

et-urmet - ALDEN NOWLAN



Terry and I at the Fair
won everything -
we filled the car

with green-eyed bears,
black jackasses with red-lined ears
and one old tiger with horsehair
whiskers that tickled

myneck, there was barely room
left for us:

we got drenched,
running to the car,
and sat there,
laughing crazily among our queer beasts,

as the empty Ferris wheel
went around
and around
in the rain.

For awhile Alden Nowlan wrote under the pseudonym "Max Philip Ireland" because it sounded so romantic, like "Robert Louis Stevenson". He says he spent more time dreaming up the name than in writing the poem it was first used for.

After the *Rose and The Puritan*, published collections of poems followed quickly. A *Darkness in the Earth* was printed in California in 1959. *Under the Ice* was published by Ryerson Press in 1961.

After ten years on the *Observer*, Mr. Nowlan became bored with the irrelevancy of a weekly and moved to St. John to become a night editor at the *Telegraph Journal*. A small Canada Council grant gave him a few months to devote to developing his verse between jobs.

He really enjoyed newspaper work, especially editing and layout, although he says, "I was always too shy to be any good at reporting."

In 1968 he came to Fredericton to become the Writer in Residence at the University of New Brunswick. Besides his reputation as a poet, Alden Nowlan is known throughout Fredericton for his cooking. Nowlan's Roast Duck is famous.

One of his favourite recipes is for "potatoes crainquebille", a dish that Alice B. Toklas often cooked for Picasso. Alice B. Toklas is one of Alden Nowlan's heroines mostly for her fine cookbook but also for putting up with Gertrude Stein all those years.

Potatoes Crainquebille

Chop 2 large onions. Melt 4 tablespoons butter in a saucepan over low flame and cook the chopped onions in it without letting them brown. Put them in a shallow fireproof earthenware dish. Cover them with large new potatoes. Pour 1 teaspoon melted butter on each potato. Cover the dish and cook on an asbestos mat over low flame for 1/4 hour. Then put in preheated 350 degrees oven for about 1/2 hour depending upon the size of the potatoes. When they are tender enough to indent with a fork, remove from oven. Turn the oven to 450 degrees. Gently press on each potato to make a small hollow in the centre. In this, place 1 teaspoon of tomato purée to which a quarter of its volume in butter has been added. Cover the purée and potatoes with grated Parmesan cheese and return to the hot oven to brown.

Another of Alden Nowlan's heroes is Bob Dylan. Mr. Nowlan agrees with Dylan's definition of verse, "A poem is a naked person."

His respect for Dylan is, "not so much for what he does, but what he is. For years and years as a kid I strived to get rid of my Nova Scotian backwoods accent - suddenly I heard Dylan with a Minnesota accent and he didn't give a damn that it wasn't New York. I stopped caring too."

Mr. Nowlan has the complete collection of Dylan Albums, beginning with the early hardcore country western records which he recorded under the pseudonym "Blind Boy Grunt."

Short stories became an important part of Alden Nowlan's expression since his arrival in Fredericton, mainly because,

"I can't write poetry from 9 to 5 but is easy to write fiction that way. Because of a Puritan conscience I have to work."

If you feel that one book is sacred,
you feel something sacred about all
books. Even now, sort of unconsciously,
I have a sacred feeling about books.

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Poetry comes much more easily to him, as he explains,

"Poems deal with interior landscape but with short stories you have to have an intense visual sense - I don't. I am very aware of what people say, but not so aware of how they look.

"To be a good fiction writer you must be intensely aware of visual-tactile sense. I have to write fiction self-consciously about places that are very familiar to me

"I feel sort of presumptuous writing about things I don't see. I'm sort of an ancient Chinese poet. I don't have much sense of abstraction when I write, although the abstract concerns me as a human being.

"I enjoy being praised for fiction more than poetry. It's sort of like a mother with a bright child and a retarded child. She is more proud of the accomplishments of the retarded child."

In writing, Alden Nowlan considers himself a "sprinter" rather than a "marathon man", and says,

"All sprinters feel marathon writers are better than them. I hope to prove my masculinity by publishing a novel. I think it will be quite good when it comes out. I have a good feeling about it."

For years Alden Nowlan has made New Year's resolutions to write a novel. He would commit himself to a page a day, but by the end of January he would give up. About fifty novels have been started this way. This time he is trying to put several short stories together to form a book. The completed work will probably be published this fall.

Writing verse had been a very magical, almost mystical, sort of thing. I was disoriented. My only connection was through the

lost that for awhile."

describes his life before meeting Cogswell as most "schizophrenic". He had two separate lives - one for the newspaper and one for creative writing. This period of secrecy had some effects.

says, "Even today I automatically put down over whatever I'm writing whenever someone walks into the room."

ed Cogswell had a press in Fredericton published the first collection of Nowlan's poems under the title *The Rose and The Puritan* in 1958. This introduced Alden Nowlan to Canadian publications for the first time.

of Alden Nowlan's early sales to a commercial publication was "Terry and I at the Fair". This is one of the few early poems that Nowlan still derives satisfaction from. In explaining this feeling, he says, "I couldn't do better."