**Ross, (James) Sinclair (1908-1996)**

Sinclair Ross was a founding figure of Canadian literature. His novel, *As For Me and My House*, and short stories, including “The Lamp at Noon” and “The Painted Door,” have been widely recognized as defining accounts of life in early- to mid-twentieth century Western Canada. Ross’ work both evokes a modernist context through its focus on the ambiguities of first person narration, and initiates a nationalist discourse through its depiction of small-town Canadian landscapes and communities. *As For Me and My House* has been described by Margaret Atwood as “archetypally” Canadian, while fellow Western writer Margaret Laurence credits Ross with showing her that “novels could be written here.”

**Timeline of Life**

**1908 1924 1942-46 1946 1968 1980 1992 1996**

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Born Leaves school, begins Canadian Army Returns to Retires to Returns to Order of Dies in

employment at the Royal Bank service in London reside in Montreal Greece, then Spain Canada Canada Vancouver

**Timeline of Works Published During Lifetime**

**1941 1958 1968 1970 1974 1982**

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*As For Me and The Well The Lamp at Noon Whir of Gold Sawbones The Race and*

*My House and Other Stories Memorial Other Stories*

James Sinclair Ross was the youngest of three children born near Shellbrook, Saskatchewan to Peter Ross and Catherine Foster Fraser Ross. His parents separated a few years after his birth and Ross remained with his mother, a situation that eventually necessitated him leaving school to support them both. Ross worked at the Royal Bank for forty-three years, in Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, and Montreal. After the publication of *As for Me and My House* (1941), a psychological study of a minister and his wife in small town Saskatchewan, Ross hoped to become a professional writer, but public indifference and his personal obligations made this impossible. He joined the Canadian Army in 1942 and spent the war in London. His masterful short stories, published in *Queen’s Quarterly* between 1935 and 1952, were triumphs of perseverance in that they were written in the evenings and on weekends for little financial renumeration.

Ross’ second novel, *The Well* (1958), recounts the story of a drifter who arrives to work on a prairie farm, a situation that ends in violence and treachery. After a lengthy, frustrating publication process and poor sales for the novel, Ross regarded his writing career as a failure. On his retirement from the bank in 1968, Ross moved to Greece, then Spain. During this period, increased interest in Canadian literature and recognition of Ross’s oeuvre encouraged publication of two more novels, *Whir of Gold* (1970), about a struggling musician in Montreal, and *Sawbones Memorial* (1974), the story of a retirement party for a small-town prairie doctor. *Sawbones Memorial* was a critical success, praised for its innovative use of voice and narrative form. A New Canadian Library edition of Ross’s previously-published fiction titled *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* came out in 1968.

In his final years, Ross enjoyed the recognition and encouragement that he had lacked for much of his career. Despite increasing difficulties with Parkinson’s disease which prompted him to return to Canada in 1980, a second collection of his fiction, *The Race and Other Stories* (1982), was brought out by the University of Ottawa; Ross published a memoir, “Just Wind and Horses” (1988), about his childhood; and he received the Order of Canada in 1992. Ross passed away in Vancouver on February 29, 1996.

**Biographies of Sinclair Ross:**

Fraser, Keath. *As For Me and My Body: A Memoir of Sinclair Ross.*

Stouck, David. *As For Sinclair Ross.*

**Chronology of All Works:**

Novels

* *As For Me and My House* (1941)
* *The Well* (1958)
* *Whir of Gold* (1970)
* *Sawbones Memorial* (1974)

Short Story Collections

* *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* (1968)
* *The Race and Other Stories* (1982)

Memoir

* “Just Wind and Horses” (1988)

Letters

* *Collecting Stamps Would Have Been More Fun: Canadian Publishing and the Correspondence of Sinclair Ross* (2010)

**References and Further Reading:**

Laurence, Margaret. “Introduction.” *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*.

Stouck, David (ed.). *Sinclair Ross’ As For Me and My House: Five Decades of Criticism*.

Images in separate files: (1) Photo of Sinclair Ross, c.1958. From a publicity photo of the author in his novel, *The Well*, 1958. (2) Cover of the first edition of *As for Me and My House*, 1941.