

*The Dilemma of the Public Critic; or,
Does George Bowering Have
A WAY WITH WORDS*

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In the "Polemical Introduction" to the *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye points to three levels of critical response to literature: those of the scholar, the academic critic and the public critic.

The . . . assumption is that scholars and public critics are directly related by an intermediate form of criticism, a coherent and comprehensive theory of literature; logically and scientifically organized . . . it would . . . establish an authority within criticism for the public critic and the man of taste.¹

The scholar searches out the facts; the academic critic formulates a coherent theory of literature; and the public critic presents insightful readings. But even though the role of the public critic is integral and not subsidiary to those of the academic and the scholar, it is a role which is, nonetheless, set somewhat apart. Frye writes:

It is the task of the public critic to exemplify how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature, and thus to show how literature is to be absorbed into a society . . . The public critic tends to episodic forms like the lecture and the familiar essay, and his work is not a science but another kind of literary art. He has picked up his ideas from a pragmatic study of literature, and does not try to create or enter into a theoretical structure. (p. 8)

Admittedly, Frye's manner of dividing up the field of critical endeavor is not the only one worthy of consideration. But for my purposes here, it provides a usefully clear background against which the dilemma of the critic who takes on the role of illuminator of literary texts may be brought into focus. The dilemma of the public critic is this: on the one hand he must be answerable, as a well informed man of taste who has made a pragmatic study of literature, to the theories or systems of literature which have been developed by the academic critic with the

¹Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 11.

aid of the scholar; on the other hand he has been granted a license to be creative which frees him from the need to enter the theoretical debate. This situation creates the illusion that the public critic has a more or less free-rein: "his work is not a science but another kind of literary art." But it is only an illusion. The reins may be loose, but they must exist. The creative work of the public critic must have a coherent theoretical base; it need not be explicitly stated but a reader must be able to recognize it and reconstruct it if he so wishes.

Canadian criticism of Canadian literature has been predominantly public criticism. What we have been most concerned with is showing that in Canada it is possible to be a 'man of taste.' What has been missing more often than not, however, is the sense of an underlying system (public criticism, it goes without saying, can be allied to any coherent theory; the choice is the prerogative of the critic). Our early critics have known enough of literary theory to be provocative but seldom enough to allow their work to stand up to rigorous analysis. The result is a series of more or less well informed "impressions." Northrop Frye again:

What we have so far, is on one side of the "study of literature" the work of the scholar who tries to make it possible, and on the other side the work of the public critic who assumes that it exists. In between is "literature" itself, a game preserve where the student wanders with his native intelligence his only guide. The assumption seems to be that the scholar and the public critic are connected by a common interest in literature alone. The scholar lays down his materials outside the portals of literature, . . . the public critic . . . is apt to make only a random and haphazard use of this material. (p. 10)

This seems a fairly accurate description of such early Canadian critics as Dewart, Lightall, Logan and French, MacMechan, Collin, and even of A.J.M. Smith, E.K. Brown, and Desmond Pacey. They can all be accused of this randomness. Perhaps the success of Frye is due not so much to what he has told us about our collective identity but to the fact that he provided, and then worked out in the essays that became *The Bush Garden*, the authority of a coherent system. He filled in the middle ground between scholar and man of taste with an academic theory of literature. He created the context wherein

the real level of culture and education [is] the fertilizing of life by learning, in which the systematic progress of scholarship flows into a systematic progress of taste and understanding. (p. 25)

If Frye's public criticism is to be challenged then, it must be challenged on the grounds that it is inconsistent with the supporting theory. To challenge the premises of the theory is to enter the theoretical debate and to play the role of academic critic. This can, of course, and indeed must, be done by academics.

George Woodcock, the first editor of *Canadian Literature*, and an influential man of letters in Canada, has energetically promoted the role of the public critic. For Woodcock, however, the interests, and therefore the theories, of the academic critics, are too narrowly literary. The public critic's role has the opportunity to be the most worthwhile because it can embrace the whole of culture and not just the formalistic concerns of one branch of culture.

The Canadian critic, when he emerges . . . will have to be something of a psychologist, something of a sociologist, something of a philosopher, something of a mythologist, besides having developed a consciousness of formal values and an imagination that is both creative and receptive.²

This role is perhaps more eclectic, but essentially the same, as that described by Frye. Woodcock's public critic is a man of taste, erudite in all areas. Thus, he must be responsible to many theories and not just to one; he must be able to recognize which theories are relevant and know how to apply them coherently, for Woodcock would have the public critic "see the work in total context."³

In spite of this increased pressure placed on the role of the public critic by George Woodcock, David Helwig at Oberon Press is actively engaged in trying to follow and to promote this example. He is energetically trying to generate just the sort of criticism Woodcock has described. Oberon has recently published, under the editorship of Helwig, two collections of commissioned essays by various critics, *Human Elements* and *Human Elements, second series*, in which the link to Woodcock and to the Arnoldian humanistic tradition which Frye found integral to the role of the public critic in Canada, is clearly announced. In his introduction to the first collection Helwig writes:

In the past, I have claimed that there are three fine Canadian critics, George Woodcock, George Woodcock, and George Woodcock.

²George Woodcock, "Views of Canadian Criticism," in *Odysseus Ever Returning: Essays on Canadian Writers and Writing* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 136.

³George Woodcock, "Criticism and Other Arts," *Canadian Literature*, no. 49 (summer, 1971), p. 3.

Not that only Woodcock has had exciting and seminal ideas about Canadian writing; what I have valued about his work has little to do with whether or not I agree with particular insights. It is the qualities of tone in his writing, the sense that a literate and superbly educated man is engaged in civilized discourse at its most humane, properly aware of both subject and audience, but bemused by neither. I see this urbanity as springing in part from his political sophistication and commitment. The fault of academic criticism that has always put me off can be seen in these terms, as a failure of tone, a failure to know the full humanity of its audience, a failure to discriminate just what importance its insights might have for the reader who is also a citizen.⁴

Such a bold statement of position, by reducing the challenge of the dilemma as I have formulated it to a question of "tone," runs the risk of denying the existence of the dilemma by denying the worth of analytical rigour, by denying the worth of academic and scholarly activity. Even though lip service is paid to the need for standards and even though some of the articles in these two collections are by professional academics, the whole project runs the risk, I would suggest, of undermining itself from the outset and of trivializing its articles when Helwig, in his introduction, writes such things as: "I prefer to approach [Canadian literature] as a common reader. My experience of Canadian critical writing has been occasional," (p. 8) and, "The articles were commissioned from people whose work I knew, and what I told them was that I hoped for essays that would give some sense of creation as a personal adventure" (p. 8).

It is unlikely that many people would try to argue that creation is not, at times, like an adventure. But surely there is more to it! In his "occasional experience" of criticism, it appears that Helwig has missed Frye's warning against assuming that the only connection between the academic and the public critic is "a common interest in literature." This attempt to deny the dilemma by ignoring it simply makes it more prominent.

After *Human Elements*, second series, Oberon published a collection of essays by George Bowering, *A Way With Words*. The intent of this collection is firmly connected to that of the two earlier collections. The note on the back cover of the book says:

How long can a national literature survive without a body of criticism to sustain it? The extraordinary flowering of fiction and poetry

⁴David Helwig, ed., *Human Elements* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1978), p. 9.

that burst upon Canada in the sixties still stands essentially naked to its enemies. In the belief that there was more to be said than that the Canadian imagination is dominated by the imperatives of survival, we have published two collections of critical essays in which Canadian writing is seen in light of the larger issues of human experience . . . In *A Way With Words* George Bowering seeks to define the dimensions of a specifically personal poetic.⁵

Bowering seems to be just the sort of public critic and personality that Helwig is looking for. This is attested to not only by the sequential connection of these three Oberon books but also by the fact that one of the Bowering's essays, "Metaphysic in Time: The Poetry of Lionel Kearns," is printed in both *Human Elements, second series* and *A Way With Words*.

While this one essay cannot possibly stand as exemplar for all of the public criticism in Canada, it can stand as a demonstration of just where this dilemma can lead a critic. And since George Bowering the critic is not without influence in this country (he has published three books of criticism in the last two years), it will be worthwhile to look closely at this essay to discover just what sorts of things can happen when a well meaning man of taste pays insufficient attention to the scholarly and academic critics.

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Two recent reviews of Bowering's criticism make abundantly clear the dilemma of the public critic. Lorraine McMullen, writing in *Canadian Literature*, finds it easy to accept Bowering's brand of criticism. She writes:

George Bowering's "Metaphysic in Time: The Poetry of Lionel Kearns" explores theme and language in Kearns' poetry in what seems to me the first serious attempt to come to grips with Kearns' art—an elusive art, as Bowering points out. "Kearns' sense of form cannot entail completion," Bowering tells us as he links Kearns' attitude to poetry and his "Hegelian sense of form" with his career as a teacher of linguistics.⁶

In almost direct opposition to this is Robin Mathews' review of *Human Elements, second series* which appeared in the *Canadian Forum* almost

⁵This is taken from the back cover of George Bowering's *A Way With Words* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1982).

⁶Lorraine McMullen, review of *Human Elements, second series*, ed. David Helwig, in *Canadian Literature*, no. 94 (autumn, 1982), p. 152

simultaneously. Although Mathews' ideological disagreement with the poetics of the Tish group, of which Bowering was a founding member, is already well documented in *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution* and in Keith Richardson's *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish*, and although Mathews opens this review by reiterating these objections, it is hard to ignore his claim that when Bowering writes about Kearns and the other Tish poets:

He writes sophisticated (and sophistical) apologies; . . . he writes public relations blurbs; he 'chats them up'. But he doesn't assess them seriously. And when he quotes them, alas, the jig is usually, summarily, up.⁷

If two such claims can be published in leading Canadian journals at the same time—and they are only claims, they are not the disagreements of a productive critical debate where the claims are supported by logical argument—if two such claims can exist side by side, then surely we are not regarding this dilemma with the respect it deserves. My analysis of Bowering's essays on Kearns should make evident the practical consequences of this disregard.

The theory of literature which informs Bowering's essay on Kearns is the Black Mountain poetic. It is presented not as a theoretical probe but as an authoritative point of reference. Since Bowering has been writing with and about this poetic for twenty years, it would be inexcusable if he misrepresented it or allowed it to appear incoherent. In fact, in a series of asides, he invokes it with what appears to be a deft thoroughness.

Black Mountain poetics was developed in reaction to the idea that the poem must be an autonomous and unified artifact. The new position held that the poem must reflect a sense of mutability. The movement was away from the noun, the image and the metaphor and towards the verb and action. "Writing is not thought but thinking,"⁸ "it is not what he [the poet] has done for us, but what we find him doing" (p. 102) "the poem is a vital link . . . rather than a thing accomplished" (p. 105).

The poet must enter the flux of the phenomenal world; he must not impose prescriptive patterns upon it. "It is a matter of acting without

⁷Robin Mathews, "In Search of a Canadian Poetic" *Canadian Forum* Nov., 1982), p. 32.

⁸George Bowering, *A Way With Words* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1982), p. 103. All subsequent quotations from this book will be noted in the text by page number only.

interference of forethought, of expression as a natural and spontaneous complement of *impression*," (p. 103) for "a person is no more unified than any other system" (p. 112).

If there is no unified system then of course a reliance on what has come before is anomalous. Pound's command to 'make it new' is therefore echoed: "the main quality of fresh art is the unusual and the death of art is the usual" (p. 104). In this always new art, "the poet himself is a conductor of poetry;" (p. 105) he is brought into the active present tense, for "the mind is a shared circumstance;" (p. 103) and "one goes to the poet's expression not to appreciate his ability to reprint the world, but to know one's own creative possibility," (p. 103) to feel "one's own share of mind moving" (p. 103). In this shared experience "the poet is one who will be being between the poem's source [*impression*] and its further journeying." (p. 105)

To leave the metaphor behind is to abandon metaphysics, since "teleology [*is*] replaced by the human verb" (p. 110). The implication being that "the proper study of mankind is flesh" (p. 108). However, inasmuch as "personal consciousness-raising is related to the wider consciousness-raising," (p. 111) (the poem is a shared experience) and inasmuch as the poet is "interested in the quality of being," (p. 106) (its phenomenal multiplicity), the poet who subscribes to the Black Mountain poetic is not limited by "the Trappist dichotomy of flesh and spirit, his celebration of the sensual does not deny the spectral," (p. 108) for "human beings are more remarkable than their artifacts" (p. 116). And while "one [does not] admire a perfect and rested little poem because that would render the poem forever closed from one's own spiritual activity," (p. 104) we are not to see transcendence as the goal of this "spiritual activity." In this phenomenological poetic "the life of the spirit is made manifest in expression;" (p. 103) it is made flesh.

But this flesh is mutable; its "form cannot entail completion" (p. 111) since "it looks for *enclosure* in its act rather than *disclosure* of its source" (p. 111). This spirit made manifest is perhaps best exemplified by the world of abstract language, the use of which is advocated. For since all language signs are arbitrary (in terms of their referential quality) the level at which words become material is at the level of sound. The sound of an abstract word is as material as the sound of a substantive. Sound therefore becomes the most important quality of poetry.

In the final analysis, then, the poem "encloses us in the act of self-reflection" (p. 104) such that we cannot test the poem (because looking

for “continuity is the curator’s job” (p. 113); rather, “the poem tests us” (p. 106). The poem becomes utilitarian as well as aesthetic; it is good if it is “something that can be used as a poem” (p. 119); that is, if it can test the reader’s “creative possibility” by bringing him into the “act of self-reflection.”

This underlying system can, of course, be argued against; but this would be to attack the theoretical premises of the poetic and should not affect the consistency with which it is used to elucidate poems. Northrop Frye has made this very clear when under attack. His readings of literature are consistent with his theory of literature, and can therefore not be attacked as readings but only as readings which are dependent upon what is perceived as an incorrect theory. So the question to be asked now is: Are Bowering’s readings of Kearns’ poems consistent with the underlying theory?

In spite of the apparent thoroughness of the theoretical asides, Bowering gives every indication that the poetry is his main concern. In less than twenty pages he mentions, quotes from or comments upon at least thirty different poems. Few books of poetry have so many poems on so few pages.

The first poem Bowering looks at is “The Birth of God,” the early concrete poem which Kearns has officially registered as his trade mark. It consists of the figure ‘1’ composed of ‘0’s’ encircled by a ‘0’ composed of ‘1’s’. Bowering calls it “a poem so totally visual as to be nearly an artifact” (p. 101). Theorists of concrete poetry suggest that concrete poems can be either kinetic or non-kinetic. A non-kinetic concrete poem, such as one of Eugene Gomringer’s constellations, requires precise placement of the language elements it deploys. A kinetic concrete poem must contain within its structure an indication of movement—as, for example, do the hedges which Ian Hamilton Finlay has sculpted into words: they will grow and change. Kearns’ concrete poem is obviously of the non-kinetic variety. Its tautological structure is metaphorical; it is an artifact. Further, it is a metaphysical artifact, that is, the embodiment of a metaphysical paradox. Bowering tries to apologize for all of this by telling us that the poem, as he reprints it for us, is only one manifestation of the poem; it has been, furthermore, transformed many times before; it has been “a greeting card, a painting, a rubber stamp, a copyrighted logo, a movie, a poster” (p. 102); but Bowering wishes that it had also been manifest in more kinetic forms: “if Kearns’ subconscious or better self were to have its way, the poem would appear as sky-writing, part of the landscape . . . gone with the wind now” (p. 102). Such wishful

thinking brings into question which poet is being examined: Kearns or Bowering.

A little later in the essay, when Bowering is arguing that Kearns' metaphysical impulses are not in the direction of transcendence (and therefore not 'out of time' and non-phenomenological but 'in time' and phenomenological) he writes that since the birth of God implies the death of God, the poem is "a self-destructive trope" (p. 110) and that "the message [is] in your circuitry" (p. 110). This demonstrates, apparently, that the metaphysical is made physical. I would suggest, however, that this reduction effectively relieves the poem of any contemplative richness it might otherwise have. But it is a strategy Bowering must risk if his supporting system is to survive.

Lionel Kearns was, of course, involved with Tish during its early years; and it is well known and well documented that Tish only published poems which it felt were written in the spirit of the Black Mountain poetic of projective verse. It is to be expected that many poems written by Kearns will therefore be open to analysis based on this system. And this is indeed the case. I would be surprised if it were not. Bowering's readings of "Private Poem for a Manitoulin Island Canada Day" and "Event" seem consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the essay.

But then appears a reading of the poem "It" which is far less securely footed. The whole of this poem is quoted (incorrectly as it happens: in the original, the last three stanzas are indented; in Bowering's essay they are in line with the margin; this structural difference can be seen as significant).

The inane
justice
of gratuitous
insanity
the poem

Crashes down
during the night
of the big wind

And is discovered
next morning
among fallen branches
and other debris

A thing
apart

To be used
or discarded

Or kept on the mantel
as decoration

Or thrown into the fire⁹

This poem is offered as an example of the poet as “one who will be between the poem’s source and its further journeying” (p. 105) as a poem where the poet demonstrates that he is “interested in the quality of being” (p. 106). I must assume that “being” as it is being used here is consistent with the underlying theory, that is, “being” in motion. And yet the title of the poem seems to stop this essential motion. An “it,” whatever it stands for (in this case a “poem”), is a thing; it is isolated and made into an artifact. Further, we have been told that the poem in motion, a poem which has entered the phenomenal flux, eschews the metaphor in favor of the verb. How can Bowering have missed seeing that this poem is little else than metaphor. It is a neatly tied modernist package that Bowering can only make use of by misreading.

The same problem afflicts his reading of “Metaphor.” (The title, once again, should give the game away.)

Their meeting
was as strange
as apple blossoms
falling on
a pool of blood

And when at last
they made love
it seemed as though
God himself
was exercising
his imagination¹⁰

Each stanza is a metaphor. And any sense of motion suggested by the verbs is made still by the tidy structural design: the balancing of death in the first stanza against life and procreation in the second. The poem is in the past tense. It is an act ‘disclosed’ not one which ‘encloses’ us.

In trying to cope with Keam’s ex-Christianity and his concept of God, Bowering resorts to labelling certain poems “parables” (p. 111).

⁹Lionel Kearns, *Pointing* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), p. 3.

¹⁰Lionel Kearns, *By the Light of the Silvery McLune: Media Parables, Poems, Gestures, and Other Assaults on the Interface* (Vancouver: Daylight Press, 1969), p. 26.

He writes that the parable “offers the post-Mallarmé realizing that an ‘individual’ is an impossible idea” (p. 111-12). This is an odd way of describing a parable. It seems in opposition to the conventional idea of what a parable is: an allegorical tale which presents characters of simplified psychology so that a point, usually moral, can be forcefully and effectively made. The “individual” in this conventional conceptualization of the parable, far from being the exemplar of “an impossible idea” is, in fact, the exemplar of a possible idea. Bowering chooses not to quote from “Personality,” one of the poems he calls a parable, but only to mention it. If he had he would have made it possible for his readers to see that what the poem does is put into pseudo-parable form a possible idea of the “split personality.” This poem is a portrait of a psychological trait, an idea of personality “disclosed.”

Saint-Denys Gameau used to split up
and actually walk down the street
beside himself, partners so to speak
though one would hardly say chums
But with me there isn't even
that consolation
You see, it was years ago, and I'd
just staggered off the train after
working three days with no sleep
and as usual I'd drifted all the way
down to Carrall and Hastings
from the C.P.R. station
Well anyway I said to myself listen
you wait right here
and I'll be back in a few minutes
Then I walked off and never returned
I don't know how long he waited there
I deliberately put him out of my mind
and gradually lost track of him
completely. Of course
I've been back a few times recently
but there isn't any sign of him now
and even if he'd stayed in that part
of town, do you suppose I could
recognize him now? Do you think
he's still up to the same old tricks
or is he a *new man*?
I wonder if he ever thinks about me?¹¹

¹¹Keams, *Silvery*, p. 22.

It is true that at the end of this poem there are three open questions. But we must ask whether they are questions about the phenomena of schizophrenia or questions about the "state" of schizophrenia. It seems clear to me that they are generalized questions about the "state" of schizophrenia.

One last example: the poem "Definition." Once again the title itself is an argument against motion and mutability. And once again the poem is incorrectly copied from the original. Bowering gives it to us in two stanzas. In Kearns' *Practicing Up To Be Human* it is printed in only one stanza. (This is more than likely due to the fact that the essay was first published in *Human Elements, second series* where the poem starts at the bottom of one page and is completed at the top of the next; the person setting the essay in *A Way With Words* then mistaking this break as a stanza break.)

In this poem Kearns is concerned to define "perfection." What could be more opposed to the underlying poetic? Bowering begins his analysis by telling us that this poem presents "a revised definition of transcendence" (p. 118) and not the real thing, not the Wordsworthian "spot in time" or any of the other numerous poetic formulations of eternity. Bowering continues: "Perfection is not a quality of eternity showing itself through the holes in the veil of mortal earth—it is momentary and threatened, and subject to time as we are" (p. 119). How does the poem stand up against such a claim?

Standing here on the wharf
 this cold January morning
 I watch the wood-chucks swim by
 dive with a small slap and re-
 emerge. Perfection
 is being totally adequate
 at a given moment. I
 have known perfection
 in your presence. Don't expect
 perfection to last. It
 is always now. When I look up
 a pair of fish-hawks
 are turning turning
 in the pale high sky¹²

The strategy of this poem is to enclose a definition within the parentheses of two images which exemplify it. "Perfection/ is being totally adequate/

¹²Lionel Kearns, *Practicing Up To Be Human* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1978), unpaginated.

at a given moment." The evident paradox (if one attains perfection how then can one lose it?) cannot be ignored. If perfection is now and now is the only time we can be in then how can perfection not last? Or to approach the problem even more pragmatically and phenomenally, if this state of "perfection" is fleeting then we as physical beings cannot possibly have any control over it. We are therefore the passive recipients of a spiritual beneficence (keyed by the wonders of nature perhaps) and the condition must therefore be one of transcendence. This poem, I would suggest, echoes precisely the Wordsworthian sentiment Bowering cannot accept. And so he is obliged to suggest that the poem is a "revised definition of transcendence" and then to revise the definition in a way that the poem does not.

Faced with poems which do not agree with his poetic, Bowering is forced to misread them. But as I indicated earlier, George Woodcock's program for the public critic requires answerability to other theories and systems of thought as well. The critic must be "something of a sociologist, something of a philosopher, something of a mythologist" and so on. He might have included in this list, for Bowering's sake, "something of an etymologist."

Bowering tells us that the word "interesting" can be broken into *inter* and *esse*, which mean "between and being, perhaps among and being" (p. 105). The *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, tells us that the etymology of "interest" is not entirely clear. Though the cognate *interesse* is recognized as one source it is from the Mediaeval Latin and relates to money and property (e.g., money paid as compensation for injury or money paid for money lent).¹³ It seems likely that Bowering got his information from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* where there is an incomplete etymology and the word is broken into *inter* and *esse*, and defined as "being between."¹⁴ But once again the meanings allied to this possible origin are pecuniary. The being in between is the middle man or money lender.

Bowering uses his etymological findings to demonstrate that the poem "Interesting" is "a vital link, . . . rather than a thing accomplished" (p. 105). It seems more than somewhat counter-productive to suggest that a usurer is a "vital link." This man in the middle takes more than

¹³See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. V (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 393-5.

¹⁴See the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Toronto: Thomas Allen & Son Ltd., 1973), p. 602.

he gives. Does Bowering really want us to see the poem in this negative way?

There is one final strategy of Bowering's that I would like to point to: his use of metaphor and analogy. As I have already shown, Bowering's poetic, a poetic Kearns apparently shares, eschews the metaphor in favour of more vital and phenomenological language. Why then, should he feel compelled to use metaphors in his critical writing. But I do not wish to take issue with this here; what I do wish to take issue with is the manner in which metaphor is used. A metaphor is a comparison; it presents one thing in terms of another. Therefore, just as a reading must be answerable to an underlying theory of literature, we expect that the two sides of a metaphor will display a similar coherence. It is no use calling an apple an orange when you want to compare the location of the seeds.

At one point Bowering uncritically borrows a metaphor that Kearns uses to explain his own approach to creative endeavor.

When Kearns writes about playing hockey, he never mentions goals; he mentions the speed of the puck, the pass and skating. Not the puck in the net but the man in the world. Not the goal that freezes the clock, but the motion too fast for words. (p. 103)

If this essay reaches its hoped for audience, not the academics, that is, but the general public, this metaphor will more than likely backfire. Bowering is trying to make the point that speed and process are important to poetry, not the ability to freeze the clock, to create, that is, an artifact at the end of the process. By implication these become the most important aspects of hockey as well. It is almost inevitable that the hoped for audience of this essay will know more about hockey than about poetry and that, upon reading this, they will wonder: but what good is a hockey game without goals? This is likely to lead them to the unexpected conclusion that the type of poetry Kearns writes must be just about as pointless as a hockey game where goals have no significance. Bowering (or Kearns) might wish to argue this point about hockey from a philosophical point of view, but the audience of this essay is unlikely to stick around that long. They will look at the metaphor and draw what seem to be the logical conclusions.

A little further on Bowering presents another metaphor which is even more baffling. He writes: "from his [Kearns'] poems one draws the sense that the poet himself is a conductor of poetry" (p. 105). This is meant to indicate that the composition of poetry is like the "tran-

scription of . . . original forms" (p. 105). I would suggest that the metaphor Bowering wanted here has more to do with "orchestration" than with "conducting." A conductor has nothing to do with composition; he guides performance. And yet, even after the essay has been reprinted, the metaphor remains.

As George Woodcock suggests, the public critic occupies the middle ground between the academic and the public, just as Northrop Frye's academic critic occupies the middle ground between the scholar and the public critic. This man in the middle must be able to make himself understandable to the one side while at the same time remaining answerable to the other. The public critic is, in the full sense of the word, a "mediator;" he must be faithful to both sides.

In Canada, the role of the public critic is an important one. It is not a role to be assumed lightly. In the final analysis it is beside the point to invoke subjectivity as a caveat, for the intention is to communicate with the public—an act which entails, at the very least, intersubjectivity, that is to say, recognition of a collective agreement concerning conventions.