

**Lem Snow. *The Great Lobster Boil*** PIP-7316 Pigeon Inlet Productions, 1983; available from CFMS Mail Order Service (Stock number PIP7316) for \$8.00 for members, \$10.00 otherwise, plus \$2.00 shipping).

Lem Snow is a fine traditional poet and songwriter from western Newfoundland. Born in 1903, he has spent most of his life in the inland towns of Howley and Deer Lake working as a scaler for the International Pulp and Paper Company, a clerk in a general store, an insurance underwriter, and a caretaker of a powerhouse. This album gives a small sample of Snow's repertoire: four recitations, six songs accompanied by his four-string banjo, and two unaccompanied songs.

This recording is a valuable addition to the documentation of Canadian folklore for a number of reasons. Although the local poet and reciter of recitations is one of the most common types of folk performer in this country — there is hardly a community or neighbourhood without one — very few have been recorded or even recognized for their contributions to the verbal heritage of the country. This album preserves a small part of this vast area of folklore.

Snow is a particularly talented poet and is, for this reason alone, worthy of recognition. His artistry shows, at the same time, its traditional roots and Snow's individuality well-integrated and complementary. We see in Snow's verse the echo of other Atlantic poets, especially Johnny Burke, the "Bard of Prescott Street." Snow uses internal rhyme and a lively prosody to good effect. As well, Snow

indulges in the time-honoured and Burkean tradition of caricature; for example, in the song, "The Great Lobster Boil." Snow describes the different personalities who attended the feast with the same sense of comic stereotyping used in Burke's "The Kelligrew's Soiree."

Snow understands the proper use of repetition in traditional poetry. His two recitations, "When Summer Comes" and "Winter," are made all the more powerful (and humorous) by the strategic insertion of the phrases, "when summer comes," and "that's winter," in the respective poems. Such phrases are like refrains, urging the traditional audience to chime in either openly or in their mental monitoring of the piece with Snow's reciting. In his songs Snow maintains his heritage by using familiar tunes: the tune of "Little Brown Jug" for his "Newfoundland" and "The Kelligrews Soiree" for his "The Howley Broomball Game," to name two examples.

Perhaps Snow's greatest contribution to the tradition of folk poetry, however, is his literary and learned use of word, phrase and line. Although he has only a grade 10 education, Snow is a great reader, as the record notes tell us, and his considerable self-education is evident throughout his poems and songs. Through his mastery of the English language, Snow dispels the romantic and erroneous notion of the traditional performer as an unsophisticated or primitive artist. He uses the full extent of his vocabulary in his art; for example, the line "for aeons myriad forms of life . . ." from "Touching on Evolution" or the almost homeric "Oh that the Gods would lend me tongue to speak of thee" in "Ode to the Ocean." He also displays his reading knowledge through literary allusions, such as his last-line borrowing from Shakespeare, "what fools these mortals be," in "Touching on Evolution." None of this poetic craftsmanship is done self-consciously; it is all as much a part of Snow's art as the traditional qualities of his poetry.

This album is also valuable as a textbook of the repertoire and aesthetic of the local poet. The themes in Snow's works and the occasions for which they were composed would be familiar to anyone who has studied the traditional local poet. The major topic of such poets is local events of importance; for the poet, like the local historian, is a documenter of what is notable in his community. Snow's "The Great Lobster Boil," "The Hampden Wedding Spree" and "The Howley Broomball Game" conform to this category, especially in mentioning local characters and indulging in community in-jokes. Odes and anthems are also a theme of local poets, since their allegiance is clearly to a specific place and group of people. Snow's "When Summer Comes," "Winter" and "Ode to the Ocean" express the Newfoundlander's understand-

ing of his climate and geography. "Come Home Year" is Snow's contribution to the creative outpouring that accompanied the official celebration of the many ethnic-Newfoundland enclaves in other parts of North America — a theme very close to the heart of this emigrant-conscious culture. Snow's "Newfoundland" is obviously an anthem, but unlike other poets, who have concentrated on the landscape and seascape of the island. Snow's anthem celebrates the occupational heritage of the province, from the fishermen and loggers to store clerks and "those who catch bugs."

Although this album does not show whether Snow uses satire — a form used by many other local poets — it does preserve one example of parody, another favourite device of traditional poets. "Where River Shannon Flows" is Snow's own composition in which he mixes the theme of Irish ancestry with a kind of nonsense and illogicality common in humorous verse. Snow also explores the themes of sexuality and bawdiness, although his "Sailing Along the French Shore" is the most delicate and nostalgic treatment of these themes I have seen. Finally, Snow writes on topics which are a part of local knowledge or controversy. His "Touching on Evolution" is his contribution to the debate which runs continually in local cafes and churches. His "Christopher Columbus" is a humorous and localized treatment of grade-school history in which Columbus's sex life and fancied trip to Newfoundland mock the textbook account of the discovery of America.

Like other local poets, Snow is a "ritual-master"; that is, he is one of the community members whose talents are important in the celebration of local rites and festivals. His "The Hampden Wedding Spree" was written for a specific wedding at which Snow recited the poem. As well, "The Great Lobster Boil" is the verbal counterpart to an actual Deer Lake community celebration. Both pieces are commemorative contributions to their respective local celebrations and can be seen as customs in their own right. The notes tell us that Snow wrote "Where River Shannon Flows" as payment to an Irish-born doctor for his services; here is another context in which local poets use their artistry.

This album is an important one. The recording itself is a product of a studio session (October 1982) rather than a more natural context, but is clear and easy to listen to. The photograph on the cover is informative, showing Snow singing and playing the banjo. The notes, too, are informative, although as with almost all albums, the content calls for more than the few paragraphs of commentary given. Overall, Pigeon Inlet Productions has done its usual fine job.

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Saskatoon**