

LONG, D. S. - Poems From the Fifth Season, West Coast Poetry
Review, Reno, Nevada, 1977.

It is my intention to write an appraisal of Mr. D. S. Long's poems based entirely on the textual and structural textures supplied by them, overlooking comparison with other poems written by him, as well as both critical and authorial discussions of other works produced by him. I believe that close reading of literature permits worthwhile explications.

Poems from the Fifth Season is divided into two parts: The Four Seasons, in which appears the poem The Four Seasons, and the second part The fifth Season, in which appear eight other poems: The Winter Fisherman, At Work in the Field, Only the Warehouse, Nail Poems, The Veterinarian, That Night the Weather Broke, On the Fate of the Number Thirteen in Amberley, and Winter News.

Mr Long is certainly not a conservative poet in technique, since he plays down the use of punctuation, capitalization, regular Metrics and Rhyme. In order to illustrate the above statements let us see the beginning of The Four Seasons:

1
once upon a time
summer was an old man
digging his garden
the soil was shallow
and poor

often he would carry
heavy sacks of help
up from the beach

and buckets of water
a half mile from the creek. . .(7)

The poet becomes unorthodox when he conceives this first poem as a "fairy-tale narrative" ("mixing" reality with "magic") destroys the consecrated image of Summer by the introduction of the allegorical old man (not a sturdy young man frolicking in lush vegetation) going hungry in the best time of the year, when he makes scant use of punctuation and eliminates capitalization altogether. However in spite of all this, we can consider him a poet that carries on the Romantic tradition established by Wordsworth, on account of

his themes, his linearity of expression, his conception of existence, and his Pantheistic outlook.

The Four Seasons is a narrative poem in which we are represented the dramatic liberation of man by his power of transcending his material existence and projecting his mind over an apparently dualistic world made up of good and evil, and transforming it into a harmonious totality composed of varied, but not clashing elements:

. . .
at the gate
he paused and looked at the house
then went around back
under the trees was his garden

rank grass
scattered rows of dock, fumitory,
and wireweed
patches of fat hen, cleavers, spurrey,
and a towering shepherd's purse
even cornbind and vetch

but there also the half-crazed green
of chard on its white stem
corn ripening under a golden head
sweet rice in the ditch and mint
cress and all the other things he had
tried to plant with his dreams
growing strong
he had died by the end of spring (14 - 15)

We can see that the old man's world is transformed by the fertility of his dream, in that the strength of his hope made it possible for "evil" plants to coalesce with "good" ones, as if his garden had been restored to paradisiacal status. I believe that the redemption of his garden can only be understood in the context of the Poems From the Fifth Season.

Mr. Long writes at the end of Winter News:

Mountains and cold places on the earth
are no man's garden (33)

and indeed he develops this theme dramatically in the process of his other poems of the second part of his book. As a matter of fact, I would like to affirm that in spite of the difference of names given to the first and second parts of his book, they deal basically with the way to be adopted by man to transform "cold

places into cozy ones". At Work in The Field supplies a pantheistic solution to the problem, since in the poem the green handle of a hoe "decides" to go back to its origin and to become a tree, instead of being "owned" and serve as an accomplice of the hoe in the destruction of the forests of grass. The symbolism is evident. This field contains the scythe of death that reaps the lives of the guilty strangers until the moment when consciousness returns to the field and renders it "a peaceful garden once more". The process can be understood only in the light of Pantheism, under which all things possess spiritual existence and are mutually helpful. Naturally, in such a place, and in such circumstances, the specter of Death cannot exist.

Let us now examine what Mr. Long writes in Nail Poems and establish a relationship between these poems and others as to the central theme:

NAIL POEMS

opening up a wall
we came across
a bird
snared on the jagged
edge of a nail

black dreams
. . .
there are some scars
we only occasionally come to know

a cut into a fresh
felled apple tree
. . .
for fires this winter
. . .
a nail half rusted through
two inches beneath the surface
the colour of dried blood
fighting the wood
. . .
the back of his shop

light bleeding through dusty windows

. . .
ARDW RE
. . .
or is it only a moment yesterday
your blind child
(mine also now)

running across the safety of the lawn
where I had layed my work
the worn parts showing their nails
the new wood
and brass nails. . .
. . .

I could have called out
changing her path
but would not
remembering the bird
and the way we had found it
. . .
in the dark (22 - 25)

Nail Poems presents us the drama of having to accept the
"black dreams" of existences marked by the nail, here, symbolic
of death, existences based on the cruel destruction of the inha-
bitants of the "garden", and the transformation of the same garden
into a place of danger for one's own children. The poems are a
hymn against the "domination" of nature by man, against man's
crucifixion of the apple tree:

a cut into a fresh
felled apple tree. . .
for. . . carving. . .for
fires this winter
a nail. . .the colour of dried blood
fighting the wood
ARDW RE. . .

In short they are an attempt to bring about consciousness to
man of the necessity of dreaming the "white dreams" of an existence
based on the harmony displayed by nature, and that of leaving the
nightmare brought about by the citified civilization of nails.

The Veterinarian epitomizes my appraisal through its straight-
forward integration of man into both the animal and vegetal worlds,
via the musical existence led by the veterinarian whose hands can
only cure and preserve:

the veterinarian. . .
. . .
is never doubtful
. . .
he stands
and he watches

his speech is the dead leaf
blow across a field
his bags leak straw

and moist sawdust

I would dare say that the poems of D. S. Long are variations of the central theme of recovery of an integral existence through hope rather than through action. He implies that man's setting out to conquer a safe place for living by using his tools will always be unsuccessful. He seems to believe that man's decision to fight it out raises more problems than it solves. In the winter Fisherman the narrator states:

Hope is better than a smudge pot (18)

Indeed, we see that the fisherman presented in this poem is in capable of handling nature successfully, in spite of his having all the "necessary" instruments, all the hooks. He continues being:

a man fishing on. . . in darkness as if he'd
lost something (18)

Winter News, the last poem of the second part of the book apparently sums up Mr. Long's disappointment with the city's or man's individual capacity to find his true course in life. The poem is dominated by a sad tone, a heavy rhythm, permeated by a background promise of a different, and better place, of which John (may be the Apostle) speaks:

. . . I read you John

at dusk
from the island in the river
and it's not too cold

why shouldn't we go there

alright why shouldn't we
but it's still twelve months gone
in this city
winter again

. . .

once again

I come in out of that rain
to. . .

. . .

read you John (31-32)

REYNALDO GONÇALVES