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# Photographs

Bela Egyedi

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Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, though her parents are both from Nova Scotia and her "extended" family lives there, and grew up in and out of Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Toronto, and the Québec bush. She studied at Victoria College, University of Toronto, where she received her B.A. in 1961, and at Harvard, where she received her M.A. in 1962. She was a lecturer in English at the University of British Columbia and at Sir George Williams University in Montreal. She has received numerous awards, among them the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1966. At the present time she lives with her husband, Graeme Gibson and their infant daughter on a farm in Alliston, Ontario, 65 miles north of Toronto. Her books are:

Poetry:

*The Circle Game*  
*The Animals in That Country*  
*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*  
*Procedures for Underground*  
*Power Politics*  
*You Are Happy*  
*Selected Poems*

Fiction:

*The Edible Woman*  
*Surfacing*  
*Lady Oracle*  
*Dancing Girls* (stories)

Criticism:

*Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*



Bela Egyedi

to make *Ghost in the Wheels* a satisfying volume, and none of them seemed absolutely necessary. Birney may sustain his ritual antagonism to the critics, but in this selection he shows himself a first-rate self-critic.

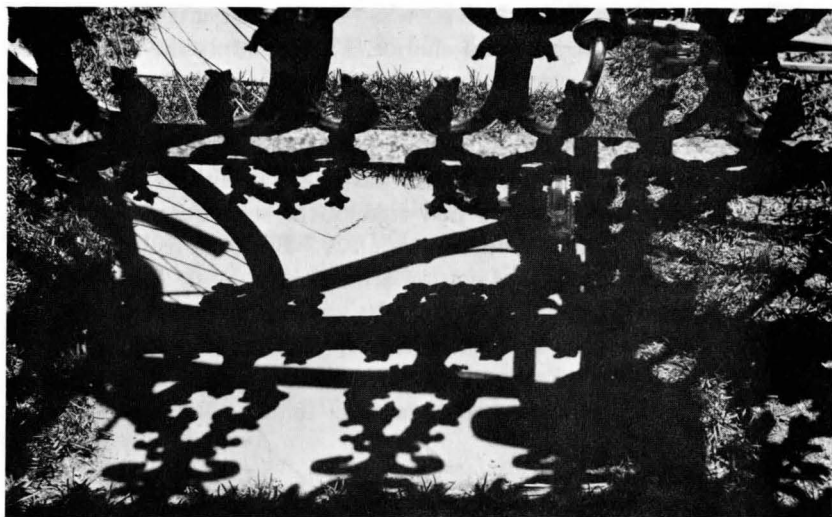
Certainly Birney's hope that none of these poems is *bad* is vindicated; one wishes every Canadian poet had been as sensitively selective in presenting his work. His thought that none of them is "great" may be more open to question. Greatness is in practice a relative term — relative to the temporal and the cultural contexts. Are great works the works that survive? Are they the works that in their time reflect most successfully what is best in their creator's culture? Possibly both aspects enter in, since works irrelevant to their time and place rarely emerge to stand among the enduring writings. Birney, there is no doubt, has been one of the Canadian poets whose work has been remarkable in its own right and also significant in its sensitivity to the Canadian setting and to Canadian attitudes. I would suggest, then, that his best poems are great by both standards; they are likely to be remembered as long as anything written at this time and place, and they are significant as reflections of the mind of a notable Canadian who has never been insular in his loyalties: who has indeed made the world his pearly and productive oyster.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

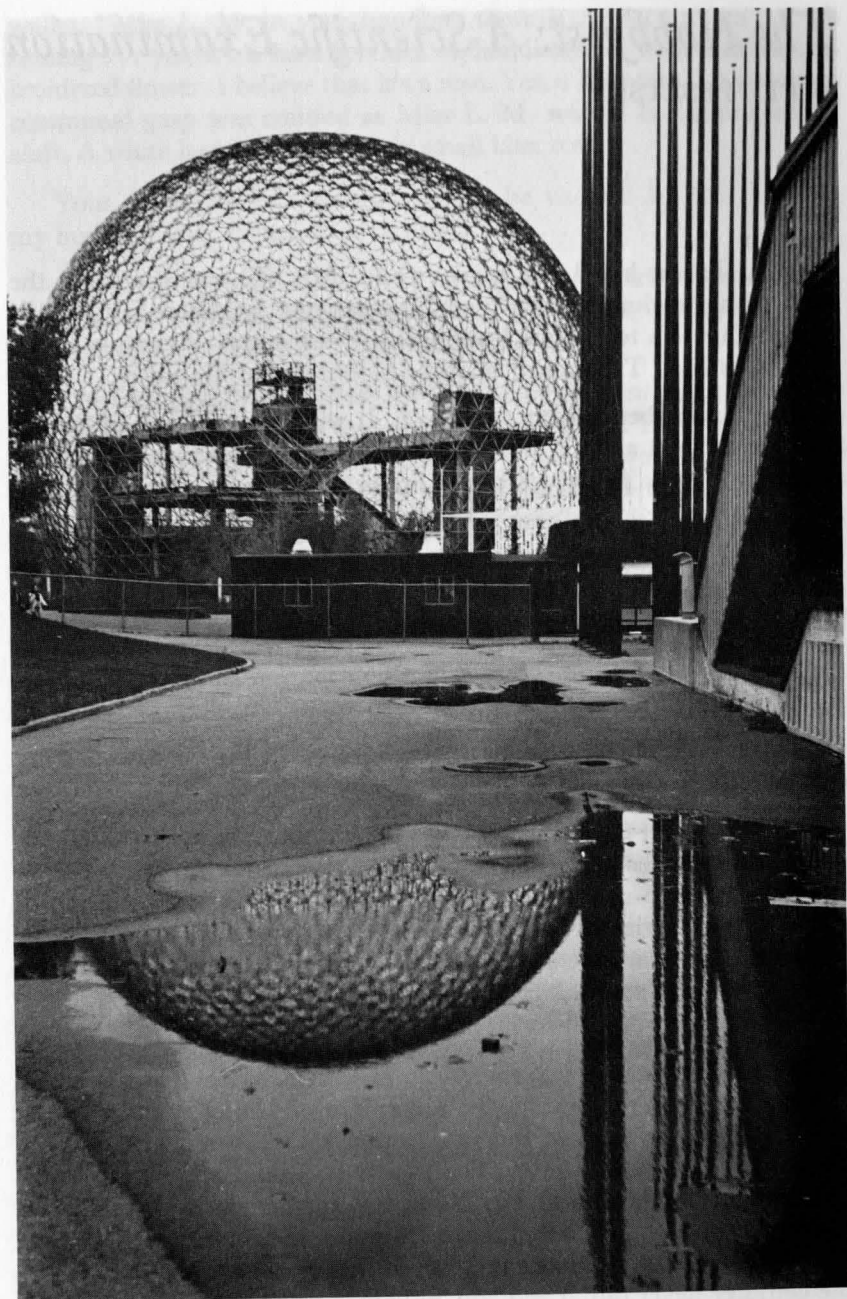


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And there you sit, in Henry James' morning coat. And you have been trying to move your pen to say something about this remarkable contract with the devil, to leave a record of it, and to record at least a few of the remarkable thoughts you've started to think in the style of Henry James, and on the subject of really getting into Henry James, the role so to speak, but the pen is moving away from you as if attached to one of those polygraphs Thomas Jefferson invented, it is pulling your hand like a Ouija board. And you are staring at the words that are appearing, dancing slowly at first, "Nothing in fact could more have amused the author than the opportunity of a hunt for a series of reproducible subjects — such moreover as might best consort with photography — the reference of which to Novel or Tale should exactly be *not* competitive and obvious, should on the contrary plead its case with some shyness, that of images always confessing themselves mere optical symbols or echoes, expressions of no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing. They were to remain at the most small pictures of our 'set' stage with the actors left out. . . ."



Bela Egyedi



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### III

You told me, lunching at Josèph's,  
foreseeing death, that it would be  
a comfort to believe. My faith,  
a kind of rabbit frozen in the headlights,  
scrambled for cover in the roadside brush  
of gossip; your burning beams passed by.  
"Receiving communications from beyond": thus  
you once described the fit of writing well.

The hint hangs undeveloped, like  
my mental note to send you Kierkegaard.  
Forgive me, Ed; no preacher, I —  
a lover of the dust, like you,  
who took ten years of life on trial  
and lent pentameter another voice.



Bela Egyedi