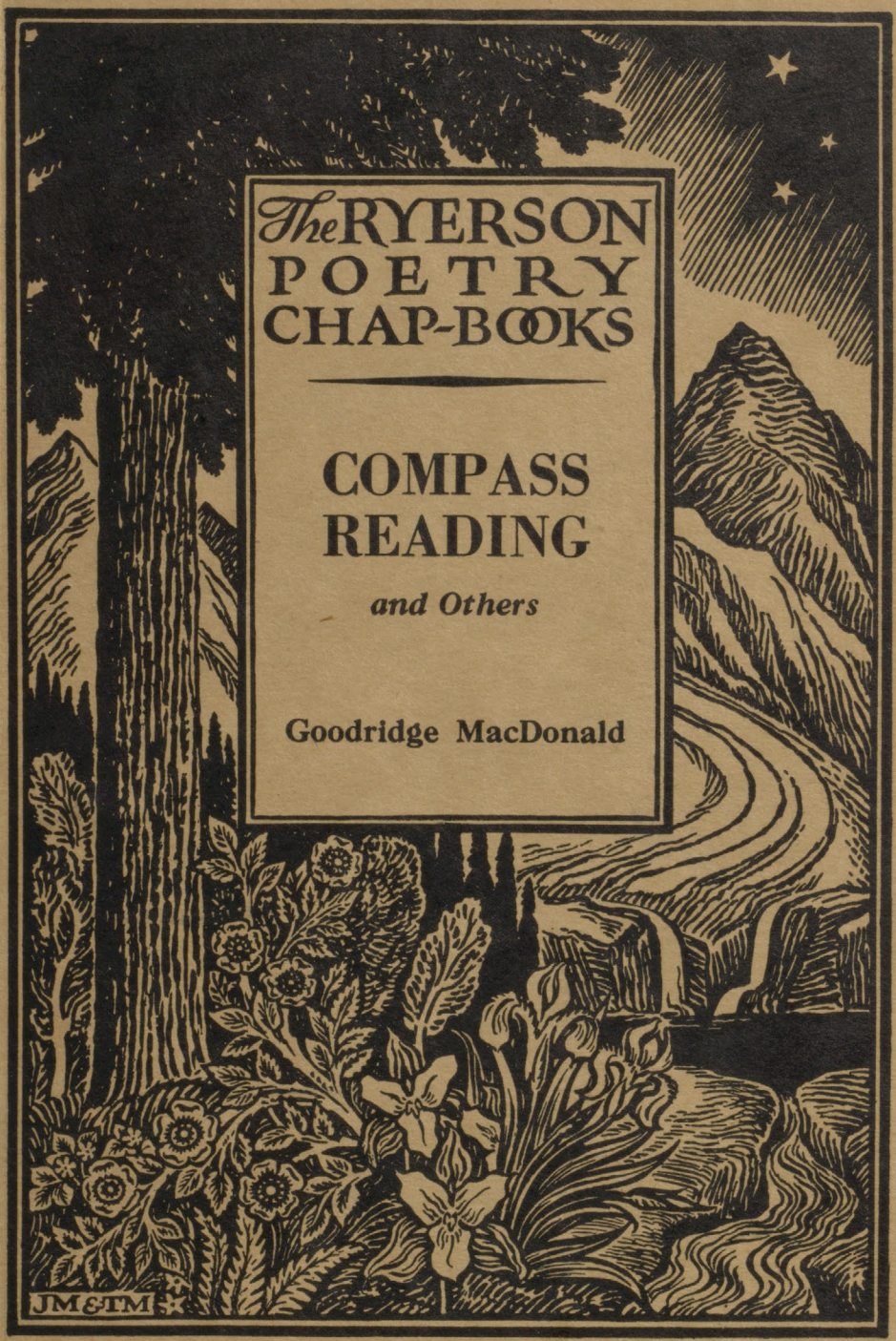


The RYERSON POETRY CHAP-BOOKS

COMPASS READING

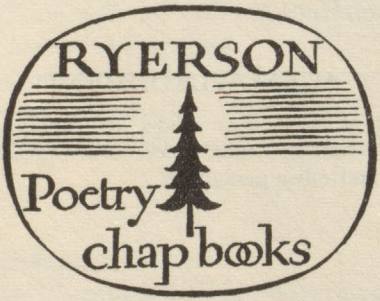
and Others

Goodridge MacDonald

COMPASS READING

and Others

by Goodridge MacDonald



TORONTO · *The* RYERSON PRESS

Chap-Book Number 158

OF THIS EDITION OF *COMPASS READING AND OTHERS*, BY GOODRIDGE MACDONALD, TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES ONLY HAVE BEEN PRINTED.

Published 1955

To

MY FATHER

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A number of these poems have appeared in *Queen's Quarterly, Saturday Night, Fiddlehead, Canadian Poetry Magazine* and other periodicals.

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

COMPASS READING
and Others

COMPASS READING
(For an Exhibition)

I

MY FRIEND (the White Rabbit)
teeters and tilts, and tips dangerously
his drink, proclaiming "Far—Far—"
and "Far—," a gentle eye
magnetic-needling adjacent bar.

While on wall and wall is a constant
northward turning,
quest beyond colour and familiar symbols
for an elusive rhythm, ultimate—
final austerity of fire and ice.

II

(Notes in transit)—
White houses herded slantwise toward sinister
water,
with intervening, cliff-line; Hay River
from the plane, its serpent rhythm
curled amid copper hills;
or Ellesmere Island:

The porpoise ice-cakes there disport,
assuming cloud forms to invade grey sky,
heedless of sleek intruder, whose angled
funnel
is an impudent gesture in a mausoleum . . .

North and northward, while the withering years
are blown away, and honours blossom.

III

(Diver forgets sensate surface,
courtesan colour, and wind-woven rhythm
of surface waters, piercing
tide-movements, undertows; flows
uncharted, overwhelm . . . Diver
plunges down, downward; the ultimate
depth, a depth below, and no returning.)

IV

North—north—and north,
where green fire flickers in the empty night,
presses in polar solitude
the huntsman heart.

(This north of spirit, north of art, is set
beyond man's finding, beyond his last regret.)

And my friend teeters and tilts, a gentle eye
magnetic-needling adjacent bar.

EQUESTRIANS IN THE SPRING NIGHT

HORSE and girl are one in flowing line:
Their lengthening shadow on the diminishing snow
Is a dark wave—a blue wind blowing.

Up the roadway ripple the other equestrians:
Throaty shout from a grey jacket;
From blonde crop uncovered, brief laughter,
Even the harshness of which is woven
Into the pattern of movement and horses,
And horsemen, above the diminishing snow.

From the snow in foreground flows
Unevenly, the sodden turf of spring.
The mountain is a background somnolence,
Its convention compromised only where the Cross
Glares unslumbering through unleafed branches.

In distant flurry of hoof-beats, men and girls,
Shaped to the horses, drift
Into the spring night, and diminishing snow,
Shadowless, gives back a mixture of street light
and sky light.

DIALOGUE

WALKING across windswept fields by night,
Thaddeus met God, and God said unto him:
"Thaddeus, lovest thou Me?"—"Yea, verily,
Thou knowest that I love Thee."—"Art thou mine
In every corner of thy will and being?
Thy heart, a temple sacred but to me?"

"Lord, I would serve Thee, knowing Thee alone,
In thought and word, and action solely Thine,
And where I fall from Thee, I know the failing.
But in my inmost spirit, quite withdrawn,
There is a rebel stronghold still where stands
The I, supreme, unconquered and alone;
For I am God within the spirit's spirit."

"Hold thou, my son, this rebel stronghold free,
This I within the I inviolate
Is God within thee, and of all thou art,
Alone returns to me. That which defies
All order, pattern, law, while all else yields,
Yields at the last to me from whence it came;
To me, when falls the final barricade."

—Thaddeus walked the windswept fields alone,
By night, under a sky swept clear of cloud.

AS WAVE AND TREE

WAVES rise and run
Awhile, under the sun.
Jade green or grey,
Or crested bright with spray,
And to the tide
Returning, sink and glide,
Or charge the shore
And break with trampling roar.

The twisted tree,
Patterned in agony
Against night sky—
Compelled before it die

To form and line,
And intricate design—
Beneath the strife,
Is rooted deep in life.

As tree and wave
Know neither death nor grave,
So must it be
With you, now lost to me,
Who, even as they,
Serve beauty for a day.

BY ST. MARGARET'S BAY

EVEN so, the sea
Comes in at St. Margaret's Bay
Leaping in gold, cold flame under the sun,
And running ever shoreward to this place
Where, idly, on an August afternoon,
Hands undirected moving in the sands,
I built an altar, to what god I know not.

Builded an altar of tide-tumbled pebbles,
Of white sand, filtering between warm fingers;
With altar-cloths of seaweed, neon-hued,
Draping grey stones and shifting sands;
Dark cerements of seaweed, neon-hued.

—To god of sea, and sun, and sand;
Of running tide, and tideless depth,
And winds that brush the waters; and of gulls,
Knifing the air with wings, and with their cries,
Heard between beating of waves, from beyond the
point.

EPITHALAMIUM

A SPRING betrothal
Is consummated in October fields,
Where life and death
Are met on bronzed bed,
With blossoms tapestried.

Enwrought its folds with purple and with blue,
With foaming asters veiled that catch the light
Of brief October suns, to pour
Upon this bridal bed of death and life.

And is it bridal veil or funeral shroud,
This loveliness of flowers and of light,
Broidered with mouldering brown and graveyard
grey?

—And of these linked lovers, who will say
Which of the twain is bridegroom?
Which is bride?

AT MORNING, AT NAMUR

I AM bathed in green
washing through birch leaves.
I absorb the flowing distillation
of sun and leaf, warm as tides that sway
down scented seaways of the atolled south.

At my feet, the brown fields fall away
to road and river; wave-like, rise again,
islanding weathered barn and white-flanked inn.
And beyond, the hills, patterned
with pasture. And beyond, the sky,
its morning blue of August washed with sun.

A moment, between light-beats, all is one; I
merge with green light and leaf and road and hill,
as they are lost in me.

Then day again is day,
blue sky is blue; hill curves to hill; and I
am I, beneath a birch, upon a hill.

STOKERS

GRIM-FACED they were, those desperate men
whose doom
Bound them in service to the bell
That banged its orders from the engine-room
Into their narrow, noise-filled hell.

They swayed in motion with the moving ship,
Their shovels scraping up the coal;
Black muscles bulging upon neck and hip
In fluctuant curve and roll.

While sullenly the shattered shadows swung,
Timed to the swiftly swinging doors;
Tangled with foam of living colour, flung
Each moment, over flesh and floors.

BERMUDA SOUVENIR

I

WE CAME to Bermuda at the end of the lily time,
When greygreen fields were sparely patched with white—
(Brighter than snow new-fallen in the night)—
Sombre hibiscus in the hedgerow burned
And oleander pinkly soothed our sight.

II

That night, in the ballroom, we saw
A young man fall from his chair and crawl,
Against the stamp of the drums, across the floor
In determined pilgrim's progress toward the door,
The stairs, the elevator and his thirty-two dollar room.
(God rest you, youth, and don't forget your prayers.)—

III

While the plushy playboy whose parties were talked of
Along the islands of easy spending that spring
Joined the orchestra, taking a trumpet and calling the tune:
And the investment broker from Boston (or Memphis or Minneapolis)
Carried a fat face, splotched and broken by fevered lips,
Between drinks wondering whether the desk would cash his cheque.

(Far on the outward reef, notorious of wreck,
White combers gossiped of forgotten ships.)

IV

And Gibbs Hill Light, and danky caves,
And Yankee guards at Kincaid port;
Basketted bicycles, and the grey
Twisted cedar; a perfume plant,
And varicoloured men and drinks, we saw,
And pastel roofs;
And the islands, lifting and dipping in last salute.

(And the lilies, the late last lilies,
Than the scarce-fallen snow more white.)

WHEN SPRING COMES BACK

WHEN spring comes back, you will return
To those dear paths we knew last year.
You'll find the first unfolding fern
Along the Pink's Lake road; and near
The end of May, I know you'll hear

Some night when a wet moon hangs low
Over the common, and the hill
Is touched with gold, the broken flow
Of song from that same whippoorwill
We heard last summer from the hill.

And he'll untangle all his song—
Predestined passion, praise and prayer—
Nor ever wake to note more strong
Or glad, though all the night be rare
With spring—and you be listening there.

The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books

Lorne Pierce—Editor

1.	THE SWEET O' THE YEAR* [1925]	*Sir Charles G. D. Roberts*
33.	LATER POEMS AND NEW VILLANELLES	*S. Frances Harrison*
52.	THE NAIAD AND FIVE OTHER POEMS*	*Marjorie Pickthall*
70.	THE THOUSAND ISLANDS	*Agnes Maule Machar*
77.	SONGS	*Helena Coleman*
81.	REWARD AND OTHER POEMS	*Isabel McFadden*
82.	THE MUSIC OF EARTH*	*Bliss Carman*
83.	LYRICS AND SONNETS	*Lilian Leveridge*
87.	DISCOVERY	*Arthur S. Bourinot*
89.	CALLING ADVENTURERS!	*Anne Marriott*
92.	THE ARTISAN	*Sara Carsley*
99.	FOR THIS FREEDOM TOO	*Mary Elizabeth Colman*
100.	SALT MARSH	*Anne Marriott*
104.	REARGUARD AND OTHER POEMS	*Elsie Fry Laurence*
108.	RHYTHM POEMS	*Sister Maura*
110.	AND IN THE TIME OF HARVEST	*Monica Roberts Chalmers*
111.	SEA-WOMAN AND OTHER POEMS	*Eileen Cameron Henry*
115.	VOYAGEUR AND OTHER POEMS	*R. E. Rashley*
116.	POEMS: 1939-1944	*George Whalley*
117.	MERRY-GO-ROUND	*Marjorie Freeman Campbell*
120.	V-E DAY	*Audrey Alexandra Brown*
121.	THE FLOWER IN THE DUSK	*Doris Hedges*
122.	THE DYING GENERAL AND OTHER POEMS	*Goodridge MacDonald*
123.	SONG IN THE SILENCE AND OTHER POEMS	*M. Eugenie Perry*
124.	THE SEA IS OUR DOORWAY	*Michael Harrington*
125.	CRISIS	*Doris Hedges*

*Out of Print

1	*thy Howard*
1	*Ruby Nichols*
1	*Lenore Pratt*
130. THE BITTER FRUIT AND OTHER POEMS	*Margaret E. Coulby*
131. MYSSIUM	*Albert Norman Levine*
132. NOT WITHOUT BEAUTY	*John A. B. McLeish*
133. NEW YORK NOCTURNES	*Arthur Stringer*
134. HIGH ON A HILL	*Marjorie Freeman Campbell*
135. SCRUB OAK	*Thomas Saunders*
138. BEGGAR MAKES MUSIC	*Goodridge MacDonald*
139. TANAGER FEATHER	*Kathryn Munro*
140. THE TREASURES OF THE SNOW	*Arthur S. Bourinot*
141. THREE MERIDIANS	*Geoffrey Drayton*
142. THE FLUTE AND OTHER POEMS	*Katherine Hale*
143. CALL MY PEOPLE HOME	*Dorothy Livesay*
144. SILVER SHADOWS	*Theresa E. Thomson*
145. EAST COAST	*Elizabeth Brewster*
146. CITY HALL STREET	*Raymond Souster*
147. THE SEARCHING IMAGE	*Louis Dudek*
148. IT WAS A PLANE	*Tom Farley*
149. MINT AND WILLOW	*Ruth Cleaves Hazelton*
150. VIEWPOINT	*Myra Lazechko-Haas*
151. PORTRAIT AND OTHER POEMS	*R. E. Rashley*
152. ON FRIENDSHIP	*William Sherwood Fox*
153. LILLOOET	*Elizabeth Brewster*
154. POEMS	*Anthony Frisch*
155. TOM THOMSON AND OTHER POEMS	*Arthur S. Bourinot*
156. QUEENS AND OTHERS	*I. Sutherland Groom*
157. PRESSED ON SAND	*Alfred W. Purdy*
158. COMPASS READING AND OTHERS	*Goodridge MacDonald*

One Dollar