

French poets find metaphor in the soil of Quebec

By ELAINE VERBICKY

Jean-Guy Pilon has a homeland.

His poetry sings of roots deep in his original earth—Quebec.

Arbre

*Mes racines s'enfoncent
Dans cette terre originelle
Au coeur des arcs-en-ciel
Et des prismes vivants
Là, dans le nom même
De la corolle noire et profonde
Dans la plus secrète demeure
Au seuil de laquelle naissent
Les mystères tremblants*

Je t'habite

*Comme le sang des mots
Dans la parole . . .*

M. Pilon attended a colloquium on Canadian poetry held here last week. He was one of a number of Quebec poets and academics who brought a message from the other solitude of Canada to the poets and critics of English Canadian literature.

In a Gateway interview conducted largely in French, he spoke of the French poetic identity in Canada.

"The literature of the French language reflects its society," he said, "and that society does not exist except within Quebec."

"The French communities outside the province are minorities. They do not have the security of a real French society."

"I think it is correct to say that today French-Canadian poetry does not exist. It is a poetry of Quebec."

The poetry of the '60s in Quebec has been filled with vibrancy.

Influenced through their tradition by the dual aesthetics of surrealism and symbolism, Quebec poets are taking for their metaphors the things of the Quebec earth—the land itself, the seasons, the cold of winter. They are turning these metaphor-making elements into symbols as large as the universe which they perceive.

And they are adding political directions to much of their poetry, joyously reaffirming and articulating the community of le pays de Quebec.

From the halls of the universities to the boîtes à chansons on the highways near Montreal, more and more

poets and chansonniers are raising their voices within this community.

"The majority of poets of my generation have chosen Quebec," said M. Pilon. "They have not opted out to America or English Canada."

"And their act of faith is translated into their poems."

Montreal has become the centre of this cultural phenomenon. M. Pilon attributed the explosion of poetry in Montreal to the nature of the city.

"Montreal is a centre of television, radio and film production. It has also a beautiful youth, and its young people make it very much alive."

He laughed. "Montreal, I would say, has the prettiest girls in the country."

Jean-Guy Pilon, at 39, has contributed eight volumes of poetry and

much of his spirit to this Quebec literary renaissance. He is already regarded as one of its fathers.

Currently in charge of literary and cultural broadcasting for the whole network of Radio-Canada production, he also directs "Liberté," the most prestigious literary revue in the French language published in North America.

In 1968, he was elected a member of the Royal Society of Canada. This year he has published two volumes of verse, *Comme Eau Retenue*, and *Saisons pour la Continue*, the last one winning the Prix van Lerberghe.

Two other literary awards have come to him during 1969: the Prix Louise-Labé and the Prix France-Canada. These are additions to an already lengthy list of honors.

The poetry of Jean-Guy Pilon is concerned with the things men have experienced through the senses—actualities.

"Until today, men could not really write poetry about the moon. But now we can make poetry, or, those men who have been there can. They have touched the moon themselves," he explained.

Two poets have influenced his style.

"I have always admired Alain Grandbois, a Quebec poet, and René Char, one of the greatest French poets of the actual," he said.

"My own poetry is a song of the country, of the land. But it is the land evolved a little. I write of a reconciliation of the earth and the woman who is the same as the earth."

He is working on a new collection at the moment.

"It will be a return to childhood," he said, "in an attempt to recreate in poetry that new regard toward the very simple things—the water, the sky."

"In all my poetry, I name actual things. These are realities."

M. Pilon found the U of A conference interesting.

"These poets have good works to present," he said. "And the attention of the audience, the degree to which the people are receptive, has astonished me."

"You never hear of poetry readings like this in Montreal. Always there would be people talking in a corner."

"English poetry seems to be more oral, to have more of discourse about it. French poetry is more economical."

The poetries of the English and French in Canada have developed side by side, but not together.

"I do not think we have parallel concerns. A few common concerns, yes," said M. Pilon.

He was silent a moment, then his last words seemed to be the voice of Quebec.

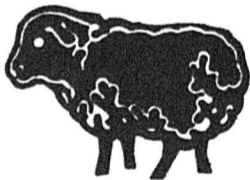
"But these two literatures have not influenced each other. They have grown alone. I do not think this is a fault."



—Jerry Kyle photo

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