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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Livesay has been writing poetry for fifty years. She has had thirteen separate volumes of poetry published to date, from Green Pitcher in 1928 to Ice Age in 1975. In 1957 her Selected Poems were published, in 1968 a collection of previously published poems with autobiographical notes entitled The Documentaries appeared, and in 1972 her Collected Poems were published. She has also written a volume of childhood reminiscences entitled A Winnipeg Childhood (1973), and she produced the anthology Forty Woman Poets of Canada in 1971.[1]

Livesay's poetry has evolved from the imagist lyrics of Green Pitcher to the social and political poetry of Day and Night and Poems For People, to the frankly erotic

[1]These volumes are documented in: Michael Gnarowski, A Concise Bibliography of English-Canadian Literature (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 73.

poems of The Unquiet Bed and Plainsongs. In her latest volume, Ice Age, Livesay explores the themes of old age, time and death. In fifty years Livesay's work has encompassed modern and post-modern trends.

The changes which have occurred in Livesay's poetry mirror changes in the form, subject and style of twentieth-century poetry. Therefore, the focus of this study will be upon Livesay's unique adaptation of prevalent poetic forms since 1928. Livesay's work is not 'derivative,' in the perjorative sense of that word. Rather, it is assumed that no poetry is constructed in a vacuum outside of historical, social and aesthetic influences. The study of Livesay's poetry in terms of these influences may serve to point out the symbiotic relationship of influence and originality in the writing of poetry.

In order to analyze Livesay's poetry in terms of general poetic trends, it is necessary to begin with the poems themselves. This analytic form of criticism differs from the thematic approach of much of Canadian criticism to date. Frank Davey, a noted Canadian critic, pointed out the alternatives to the thematic approach in his preface to From There To Here, and in an article entitled "Surviving the Paraphrase." In 1973 he wrote:

> . . . the period in Canadian writing being considered [nineteen-sixties] is one of continual search for new and more profound forms. In no way can much of this writing be opened even for thematic discussion without careful attention to the meaning of its techniques. I have also attempted by my attention to form to redress the tendency in recent Canadian criticism

> toward exclusively thematic interpretation. One must remember that it is by being encoded in the language and structure of literature that these 'themes' are transmitted from writer to reader. Ultimately, only the form of a writer's work speaks to us.[2]

Later, in 1976, he expanded these principles when he wrote:

> It is extremely important that Canadian critics not forget that there are indeed alternatives to thematic criticism, and that most of these do not involve a return to that "bête noire" evaluation. Further, these alternatives, like thematic criticism, do allow the writing of overviews of all or parts of Canadian literature. But unlike thematic criticism, they attend specifically to that ground from which all writing communicates and all themes spring: the form - style, structure, vocabulary, literary form, syntax- of the writing. One such alternative, historical criticism, could provide a history of Canadian poetry- a history not of its themes and concerns but of its technical assumptions, the sources of these assumptions, and the relationship between the prosody of Canadian writers and that of other Western writers.[3]

A study of the relationship between Livesay's poetry and that of other Western writers involves an evaluation of both artistic and social influences on her work. Her early reading of Imagist poetry from the United States, her later awareness of the work of British 'social' poets such as Auden, Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice, her relationships in the nineteen-sixties with modern and post-modern poets in Canada and the United States, are all factors which have influenced her work.[4] In addition,

[2]Frank Davey, From There To Here (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1974), p. 10.

[3]_____, "Surviving the Paraphrase," Canadian Literature, 70 (1976), 9-10.

[4]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 40-48.

her experiences as a social worker and political activist in the nineteen-thirties have influenced the world outlook and political content of many of her poems.[5] The effects of these influences upon the techniques and themes used by Livesay can be contrasted and compared with the subjective and personal aspects of her work.

In Livesay's poetry, certain consistencies of theme and style can be isolated. These consistencies include her optimistic world outlook, her concern with the dichotomies of innocence and experience, and her use of both the lyric and narrative forms of poetry. Livesay's optimism was derived from her political viewpoint which included a belief in the possibility of social ~~recon-~~ struction. She has attributed her concern with innocence versus experience to Blake,[6] while her use of the lyric form was influenced by Imagist poets.

Four major influences at succeeding times in Livesay's poetic career have been the attitudes of the French Symbolistes, the American Imagists, the British Moderns, and Canadian and American Post-Moderns. Livesay's early volumes were influenced by the work of Imagists such as H.D., Elinor Wylie and Harriet Monroe. The Symboliste

[5]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 17.

[6]_____, "Foreward," Collected Poems. The Two Seasons (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 1.

influences of Flaubert, Valéry and Verlaine were less pervasive and more theoretical as Livesay studied the works of these writers in Paris in 1931-1932. Her poetry written in the Symboliste manner remained largely unpublished as she became more politically involved in these same years and began to reject the anti-social aspects of the Symboliste poetry. Livesay wholeheartedly accepted the social and political uses to which poetry could be put in her volumes Day and Night, Poems For People, and Call My People Home.[7]

Whereas Livesay's poetic style and social subject-matter of her poems in the Thirties and Forties were modern in concept, it can be pointed out that in many ways Livesay's work has never been a part of the mainstream of Modernism. She lacks the sense of tragedy and alienation which pervades much of modern poetry, and she remains optimistic about man's fate even in the midst of industrialization and war. Most importantly, Livesay has not been concerned with the dichotomies of the individual versus society and reason versus emotion which are the concerns of many Moderns. Instead, she has sought a synthesis of the personal subjectivity of the poet with the objective realities of nature and society. In these senses all of her poetry has connections with both the earlier

[7] Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), pp. 117-124.

Romantic movement and the later Post-Modern movement.

Post-Modernism has been associated with a rejection of the Modernist view that the poet was to be a manufacturer of pure form and symbol in the midst of the materialism of society. Davey writes that,"Modernism was essentially an elitist, formalistic, anti-democratic and anti-terrestial movement."[8] What Davey rejects in Modernism are the classical patterns and aesthetics which dominated the poetry of T.S Eliot.

Davey related the post-modern emphasis on man's relationship to his environment to social factors such as the beginning of the post-industrial technological age, the media explosion of the Fifties and Sixties, the new electronic environment, and the rise of the small press. The result of this explosion in sensory stimulation was the development of post-modernism in art. Davey characterizes post-modern writing in this way:

> Throughout such writing we see the triumph of particularity over philosophy. Bare images and stimuli take precedence over ideas. Like the electronic media themselves, post-modern Canadian writing is phenomenological in context, presenting the unprocessed, pre-reflective phenomena of perception rather than 'rational' reflections of the modernist writer. The post-modern artist does not believe that he can absorb, structure, organize and discourse effectively on the universe.[9]

[8]Frank Davey, From There To Here (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1974), p. 19.

[9]Ibid., p. 21.

In Canada, one type of post-modern poetry came almost directly from the Black Mountain group who transferred some of their ideas to the San Francisco poets, and hence to the Tish group in Vancouver. Livesay, whose writing of the Forties and Fifties had been published largely by Alan Crawley's Contemporary Verse in Vancouver, remained open to influences from Vancouver poets and intellectuals afterwards.[10] The nineteen-sixties were a turning-point in her work from Modernism towards a newer, freer post-modern aesthetic.

The resurgence of publishing activity in the Sixties in Canada provided Livesay with a new impetus both for creative work and for editing. Essentially, the role which Livesay has taken in the past ten years is one of an interpreter and adaptor of new poetic trends. Livesay has interpreted her influences in the light of her place in Canadian society and in terms of her personal and political beliefs.

Livesay's earliest poetry, with its Imagist perspective, was a direct reflection of her status at that time as a young middle-class student. The derivative aspects of her poetry are also characteristic of the beginning tentative work of the young poet. The poetry which came out of the Thirties had a distinctly political

[10]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

and social subject-matter, and it was derived from her profession at that time as a social worker and her growing political involvement with left-wing groups in Canada. A return to a more personal lyrical type of poetry in the Forties and Fifties shows her involvement at that time with raising a family and with home duties. With the nineteen-sixties, Livesay's poetry took on a new tone as she travelled in England, Europe and Africa, and as she began to make new contacts with younger poets. Canadian nationalism and the new feminist movement were two causes which she adopted during these years. Livesay's poetry has therefore been a reflection of her changing life-style through the years, as she has interpreted and reinterpreted her situation.

Livesay wrote about her poetic theories in an article entitled "Song and Dance," written in 1969, in "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre" (1969), and more recently in her editorials for CVII. From "Song and Dance" one can see the importance of technique in Livesay's poetry. "The Documentary Poem" points out Livesay's earlier social concerns, which she had elevated by the nineteen-sixties to the status of a Canadian genre of poetry. Her work and her editorials for CVII show us that Livesay has been concerned with the development of a new poetry and a new poetic theory through the discussion and dissemination of the work of new poets.

In "Song and Dance," Livesay chronicles the development

of her poetry through modern and post-modern eras. In chronological order, she discusses the influences upon her work - Ezra Pound's notion of 'melopeia,' the free verse of Poetry (Chicago), social concerns of the Thirties, Alan Crawley's encouragement and the western emphasis of Contemporary Verse, the philosophy of Simone Weil, the music of Africa, the Black Mountain group of poets, and the poetry of Milton Acorn.[11] Her openness to these influences has meant that her poetry has been in a continuous process of evolution.

Nevertheless, Livesay states that there are certain constants in her poetry. One of these constants is the 'song and dance' of poetry; a second constant is her essential optimism conveyed in poetry. She writes that:

> . . . I insist that the nursery-rhyme and ballad pattern are essential elements in poetry, not to be ignored. I suppose that all my life I have fought against obscurantism! For me, the true intellectual is a simple person who knows how to be close to nature and to ordinary people. I therefore tend to shy away from academic poets and academic critics. They miss the essence.
> The essential remains: Song and Dance.[12]

The elements which Livesay finds common to all of her poems are: "music; dance rhythm (metered and free); speech rhythms; and, in tone, a sense of isolation leading to a game of wry wit, a play on words. Behind it all a

[11]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 40, 43-47.

[12]Ibid., p. 45.

belief in love, in communication on all levels; and a sense of grace; a call to praise."[13] Livesay's essential optimism belies the tragic outlook of the mainstream of modern poetry. She writes that as Canadians:

> We are optimists, Blakeian believers in the New Jerusalem. We cannot see man's role as tragic, but rather as divine comedy. We are alone - so what? We are not always lonely. Laughter heals, the dance captures, the song echoes forth from tree-top to tree-top. I won't stop believing this until every tree in Canada is chopped down! I thumb my nose at those who say that nature, and with it, human nature, is becoming "obsolete."[14]

In "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," Livesay expands her poetic theories to attempt an analysis of a particular type of Canadian poetry. In analyzing aspects of the documentary as opposed to the narrative or epic traditions, Livesay concentrates upon the subjective-objective dialectic which she finds common to Canadian documentary poems. She writes that:

> What interests me in these developments is the evidence they present of a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet. The effect is often ironic; it is always intensely personal (as in Purdy's "The Cariboo Horses"). The more the pattern is studied, the more clearly it seems that such poems are not isolated events in Canadian poetry. Rather, they are part of a tradition which had enlivened our English-Canadian literature for a hundred and fifty years. Although this tradition has been somewhat loosely termed "narrative," I propose

[13]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

[14]Ibid., p. 48.

> to show that in our literary context it is more than that: it is a new genre, neither epic nor narrative, but 'documentary.'[15]

The synthesis of subjective and objective descriptions of life is, from Livesay's point of view, a social synthesis. Poetry, and in particular the documentary poem, confront the reader with a vision of a new society, a new community, a new Eden. Livesay writes that:

> By deposing old myths a new myth is asserted; the Canadian frontier, it is suggested, will create the conditions for a new Eden. Neither a Golden Age nor a millennium, neither a paradisal garden nor an apocalyptic city, but a harmonious community, here and now. That idea occurs again and again in our poetry and fiction.[16]

In addition, Livesay believes that this synthesis of objective and subjective realities is peculiar to Canadian society. This notion further extends the significance of social thought and history as found in the documentary genre. Livesay writes:

> Such poems record immediate or past history in terms of the human story, in a poetic language that is vigorous, direct and rendered emotionally powerful by the intensity of its imagery. Thus we have built up a body of literature in a genre which is valid as lyrical expression but whose impact is topical-historical, theoretical and moral. For we are a curious breed, we Canadians, who somehow or other imagine we can save man from self-destruction.[17]

[15]Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 267.

[16]Ibid., p. 274.

[17]Ibid., p. 281.

Livesay's poetic, political and social concerns are united in her synthesis of subject and object, as well as in the concept of the poet as being within the world rather than apart from and above the concerns of the world. The poet's task is to be that of an illuminator, bringing his peculiar subjectivity to shed light upon the objective complexities of the world. In her role as a critic, Livesay sees poetry as being a process, rather than as being the object of the reader's perusal. She writes that:

> The aim of poetry, which has the potential of surviving fashions and fads, is to illuminate the world and mankind's task within it. Thus we need to challenge, in terms that are cogent, apropos and informed, the writings of our avant-garde experimentalists, so that we may profit by what extends the bounds of poetry, and not be held back by sentimental revisitations of the scandals and astonishments of the past.[18]

Dorothy Livesay believes that poetry is song, the dance, rhythm and lyric. This subjective 'song' is fused with her objective concerns about Canadian society and the writer's role in that society, and with the objective 'fact' of nature. Poetry for Livesay is a process of continual change and development for both the poet and her poetry. Thus Livesay the early Imagist, the Modern of her mature work, and the Post-Modern of the Sixties and Seventies, has managed to integrate her poetic theories and

[18]Dorothy Livesay, "A Putting Down of Roots," CVII, v.1, no. 1 (1975), 2.

techniques with the changes in contemporary society. Livesay's optimism and her belief in the relevance of poetry to the needs of society have remained constant throughout the years.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY POETRY

Dorothy Livesay's early childhood was spent in Winnipeg. Her father, J.F.B. Livesay, was the first president of Canadian Press and her mother, Florence Randall Livesay, translated several volumes of Ukrainian poems.[1] When the family moved to Ontario in 1920, Livesay met the novelist Mazo de la Roche. She became aware of the precarious situation of the woman writer in Canadian society. Livesay has written:

> When I was a girl, living next door to Mazo in Clarkson, I had occasion often to see her through the eyes of my mother, who was a friend in whom she confided. We were sympathetic to the problems of being a woman writer, desperately lacking a means for living, depending on her cousin's job as an office worker to earn the daily bread.[2]

[1] Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, ed. Norah Story (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 466-467.

[2] Dorothy Livesay, "Getting It Straight," Impulse, 2 (1973), 30-31.

Her mother's interest in poetry and literature also influenced Dorothy Livesay's outlook, providing her with a model for her development as a poet. Livesay writes that:

> I do not resent the fact that she [Livesay's mother] had absorbing interests outside the home. As I grew older, these contacts made her a stimulating companion, opening doors for me because she passed on her interest in Canadian literature to me.[3]

Dorothy Livesay attended the University of Toronto and then the Sorbonne. At the University of Toronto she was already writing poetry, and she won the Jardine Memorial Prize in her second year for her poem "City Wife." Her first volume of poetry, Green Pitcher, was published in 1928, when Livesay was only nineteen, and in 1932 Signpost was published.

In Paris, Livesay studied the effect of French Symbolism upon English writers, and she composed some poems influenced by the French Symbolistes. A few of these poems were published in 1972 in her Collected Poems, but for years they had remained unpublished. Livesay's opinion of these poems was not high. In 1948 she told Alan Crawley that:

> Following the poetry of my adolescence, influenced by the free verse movement and poetry, and that of my twenties influenced by American woman poets (though I had not read Emily Dickinson until after my book Signpost appeared in 1933), there came a time when I wrote "Symbolist" and sentimentally lyrical work which

[3]Dorothy Livesay, "Livesayana," Canadian Author and Bookman, 43 (1967), 10.

is entirely unpublished.[4]

Writers who influenced Livesay in the Twenties and early Thirties came from the United States and Canada. American woman poets such as Elinor Wylie, H.D., and the editor Harriet Monroe were the models for Livesay's imagist perspective in the poetry of Green Pitcher and Signpost. Canadian writers who provided Livesay with a model of the woman writer during her childhood and adolescence were Isabella Valency Crawford, Mazo de la Roche, and L.M. Montgomery.[5] Except for the slight influence of the French Symbolistes, all of the writers who influenced her work during this period were women. Her poetry in the Twenties was personal, romantic and feminine; her explorations into the world were tentative.

In her first published volume of poetry, Green Pitcher, and in her unpublished work from the same period (entitled "The Garden of Childhood" in Collected Poems), Livesay attempted to master the simple free verse forms which she had encountered in Poetry (Chicago).[6] The poems of this period were carefully constructed along imagist principles

[4]Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948, pp. 121-122.

[5]Dorothy Livesay, "Getting It Straight," Impulse, 2 (1973), 29-35.

[6]_____, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 40.

and Livesay experimented with some different structures including the rhymed lyric and the narrative poem.

In Green Pitcher, Livesay conveyed a sense of childhood wonder in her poetry. Images of nature formed the basis for her poems. The mysterious aspect of nature was developed through Livesay's use of diminutive words and small details of nature to convey the romantic notion of communion with nature. Poems such as "Such Silence," "Autumn," and "Secret" all conveyed the essence of nature through the simplicity of poetic form and style. In the lyric mode, Livesay's poetry was spare and simple. She wrote:

> How lovely now
> Are little things:
> Young maple leaves -
> A jet crow's wings.[7]

In Green Pitcher, there are also longer poems, including "Phantasy In May," and "Impuissance." These poems were written in free verse, although Livesay injected a sense of rhythm into them through her repetition of key words and sounds. In "Phantasy In May" she used the repetition of words,

> He will run, he will run
> We shall see him running[8]

[7]Dorothy Livesay, "Secret," Green Pitcher (Toronto: Macmillan, 1928), p. 5. Other references to this volume will be abbreviated as GP.

[8]_____, "Phantasy In May," GP, p. 9.

and of suffixes,

> Candles are yellow and steadily bright
> Trying never to dance
> But to gleam palely, soberly, chastely,[9]

to achieve a sense of rhythm. She also combined the techniques of rhyme and free verse within the same poem as in "The Lake":

> You will not find the place
> Where death came suddenly and laid its hand
> Like sun, upon his face . . .
>
> Go out: go in canoes
> He was not made to answer any voices
> Save the too urgent, too insistent calling
> Of his dream.[10]

Livesay's images in Green Pitcher were restricted to the world of nature and the domestic world. Images of earth, air, fire and water appeared and were given conventional symbolic meanings - earth was the giver of life; fire, the passion of life; water (sea and lake), the destroyer of life; and air, the symbol of freedom.

The most prominent and pervasive image used by Livesay in these poems was that of fire, which symbolized passion, excitement, and the emotional life. The symbol of fire was opposed to the image of darkness; hence light and darkness were the dichotomies of passion and reason, life and death. These symbols occur in the

[9]Dorothy Livesay, "Phantasy In May," GP, p. 7.

[10]_____, "The Lake," GP, p. 12.

poems "Fireweed" and "Fire and Reason." In "Fireweed," the darkness and the fire were contrasted through the comparison of the brilliant fireweed with the charred aftermath of the forest fire. Paradoxically, the destructive fire produces the,

> Seed of the fire
> Sprung from charred ground
> To hide the dry, stark trees
> Carved in black nakedness.[11]

In "Fire and Reason," the blackness of night is symbolic both of reason and of death, while fire symbolizes passion and life. The poet discovers that:

> The many fires we light
> Can never quite obliterate
> The irony of stars;
> The deliberate moon,
> The last, unsolved finality of night.[12]

From the beginning of her poetic career, Livesay worked out of the modern tradition, and she also emulated the Imagist woman poets of the United States. Since Livesay was writing out of a feminine tradition, one can understand the close affinity of her work with that of Emily Dickinson, even though Livesay at that time had not read Dickinson. Preferring at this time in her life to confront reality indirectly through the metaphysical symbol rather than to seek some 'essence' of experience

[11] Dorothy Livesay, "Fireweed," GP, p. 6.

[12] _____, "Fire and Reason," GP, p. 16.

in poetry, Livesay, like Emily Dickinson, could have said, "My business is circumference."[13] As early as 1936, W.E. Collin recognized Livesay's affinities. He wrote:

> And so this poet set out as a disciple, not of metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, but of recent women poets like H.D., Elinor Wylie and Emily Dickinson, the last two of whom knew not Browning or Tennyson but looked to the seventeenth century for their art: to Sir Thomas Browne and John Donne.[14]

Like H.D., Livesay often used the free verse form and incorporated the symbols of the garden, the sea, darkness and light in her poems. H.D.'s poem "Evening," has both stylistic and thematic parallels with Livesay's poem "The Invincible." Whereas H.D. wrote:

> black creeps from root to root,
> each leaf
> cuts another leaf on the grass,
> shadow seeks shadow,
> then both leaf
> and leaf-shadow are lost.[15]

Livesay wrote:

> In the dark garden
> I hear strange rhythms
> Rising and falling:
> Deeper and deeper
> The elms delve their arms
> Into the helpless earth
> And suck the young wines

[13]Emily Dickinson, letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Selected Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson, ed. Robert N. Linscott (New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 10.

[14]W.E. Collin, "My New Found Land," The White Savannahs (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), p. 151.

[15]H.D., "Evening," Imagist Poetry, ed. Peter Jones (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), p. 63.

Of spring.[16]

Green Pitcher represented Livesay's attempt to adapt the Imagist movement to her own particular situation. Her metaphysical explorations during the nineteen-twenties were valid both as experiments in technique and as explorations of the relationship of the self to nature. From the beginning of her poetic career, Livesay had worked out of a particular feminine sensibility in interpreting the world, and had chosen two of the central images of her poetry throughout the years: fire and the garden. This beginning was an exploration in feminine innocence, later to be modified in the nineteen-sixties by an exploration of feminine experience.

Livesay's second volume, Signpost, can be seen as a turning-point in her writing. These poems were published while Livesay was in Paris and while she was becoming aware of political and social conditions in Europe and America. The poems in Signpost had been composed before she became politically involved, and the volume contained lyric poems and some narrative poems. Desmond Pacey, in his introduction to Livesay's Selected Poems, wrote:

> While she was in Paris, her second book of verse, Signpost, was published by Macmillan in Canada in 1932. This event was not as significant as it might have been because the book contained mainly poems which she had written before her political interests became dominant. The poems differ little from those which had

[16]Dorothy Livesay, "The Invincible," GP, p. 3.

> appeared in Green Pitcher: they are mainly lyrics of personal emotion or nature description, short, simple, direct and restrained. The nervous intensity which had been the most distinctive quality of the best poems in Green Pitcher remains the most attractive quality here, in such poems as "Climax," "In the Street," and "Song For Solomon." Two of the poems of Signpost, however, are truly signposts leading to the poet's future: "Old Man" and "City Wife" show a sympathetic understanding of other people which prepares us for the later social poetry.[17]

Whereas the form and style of the poems of Signpost had much in common with those of Green Pitcher, there are some differences to be found. Signpost is generally a much more uneven volume than Green Pitcher, and the collection lacks the unity of subject and style of the first volume. The poems of Signpost indicate that Livesay was searching for a new style during this period, and that she was attempting to imitate and to perfect different poetic styles.

The poems of Signpost were often based on the question form. The statements of Green Pitcher were replaced in Signpost by tentative questions concerning the relationship of the poet to the world. The subjects of the poems also indicate this questioning attitude: "The Unbeliever," "Monition," "Alienation," "Interrogation," "Blindness," "Perversity." An example of this tentative attitude is in "Ask of the Winds":

[17]Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," Selected Poems of Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957), p. xv.

What is there about you that shakes me
With such sharp coldness;
What breath of winter blowing.
Retards my spring?[18]

In Signpost, however, Livesay attempted to improve her techniques of lyric and free verse forms. Her "Song For Solomon" was a simple yet technically perfect lyric. Livesay also used new symbols in this volume. The most important of these were the home, the seasons and the dance. The symbol of the home can be found in the poem "Threshold," where the doorway through which the poet looks out upon the world symbolizes the threshold between innocence and knowledge. She writes:

This is the door, where others quickly pass,
But where my feet seek out a resting-place -
Balanced for this brief time between the thought
Of what the heart has known, and must yet know.[19]

In "City Wife," the house was a symbol of refuge from the demands of the land upon the farmer. The city wife asks herself:

Will not the dark bring quietness
And make him forget the land,
Make him forget the harvesting
Of the strong land?[20]

The seasons in nature provided the symbolic frame-

[18]Dorothy Livesay, "Ask of the Winds," Signpost (Toronto: Macmillan, 1932), p. 9. Other references to this volume will be abbreviated as SP.

[19]_____, "Threshold," SP, p. 27.

[20]_____, "City Wife," SP, p. 44.

work of many of the poems of Signpost. The image of the wind was used to convey the changeable nature of existence and the unreliability of individual perception. Sometimes it was the March wind which challenged the poet's belief in the coming of spring and sometimes the wind symbolized the changeable nature of emotion, as in "Climax" where:

> My heart is stretched on wires,
> Tight, tight.
> Even the smallest wind,
> However light,
> Can set it quivering -[21]

Finally, the wind could be a diabolical presence, engendering fear in the mind of the listener. In "Staccato," Livesay wrote:

> The night and the wind,
> The hungry pecking bird
> Hammer their voices through my head
> The night and the wind
> Drown out every word.
> Your phantom might, perhaps might not,
> have said
>
> O certainly, the wind! -
> Who else?[22]

The image of the dance was used by Livesay in the poem "Blindness." The solitary dance of the woman in love symbolizes a passionate ecstasy from which the man is excluded. Livesay writes:

> I did not dance for eyes to see
> Only a fluttering breath of me

[21] Dorothy Livesay, "Climax," SP, p. 13.

[22] _____, "Staccato," SP, p. 4.

Flashed with the sunlight on the wall,
Sank - and grew tall,
Taller than my own ecstasy.[23]

Signpost appears to mark a transition in Livesay's poetry from the personal lyrics of Green Pitcher towards a new emphasis upon technique. However, in the poem "City Wife," Livesay had begun to develop a distinctive narrative technique and a distinctly Canadian subject-matter. In this poem, the young woman from the city who now makes her home in the country is bewildered by the dominance which nature holds over rural life. The coming of spring casts her into a dream-like state which is broken only by the reality symbolized by the image of the sun and the harsh song of the crow. Livesay writes:

Why should I know how springs came long ago,
Lost as I am in this? Only I feel
No more is morning like a gleaming knife
Coming to pierce my sleep. Instead it is
Dream into changing dream, until at last
There comes reality - the scarlet sun.
Or say it is song into song, perhaps, until
Harshly the song of the crow breaks over all.[24]

Critical approaches to Livesay's early poetry have differed somewhat over the years. Critics from the nineteen-thirties to the present whose orientation is toward the early Modernist movements have generally preferred the poems of Green Pitcher and Signpost to the

[23]Dorothy Livesay, "Blindness," SP, p. 14.

[24]_____, "City Wife," SP, p. 41.

socio-political poems of the Thirties. Differences in attitudes to Livesay's early poetry can be shown through the contrasting evaluations of Desmond Pacey and W.E. Collin. Collin, who preferred realism to abstraction, wrote:

> She [Dorothy Livesay] has brooded in the same sequestered places as Emily Dickinson and Elinor Wylie and, in a manner similar to theirs, her emotion receives its final sanction in her mind. Narcissus-like, she sees herself in the limpid mirror of her mind; each poem is a thought expressed through the medium of dry, coloured, visual, often feminine images.[25]

Pacey, who preferred the techniques of Imagism to those of social realism and political polemics, wrote:

> The poems in it [Green Pitcher] show remarkable skill and maturity for one so young. They are brief lyrics, describing nature or states of personal feeling, and they have the simple, direct, concrete quality which both the Georgians and the Imagists had been seeking. But their simple directness serves only to intensify the strong feeling which these poems express: they are all stretched tight as the skin of a drum. Dorothy Livesay has never surpassed the restrained intensity of such of these early poems as "Reality," "Such Silence," and "Fire and Reason."[26]

Peter Stevens and Robin Skelton have found these early poems to be too derivative and not 'modern' enough. Stevens wrote:

> The early poems still have some romanticism clinging to them, although some of the poems are admirable

[25]W.E. Collin, "My New Found Land," The White Savannahs (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), p. 153.

[26]Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," Selected Poems of Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957), pp. xiii-xiv.

> statements of the wayward passions, misgivings, deceits and contradictions of love. And certainly they are the first attempts in Canadian poetry to express a modern approach to love, even though they are not always successful.[27]

Skelton wrote of Green Pitcher that:

> In these intense lyrics of the nineteen-twenties Dorothy Livesay indicates one of the primary impulses in her early work - the impulse to record, to set down, the moment. The language of these lyrics is traditional, non-innovative, and occasionally has that wayward oddity which is characteristic of Emily Dickinson.[28]

It appears from an analysis of the earliest poetry of Dorothy Livesay that there are many derivative aspects of these poems and that during this period Livesay was still assimilating the poetic discoveries of her predecessors. The poetic forms which she chose to use often appear to be 'practice' in the lyric and free verse forms, and occasionally one glimpses a certain clumsiness of technique in her attempt to make lines 'fit' to a predetermined pattern. In terms of the subject-matter of these poems Livesay also adopted a somewhat romantic attitude towards nature and love. Her main themes were those of the loneliness and alienation of the young and, symbolically, the estrangement of the artist from the world.

[27]Peter Stevens, "Dorothy Livesay: The Love Poetry," Canadian Literature, 47 (1971), 28.

[28]Robin Skelton, "Livesay's Two Seasons," Canadian Literature, 58 (1973), 78.

However, Livesay cannot be called a traditional poet in the Canadian context of the nineteen-twenties. She was ahead of the Canadian poetry scene of the Twenties and Thirties. Sir Charles G.D. Roberts published a volume of poetry, The Vagrant of Time in 1927, one year before Livesay's Green Pitcher. Bliss Carman's Selected Poems was published posthumously in 1954 although the poems had been selected in 1929. Archibald Lampman published At The Long Sault in 1943 and Duncan Campbell Scott his Circle of Affection in 1947.[29] All of these poets were writing out of a Victorian sensibility which bore little relation to Livesay's poetic attitudes.

Livesay was ahead of most other Canadian Modernists. E.J. Pratt's Titans was published in 1926, only two years before her first volume. F.R. Scott's first published work was coming out in the McGill Fortnightly Review during this time, but he gained only a small reading audience until the founding of the Canadian Mercury in 1928. The same applies to the work of A.J.M. Smith.[30] In this sense, Dorothy Livesay's work during this period was a radical departure from most poetry of the period.

[29]Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, ed. Norah Story (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[30]Munro Beattie, "Poetry 1920-1935," in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 731.

Livesay had also made great progress in coming to terms with her own poetic sensibility. In terms of poetic form, she had adopted and learned to render effective a free verse form which relied on internal rhythm for its dance-like effect. She had also been successful in "City Wife" with a long narrative poem which described the lives of ordinary people in the Canadian context. In terms of images and symbols, she was beginning to augment the symbols of nature with modern industrial references. Her thematic attitude by the Signpost volume had evolved from the description of adolescent loneliness to a more complex idea of the strength of the individual in the face of a sometimes unfriendly nature and society.

These processes of poetic maturity would be further changed with Livesay's personal involvement in society in the Thirties as a social worker and political activist. Livesay would begin to enlarge the social aspect of her poetry and widen the techniques she had already adopted.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL POETRY

The period from 1932 to 1945 was for Dorothy Livesay a time during which she moved outwards from her insular environment as a student through travel and work. The most important events for her in these years were the two years spent in Paris, her decision to train as a social worker and her subsequent jobs in Montreal, New Jersey, and Vancouver, her political involvement with left-wing organizations, her marraige to Duncan MacNair, and the birth of her children.[1] The new interests generated by these events and activities were reflected in the poetry Livesay wrote in these years.

In 1931 Livesay travelled to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. The topic of her thesis was the influence of

[1]Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), p. 120.

French Symbolisme on modern English poetry. The slight influence of French Symbolisme on Livesay's poetry has already been discussed. However, it was in Paris that she first became aware of the young Marxist, anti-Fascist movements which were gaining strength in Europe. She was particularly influenced by Henri Barbusse's League of Revolutionary Writers.[2] Livesay returned to Toronto in 1932, and completed her degree in Social Science in 1934.[3]

In the years 1932-1935, Livesay found it difficult to continue writing poetry. She had abandoned the personal, reflective attitude of Green Pitcher and Signpost but she could find nothing with which to replace it. While she was working in the New York City area, Livesay encountered the works of new British poets in a bookshop. She began to realize that it was possible to reconcile the demands of art with those of society. Desmond Pacey wrote:

> The revelation that the writer could most effectively play his part in the revolutionary social process as a writer came to her during the winter of 1934-1935, when she was working with Negro and white families in

[2]Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing In Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1961), pp. 147-150. Whereas Pacey has stressed the importance of the League upon Livesay's attitudes, Livesay disputes this somewhat in an interview with me (see Appendix I).

[3]Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), p. 120.

> a relief agency in Englewood, New Jersey. In the bookshops of New York City she encountered for the first time the dynamic left-wing poetry of Cecil Day-Lewis, Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, and was immediately seized with a desire to emulate their work.[4]

Livesay had discovered that: "the dance could extend to an identification with a community, a nation, a world."[5] In the activist British poets of the Thirties, Livesay found a precedent for the reconciliation of the intellectual status of the poet with the needs of the proletariat. She writes that: "Perhaps we too were just isolated "bourgeois intellectuals" but the impact of the times, the crises of social life, deeply moved us. The poetry was crying out."[6]

During the years from 1932 to 1935, Livesay was so involved in political work that she had no time for poetry. Her encounter with the works of Day Lewis, MacNeice, Auden, and Spender served as a catalyst for her work after this period. In 1935 Livesay returned to Canada from the United States and while resting at home she began to write. Livesay recounts this experience of beginning anew in The Documentaries. She writes that:

[4]Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," Selected Poems of Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957), pp. xv, xvi.

[5]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 43.

[6]_____, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 17.

> Soon after that experience [as a social worker in the U.S.] I returned to Canada, supposedly because of a stomach ulcer; but actually, I believe now, with a kind of nervous breakdown. Given a month's holiday in which to recuperate, I spent it at our country place in Clarkson - barring one week spent quite alone on a farm north of Galt. It was there that I wrote "The Outrider." My illness, however, continued and led to a decision to give up work in the U.S. and have a longer rest at home. During that winter I wrote "Day and Night."[7]

In 1936 Livesay moved to Vancouver to take a job with the British Columbia Social Service Staff. There she met and married Duncan Cameron MacNair in 1937. In 1940 a son, Peter, was born and in 1943 a daughter, Marcia.[8] She continued to write poems with a political perspective such as her "Seven Poems" and her "West Coast." Livesay also began to incorporate her experiences as a wife and mother in such poems as "Serenade For Strings" and "Five Poems." Whereas many readers and critics saw a sharp distinction between Livesay's political poems and her personal poems, Livesay herself has always refused to admit such sharp divisions in her poetry. She told Alan Crawley that:

> I have been called a public and a private poet. My interest lies in both ways, in personal and family relations, marraige, birth and child rearing, and in the social and political scene. These two directions will be found in my poetry. It annoys me to be told that such poetry is obscure. If people saying that

[7]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p.17.

[8]Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), p. 120.

> would take the time to read the French Symbolists, T.S. Eliot, Auden, and the poetry being written today by those in their twenties in Canada and the United States, I think I would emerge crystal clear.[9]

Whereas Livesay wrote many poems in the period from nineteen thirty-five to 1945, social and political circumstances during this time delayed publication of her poems. First the Depression and then the war made it impossible for publishers to accept the work of young poets. Whereas "The Outrider" was completed in 1935 and "Day and Night" in 1936, these poems did not appear in book form until 1944 in Day and Night. The poem "Day and Night" was first accepted for publication in E.J. Pratt's Canadian Poetry Magazine in 1940, so Livesay had waited for four years for recognition of this poem written about workers in the Depression.[10] Day and Night won the Governor General's Medal in 1944, while Poems For People again won the award in 1947.[11] Unfortunately, Livesay's work did not have the immediate social and political impact of the work of Auden, Spender and MacNeice because of these delays in publication.

[9] Alan Crawley, "Dorothy Livesay," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W.P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948), p. 122.

[10] Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 16.

[11] The Oxford Companion To Canadian History and Literature, ed. Norah Story (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 861.

Since she had written the poetry published in Signpost, Livesay had radically changed her attitudes, both in subject and style. Her poetry in the nineteen-thirties was a reflection of the political attitudes in Canada which were radically transformed by the Depression. Although the government in Canada remained Victorian and conservative, there were indications in Canada that both the intellectuals and the workers were becoming radicalized. This was the period of the growing power of the CCF and populism in the West, of worker's strikes and the beginnings of industrial unionism, of pacifism and communism among the intelligensia. In the United States, Livesay saw a model of democratic populism in the Roosevelt adminstration which gave her hope for the future. She wrote:

> Quite a different aspect of the American scene surprised and cheered me. This was the tradition of free speech and assembly which I knew was lacking in Canada under the regime of R.B. "Iron Heel" Bennett. In the United States Roosevelt's NRA program with its policy of "making work," of building cultural projects and highways, of encouraging free discussion and open political dialogue led me to hope that perhaps democracy could be made to work.[12]

"The Outrider" was the first poem which Dorothy Livesay composed while convalescing in Clarkson, Ontario. About this poem Livesay writes:

[12]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 16.

> The title is taken from a poem of C. Day-Lewis and it implies that there are individuals who were ahead of their time, forseeing the changes to come. In "The Outrider," the "prophet" is much like a poet-friend, Raymond Knister, for whom the impact of industrial life on rural existence was fascinating but anguished. In place of boredom and stultification the prophet found change and violence.[13]

The Prologue of the poem introduces the figure of the outrider. Livesay produces an atmosphere of foreboding and mystery through images of rural tranquillity disturbed by the presence of the outrider. The first stanza of the poem conveys the noise of the birds in contrast to the quiet of the countryside; the second gives a still life portrait of the people awaiting the coming of the prophetic figure. A sense of calmness and peace about to be shattered by change and violence introduces the poem. Livesay writes:

> The old man standing with his hayfork high
> Can let it rest, mid-air, and burden fails
> And falls within the sun-dipped gloom of barn.
> The young boy bowed behind the clicking mow
> Feels his spine stiffen as if the birds had whirred
> Behind him, or a storm had clapped its clouds.
> A girl, chin pressed upon a broom, will stir
> As a warm wave of wonder sweeps her out
> Whither her musings never leapt before
> And so it is.[14]

The first division of the poem begins with a description of the hardships of settlement, then an

[13]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 3.

[14]_____, "The Outrider," Day and Night (Toronto: Ryerson, 1944), p. 7. Other references to this volume will be abbreviated as DN.

idyllic description of romantic love and the love of parents for children, and then ends with a portrait of a young man trying to escape the land. The poem gives the reader four different perspectives: that of the old man, the husband, the child and the adolescent. Resignation and a fatalistic acceptance of the harshness of life are the characteristics of the old man's viewpoint. As a young man, he contrasted his desire for his wife with his inability to understand her sensibility. He has discovered that:

> . . . love was never enough, though children sprang
> Year after year from your loins - never enough
> For my yearning though your eyes burned strangely -
> And earth has kept you far more fierce and safe.[15]

The farmer is afraid of freedom. His rememberances as a young child are those of the fear of loss of security, coupled with a desire to tame whatever he encounters. The adolescent, however, accepts his freedom and makes his decision to leave the farm. The images of the beast with his burden and of the crow with his predatory dive from the sky are used by Livesay to symbolize the roles of farmer and industrial worker. The boy's decision is that:

> . . . I would no longer be the beast
> Who ploughed a straight line to the barrier
> And swung back on his steps - my father's son.
> It would take long. But from that summer on
> My heart was set. I raced through swinging air,

[15]Dorothy Livesay, "The Outrider," DN, p. 9.

Rumpled my head with laughter in the clouds.[16]

The prologue of "The Outrider" sets the prophetic tone of the poem as the reader is introduced to the dim figure who enters the silent world of the country. The first division of the poem destroys the idyllic myth of the pastoral setting and the contentment of the farmer. Instead, the rural life is seen as a harsh struggle of man against nature, as man attempts to impose order upon anarchy.

The second division of the poem provides a vivid contrast to the first. The industrial world is portrayed as merely a faster version of the farmer's subordination to outside forces. Instead of the imposition of nature upon the farmer, the factory is portrayed as an imposition of slavery upon the worker. The factory is:

> Dark because you're beaten
> By a boss's mind:
> A single move uneven turned
> Will set you in the wind.[17]

The tempo of the poem becomes increasingly faster and more urgent as Livesay portrays the subterranean world of the factory. The rhythm of the poem has altered from the narrative quality of the prologue and the first section to the military precision of:

[16]Dorothy Livesay, "The Outrider," DN, p. 10.

[17]Ibid., p. 11.

Early morning
sky shows blue
men are marching
two and two.[18]

The industrial world of the factory worker is presented as a speeded-up version of the slower but still crushing exploitation of the farmer. Livesay insists in this poem, as in all the poems of Day and Night, that these forms of exploitation can be ended only through solidarity of all people, whether they be from rural or urban environments. She writes that:

> Cities that sell their toil, must put
> Possessiveness to shame
> And draw you to them in the fight:
> The battle is the same.[19]

The epilogue of the poem, like the prologue, gives the reader a vision of the figure of the outrider. While the prologue set a mood of uneasiness in the figure of the dark outrider, the epilogue ends in a tone of hopefulness. The last stanza of the poem is a hymn for the international proletariat. Livesay writes:

> O new found land! Sudden release of lungs,
> Our own breath blows the world! Our veins, unbound
> Set free the fighting heart. We speak with tongues -
> This struggle is our miracle new found.[20]

As a political poem, "The Outrider" works on the basis of a set of dialectical situations which are finally

[18]Dorothy Livesay, "The Outrider," DN, p. 12.

[19]Ibid., p. 14.

[20]Ibid., p. 15.

resolved in a synthesis of a new social order. The oppositions of the farmer and the factory worker, the old man and the young man, the insider and the outrider, countryside and city are reunited in a visionary socialist state.

In "Day and Night" Livesay used the same theme of social reconstruction as in "The Outrider." In this poem, however, she did not use the visionary figure as the catalyst for change. Livesay also enlarged her use of different rhythms to illustrate oppositions in the poem. Descriptive introductory and concluding passages are written in a narrative style, the world of the factory is portrayed as a rhythmic jazz dance, and conversations among factory workers are written in colloquial forms. The first stanza of the poem contains the idea of the dance which will form the basis of the poem. Livesay writes:

> Men in a stream, a moving human belt
> Move into sockets, every one a bolt.
> The fun begins, a humming whirring drum
> Men do a dance in time to the machines.[21]

Workers condemned to ceaseless repetition of the same action are portrayed by Livesay as jazz dancers. The steps in the dance are:

> One step forward
> Two steps back

[21]Dorothy Livesay, "Day and Night," DN, p. 16.

Shove the lever,
Push it back[22]

In the second division of the poem, Livesay sets human values against capitalist values. She insists upon the necessity for human love, emotion and passion as an antidote to the inhuman rationality of the factory life. She writes:

I called to love
Deep in dream:
Be with me in the daylight
As in gloom.

Be with me in the pounding
In the knives against my back
Set your voice resounding
Above the steel's whip crack.[23]

The third division of the poem is a polemic on the theme of racial prejudice used by the overseer to set worker against worker. Livesay ironically uses the image of the blackening furnace from which all workers emerge the same to illustrate her point. She also uses the jazz rhythm with overtones of the Negro spiritual to portray the effects of the factory life upon all workers:

Boss, I'm smothered in the darkness
Boss, I'm shrivellin' in the flames
Boss, I'm blacker than my brother
Blow your breath down here.[24]

"Day and Night" ends with a call for workers'

[22]Dorothy Livesay, "Day and Night," DN, p. 16.

[23]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[24]Ibid., p. 19.

resistance against the bosses. The worker is to organize and press for change:

> Day and night
> Night and day -
> Till life is turned
> The other way! [25]

By using jazz rhythms in "Day and Night," Livesay composed a poem with implications beyond those of mere propaganda. The poem conveys an emotional and passionate commitment to a materialist cause. W.E. Collin wrote of this poem:

> In the poetry we have just read ["The Outrider" and "Day and Night"] we have machinery used, not to create geometrical style or form, but mainly as imagery for propaganda. Instead of a "tendency to abstraction," which is the impulse behind geometrical art, we have a desire for concrete and vital imagery; since the chief aim is to present a fiery, lambent, scorching drama of the mechanization of labour and the exploitation of men as machines. We cannot study this poetry, as we can study Pratt's, in a detached way, simply as art or as illustrating the invasion of industrial realism into poetry, because it speaks out with such resounding purpose; it sends out a call, it issues a challenge which may well give us pause.[26]

In 1939 Livesay wrote a poem in honour of Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet hailed as a martyr to the cause of the Spanish Republic. This poem is unlike "The Outrider" and "Day and Night" in that the harsh rhythm of the factory and the unrelieved austerity of the farmer's life have been

[25]Dorothy Livesay, "Day and Night," DN, p. 21.

[26]W.E. Collin, "My New Found Land," The White Savannahs (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), p. 171.

replaced by a vision of peace and hope. The three recurring images in "Lorca" are those of light, flight and the 'word' of poetry. Set against the image of light is that of darkness and death; against flight, that of the rooted tree; against the word, the bomber's bullet. The theme of the poem is the transcendence of the hero over death. In "Day and Night" Livesay had used the jazz rhythm to portray the harshness of factory life, while in "Lorca" she used Imagist techniques to portray the:

> Bare, stripped light
> Time's fragment flagged
> Against the dark.[27]

"The Outrider," "Day and Night" and "Lorca" illustrate Livesay's concern with social reform in the nineteen-thirties. In "The Outrider," Livesay had written of the farmer's despair in the Depression years, but she had also written of his tenacity in these lines:

> How the expected sunlight will shrivel your pounding heart,
> the seed you plant be killed
> The apple be bitter with worm, but your honesty firm seeking another start.[28]

Louis MacNeice had also written of the 'seeds' of ideas which could be translated into action. He wrote:

> Still there are still the seeds of energy and choice
> Still alive even if forbidden, hidden,

[27]Dorothy Livesay, "Lorca," DN, p. 24.

[28]_____, "The Outrider," DN, p. 10.

> And while a man has voice
> He may recover music.[29]

Livesay had written in "Day and Night," of the interminable wheel of industrialism in images of darkness and light. Stephen Spender elucidated the images of day and night in a more philosophical way. His words can be used as a formulation of Livesay's theme. He wrote:

> The world, my life, binds the dark and light
> Together, reconciles and separates
> In lucid day the chaos of my darkness.[30]

During the years 1935-1939 Livesay's work changed drastically from her earlier personal perspective to a political perspective which lent itself to expression in longer narrative form. Livesay was writing out of an intellectual perspective which was manifest in Britain at that time, the perspective that the intellectual could be a man of action through his propaganda. Livesay used the Canadian farm scene in "The Outrider" and the Canadian industrial scene in "Day and Night" to convey this perspective.

In 1938-1939 as Hitler was consolidating his power and beginning to expand into other coutries, Communist-pacifist sympathies of a generation came into question.

[29]Louis MacNeice, "Autumn Journal," Collected Poems. 1925-1948 (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 160.

[30]Stephen Spender, "Dark and Light," Collected Poems. 1928-1953 (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 92.

Livesay was not unaffected by these developments. She writes:

> Like so many leftists who had for ten years warned against the threat of fascism and war, I was faced with a dilemma when war actually broke out in 1939. Was this a "phoney" war or was it indeed the necessary battle which had to be fought to defeat totalitarianism? I remember some violent arguments between friends; and then I lost all contact with Communist Party acquaintances, who went underground. It was not until Churchill proclaimed, on that famous Sunday morning, that Britain would come to the support of the U.S.S.R., that our emotions overcame our caution. And for a few years, those years of the Hitler onslaught, we believed it was a just war and that Hitler must be stopped.[31]

Livesay lived in Vancouver during the war. Her political and social concerns were now fused with her personal home life with husband and children. In the period 1939-1949, Livesay continued to write poetry with a social perspective but she also began again to write personal lyrics. In "Prelude For Spring," written in 1939, she used nature imagery and the dream pattern to enunciate the unsettled feeling of the times. She wrote:

> But still
> On heart's high hill
> And summit of
> A day's delight
> Still will he swoop
> From heaven's height
> Soaring unspent,
> Still will he stoop to brush
> Wing tip on hair,
> Fan mind with fear.[32]

[31] Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 24.

[32] _____, "Prelude For Spring," DN, p. 28.

The divisions of Livesay's fourth book of poems, Poems For People (1947), show the new concerns of Livesay during the Thirties. Her "Poems of Childhood" are for the most part light-hearted lyrics based upon the rhythm of the dance, in which Livesay uses fantasy and fairy-tale images to great effect. "Poems For People" includes political and social poems of description and elegy. The "Poems As Pictures" section consists of descriptive nature lyrics.

Livesay's concerns during this time were more diversified than those of the Twenties and Thirties. She had discovered that her social and political concerns could be expressed in personal images of home, children and friends. In her "Seven Poems," written and revised between 1934 and 1940, Livesay had already begun to fuse political and personal themes. She writes:

> The child leans on the future,
> Slender tree ungainly rooted there by private worlds
> Who knew a private ecstasy unshared by him
> But let the memory slip and rear a hedge
> Of bristling phrases, last year's bills, and
> week-ends snatched
> In secret hate; his room laid waste when radios
> Are tuned, when rumour's blatent voice hits nerve,
> Dries tissue, brittles down
> The new unmoulded bone.[33]

The "Poems of Childhood" section of Poems For People shows the reader that Livesay does not treat

[33]Dorothy Livesay, "Seven Poems," DN, p. 6.

childhood as a state of ideal perfection; instead, the child is seen as an embryonic container for the responsible man of action. She writes that:

> The infant like an invalid
> Is slow aware of worlds to win.[34]

In these poems, Livesay often uses a deceptively simple structure based upon nursery-rhyme forms. An example of this type of poem is "Abracadabra," which uses the nonsense poem of childhood for its basis. Livesay writes:

> In the witty time of day
> When the mind's at play
> The cat's at call
> The guitar off the wall
> Wind holds sway
> In the witty time of day.[35]

However, this poem is not merely a nonsense poem or a nursery rhyme. In this form is contained the idea of time, fate and obligation which can wreak havoc in the life of a woman. She writes:

> And time with his
> Weaving, wailing horn
> Shivers my timbers
> Shatters my corn:
> Little boy blue
> Blows a blue tune
> On a wicked afternoon.[36]

[34]Dorothy Livesay, "Preludium," Poems For People (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 5. Other references to this volume will be abbreviated as PFP.

[35]_____, "Abracadabra," PFP, p. 11.

[36]Ibid., p. 12.

Livesay's opening poem of the "Poems For People" section sets the anti-romantic p[illegible]ist tone conveyed in this section. These poems are to be written in the realistic tradition of narrative and saga. She writes:

> Mourn not, as maudlin singers did, the scars
> Left by the slag, industrial wars,
> Men tearing fields apart for railway towns
> Wresting the silly sheep from sleepy downs:
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Sing only with the gibing Chaucer's tongue
> Of foible and grave fault; of words unsung,
> More pungent victory than battles won:
> Sing deeds neglected, desecrations done.[37]

The poems of this section follow traditional poetic forms more closely than any others of Livesay's. "Of Mourners" is written as a standard four-line lyric in couplets, "Contact" and "Sonnets For a Soldier" are sonnets. In these poems Livesay was allying herself with both the modern formalists and the modern political poets - with Eliot and with Auden.

In the "Poems For People" section, Livesay also composed elegaic poems. The individual and his reactions to life and death were the subjects of the poems "Sonnets For a Soldier" and "Railway Station." The poem "FDR" was both an elegy on the American leader and an elegy for Walt Whitman. Livesay writes:

> I tell you, Walt
> There was none

[37] Dorothy Livesay, "Of Mourners," PFP, p. 17.

None other nowhere known
None from our time
Who sat so easy in a politician's saddle
And made it everyone's, our own.
To the people's knock, a man always at home.
Yet a traveller after your own heart, Walt.
And the world his room.[38]

In the last two poems of this section, Livesay enunciated her philosophy. The themes of "Matins" and "Lullaby," are similar. In both poems, she portrays a grim world caught in the aftermath of war. Hope for the future is balanced by an acceptance of the agony of the world. In "Lullaby," Livesay wrote:

Let me sleep at last
Who groan as the earth creaks over
Its own disasters
Let me close my eyes forever against
The map on my wall
Let me be silent and still
Stop up my ears to blur
The child's cruel cry at my sill.
Drug and dope me, dress me with love's fine hand
Till the end of our time.[39]

In "Poems As Pictures," Livesay portrayed the countryside in contemplative lyrics. All of these poems are 'pictures' of nature, given without overt social statements. If they have a single theme, it is that of the poet's reaction to nature and the role of the physical world in the making of poetry. Livesay wrote of the Fraser River:

[38]Dorothy Livesay, "FDR," PFP, p. 22.

[39]_____, "Lullaby," PFP, p. 32.

Water is life; and the thrusting fruit-
Trees suck to my twisted course;[40]

and of the Welsh countryside:

Hold here familiar
Or strange meeting-place;
Green hills be walls
Forever shaping us.[41]

Livesay's Poems For People is a collection in which her three principal interests are interwoven. She is concerned with collective society, with interpersonal relationships, and with man's relationship to his environment. What is unique about this volume is that for the first time Livesay united these concerns: the future of the collective is seen through the eyes of the child; a single soldier symbolizes the fate of a nation of young men; the destruction of the storm and the life-giving water symbolize the dual nature of existence. In the Twenties Livesay had been concerned with Imagist and free verse techniques in poetry, and in the Thirties she had devoted herself to social reform. In the nineteen-forties, Dorothy Livesay began to unite her personal, social and aesthetic concerns for the first time in her poetry.

[40] Dorothy Livesay, "Okanagon Pictures," PFP, p. 34.

[41] _____, "Autumn In Wales," PFP, p. 40.

CHAPTER IV

THE NINETEEN-FIFTIES

Dorothy Livesay was optimistic for society's future after the Second World War. This optimism was evident in her poem "West Coast," written in 1943. She expressed the workers' committment to the war effort in contrast to their earlier disillusionment in the Thirties, with these lines:

> Who have been thrown a bone and yapped at the thrower
> who looked this gift horse sharply in the mouth
> who work, watching; who launch ships, wary
> waiting the year's turn, living to see . . .
>
> We too are here, bent over bench and caulker
> our hearts awake; for now, our voices free:[1]

In The Documentaries, Livesay discusses her identification with the fight against fascism. She writes:

> It is easy enough to see now that World War II only led to further chaos, and to the threat of world destruction through the Bomb; yet at the same time there were very few who had that vision. Among

[1]Dorothy Livesay, "West Coast," DN, p. 46.

> English-speaking poets there was no Wilfred Owen. We were soon to face the shock of Hiroshima, but in the meantime we were caught up in the round of raising children in wartime. At times a mood of elation, of belief in a new world swept over us: in such a mood "West Coast" was written.[2]

At the war's end, Livesay went to England as a reporter for the Toronto Star.[3] It was in England that she first understood the horror which war could evoke. Hope for the future began to be replaced by doubt. Upon her return home to Canada, Livesay began to write Call My People Home. This radio-poem recounts the hardships of the Japanese Canadians of the west coast who were interned in camps for the war's duration.

Livesay's disillusionment with the state of the world increased in the nineteen-fifties. Anti-communist feeling in the United States and Canada was prevalent, the threat of a nuclear holocaust existed, and the Korean conflict only served to increase the disillusionment of the left-wing with the governments in power. Livesay writes about this unhappy period of her life:

> For someone who believes in man, in his potential for growth and change, no more depressing period occurred than the 1950's. Everything that we believed might come out of the holocaust of war: free independent nations living in harmony of economic and cultural exchanges, moving from competition

[2]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 24.

[3]_____, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 45.

> to co-operation - everything was shown to be a mockery. Man was not capable of social intelligence! He was a ravager. The Korean War proved it. Despair, almost an existential despair, took hold of me in those years. The resulting poems were alienated, groping, as in the little chapbook Jay Macpherson published for me, New Poems. From the gaiety of "Bartok and the Geranium," I moved to the confusion of "The Dark Runner."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> In poems such as this I came closer to mystical experience than heretofore; and also closer to despair. I was reading Simone Weil.[4]

After the end of the war, Livesay completed three volumes of poetry. Call My People Home was published in 1950 by Ryerson, and New Poems by Emblem Books in 1955. In 1957 Livesay's Selected Poems was published by Ryerson. Livesay's poetic output during this decade was small, and the poems conveyed her new pessimism concerning the future.

Livesay began writing Call My People Home in 1948 and it was performed for the first time on CBC Vancouver in August, 1949.[5] She had had an idea for this poem from 1941 onwards, but she continued researching the poem for many years before its completion. In The Documentaries Livesay writes:

> On my return home to Vancouver [after visiting Malcolm Lowry's cabin] I realized that a considerable amount of research would be needed to corroborate my personal impressions of the Japanese-Canadian evacuation. I spent several afternoons reading back

[4]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 45.

[5]_____, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 33.

> files of the Nisei newspaper, to obtain the material for the long section of the documentary, "The Fisherman." My son, who has himself fished halibut up that coast, tells me that my description is authentic: but I owe that fact to the letters of Japanese fishermen who wrote to the paper describing their personal uprooting. From the same paper I obtained the details for "The Wife." Material for "The Mayor" came to me after I had made a visit to the Similkameen where the then mayor of Greenwood, B.C., showed me around that "ghost" town and told me most movingly of his experience with the Japanese evacuee families.
>
> After writing that account, and the last two sections, I believed that the poem was complete. I read it, one evening, to Esther and Earle Birney. It was Esther who remarked that I had omitted to describe the significant, very distressful period of the evacuation when women and children were separated from their menfolk, who had been sent to Interior work camps. While awaiting hostel accommodation in the Interior the women and children were forced to live in Vancouver's Exhibition grounds, in the buildings usually allocated to farm animals. After reading the accounts of this experience, I wrote the fictional section called "Mariko." This, I believe, intensified the lyrical element in the documentary and added to its authenticity.[6]

Call My People Home is the first poem which Livesay wrote which was specifically intended for oral presentation. Two elements of the poem which show this oral quality are those passages intended for the Announcer, and the passages of the Chorus of Isseis. The function of the Announcer is to introduce the scene and characters, to provide a background to the situation of the poem, and to connect characters and chorus to each other. The Announcer's voice is impersonal; his perspective is

[6]Dorothy Livesay, The Documentaries (Toronto: Ryerson, 1968), p. 33.

historical. This voice introduces Call My People Home:

> Now after thirty years come from a far island
> Of snow and cherry blossoms, holy mountains,
> To make a home near water, near
> The blue Pacific; newcomers and strangers
> Circled again and shaped by snow white mountains,
> These put down their roots, the Isseis:
> The older generation. This is their story.[7]

The role of the Chorus of Isseis is to provide a commentary upon the actions of the characters, a philosophical counterpoint to the objective situation of the Japanese-Canadians, and generalizations from the specifics of character. The central theme of the poem is that of the significance of the concepts of home and homeland. This theme is expressed in the song of the Chorus:

> Home was the uprooting:
> The shiver of separation,
> Despair for our children
> Fear for our future.[8]

The poem ends on a more optimistic note as the Chorus revises and incorporates the thoughts of the individual speakers of the poem to conclude that:

> Home is something more than harbour -
> Than father, mother, sons;
> Home is the white face leaning over your shoulder
> As well as the darker ones.
>
> Home is labour, with the hand and heart,
> The hard doing, and the rest when done;

[7]Dorothy Livesay, Call My People Home (Toronto: Ryerson, 1950), p. 1. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as CPH.

[8]Ibid., p. 1.

A wider sea than we knew, a deeper earth,
A more enduring sun.[9]

The characters of the poem include the fisherman, the student, the wife, the daughter, and the white mayor of a town used for relocation of Japanese-Canadians. Livesay has succeeded in portraying her characters in such a way that their differing personalities are reflected in differing poetic styles. The Fisherman and the Mayor are shown to be materialists: the facts of their lives are external events; they are not thinkers, nor are they emotional in their approaches to life. Livesay uses a narrative style full of detail to portray these characters. The Fisherman begins his tale, for example, with the central fact of his life:

Home was my boat: T.K. 2930 -
Wintering on the Skeena with my nets
Cast up and down the river, to lure and haul
The dogfish. (His oil, they said, was needed
overseas
For children torn from home, from a blitzed town.)
We made good money, and the sockeye run
That summer had outdone all the remembered seasons.[10]

By contrast, the character of the Student is philosophical and spiritual. Livesay uses the lyric mode to introduce this character:

To be alone is grace; to see it clear
Without rancour; to let the past be
And the future become. Rarely to remember

[9]Dorothy Livesay, CPH, p. 16.

[10]Ibid., p. 2.

The painful needles turning in the flesh.[11]

In Call My People Home, Livesay portrayed each character of the poem in separation from the others. The fisherman is shown as a man concerned with his personal struggle for material prosperity. The young Nisei deals with colour prejudice in the school situation. Wife and mother mourn the loss of family and home. The mayor is caught in his situation and cannot cope with his conscience, and the college student attempts to escape his situation through philosophical detachment. The announcer and the chorus unite these characters through description and explanation of the central theme of the homeland.

This poem can be described as an oral poem, a narrative poem, or a documentary poem. As an oral poem, Call My People Home depends for its effect upon the voices of the characters, announcer and chorus. Each reading of the poem will be of necessity somewhat different from the last; hence the poem's effect is changeable. The listener, unlike the reader, cannot refer back to the text; therefore, Livesay intended that the effect of the poem should be immediate and total.

As a narrative poem, Call My People Home tells the story of the expulsion and relocation of the Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War. Through the eyes

[11]Dorothy Livesay, CPH, p. 15.

of the characters, we are given a complete and detailed account of an historical event. Unlike many narrative poems, however, this poem does not proceed as a single story seen through the eyes of the poet or a single character, progressing through time and event in logical order.

Livesay has therefore termed this poem a 'documentary' poem. In the documentary poem, a situation is presented through the eyes of many characters. Unlike Livesay's earlier poems, "Day and Night" and "The Outrider," this poem is not overtly political in the sense that the listener can hear the poet's voice in the poem. Instead, Call My People Home consists of a series of situations which may affect the listener's perception of a particular historical event. Finally, the documentary poem is based upon documentary sources, as we have seen from Livesay's comments about her research for this poem. Because the poem is based upon interviews with people and newspaper accounts, it is subject to continuous revision as new documents appear. Therefore, both the oral aspect of the poem and the documentary aspect of the poem mean that it can continually evolve through additions to the poem and different readings of the poem.

Call My People Home works as a political object-lesson through Livesay's use of character types to humanize a social situation. Each character speaks with a distinctive voice and with a different social and familial

perspective. Taken together, the characters of Call My People Home represent a series of political 'examples.' Livesay neither romanticized nor idealized these characters. Northrop Frye wrote about this poem:

> It is written with a close sympathy and a dry, unlaboured irony, and in a taut, sinewy narrative style with no nonsense about it: it will pick up an image as it goes along, but it never stops for any synthetic beautifying.[12]

Linda Rogers has written:

> Her dramas, "Prophet of the New World," about Louis Riel, and "Call My People Home," a radio play about the Japanese Canadians interned during the Second World War, are more effective than some of the documentary poems about the Spanish Civil War and the Canadian depression, because she is working with characters, listening to their conversation. She has referred to her voices, the words that come out involuntarily. Sometimes they are harmonious and sometimes they betray her. In the plays they work. "Call My People Home" has the austere elegance of Japanese life and language.[13]

Call My People Home would be Livesay's last long politically-oriented poem for the decade of the nineteen-fifties. This poem was succeeded by a small chapbook entitled New Poems. These poems were very different from her social poetry of the Thirties and her lyrics of the Twenties. The poems expressed two new and not particularly productive ways of looking at the world: pessimism and escapism. The poems of New Poems can all

[12]Northrop Frye, "Letters In Canada," University of Toronto Quarterly, 20 (1951), 259.

[13]Linda Rogers, "The Two Seasons: Collected Poems," Books In Canada, 2 (1973), 50.

be classified in one or the other of these categories. In the pessimistic category are "On Seeing," "Generation," "After Hiroshima," and "The Dark Runner." In these poems Livesay has completely reversed her former attitude: instead of seeing man as a creature developing towards maturity and responsibility, man is now a pawn in the forces which control him and he can only seek respite in brief glimpses of a better life. In the poem "On Seeing," Livesay writes:

> The inward eye begins as infantile,
> Sees only the broad outline of the self;
> Until some blinding day
> When stricken on Damascus way
> The details are revealed:
> Gnarled hands of age, distorted love,
> The skin of sickness stretched upon a soul;
> The look "I hate," the voice "I scorn"
> The cry upon the deadly thorn:
>
> This clarity is mercy for our sight:
> Deformed, we seek the therapy of light.[14]

In New Poems, pessimism concerning man's future is counterpointed by an escapism from social and political concerns. This escapism manifests itself in witty attitudes towards art and in a negation of the world outside the purely private concerns of the poet. Poems such as "Genii," "Bartok and the Geranium," and "Winter Song" fall into this category. In "Genii," escapism is manifested in the private dream of an unknown place to which the

[14]Dorothy Livesay, "On Seeing," New Poems (Toronto: Emblem Books, 1955), [p. 3]. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as NP.

poet can run from her cares. Livesay writes:

> I dream of California, never seen:
> Gold globes of oranges, lantern lemons
> Grapefruit moving in slow moons,
> Saucers of roundness
> Catapulting colour.[15]

"Bartok and the Geranium" is based upon a metaphysical wit and a parody of music. The conceit of the poem is in the triumph of the lowly geranium over the mad wildness of the music. Livesay writes:

> Yet in this room, this moment now
> These to gather breathe and be:
> She, essence of serenity,
> He in a mad intensity
> Soars beyond sight
> Then hurls, lost Lucifer,
> From heaven's height.
>
> And when he's done, he's out:
> She lays a lip against the glass
> And preens herself in light.[16]

"Winter Song " represents a retreat by Livesay to Imagism - a retreat because she concludes the poem with an essentially insignificant question. This poem is beautifully crafted, but lacks the incisiveness and passionate attitude of the poems of Green Pitcher. In "Winter Song," Livesay writes:

> Clouds close over
> Your cool covey
> Sunshine marches
> From your shadow

[15]Dorothy Livesay, "Genii," NP, [p. 1].

[16] _____, "Bartok and the Geranium," NP, [p. 2].

And deeper than flash
Of fin in well
Your thoughts dot, dash -
But never tell.

O when will you freeze
Glassy, clear
Frost-breathing image
On polished air?[17]

In the nineteen-fifties with her volume New Poems, Livesay was writing more than ever before out of a distinctly personal and subjective viewpoint. Because of her disillusionment with political and social conditions, Livesay during this period turned inwards for the impetus to write. The poems of this volume strike the reader as being more 'modern' than those of either her Imagist or social-realist periods. Livesay experimented here with the craft of poetry. She tightened her use of words to combine several images in one line, as in "Genii":

I summon up the roller-coasting south,
Shake the sun's lion paw![18]

Livesay also began to write out of a private mystical experience. Like many modern poets, she wrote of the poet's uniqueness - his essentially private and special character. In the poem "Other," she wrote:

But do not show me! For I know
The country I caress:
A place where none shall trespass
None possess:

[17] Dorothy Livesay, "Winter Song," NP, [p. 8].

[18] _____, "Genii," NP, [p. 2].

A mainland mastered
From its inaccess.[19]

Her lyric poems during this period became more complex, more structured. Instead of the simple song and dance forms of the earlier work, Livesay used subtler rhythms and more philosophical themes. In "Nocturne," she wrote:

All springs, wild crying with the wood's mauve bells
Anemone, hepatica
Trembling to feel the fanning leaf;
Breast aginst bark, the sap's ascent
Burning the blood with bold green fire . . .

All autumns, solitary season,
Treading the leaves, treading the time
Shredding the soul of its last hope:
Autumn stripped deception to the bone
Left me as animal, alone.

All seasons were of light,
Stricken and blazing,
Only now the shout
Of knowledge hurls, amazing:
O bind me with ropes of darkness,
Bind me with your long night![20]

The poems of this volume represent a distinct change in Livesay's attitudes towards life and art. Stylistically, they show that she was crafting her poems more carefully, and that she was using more classical forms, increasing her use of several images in a single line, and attempting to embody a single idea in each poem as a proposition illustrated by myriad images. Theor-

[19]Dorothy Livesay, "Other," NP, [p. 2].

[20]_____, "Nocturne," NP, [p. 11].

etically, she had exchanged political and social themes for an exploration of the inner self. Emotionally, the poems are no longer hopeful or optimistic, nor are they connected to the larger world outside the poet's consciousness. Livesay now writes out of a personal and pessimistic consciousness, which finds solace in escape from the world.

There was little critical comment upon New Poems at the time of its publication, perhaps because of the smallness of its content and circulation. Pacey, who preferred Livesay's personal poetry to her social poetry of the Thirties, wrote of New Poems:

> From her early Imagism she moved through the social revolutionary phase of the 'thirties and early 'forties, and she has now reached a temporary plateau from which she looks down at life with the freshness of early vision but also with the knowledge derived from prolonged observation. The result is a fascinating combination of innocence and experience, of hope and apprehension.[21]

Peter Stevens, writing in the nineteen-sixties, recognized that New Poems represented a low point in Livesay's personal life, when he found a sense of bleakness and depression in these poems. He writes:

> She singled out one of them to illustrate this sense of desperation and it is significant that images of concealment and the closing of windows and doors

[21]Desmond Pacey, review of New Poems, The Fiddlehead, 27 (1956), 23.

occur in the poem. It is in her poem "The Dark Runner."[22]

In that poem Livesay writes:

> The integer is I; integral while
> I'm centered in sun's round:
> But O, how swift the door is swung
> And fumbling darkness found.[23]

One of the positive events which occurred for Livesay during these years was the publication of her Selected Poems in 1957. This volume resulted in more recognition for Livesay as a major Canadian poet. It provided an impetus for critics to reassess Livesay's work over thirty years. It also represented her first large volume of poetry distributed throughout Canada and available to the general public. Finally, Selected Poems represented a sanctioning of Livesay's work through Desmond Pacey's long introduction to the volume, and through Alan Crawley's help and encouragement in the publication of the volume.

Selected Poems contained some previously unpublished poems as well as selections from all of her previous volumes. The new poems in this volume were "Signature," "Of Neighbors," "Chant," "Hymn to Man," "At Sechett," "Lament," "The Traveller," "Wedlock," "The Skin of Time,"

[22]Peter Stevens, "Out of the Silence and Across the Distance: The Poetry of Dorothy Livesay," Queen's Quarterly, 78 (1971), 587.

[23]Dorothy Livesay, "The Dark Runner," NP, [p. 7].

and "On Looking Into Henry Moore." These poems, like those of New Poems, were personal and subjective in their perspective, and they again appear to be written from a pessimistic and despairing attitude. Included in the poems was an ode to Livesay's father, which showed her preoccupation with death during this period. She writes:

> And now unmoving in this Spartan room
> The hand still speaks:
> After the brain was fogged
> And the tight lips tighter shut,
> After the shy appraising eyes
> Relinquished fire for the sea's green gaze -
> The hand still breathes, fastens its hold on life;
> Demands the whole, establishes the strife.
>
> What moved me, was the way your hand
> Lay cool in mine, not withering;
> As bird still breathes, and stream runs clear -
> So your hand; your dead hand, my dear.[24]

The concluding poem of Selected Poems, entitled "On Looking Into Henry Moore," marks a new departure in Livesay's work. This new direction involved Livesay's use of the images of male and female to illustrate the duality of existence. Livesay had previously worked from an antithetical viewpoint in the Twenties with her images of fire and ice, and in the Thirties with the images of day and night. But in "On Looking Into Henry Moore," Livesay is for the first time explicit about the relationship of the poet's work to her femininity and

[24]Dorothy Livesay, "Lament," Selected Poems of Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryerson, 1957), p. 59. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as SP.

sexuality. This theme would be used extensively in her poetry of the nineteen-sixties, and in this poem it represents a departure from the unrelieved pessimism of Livesay's other poems of the Fifties. In the poem Livesay writes:

> The fire in the farthest hills
> Is where I'd burn myself to bone:
> Clad in the armour of the sun
> I'd stand anew, alone.
>
> Take off this flesh, this hasty dress
> Prepare my half-self for myself:
> One unit, as a tree or stone
> Woman in man, and man in womb.[25]

Critical commentary on Selected Poems was generally positive, with some few exceptions. One of these exceptions was Norman Endicott's sarcastic comment in the Tamarack Review. He wrote:

> I have referred to the earlier poems as fancies. With practice Dorothy Livesay has developed verbal skill in the use of very short lines. I do not often find much more, but I should perhaps put more emphasis on their maker's generous and liberal type of mind.[26]

Munro Beattie, writing later in the Literary History of Canada, said:

> The Selected Poems (1957) displays chronologically the evidence of a widening and deepening sensibility with which her powers of expression have admirably kept pace. Poems which most clearly show her

[25]Dorothy Livesay, "On Looking Into Henry Moore," SP, p. 82.

[26]Norman Endicott, "Poetry Chronicle," Tamarack Review, 4 (1957), 83.

sensitivity and craftsmanship are "London Revisited," "Page One," "Lament," and "Bartok and the Geranium."[27]

The most complimentary comments on Livesay's work came from Desmond Pacey, who wrote the introduction to Selected Poems:

> Having achieved such recognition, some writers might have been content to rest on their laurels. Not so Dorothy Livesay, whose energy and enthusiasm are indefatigable. Since 1949 she has published many poems in the magazines and two chapbooks of verse (Call My People Home, 1950 and New Poems, 1955), has prepared an anthology of her poems to be read on the Trans-Canada Network of the C.B.C., and has compiled this book of her selected poems.
>
> It is impossible to predict just what turn Dorothy Livesay's poetry will take in the future, but we can be confident that it will continue to develop. Since her earliest youth she has been constantly experimenting and growing in skill and power. From her early imagism she has moved through the social revolutionary phase of the thirties and early forties and has now reached a temporary plateau from which she looks down at life with fresh but sophisticated vision. The result is a fascinating combination of innocence and experience, of hope and fear, of faith and doubt. She now proclaims her faith in man, but recognizes human fallibility and the need for some supernatural guidance; she still believes in the need for social regeneration but admits its difficulty and necessary gradualness; she believes that the world of nature is essentially good and beautiful but recognizes its latent power to destroy. In a world which often seems in imminent danger of disintigration she lyrically proclaims the values of love, joy and art which are at once the justification and the salvation of the world.[28]

Livesay appears to have agreed with Pacey's interpretation, as she later sub-titled her Collected

[27]Munro Beattie, "Poetry 1920-1935," Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 741.

[28]Desmond Pacey, "Introduction," SP, pp. xviii-xix.

Poems as "The Two Seasons," explaining that the 'seasons' were those of innocence and experience.[29]

The nineteen-fifties represented a low point in Livesay's life and work. She was disillusioned with politics, felt tied to home and children, and was pessimistic both about her own future and the future of the world.[30] Her poetry of this period was adequate technically, but lacked any counterpoint to its pessimism. In "On Looking Into Henry Moore," there is a glimpse of the regeneration in Livesay's poetry which was to occur in the Sixties. Two specific directions had been solidified in the Fifties; that of the oral documentary poem, and that of the personal love lyric. The nineteen-sixties would reveal a new force and clarity in Livesay's work. Robin Skelton writes:

> After 1956 the earlier prolixity and syntactical disarray seem to have been almost entirely conquered. The punctuation remains arbitrary on occasion, but the poems have a new force and clarity, a new directness and sense of form.[31]

In 1959 Livesay left Canada for London and Paris, and later for a UNESCO appointment in Zambia. She did

[29]Dorothy Livesay, "Foreward," Collected Poems: The Two Seasons (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. v.

[30]_____, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 45.

[31]Robin Skelton, "Livesay's Two Seasons," Canadian Literature, 58 (1973), 81.

not return until 1963. This period of travel and her release from home duties gave Livesay new impetus and inspiration for writing poetry. The pessimism and escapism, the political despair of the nineteen-fifties would give way in the nineteen-sixties to a poetry of freedom, passion and involvement with the world.

CHAPTER V

THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES

The nineteen-sixties marked an abrupt change in Livesay's life. She travelled to England and France, and then went to Zambia as a teacher for CUSO.[1] When she returned to Canada, she first went home to Vancouver, where she studied for her Master's degree in Education at U.B.C. From 1966 onwards she moved often, taking teaching positions first at the University of New Brunswick, and then at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.[2] Through her travels and her teaching experience, Livesay came into contact with younger poets throughout the country.

[1]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 46.

[2]Supplement to the Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 216.

From 1958 to 1959 Livesay studied in London. During this period she wrote her "Poems From Exile," which were not collected together until 1972 with the publication of her Collected Poems. This move from Canada had a profound effect upon Livesay's work, as it coincided with personal and family changes, and thus provided both a physical and emotional severance of the poet from the past. She writes that:

> It required a tremendous, traumatic break before I could escape from the defeatism of the Fifties. The opportunity came when I won an educational fellowship from the Canada Council, for a year's study in London. Ironically, the stimulation of that environment was countered by deep personal loss . . . the sudden death of my husband and the growing independence of my children - one working, one away at boarding school. Yet, for the first time in some twenty years, I was a free woman.[3]

After her year in London, Livesay went to Paris for a short period and then to Zambia with CUSO in 1960. From 1960 to 1963 she taught in Zambian schools. The effect of her African experiences was to be found in her new awareness of rhythm and the dance in poetry, as well as in a revival of her optimistic social outlook. She writes that:

> . . . Africa set me dancing again! My students, I discovered, woke up singing; no sooner was their breakfast of "mealie-meal" over when they would cluster in a common room, turn on the record-player, and dance. Most of their dances were unsophisticated,

[3]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 46.

> jive and jitterbug; it was easy for my feet to catch the beat. Best of all, you didn't need a partner. You could dance opposite a girl student as easily as opposite a youth. Not a dance of touch, but one where the rhythm itself created an unseen wire holding two people together in the leap of movement. I had never been happier![4]

Livesay's trip to Zambia provided a new impetus for writing. For the first time in many years she was completely free to do as she pleased. This feeling of freedom was to heighten all of her experiences in Africa. The rhythms of Africa were less restrictive than those of either traditional poets or free-verse modernists, and these rhythms were to be reflected in Livesay's poetry of the Sixties. Livesay would also bring a sense of immediacy to her poetry because of the many new experiences which were occurring in her travels. Her poetry became a record of these experiences.[5]

In her African poems, Livesay began to internalize the ideas of the song and dance, and began to move away from the traditional lyric form. She found that through manipulation of the phrase, rather than the verse, she could achieve a sense of syncopated rhythm in her poetry. From the political orientations of the Thirties and Forties and the pessimism of her poetry of the Fifties, Livesay began to move towards a celebration of life. The sense of

[4]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 46.

[5]Ibid., p. 47.

personal and poetic freedom pervaded her work.

When Dorothy Livesay returned to Canada in 1963, she felt that she had been away from the Canadian literary scene for a long time. She was not sure of the worth of her poetry, and she felt it necessary to seek other opinions as to its value. She writes:

> At first I was extremely hesitant about showing this poem [The Colour of God's Face] to anyone, for I had long been out of the Canadian literary scene. I scarcely believed I was a poet anymore. However, one afternoon my old friend Anne Marriot, the poet from North Vancouver, came over for lunch. On the back of the lawn, sitting in the sun, I had the courage to read her a section, "The Prophetess." "Why," she said, "it's fine, exciting! You've really got the feel of it."[6]

From this encouragement, Livesay began to take further advantage of her new-found freedom. She formed connections with younger poets in Vancouver, accepted teaching positions, and travelled a great deal across Canada. From her new connections she gained more self-confidence as a poet. She writes that:

> One has to be believed in, or perish! From then on I began to write, stirred also by contact with the Black Mountain group and by discussions with Milton Acorn. The next year I fell deeply in love and poems "sprang from my loins," as it were. All the yearning to sing and dance revived again; but this time I did so with more confidence. This time I spoke out of immediate experience. I disguised nothing.[7]

[6]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

[7]Ibid., p. 47.

Livesay had returned to Canada full of energy, and this energy is reflected in her work during that period. In the Sixties Livesay not only taught, studied and wrote a thesis for her Master's Degree at U.B.C.,[8] travelled and edited magazines, but also produced The Colour of God's Face, The Unquiet Bed, and Plainsongs. All three of these books marked a radical change in Livesay's perspectives from the pessimism and despair of the nineteen-fifties toward an optimistic, joyful view of poetry as song and dance.

The Colour of God's Face was originally published in 1964. Livesay took notes for this poem while in Zambia, and recorded her experiences of attending an African wedding and funeral to use in the poem.[9] The poem was written on her return to Canada in 1963, and was later revised and entitled "Zambia" in The Unquiet Bed. The poem is a documentary of Livesay's experiences in Zambia seen through African eyes.

The structure of The Colour of God's Face has some connections with the earlier poem Call My People Home. Like the earlier poem, this documentary consists of a series of poems, loosely connected together by a central

[8]Dorothy Livesay, Rhythm and Sound in Contemporary Canadian Poetry (Vancouver: M.Ed. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965), Curriculum Vitae.

[9]_____, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

perspective. In the case of The Colour of God's Face, this central perspective which links the incidents of the poem is the narrator's voice, which is feminine. The feminine point of view pervades the whole poem and links the different ceremonies and rituals of the tribe.

The original poem consists of four major sections entitled "The Land," "The People," "The Prophetess," and "The Leader." The opening of the poem reflects the feminine viewpoint, as the land itself is seen as a woman. Livesay writes:

> Implacable woman
> the land reclines: dusty leaf
> heart of stillness mummified stillness
> black[10]

The theme which also serves to connect the sections of the poem is that of the dance - the free African dance which is linked both to the people and the land. Livesay writes that:

> the land is dancing![11]

and,

> O wild fig tree
> you dance in fire and ashes
> over world's mouth
> dance.[12]

[10]Dorothy Livesay, The Colour of God's Face (Vancouver: Author, 1964), p. 1. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as CGF.

[11]Ibid., p. 1.

[12]Ibid., p. 2.

The dance is linked with the African drum rhythms. The rhythm of the drum symbolizes the fertility of the land, and human sexuality. Livesay writes:

> At the periphery and fringe
> of villages where drumming swings
> the hand that does the drumming
> moves the world
> meets sun halfway
> and hauls him over the rim
>
> The hand that does the drumming
> drums man home
> to womb and woman
> beats that rhythm
> on black curving thighs
> thrusts love upward[13]

The drum rhythms are also linked to the images of woman and nature. Nature being feminine also, the beating of the drum is a hymn to the African mother. Livesay writes:

> The drums beat
> tentative questioning
> the drums come out of hiding
> new strong ones, bold ones
> the drums beat louder and louder
> for you, Lenchina
> standing by the fire now
> short and stumpy
> rooted as a tree
> a tree singing the new hosannah
> Lumpa in the highest . .
> lumpa the drums beat
> lumpa lumpa
> lumpa lumpa lumpa[14]

Livesay's use of sound in The Colour of God's Face

[13]Dorothy Livesay, CGF, p. 5.

[14]Ibid., p. 9.

is more intricate and pervasive than in her earlier poetry. The sound of the drum is always present. In addition, Livesay uses different patterns of sound as variations upon the drum beats of the poem. Basically, these sound patterns involve repetitions of words and word-endings, and repetitions of phrases. The sound of the cry or the wail, either in ecstasy or in pain, is set against the idea of silence. Livesay attempts in this poem to catch the feeling of silence between the drum beats in her use of unpunctuated open lines which seem to fade into silence. The best example of Livesay's use of these techniques of silence and sound is in the section "Funeral," a part of the longer section "The People." She writes:

> Not the women wailing
> sitting in groups, wailing
> in hysterical fixed pitch;
> not the men standing aloof
> correctly silent;
> not sultry dust
> yellow-brown, borne
> wayward by wind
> hither and hither
> round the house
> round the thatched house
> where the boy ran[15]

In The Colour of God's Face, Livesay was attempting to capture the feeling of her experiences in Zambia; the land, the people, the religion, the open rhythms and sounds of the area. In doing this, Livesay also became a post-modern, rather than a modern, writer. She was experimenting

[15]Dorothy Livesay, CGF, pp. 3-4.

with an open form of poetry which gathered into it the experience itself, rather than the philosophic distillation of the experience. Her attitude in this poem is that of the phenomenologist, rather than of the rationalist.

The Colour of God's Face was published privately in Vancouver by Dorothy Livesay, and it did not receive critical attention until the publication of the retitled version, "Zambia," in The Unquiet Bed. Hugh MacCallum, writing in The University of Toronto Quarterly, noticed the phenomenalistic aspect of the poem. He wrote:

> A continuous awareness of process, of action and reaction, is conveyed by the reliance on verbs. When, as in her African poem "Zambia," she finds a subject which permits close attention both to image and ritual act, the result is memorable indeed.[16]

The feminine viewpoint of the poem was elucidated by Doris Leland, who wrote:

> The African mother, and prophetess, becomes a saviour figure, replacing the "white man's God." It is her death and resurrection through a natural force, rather than through the forces of society and the supernatural, which makes her acceptable to the African as saviour figure.[17]

Several new directions in Livesay's poetry can be traced to the publication of The Colour of God's Face. In this poem, Livesay used the technique of immediate

[16]Hugh MacCallum, "Letters In Canada (Poetry)," University of Toronto Quarterly, 37 (1967-1968), 369.

[17]Doris Leland, "Dorothy Livesay: Poet of Nature," Dalhousie Review, 51 (1971), 411.

documentation of the event. She moved from a philosophical or political perspective to a perspective which incorporated the post-modern concern with immediacy, process and action with her earlier imagist perspective. For the first time Livesay also exploited the erotic aspects of femininity. She dealt with sexuality in a frank and direct manner. The Unquiet Bed reveals that Livesay had continued to develop her writing along these lines.

The Unquiet Bed was published in 1967, and unlike The Colour of God's Face, was a major volume which received wide critical and public attention. Feminism and Canadian nationalism interested Livesay during this period. Her exploration of the male-female relationship was radical because of her explicitness and her departure from the veiled attitudes of the past.

The poems of The Unquiet Bed consisted mainly of short lyrics (with the exception of "Zambia"). Livesay attributed her technique in these poems to the influences of the Black Mountain poets and the Tish poets.[18] She began to subscribe to the attitudes of Olson and Creeley, in that the poem was to be described as a "field" which gathered into it the raw data of experience. In addition, she saw some of her poems as being written unconsciously,

[18]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

as coming directly from the dream state.[19] However, these techniques of immediacy and openness of rhythm were also characteristic of The Colour of God's Face. It may simply have been the rhythms and sounds encountered in Africa, that had the most profound effect upon Dorothy Livesay's new attitude towards poetry.

Livesay was beginning to experiment with the description of action in objects. Her poetry became less philosophical and didactic, and instead became evocative. An example of this post-modern attitude in The Unquiet Bed is in the poem "Soccer Game," in which Livesay used the image of the ball as an evocation of human communication. She writes:

> O let the ball be
> lightsome, curl of light
> tossed as a halo
> head to head
> knocked as a message knocks
> between two men
> who wheel and spin
> manoeuvring
> feet head
> head feet
> but hands forever tied
> unless "offside"
> and onto sidelines
> hugged to breast
> round world, bounced
> and then released.
>
> And once again
> into the melee, each
> man tied to each

[19] Kent Thompson, review of The Unquiet Bed, The Fiddlehead, 73 (1967), 81.

his shadow
dodging him
bogging and stopping him
round
round the field a dance
to the ball's bounce.[20]

Livesay used an Imagist technique in "Flower Music," a lyric in which three flowers; cyclamen, geranium and peony, are described. The description of the flowers leads outside the immediate field through symbolic association to sexuality, procreation, and male dominance. Livesay writes:

My neighbour's peonies
blow white
with spilt blood
at the centre
fragrant
inviolate
What spite: the flowers
I have grown tyrannically
that never blossom
he fathers forth
so light
so silken[21]

Whereas Livesay treated male-female relationships in poetry from Green Pitcher onwards, it is only in the Sixties that she uses explicit eroticism in her poetry. In The Unquiet Bed the sexual act is seen as a kind of rebirth, and also as a celebration of life and movement. Sometimes Livesay uses a gentle and playful humour in her treatment of sexuality. The image of the sexual act is

[20]Dorothy Livesay, "Soccer Game," The Unquiet Bed (Toronto: Ryerson, 1967), pp. 3-4. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as UB.

[21]_____, "Flower Music," UB, p. 35.

linked with the image of the dance of ritual celebration. The image of rebirth forms the focus of the poem "The Touching." Livesay writes:

> Each time you come
> to touch caress
> me
> I'm born again
> deaf dumb
> each time
> I whirl
> part of some mystery
> I did not make or earn
> that seizes me
> each time
> I drown
> in your identity
> I am not I
> but root
> shell
> fire
> each time you come
> I tear through the womb's room
> give birth
> alone
> and yet
> deep in the dark
> earth
> I am the one wrestling
> the element re-born.[22]

A wry humour is found in the treatment of male-female relationships in "And Give Us Our Trespasses." The more serious theme of the poem is in its conclusion, "Forgive us our/distances,"[23] but with a playful erotic quality Livesay writes:

> My tongue
> was too long
> my kiss
> too short

[22]Dorothy Livesay, "The Touching," UB, p. 35.

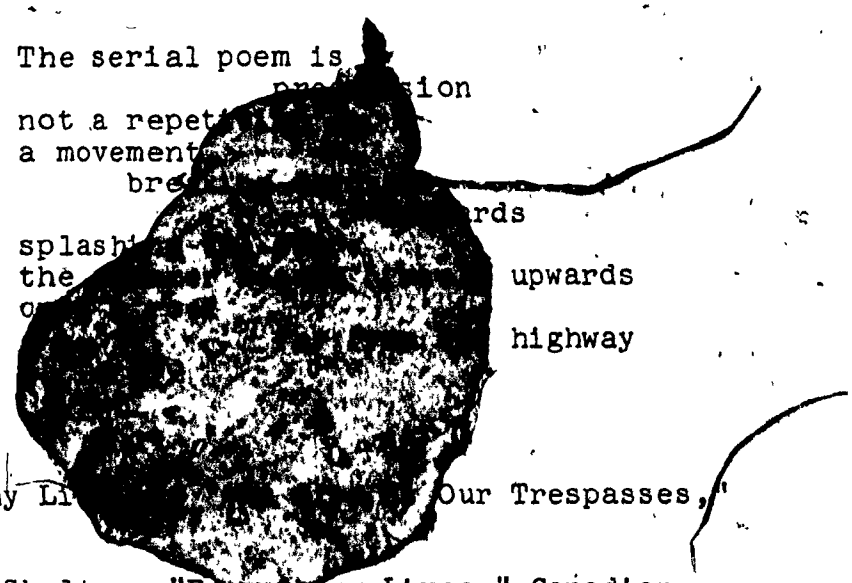
[23]_____, "And Give Us Our Trespasses," UB, p. 50.

inadequate I shrank
from perfection[24]

Livesay's love poems in The Unquiet Bed link sexuality with human awareness and transformation. Robin Skelton has written:

> Moreover, instead of presenting us with erotic intensity as the heart of the matter, she reveals that the erotic is part of a total transformation of human awareness and the individual's sense of identity.[25]

Livesay's close association with other writers, particularly from the Canadian and American west coast, has often been used even by Livesay herself, to explain the changes of style which occurred with The Unquiet Bed. Livesay used the terminology of the Black Mountain and Tish poets, as well as attempting to write the 'unconscious' poem coming directly from the dream. In a poem for Jack Spicer, entitled "Making The Poem," Livesay elucidated her new theory of the genesis of poetry. She writes:



The serial poem is
pro ion
not a repet
a movement
bre
rds
splash
the upwards
o
highway

[24]Dorothy Li Our Trespasses," UB, p. 49.

[25]Robin Skelton, "Everything Lives," Canadian Literature, 35 (1968), 91.

iv.

I wake:
it's middle of night, danger
is the poem. Here
it's been waiting, counting, am I
ready?[26]

Several critics have denied that Livesay's poetry is derivative in the sense that she herself used that word. The publication of The Colour of God's Face before these new connections with younger poets had been made by Livesay underscores this point. Kent Thompson has written:

> For example, when she talks of her "Making the Poem - For Jack Spicer," Miss Livesay insists that it was written nearly automatically, that it simply 'arrived' one night when she was half asleep. But look how it arrived - in full possession of poetic craft. It arrived in metaphor, in balanced cadence, in developing imagistic analysis of experience. The poem's techniques deny, it seems to me, Miss Livesay's denials.[27]

Afred Purdy has written, in the same vein:

> If, as Livesay says, verbalizing techniques of Creeley and Duncan have given her this human dimension, I applaud them - but prefer to give credit to Dorothy herself. The love poems in this book strike a wise, witty, and warm counterpoint to the woman herself.[28]

It seems that Livesay's associations with West Coast poets while she was writing the lyrics of The Unquiet Bed constituted a confirmation of her technique used in The Colour of God's Face, rather than a precedent

[26]Dorothy Livesay, "Making The Poems," UB, pp. 22-23.

[27]Kent Thompson, review of The Unquiet Bed, The Fiddlehead, 73 (1967), 81.

[28]Alfred Purdy, "Aiming Low," Tamarack Review, 47 (1968), 89.

and lesson in writing poetry. Livesay has said that she was "deeply in love"[29] during this time. Like The Colour of God's Face, the erotic poetry of The Unquiet Bed constituted an attempt to record and transmit that personal experience with its attendant insights, to others.

In 1969 another chapbook of poetry, entitled Plainsongs, was published by Fiddlehead Books. The poems of Plainsongs were an extension of the themes and the lyric quality of The Unquiet Bed. Livesay supplied a dictionary definition of these poems in the introduction to the volume. She defined her poems as, "Vocal music composed in medieval modes and in free rhythm . . . and sung in unison."[30]

In this volume Livesay assimilated her earlier techniques with post-modern techniques. She extended her use of the song to include an Imagist perspective in such poems as "The Uninvited." She wrote:

> I walk beside you
> trace
> a shadow's shade
> skating on silver
> hear
> another voice
> singing under ice[31]

[29]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance," Canadian Literature, 41 (1969), 47.

[30]_____, Plainsongs (Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1969), p. 5. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as PL.

[31]_____, "The Uninvited," PL, p. 12.

The title of her previous volume, The Unquiet Bed, was used as the central image in the poem "The Cave":

> Taking my body so
> on the unquiet bed
> you pretend to care
> save the act done, said[32]

In Plainsongs, Livesay also began to consider the theme of old age in poems such as "Sorcery," "Dream," "Objet Trouvés" and "The Operation." In the poem "Sorcery," old age was denied in the youthful joy of the dance. Livesay writes:

> Not to be touched and swept
> by your arm's force
> gives me the ague
> turns me into a witch
>
> O engineer of spring!
> magic magic me
> out of insanity
> from scarecrow into girl again
> then dance me toss me
> catch![33]

Set against the images of old age and sterility was the image of the sixties youth, symbolizing freedom and innocence. In "The Metal and the Flower," Livesay writes:

> The young celebrate once more
> innocence and experience
> proclaim in their blue jeans
> jackets and long hair
> the right to own love
> to distribute its blossoms

[32]Dorothy Livesay, "The Cave," PL, p. 7.

[33]_____, "Sorcery," PL, p. 9.

For People. With New Poems and Selected Poems, Livesay began to be concerned with private life; her poems here are the most pessimistic of her career and they reflect the ennui of the late Forties and Fifties in Canada. Travel in Europe and teaching in Zambia in the early Sixties gave another new perspective to Livesay; that of the independence and freedom which she found in her personal life, and the experience of being confronted by a totally different culture. Upon her return to Canada, Livesay's poetry entered a post-modern phase of freer rhythm and structure, optimism of outlook, and phenomenalism in philosophical attitude.

In 1973 Livesay published her first collection of short stories entitled A Winnipeg Childhood. These stories are autobiographical. Livesay describes the life of a young girl growing up in Winnipeg during the First World War. She invokes the customs and ceremonies of childhood with romanticism and nostalgia. The theme of the collection is found in the poem "Isolate," which opens the book. Livesay writes:

> To find direction
> the only child creates a web of action
> pulling them in, to play
> new, unknown games
> making herself a centre.[13]

[13]Dorothy Livesay, "Isolate," Beginnings. A Winnipeg Childhood. Toronto: Peguis, 1973, p. 1.

A second theme of these stories is found in "Prelude." As in "the two seasons" of her Collected Poems, Livesay is influenced by the passing of seasons in nature; in the innocence and experience invoked by the passage of time. In this story she writes:

> The drama of Winnipeg is in its seasons; its weather. The city cannot rely on mountains or hills, even, for variety; nothing but the endless flatness of prairie grass surrounds it, there where the streets end. Especially in its early sprawling days the city could not rely on trees for shade, except along the low wooded slopes of the Red River or the Assiniboine. In the raw young neighborhoods newly planted elms, oaks, and maples struggled to grow window-high; evergreens were rare. But summer, with its intense heat, all-powerful sun, ever deepening blue sky and the long, cool twilights lasting nearly to midnight, summer pulled the child into its drama. Nights might be lit with the aurora borealis drawing, with phosphorescent fingers, vast designs upon the heavens. Or, at evening, the intolerable blanket of heat would suddenly be broken by gusts of wind, tearing up dust and leaves. Clouds would loom on the horizon in purple and black formations, rumbling with thunder; until loud as fireworks the rain would explode, great curtains of it ripped open by forked lightning; and down the barren asphalt road a pelting river of rain would sweep dust and leaves into the gutters.[14]

Like her earlier volume, The Documentaries, A Winnipeg Childhood reveals an attempt on Livesay's part to re-create and to document the past. Her stories do not fall into the post-modern theories of writing, but they do reflect that continuous romantic preoccupation with the world of the child which has always been an

[14]Dorothy Livesay, "Preludes," Beginnings. A Winnipeg Childhood (Toronto: Peguis, 1973), p. 5.

integral part of Livesay's work.

In her latest volume of poetry, Ice Age, published in 1975, Livesay shows that she has been greatly influenced by post-modern poetics. She dedicates this volume to "my youngers,"[15] and the volume is published by the avant-garde Press Porcepic. The ice age to which Livesay refers is both the new age of technology with its new ways of destruction, as well as the more personal ice age of old age. She writes that:

> What happens to our living
> is death
> to eating
> is hunger
> to crying is silence
>
> We, born to flourish
> in a heyday of sun
> and tumble to rubble
> when the ice age comes[16].

However, Livesay consistently maintains a duality in her poetry between the objective and the subjective, the rational and emotional aspects of existence. The image of ice is balanced by the image of fire; old age is balanced by passion for life. In "Cassandra," she writes:

> And then I saw my own
> shrunk arm . . .

[15] Dorothy Livesay, dedication, Ice Age (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1975), n.p. Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated as IA.

[16] _____, "Unitas," IA, p. 18.

after sixty winters whittled down
to the bare bone

And I cried to the young
Beware!
Look at Yeats!
rattling in his grave
in Ireland, bloody Ireland
where the poems dare not push
into the light again.[17]

Livesay's social commentary has become more personal than were her moralistic protest poems of the Thirties and Forties. In 1937 she addressed her poem "Spain," to her middle-class readers who:

Can count peace dear, when it has driven
Your sons to struggle for this grim, new heaven[18]

In Ice Age, she uses a more personal, straightforward and less moralistic tone:

What happens to Allende
happens to you and me
who have not the courage
to take the knife, the gun
before that enemy
has girded on
his sinister plan:[19]

Livesay has entered the post-modern world of senseless violence. While there is a rejection by Livesay of chaos and anarchism, she wants to see:

trans-generationists
who take on

[17] Dorothy Livesay, "Cassandra," IA, p. 43.

[18] _____, "Spain," Collected Poems: The Two Seasons (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), p. 98.

[19] _____, "Unitas," IA, p. 18.

the motorcycle gang
the hold-up guy
kidnappers and hi-jackers
and simply bomb the town
with the power of their ten arms.[20]

For Livesay, as for some younger poets, the old distinctions between war and peace, humour and seriousness, the subject and the object, have been destroyed by the instantaneousness of communication. In "Perspectives," she asks whether,

distortion
is a better way of seeing?[21]

In order to reconcile these opposite perspectives, Livesay returns to the image of the dance. She writes:

The answer might be: to re-stream?
leap on that new plane
of being
become the dancer
in motion forever
dancing his own dream.[22]

In Ice Age, Livesay has begun to reconcile the dichotomies of subject and object. The viewer and the object being viewed are united in the instant of perception, and the poet becomes a part of the physical world. Livesay writes that:

We live
only to submerge.[23]

[20]Dorothy Livesay, "Salute to Monty Python," IA, p. 15.

[21]_____, "Perspectives," IA, p. 23.

[22]_____, "Of Chains," IA, p. 51.

[23]_____, "Surfaces," IA, p. 73.

However, unlike the younger poets with whom she has associated, particularly with Nichol and Bissett, Livesay as a poet does remain outside of the poem. She explains and elucidates phenomena, rather than cataloguing them or treating her own existence as part of the poem's 'happening.' In this sense, her poetry is modern rather than post-modern in that the poet's role is that of translator, of explainer to her audience.

Critical comments to date on Livesay's latest collection of poems have been appreciative and laudatory. Peter Such, who has felt that the personal dichotomies of love versus distances between people form the focii of Livesay's work, wrote of Ice Age:

> From her structure and titling it's obvious that her intention was to write a book with a less personal thrust: that of the transition of generations. We are, of course, into the new "Ice Age," as the title poem suggests - an age in which even our hearts seem to be made of glacial debris. I would like to think, though, that this theme is simply an extension of the "hidden agenda" in these poems that I've tried to extrapolate.[24]

There is, however, a mature optimism in the poems of Ice Age which Such appears to be denying. Katherine Glovier seems to have seen these more optimistic themes of reconciliation and grace in the poems of the volume. She writes:

Livesay communicates not the petulance which might

[24]Peter Such, "Three Grand Old Parties," Books In Canada, 5 (February 1976), 10.

see the deterioration of the world in her own aging, but the reconciliation of the soaring and the descent, of gratitude and rage which is a personal identification with cosmic wintering.[25]

In Ice Age, Livesay has confronted the death of a civilization and her own death. Her pessimism concerning civilization as we know it is revealed in the poem "Ice Age." It is a pessimism concerning society, political action and its value, and man's pride. She writes:

> Worse than an animal
> man tortures his prey
> given sun's energy
> and fire's blaze
> he has ripped away
> leaf
> bird
> flower
> is moving to destroy
> the still centre
> heart's power[26]

But the pessimism is balanced by the possibility of individual peace of mind. In a prayer entitled "Windows," Livesay contemplates the end of the individual. She writes:

> Deliver these ears
> from voices
> bondage of language
> deliver me
> from devious thought
> a woman gone through drought
> now fully whole
> blessedly
> complete

[25]Katherine Glovier, "A Grande-Dame's Wide-Angle Vision," Canadian Forum, 662 (June-July 1976), 50.

[26]Dorothy Livesay, "Ice Age," IA, p.70.

Let me see through
the windows

beyond[27]

Like Yeats's Last Poems, Livesay's Ice Age is an exploration of the themes of old age, death and the rejection of the coming society. Like Yeats, Livesay continues to celebrate sexuality in this volume, but she lacks the raging tone of Yeats in regards to death.[28] Her attitude is one of calm acceptance, of tranquility, and of continual optimism for the survival of the individual. Her attitude is summarized in the words:

O, to survive
what must we do
to believe?
In the trees, my grandson.
In these roots. In these leaves.[29]

[27]Dorothy Livesay, "Windows," IA, p. 65.

[28]Compare Livesay's "Windows" (above), with W.B. Yeats, "Under Ben Bulben," Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 397-401.

[29]Dorothy Livesay, "Grandmother," IA, p. 33.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Several different aspects of Livesay's poetry have been dealt with in the thesis. Her poetry from the Twenties and Thirties was the most derivative of her work, and the influences of other poets and poetic movements on Livesay is discussed in the first two chapters. In her work of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies Livesay begins to make her own thematic and technical assumptions.[1] From the late nineteen-fifties onward, she integrates romantic, modern and post-modern attitudes towards poetry in her unique themes and styles. In the nineteen-sixties she also begins a process of revisionism. Her own poetry is redefined as being 'documentary' rather than 'narrative;' 'modern dance' rather than 'lyric.' All of these aspects

[1] Frank Davey, "Surviving the Paraphrase," Canadian Literature, 70 (1976), 9-10. See this reference in Chapter I (Introduction).

of her poetry have tended to divide critics into two opposing camps: those who would reject the intense individuality and personal orientations of her poetry, and those who would reject her political and social orientations.

Four major influences on Livesay's work have been documented in the thesis. The first of these is Imagism, which is seen as the turning-point from romanticism to modernism. From the Imagists she read in her childhood - Elinor Wylie, H.D., Harriet Monroe - Livesay derived her technique of simplification and reduction of the idea to the smallest and clearest possible image. She used Imagism as a way of conveying her romantic attitude towards nature in Green Pitcher. Imagism was the ideal theory of poetry with which the young girl could convey her own innocence and sense of wonder in creation.

Secondly, Livesay was somewhat influenced by French and English Symbolism. While she did not appreciate the other-worldliness of the Symboliste movement and its rejection of society and politics, she did incorporate into her work central symbols which form the focii of the poems. Her use of the symbols of earth, air, water and fire are henceforth always connected with the dichotomies of male and female, passivity and passion, in her poems.

In the nineteen-thirties Livesay's political awakening was accompanied by an awareness of the works of

the social realist poets of the period: Auden, Spender, MacNeice, Day-Lewis. From her reading of these poets, Livesay concluded that it was possible to write a politically-oriented, socially aware poetry that was not elevated to the heights of nature or philosophy, but which could put forward the lives of working people in an industrial setting. In this period, with her poems "City Wife," "The Outrider," and "Day and Night," Livesay did not imitate the style of these poets, but she adopted their attitude that poetry should provide social enlightenment.

Finally, Livesay was influenced by the poetry forums and discussions held at the University of British Columbia in the early nineteen-sixties. These forums included poets from the United States - Duncan, Olson and Creeley - and younger poets from the Vancouver area. Livesay felt that their influences contributed to her techniques used in The Unquiet Bed, although it would appear that her experiences in Zambia also injected her poetry with a new freedom of style.

The new post-modern poetry which Livesay read in the Sixties had a profound effect on her attitudes. The nineteen-twenties, the Thirties, Forties and Fifties had been marked by three different types of poetry: Imagist, Social-Realist, and Eliotian Modernist. In the nineteen-sixties Livesay looked for her underlying assumptions about poetry and poetic technique which could distinguish all of her poetry as a single body of work.

The first of these new technical assumptions was derived from her experiences as a teacher in Africa. From the African way of life, from their rhythms and songs, Livesay realized that she had an affinity with a lyrical yet free mode of expression.[1] In her article "Song and Dance," she elucidated this poetic technique. Her poetry, including both her politically-oriented and personal poems, was based upon song and dance; it conveyed within the song and dance a freedom of expression which did not depend upon rigid rhythm and rhyme. Finally, in the nineteen-seventies, Livesay united her personal and public voices in a post-modern phenomenalistic outlook. Whether the poet's eye looked inward to herself or outward to the world, all phenomena were equal in effect, for example:

> what happens to Allende
> happens to you and me[2]

Also in the nineteen-sixties, Livesay began to revise her earlier poetry, not by making major changes in the poems themselves, but by issuing new collections which presented her new outlook. The Documentaries is the best example of this revisionism, as Livesay gathered all of her longer poems from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-sixties together with personal views of the social

[2]Dorothy Livesay, "Unitas," Ice Age (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1975), p. 18.

backgrounds to the poems. The common currents running through all of the poems were their social outlook, their Canadianism, and their historical perspectives. Each poem exemplified a particular state of social development in Canada, and the whole book was to be seen as an historical document. A second example of this kind of revisionism was to be found in Livesay's Collected Poems, as she saw the whole body of her work as exemplifying the dichotomies of innocence and experience.

Attempts by critics to define Livesay's work as either romantic, modern or post-modern have failed. Livesay during her lifetime has shared assumptions about poetry with all three kinds of poets - she has been acquainted with Canadian poets from Sir Charles G.D. Roberts to b.p. Nichol.[3] In her earliest poetry of Green Pitcher, she displayed a Wordsworthian attitude towards nature and towards the child as the "father to man." In her politically-oriented poetry of the Thirties and her more pessimistic poetry of the Fifties she displayed modern outlooks and modern techniques. Her poetry of The Unquiet Bed, Plainsongs, and Ice Age has modern and post-modern aspects. Generally, Livesay's poetry has often been romantic in philosophy. Her poetry has never been rigid

[3]Dorothy Livesay, interview with Susan Wood, 29 April 1977 (see Appendix I).

in form, nor has she ever abandoned all semblance of form.

Livesay's critics appear to have had problems in defining her poetry as a single body of work. Most have had a tendency to reject her longer, socially-oriented poems, and to accept her lyrical and erotic poems. Partly this is because of the unfashionableness of political poetry and political theories of art today. Nevertheless, most critics have failed to distinguish the basic dichotomy of Livesay's work: that she has always looked both inward and outward, and that her social poems are balanced by the silence and isolation of her lyrics.

There are several pervasive characteristics of Livesay's work from 1925 to 1975. One consistency throughout her poetry is in her use of the dialectical form - the antitheses out of which a new synthesis is formed. Another pervasive characteristic is her imitation of modern music in all of her poems, including her documentaries (witness the jazz rhythms of "Day and Night" and the drum rhythms of "The Colour of God's Face"). Livesay's "technical assumption" is to imitate modern song and dance in poetry.

Thematically, Livesay's use of antitheses has revolved around the tension between the silence and isolation of the individual, and the collective activity and progress of society. Livesay's belief in social reconstruction in the Thirties is countered by her sense of

isolation in the Fifties. Other ways of expressing these subjective and objective dichotomies which Livesay uses are in her themes of innocence versus experience, home, friends and personal life versus the collective, and the simultaneous isolation and unification of male and female through love and sex.

Livesay's poetry has been remarkably consistent in its themes and technical assumptions thoughout the years. While she has adapted her style of writing and her subject matter to the timely concerns of herself and her readers, she has never deviated from her major concern: that we are both isolated from and a part of the society and the universe around us, and that through the song and the dance some unification of these antitheses may be found.

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APPENDIX I

DOROTHY LIVESAY INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN WOOD

29 April 1977

(Susan Wood and Dorothy Livesay are abbreviated as [W] and [L]).

W. I want to ask you some biographical and historical questions first. First of all, when you were studying the French Symbolistes at the Sorbonne, were you influenced by Henri Barbusse?

L. There were a group of Canadian students there that year - Leon Edel was there, the Levy sisters from Montreal, Stanley Ryerson and myself. French writers were aligning themselves with the movement against fascism and against war. We never knew any French militant writers but we participated in the demonstrations. We were far too shy and remote to relate ourselves with the French literary world or intellectual world. We were just very insignificant Canadian students studying at the Sorbonne. I have never looked into what was going on with Henri Barbusse and those

French revolutionaries. Stanley would know more than I do.

W. So you were just influenced by the particular political atmosphere at that time.

L. Yes, that's right.

W. When and where did you first encounter the works of the American imagist poets such as Wylie and H.D.?

L. When I was just a very young girl. My mother had poems published in Poetry Chicago. She was translating Ukranian and Lithuanian folk-songs into English and she was publishing in Poetry Chicago in the Twenties (specifically in 1923). Her book (Songs of Ukrania, published in 1917) was very well received in England and America. She subscribed to Poetry Chicago and to the Dial. They came every month and I just automatically read these imagist things.

W. Was that before you wrote the poems that became part of Green Pitcher?

L. That was during that whole period. I was aware of the imagist movement and the free verse movement, and

I objected to writing structured verse, rhymed verse, because I felt that it interfered with what you wanted to say. I had some discussions with people like Charles G.D. Roberts about free verse. He told me that free verse was much more difficult than structured verse, because you had to create your own thing, so to speak. But I met, through my mother, Duncan Campbell Scott, who was very much an experimentalist in free verse. I also met through my mother Robert Finch, but most importantly Ray Knister, who had been to Chicago and come back to Canada. He was writing free verse and I responded to all that kind of writing. My mother was very definitely in all the French forms of verse like rondelles. She tried to get me to write those kinds of things but the forms did not interest me at all, really. I liked the new Imagists.

W. When you were at the University of Toronto did you meet some poets there? Did you know E.J. Pratt?

L. Yes. In the very first year that I was there I knew through my mother him and Robert Finch and Knister, but they weren't exactly connected with the teaching there. This was a period of very great Canadian nationalist expansion - people like Bliss Carman and Roberts were going north and reading

their poetry all the time. We went to readings at Victoria University. I heard Pratt read "The Witches' Brew." It was very exciting and very delightful and so full of humour and wit and music. I got to know Pratt because he was close to the students. In the summer they had discussions in Muskoka. I was there one summer when I was seventeen or eighteen. They put on plays in summer theatre and Pratt came up at one point, spent time with us talking and reading with students, and he was very very friendly and open. You felt very at home with Pratt. My cousin put on a play she made up for which I had some role. Summer theatre and poetry readings were quite lively things and everybody participated. I was a very beginning writer at that time.

W. Which Symboliste poets did you study in France?

L. All of them - the whole crew from Baudelaire through to Verlaine. I studied the relationship between the French Symbolistes and the seventeenth-century metaphysicals - with John Donne - and then with Eliot and the Sitwells and Huxley. I related their poetry to the French Symbolistes and the combined end points of imagery from the seventeenth century. My tutor urged me to go on and do a Doctorat d'Etat on these influences but the depression came and so

I didn't complete it. In the meantime an American did a thesis on the subject.

W. I am puzzled about the "Garden of Childhood" section of Collected Poems as I have never seen these before, and they appear to have been written out of a Symboliste sensibility.

L. They were never published before but they were written in Paris at that time. Laforgue and Eliot were the influences on that poem.

W. In "Song and Dance," you said that after you returned from Zambia that you had discussions with different poets - you mentioned Milton Acorn and the Black Mountain poets and the Tish poets. Exactly what different sort of effects did these poets have on your work?

L. Well, I do not think Milton affected my style at all. I was arguing and discussing the importance of poetic committment and poetry used for change and the importance of the movement towards a new society with him. But he didn't affect the structure of my poems.

I was influenced by that whole crowd. Ginsberg and Olson and Creeley and Levertov were there that

summer at U.B.C. The only Canadian at that summer school was Margaret Avison. She was the only Canadian connected with that American group. I went to all the sessions they had. I was very entranced by the oral aspect of their poetry and the fact that they were all reading aloud. The students would sit for hours listening. I was interested in it because I had not been writing very much for three or four years and that summer, under their influence, I wrote the poem "Zambia," which had different versions. The first one was called "Colour of God's Face." That was the first version published in a little booklet by the Unitarian Church and then I revised it. It was eventually called "Zambia." I hadn't written for so long - for five years. I had been absorbed with UNESCO. The African situation certainly loosened me up and I think I wrote from the experience of the African dance. I think I wrote much more freely in that poem.

W. Would you say that the song and dance aspect of your poetry has almost replaced the committed aspect of your poetry? Do you consider the oral aspects of poetry most important now?

L. Well, we weren't in any way using oral poetry except in the Thirties agit-prop plays of which I

have a number. They will be appearing this fall. There is one already out. I am republishing some of these poems - a children's mass chant among them. They are all very oral. I don't think I ever stopped writing oral poetry. It was just that there was not much opportunity to do it in this country except during the depression. We saw the French movement of agit-prop mass chants and we brought this to Canada. Day and Night is very, as you say, jazz, and it is based on the beat. The trouble was that there were no groups to perform it.

W. It was not until the Sixties that people started doing that again.

L. During the Sixties I would say that that was the case in Canada. But I was all ready to go - after all, I had been deeply influenced by Edith Sitwell. She affected me to no end [sic]. The first time we really had a chance to perform oral poetry aside from these sort of skirmishes in the Thirties was after the events in Vancouver in '63-'64 - when poetry was being read aloud on the campus of U.B.C. all day and all night long. That is what gave me the courage to write the Zambia poem. Even so, it was never read as I envisaged it. I did do the documentary Call My People Home - the one which was on the radio which

was a poem for voices.. I think I was geared right from the Thirties to do these oral kind of presentations [sic] - dramatic presentations for voice - but in this country there was hardly any chance to get it done. Probably the first time it was done was when the C.B.C. put on Call My People Home, first of all in a fifteen minute program and then in a longer one. They actually did it three times.

W. You wrote, in "Song and Dance," that you were depressed in the Fifties.

L. Oh, we all were. Nobody was writing. It was the end of the war and the new world was supposed to be built, instead of which the Korean War started. We were in absolute depression because every hope we had of change in society did not materialize.

W. Do you feel that the Seventies are a bit like that?

L. Well, the Seventies are more like the Thirties. There is a possibility of change. We fought against fascism and against war. There was a very strong anti-war movement in Canada. Then, of course, we identified, as I have written in CVII, with the Spanish Civil War. Almost every poet of the period wrote poems on behalf of the war - P.K. Page, Miriam

Waddington, F.R. Scott, Ralph Gustafson, A.M. Klein. It had a tremendous impact on Canadians. We were very much involved in the Spanish Civil War because we were trying to get Britain to put an embargo on arms to Franco. So all countries connected with the British Commonwealth were working. We were involved, after all, we sent twelve hundred young men to Spain to fight against Franco. Only six hundred came back. My cousin was a young architect from London who went. He was one of the first volunteers from England and he was killed almost the first day.

W. Did you edit Forty Woman Poets because of any feminist principle, or simply because you felt that woman poets were not getting enough recognition?

L. I guess that since the Fifties I was very concerned with the fact that all anthologies were published by men, scarcely publishing women. It got worse and worse - more and more anthologies, more and more magazines publishing poems by men and edited by men. Very fine poets like Anne Wilkinson and Margaret Avison and I were almost ignored. I thought about it when I went back to B.C. after being in Europe and Africa. It seemed to me that more and more good woman poets were writing besides the ones I had known before. There seemed to be a lot of younger ones and they

couldn't get published. I thought it was time to put them in front of the nose of the public. Seymour Mayne was agreeable to doing this. He was a graduate student of mine at U.B.C. and he said he could get his press to publish this. We advertised and expected to get about twenty applicants and we got sixty. Out of those I chose forty people. I had wanted Avison and Webb to be in on it, but Avison is very very cagey about women's things and Webb wrote and said she did not want to be a part of a women's ghetto. I just made the comment, "Don't you know you are in a ghetto. Nobody will publish you or give you any prominence." Gary Geddes published his 15 Canadian Poets and there were only about three women in it. Disgraceful - absolutely disgraceful.

W. How does your editing work fit in with the writing of poetry? Do you think it helps or hinders? Is it a distraction?

L. Well, I have never been able to separate the two. I have not been able to write poetry in isolation. It has always been a group stimulation that I liked. My first experience in any kind of public writing was about age thirteen at a girl's school. A friend and I published a thing called "Fortnightly Follies of the Lower Fifth" - satirical verse about our

teachers, comic verse and other little snippets. But it only ran two editions because the headmistress discovered it and banned it. But I learned then what it was like to run a magazine and what it was like to use the magazine to criticize society and what it was like to have it banned.

W. What about CVII?

L. It is just one amongst many of my entries into editorship. I wrote for Leo Kennedy's magazine. I wrote for the Canadian Forum, and then in the Thirties I broke away from the Forum, saying it was far too mild and pink. We wanted something that represented the United Front of Intellectuals With the Working Class Against Fascism. So my best friend started putting her money into New Frontier. Ron Lawson was the editor. His wife was Jean Lawson, Jim, we called her. She had been overseas in Spain as an ambulance driver with the MacKenzie Papineau Battalion. She knew Norman Bethune. She had money from her capitalist grandfather and she put it all into this magazine in the Thirties. The magazine lasted about one and a half years. It's a very excellent magazine. It's astounding how good it is if you read it, and Ron wrote to all the interesting international writers. For example, Hugh McDermott, the Scottish Marxist,

sent poetry. He had all these international people writing for it as well as Canadians like Klein, Leo Kennedy and myself. I had toured the country with this magazine, setting up editors and people who would sell it across the country. The year I went to Vancouver - 1936 - we set up a writers' group there. This magazine, I feel, was a very significant point in Canadian writing. It was mainly concerned with supporting Spain.

In the Forties we turned inwards and developed poetry readings in the high schools and Contemporary Verse with Alan Crawley. Earle Birney was active, so was Alan Crawley. Towards the end of the war Alan and his wife toured the country reading poetry. It was a remarkable tour considering that he was blind and was saying all the poems by heart. All through that period I was very much involved in B.C. and in Contemporary Verse. Crawley was the editor but he asked me to read some stuff and give my opinion on it.

Then, the next stage of my editing work was when Earle Birney had set up his creative writing course. He split off from the English Department in '61 and set up a Creative Writing Department. After one year he couldn't take it at all because it was such a burden. He called me in to talk with him at his office and we had coffee and he asked me if I would take on his poetry course in the department. It

included editing all of the poetry for Prism International. By this time I was doing my M.A. - Rhythm and Sound in Contemporary Canadian Poetry. I met a whole crowd of young people then - analyzing them linguistically for my thesis - Lionel Kernes, Frank Davey, Margaret Atwood. Atwood was a graduate student there but I asked her to come in for a recording. She was shy and scared and couldn't talk - incredible.

Anyway, I was editing Prism International all that winter. Rosenblatt's poems were first published by me in Prism. I published Bissett too, because these people were utterly ignored by any magazine in the country.

W. Was Very Stone House Press in your house?

L. Oh, yes. I rented a house in which my kids lived upstairs - Peter and Marcia. They were going to university. Then the next year they went off, so I rented the upstairs when Seymour Mayne arrived from Montreal. He called it Very Stone House Press - the printing was actually done in Montreal and it was there that he started Ingluvin Press and then went on to do the anthology of woman poets.

W. Stone House had Nichol and Bissett too?

L. That's right, yes. That was the period when the Tish movement was going, there were poetry clubs and poetry in coffee houses and pubs.

W. And after that?

L. In 1966 I went to U.N.B. There were all kinds of poetry things starting there too. Then Henry Kreisel phoned me from the University of Alberta and asked me if I would come there. I had committed myself to staying on at U.N.B. but Pacey allowed me to leave. I went to Alberta teaching Canadian literature. That's the year I got cancer and I had an operation and I started rather late in October in Alberta. The second year I was at Edmonton they brought in Peggy Atwood and we were all asked to do creative writing as a group. Peggy did two poetry sections. That was the year Peggy and I fought so against having students marked. We were very much against regulating students in this way and we protested and fought very hard. We didn't get very far.

So Peggy and Elizabeth Brewster and I did a lot to make changes there. The Watsons were very strong there also, and that was the year Sheila started White Pelican. It was a very interesting time there. We had a symposium - Critics and Poets - and brought critics and poets from English-speaking Canada and

from Québec. It was the first time there was ever a conference of French and English writers together. We had no machines to translate - but they came! This hasn't happened since. That year was 1970. That's what should have been done all over the country - this absolutely intense meeting together of French and English writers. It is to me a very very sad thing - that what we did there wasn't carried on.

W. Is the League of Canadian Poets still a driving force for poetry in Canada?

L. Well, it has had a great many problems. At the last convention there were a hundred poets and it was very very helpful. We've had very bad doubts because most of the activity we have had is in Ontario with the Arts Council. The whole set-up is very weird, you see. By the terms of our constitution the Canada Council gives educational help to anything lower than university level. So they can only support poetry readings and other writers' readings in the high schools or in organizations for adults. The League has attempted to do some university things but they also charge fifty dollars which the universities don't like to pay. So the universities deal mostly directly with the Canada Council and pay money to them.

At the Victoria meeting the president was Pat Lowther. We felt the League was too restrictive; that it wasn't helping young poets. I put through the resolution that we have associative members; five dollars a year for younger poets who hadn't made their mark or had a book published. We decided to help them to give readings locally. But nothing was done that year.

In the meeting last month, in March, they decided to really launch this thing and have associate members. But, in the main the problem has been that the main activity of the League has been in Ontario because the Ontario Arts Council supports it. Several other provinces are just doing their own thing. Saskatchewan is doing a great deal for poets and Manitoba has been pressured a great deal by newly surfacing writers and editors to give help to the literature side, not just to ballet and music. In Manitoba the Manitoba teacher's association has gone all out to raise money to hear poets in the high schools. Now, finally, after years of utter silence the Maritimes have started a Maritime Writers' Union to ask the Canada Council for help to give readings. The whole thing is a regional activity centered now on high schools. The Canada Council grants to readers are still mostly to well-known poets who are asked for by universities.

W. You have been associated with universities since the Sixties; do you enjoy that environment?

L. I'm delighted that poetry is being said aloud by poets across the country in universities and high schools. I personally enjoy a high school audience tremendously - they're just terrific. I think it's just marvellous - the interest in poetry and poets across the country. But I think it's the wrong thing for a person of my age. We can't do our own writing if we're constantly running around giving readings,

W. Are you writing another book now?

L. Well, I'm bringing out a book on the Thirties. It's a collage, not a new book. It's work that's never been published or collected - plays, six short stories about the unemployed in the Depression and many documentary articles about the conditions, critical articles about proletarian art and a whole collection of artifacts - photographs of people involved, workers' theatre groups, playbills, letters.

W. Most of the critics I've read seem to like either the lyric and personal poetry or the documentary and