

GORDON, Don - On The Ward , West Coast Poetry Review, 1127  
Codel Way, Reno, Nevada, 1977.

The crucial idea in Don Gordon's book "On the Ward", it seems to me, is wonderfully characterized in the two first verses of the poem "The First Law".

"The first law of the dynamics of life  
is to know how to die".

But Gordon's first law reflects a brilliant idea that does not seem to be restricted to only one poem particularly, but it can be found developed in the whole book. For, knowing how to die is nothing more, nothing less than knowing how to live on a ward where pain, suffering and death are interrupted by a light truce which gives men a chance to dance, not because they want to dance, but because this dance is intimately related to the ritual of death.

According to Gordon, death became a continuous exercise to mankind, a kind of special food from which men obtain all their energy in order to go on existing. Death destroys the children, the old people, and the mutilated ones with the same voracity with which it annihilates men's ideas, hopes and dreams. These two components - the physical death and death of ideas - run together in Gordon's book by setting men's decay at the same level of the decay of Western Civilization, in which Christian philosophy and behaviour failed before an exaggerated materialism, before the negation of the most precious values of the West.

Death in Gordon's point of view spreads freely on the ward, as a mighty lady, dominating, directing mankind, finally constructing men's destiny.

JOSE ENDOENÇA MARTINS

