

PNOMES JUKOLLAGES & OTHER STUNZAS
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designed by bpNichol

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books by earle birney: DAVID & OTHER POEMS (1942), NOW IS TIME (1945), TURVEY (a novel), & subsequently STRAIT OF ANIAN, TRIAL OF A CITY, DOWN THE LONG TABLE (a novel), ICE COD BELL OR STONE, NEAR FALSE CREEK MOUTH, & SELECTED POEMS 1940 - 1966

"In Chauceres haselwood I walke alweye
Ans never thynke out of hise shawes
/to streye."



an introduction

someone once said (maybe northrop frye) that there was no such thing as experimental poetry, that there were only poems that worked & poems that didn't. you gotta admit there's some truth in that. only trouble is there's so much hassle about what a poem is. like i once wrote to frank davey about opening himself up to the wider possibilities that visual & sound poetry offered & he dismissed me in a few well chosen words (they really were well chosen). now to me experimental poetry is poetry which falls outside what have classically been called poems & hence i found myself writing THE POEM IS DEAD LONG LIVE POETRY over every available wall. poems (to my mind) are the finished artifacts and poetry the alive process, the organic flow within the poetic body (which is called "poems". but let's forget all that.

this is an introduction to a section of earle's work which has been termed "experimental" by every review & critical article i've read. to my way of thinking it is the body of work which best reflects the flow of his mind. the truths of most eastern religions concern the beauty to be found in simple things. "concrete" or "experimental" poetry concerns itself with a return to the simpler elements of language. for birney this has meant a return to the ear, and a search for some way to orchestrate for it. (when dave aylward and i worked at the u of t library one of our jobs was putting theses away in the theses cage (faeces cage we affectionately called it) and i used to thumb thru earle's phd on chaucer. now who can love chaucer and not love sound. chaucer had one hell of

an ear for voice rhythms).

okay so how does he go about it. early things like "shetland grandaunt" show an awareness of dialectic, of accent. and accent is the key here. enhancement. he wants to show the rise and fall of the human voice so he lets the line rise and fall. regrettably (as always) his critics go confused. (i remember reading a review once in which the reviewer chastised him for wasting his time with "foolish typewriter experiments"). but it moves on from there. "alaska passage" gives us the actual flow of his mind, words working their way thru the riots of impression left by the trip, sprayed on the page, their million voices talking to you at once leaving you gasping for cool air "to slide its bones in a green tide". a double-layered poem. linear to describe a linear voyage. simultaneous to describe the mind's working, to put you in the poet's mind, into the living process of poetry. and there it is. the visual used to accent the linear message, the senses brought into use by the poet's fingers providing alternative routes into and out of the act of poetry. visual & semantic content.

these are acts of giving. the poet allowing you into the flow of his mind, into the creation of poetry. accept them in the spirit they are given and so much could be learned. birney is one hell of an artist and he's trying to describe some roots your mind could try, directions to explore. for your own sake listen!!

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