

# "A REAL GOOD GOOSIN' "

Montreal's Vehicule poets celebrate life, and sometimes poetry

## THE VEHICULE POETS

Preface by Artie Gold  
Maker Press, 94pp, \$4.00

By LOUIS DUDEK  
Special to The Gazette

The extraordinary poetry scene in Montreal is so complex and confused today that the average reader has little chance of seeing the light in the galactic cloud. This little book of terrific and terrible poetry will only illustrate the problem, on the English side.

"Montreal is a real hot-bed of poetry," says Tom Konyves (the man who got poetry into the buses); but at the same time nobody reads or understands the stuff (see Patrick Barnard's write-up on poetry in the buses, *Gazette*, Feb. 2).

The so-called "Vehicule Poets" are the seven whose faces shine on the front and back covers of this book. They make no claim to being a school, but they have a lot in common. And they've been tremendously active — 33 separate books so far, and entries in 12 different anthologies; plus performances, videopoems and other periphra.

As you read them, you have to become accustomed to such things as "this desperacy . . ." "sort of as a replacement . . ." "I don't somehow feel . . ." "fell in immediate love . . ." Sometimes it's deliberate bathos: "I feel the night of a thousand clams." And sometimes it makes the record, as Artie Gold does for the longest split infinitive: "to mysteriously over fifty years lose its potency."

However, all this has a purpose or meaning, believe it or not. As the picture on the cover tells you, there is immense joy of life in these performances, and it is perhaps on behalf of life rather than of 'immortal poetry' that the poems are cast. Since life today does need "a real good goosin'" as Allen Ginsberg sometime somewhere said no doubt, the risk is worth taking

of sacrificing a little immortality for a temporary resurrection in the life here-and-now.

"An intentionally rough, smudged, improvised quality, calculated to produce an unruly effect," writes Norman Snider on the painting of Larry Rivers & Co. in the *Globe and Mail* (Feb. 2). These terms apply perfectly to our Vehicule poets. Also the observation that "some people find the style sloppy, others find it exhilarating . . ."

What is on the boards (and the buses) is no less than "a whole culture busting loose," a catharsis of values, an aesthetic revolution.

can be very funny (see his poem for Ken Norris) and he does have a fine artistic sense. Claudia Lapp is the mystical good-fairy of the group, full of Jungian dreams and pixyish ecstasies.

But then in the second half of the book you come to some very impressive suggestions of poetry. Stephen Morrissey's "Divisions" is one of the most moving confessional poems I know. Ken Norris, author of the current *Book of Fall* and of *The Perfect Accident* (1978), writes some of the best poetry in Canada today (try the "René Char" poem from this book reproduced here). And John McAuley is a brilliant experimentalist and wit.

from

### 'Poem Beginning with a Translated Line from René Char' by Ken Norris

Artie returns with the arrival of summer,  
bringing with him a crescent moon  
which he plants in the dark blue night sky.  
He returns with stories of the West  
& a black notebook full of poems  
composed on a thousand typewriters. He gives us  
poems which we take & turn like jewels in our hands.  
they are like stars shining in the warm space  
all cynics call a void. He coughs for us  
& we begin to relax, he curses a few enemies  
& our hearts unfold like flowers that have been  
a long time closed. A bit of that foreign shore  
is brought to us in the lines of his face.

The most incoherent and inchoate of these poets stand at the front of the book, Endre Farkas, Artie Gold, Tom Konyves, Claudia Lapp. Konyves, the ringleader, is the most avant-gardist, Dadaist, surrealist, multi-media-prone. You must put your reason and sanity aside to read him. Artie Gold is the Tristan Corbière of the group, a wandering *clochard*, bohemian, mournful minstrel. On Endre Farkas my comment is "Too loose, Lautrec" — but he

Put them all together and you have *The Vehicule Poets*, a branch of Montreal poetry to puzzle the monophones of Canada. As Edwin Arlington Robinson said when he heard Walt Whitman read aloud, "If that's not poetry, it is something greater than poetry."

Yes. It is life.

• Louis Dudek is the well-known Montreal poet and critic.

THE MONTREAL GAZETTE - FEBRUARY 16, 1980.