINE

published every Tuesday

editor Martin Segger
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and Jerri Jelinek
art Martin Springett
poetry editor Jane Foster, Barber Trottier
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