**Woodcock, George (1912-1995)**

George Woodcock was a British-Canadian poet, political activist, biographer, travel writer, novelist, dramatist, translator, and literary critic. He was born in Winnipeg, but spent his childhood and early adulthood in England. Returning to Canada in 1949, he moved “back to the land” on Vancouver Island and then to the city of Vancouver, where he lived until his death in 1995. Woodcock’s poetics and politics were informed by pacifism and anarchism. William Morris, Thomas Hardy, George Orwell, Roy Fuller, Julian Symons, Gabriel Dumont, the Dalai Lama, and Simon Gunanoot, a Gitksan rancher, contributed to Woodcock’s worldview. Woodcock taught at the University of British Columbia for over two decades and was the first editor of the journal *Canadian Literature* (1959-present) <http://canlit.ca/>, editing it from 1959 to 1977 <http://canlit.ca/woodcock/>.

In 1944, Woodcock published a political-historical work on anarchism, *Anarchy or Chaos*; it demonstrated his move from pacifism to anarchism and later informed his interest in Canada’s political and literary world. He also edited the short-lived but influential British anarchist journal *Now* (1940-1947), which attracted international contributors such as Mulk Raj Anand, Julian Huxley, Henry Miller, George Orwell, Herbert Read, and Kenneth Rexroth.

A long-time friend of George Orwell, Woodcock wrote a critical biography of Orwell and his work, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell* (1966), which won Canada’s Governor General’s Award. Woodcock was also awarded the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Canada (1968), the UBC Medal for Popular Biography twice (1973; 1976), and the Molson Prize (1973). He refused the Order of Canada on principle. He and his wife Ingeborg Woodcock established the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society in 1962, now the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society <http://tras.ca/>, Canada India Village Aid <http://www.civaid.ca/> in 1981, and the Woodcock Fund <http://www.writerstrust.com/Programs/Financial-Grant.aspx> for writers in 1989.

Poetics, for Woodcock, were primarily a matter of biography, or of autobiography. He states in his Introduction to his *Collected Poems* (1983), that a “*Collected Poems*, when prepared by the author himself, is in some way nearer to an autobiography than it is to an ordinary collection of verse” (19), because it is a “moral as well as a literary act” (21). Among his influences were Auden, the Imagists, and regional poets of the Pacific Northwest such as Theodore Roethke and Kenneth Rexroth. Like Roethke, many of Woodcock’s later in life poems meditate upon death against a backdrop of coastal mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and west coast neighborhoods. For example, see “The Cherry Tree on Cherry Street” <http://canlit.ca/poems/12236 > [Copyright *Canadian Literature*] (*The Cherry Tree on Cherry Street and Other Poems* 1994), about his home on McCleery Street in Vancouver. The poem conveys a strong sense of continuity in place where poet and tree age together. When the tree is felled, the poet writes, “I felt my own heart fail. / You had become parallel.” Compare also Woodcock’s “The Box Canyon” (1994) with Rexroth’s “Lyell’s Hypothesis Again” (1950).

Woodcock’s contributions to Canadian modernism are, like his poetics and politics, individually focussed yet cosmopolitan; see, for example, his travel accounts of Canada, *Ravens and Prophets: An Account of Journeys in British Columbia, Alberta and Southern Alaska* (1952) and *Canada and the Canadians* (1970). For an interview with Woodcock about his life and work, go here <http://canlit.ca/woodcock/interviews>. [Copyright *Canadian Literature*.] To learn more about Woodcock, watch the documentary “The Anarchist of Cherry Street” here <http://www.georgewoodcock.com/anarchist-of-cherry-street.html>. [Documentary copyright of A. R. T. BookWorld Productions; *George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award* website copyright of George Woodcock Literary Achievement Awards, 2011; website design by Jackson on the Moon Web Site and Graphic Design] For an extended bibliography of Woodcock’s prolific publications, go here <http://www.georgewoodcock.ca/>. [The *George Woodcock Online Research Centre* website copyright of Matthew Hiebert <http://matthewhiebert.ca/>.]

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