

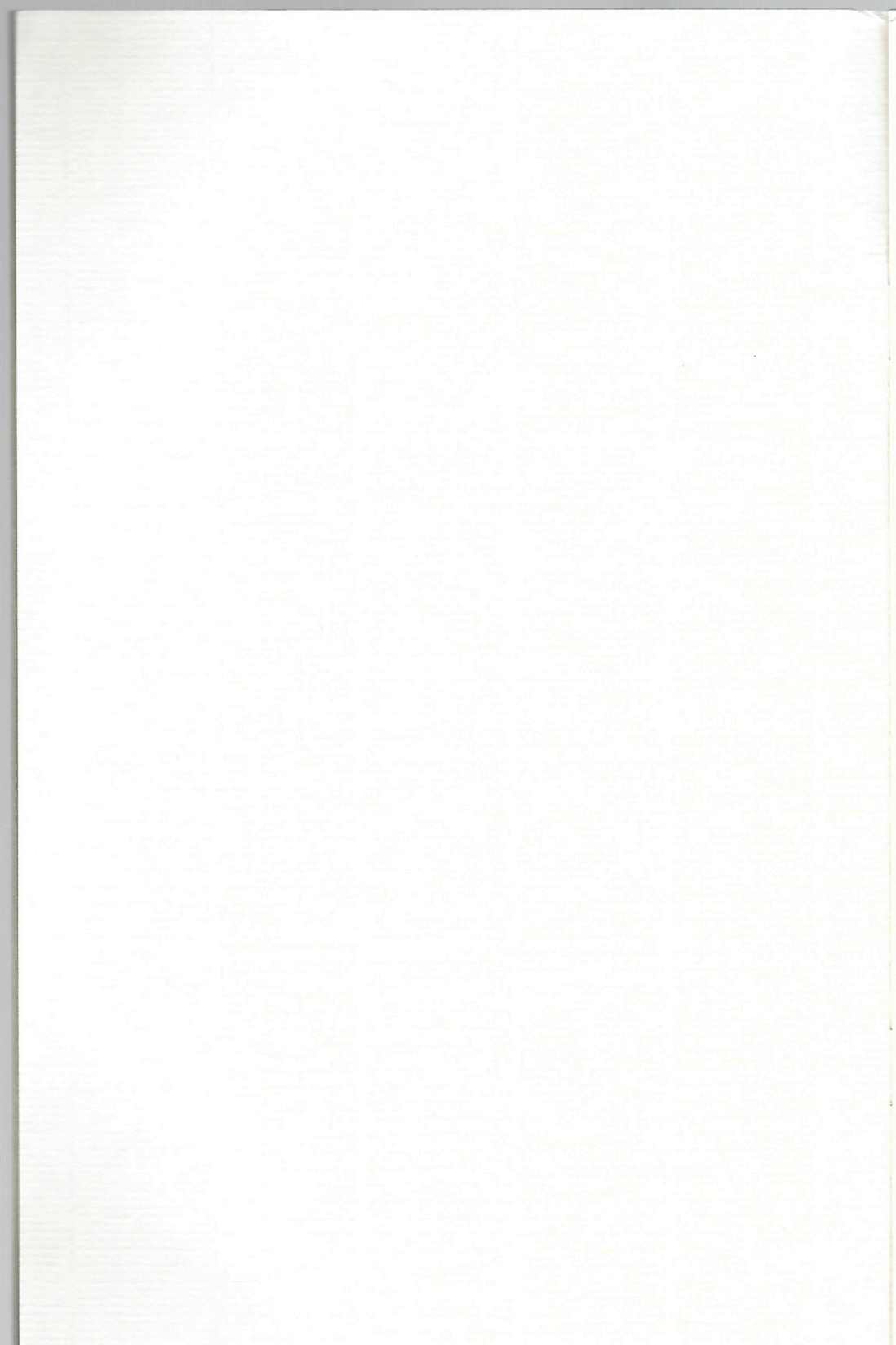
You Too, Nicky

from The Martyrology Bo(o)ks 7(VII)

bpNichol



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All of us are born out of someone. Too many of us spend a lifetime tied to that moment or trying to live it down. But family, what you came from, what came before you, lives in the body like an organ you only know the shape of thru x-rays or textbooks. Who were they, really, those early ones who suffer from the diffusion of histories lived with no importance given to writing them down? We, all of us, move forward thru time at the tip of a family, a genealogy, whose history & description disappears behind us.

'You too, Nicky,' a friend said to me, 'none of us ever escapes our families.' And restless, as i have been, tired, as i am now, feeling some sort of longing which can only be satisfied by moving & is never satisfied by standing still, i took off with Ellie in the autumn of 1979 to visit, revisit, both our families. Among the luggage we carried was a notebook i had kept in 1969 when i had last driven west. In its opening pages i found this poem:

the dead
porcupine
 decapitated by
the speeding cars
 & the bleak stone
landscapes
 going home(?)
thru the Sault

 it is
a country as wide as dreams are
full of the half-formed
unsuspected
 ruthlessness
around the corner of things
the smooth hum of the car
carrying the far strangers ahead of us

nothing is as it seems

the partly known truth entices

we are forbidden to pass till the future is seen

it is as if

 hands
 reached out & touched us
as they were meant to do

the grey clouds turned over &
their backs were blue

II

You have plans but so many of them don't work out. You have dreams, tho you do not mean the dreams you wake from, troubled or happy, but visions rather, glimpses of some future possibility everything in you wishes to make real. We drove west but the poems I'd planned to write barely occurred. A few fragments here & there – Edmonton, Blue River, Vancouver – cities & places I had visited & written from before. By the time we got back Ellie was pregnant and much of the shape of our lives together changed. Even tho our son died stillborn, or because of it perhaps, our lives changed absolutely. It is the kind of moment of which one tends to say 'something deepened between us' and yet that notion of depth seems in itself shallow, lacking as it does an attention to the details of the dailiness between you, the actual exchanges that comprise living. Other poems occurred but nothing of what was planned. We came out of families, came together and within two years of that trip had begun a family of our own. Except the family was there before we began. We were part of it. Became part of it again. Despite what I had once intended. Unplotted, unplanned, undreamt of. It continued. It began.

III

There is some larger meditation that seems obvious. An inference or moral perhaps. I only know the poem unfolds in front of me, in spite of me, more in control than me. Its not that the poem has a mind of its own but that poetry is its own mind, a particular state you come to, achieve.

Sometimes i talk too much of it, like a magician explaining his best trick and you see after all he is only human. Which is what I wish to be, am, only human.

Certain phrases like that, that hover on the edge of cliché, seem like charms to me & i clutch them to my chest. And the real magic, which is what the language can achieve, remains a mystery the charm connects you to.

it is not so much that
images recur
but that life
repeats itself
& the lights of
Vancouver say
shine
even when lines aren't there to be written

Only human, only a skill you've managed to achieve. And if the writing is evocative it is only so thru evocation. Which is partly syntax, partly mystery.

IV

what is smaller than us?

what is more futile than
our wars and treacheries

we are all dying
every day walking closer to the grave
the sword and the bomb and age accompanies us

what are the great themes but those we cannot name
properly

what are the minor notes but
our lives

here amidst the flickering oil wells
among the fields now emptied from harvest

our lives

all that really is ours

V

Of course I repeat myself, phrases, insist certain contents over & over.

driving thru the smoke of the forest fires
Blue River to Kamloops
sun not yet visible over the mountaintops

Of course I had driven that road before. Others. Correspondences. You build up a vocabulary of shared experiences, constants you draw on tho you cannot depend on them.

between the still standing trees
the smoke the mist
down into the valleys

Of course I am *aware* of what I am doing, not aware. Of course there are such contradictions in living.

VI

We have our infatuations, our cloudings of the mind.
People, ideas, things. We have our fevers that drive
others from us, afraid of the shrill quality in our voice.

we are pushed here there
'driven' is what we say
and the i is lost

And if i tries to retain a kind of loyalty to ideas, not
blindly, but allowing them, always, to evolve under the
scrutiny that time permits, it is simply that struggle with
constancy, to stick with what makes sense until it no
longer makes sense, to not be swayed by infatuation's
blind calling. It is what binds books together, these
motifs and concerns, the trace of a life lived, a mind.

in the rooms you live in
other people's books line your shelves

the traces of their lives
their minds

too

VII

something of that is what family is. other minds enter,
other lives you pledge a constancy to.

there are other journeys, other poems, other plans that
do not realize themselves.

living among family you are changed. it is the way your
vocabulary increases. you occupy certain nouns, are
caught up in the activity of certain verbs, adverbs,
adjectives. syntax too. tone.

the language comes alive as you come alive and the real
mysteries remain.

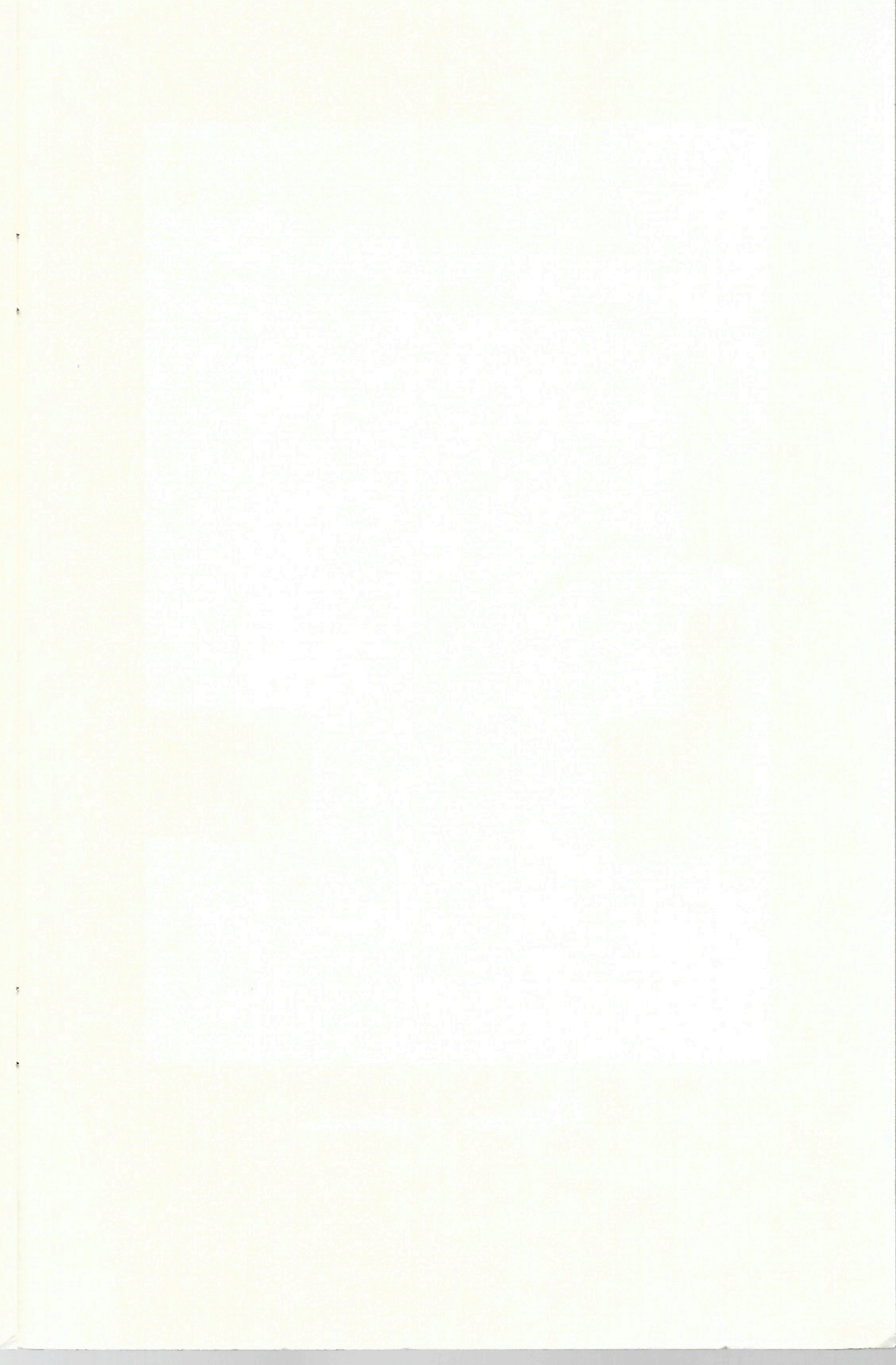
outside the window
the rumble of other journeys
planes, trains, cars passing
the feet of friends or strangers echo the unseen concrete

the blind is white under its horizontal ribbing

the world enters

your ear

– *Autumn 1979 to Autumn 1985*



One of the small traditions bp loved was the annual
Christmas 'card' we sent to family and friends.
With sadness and fond memory, *You Too, Nicky*
is printed as a gift for Christmas 1989 by
Eleanor and Sarah Nichol.

Eleanor + Sarah

