

Oral History: Michael Gnarowski

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An Oral History with Michael Gnarowski

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Abstract

Michael Gnarowski is a Canadian poet and Professor of modern Canadian poetry, teaching at Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, Lakehead, and Sir George Williams University. Beginning in 1972, Gnarowski served as the editor of the Carleton Library Series which published important works of Canadian literature.

Gnarowski had a long career which also included the publishing and co-editing of various literary magazines including, *Yes*, *Le Chien d'or/The Golden Dog*, and *Tecumseh Press*. This oral history covers Gnarowski's early career and his initial exploration into the Canadian literary world, as well as the development of his early magazines and little presses.

Patti Harper: “Hi this is Patti Harper from the Archives and Research Collections at Carleton University, it’s September 18th 2014 and I’m here with Michael Gnarowski and today we’re going to talk about *Delta* and *Yes* magazines and modern poetry. Welcome Michael. Our first question: can you tell me how your interest in poetry started?”

Michael Gnarowski: “By way of preliminary fear, you know that I had come to McGill to study chemistry and our curriculum or our study program in those days was quite rigidly controlled by the university, you had limited access to certain courses. But you also were allowed to do when you had a certain science degree, you were allowed to do arts options and I took literature. You had to do a course in literature, English literature, that was mandatory and as part of that English literature course – English 100 – there was a component called English 100C, which was English 100 Composition it was intended to teach us how to write essays. And that course, or that subsidiary course to which I was assigned – you had no choice there you were told to go to room A, B or C – was being taught by a recently returned to Canada individual called Louis Dudek, he had come back from New York where he had been studying at Columbia, doing his PhD at Columbia, and he got a job at McGill. And actually I think he came in part as a replacement for the well-known figure of Patrick Anderson, who came back as...

Anyways, so I was assigned to do this course with Louis Dudek. Lo and behold, in the course of our composition classes, we also did poetry and all the other things. I was always interested in poetry, always. But I didn’t know any Canadian poetry, I had only known British poetry and American poetry in school. So when I took this seminar like course with Louis Dudek I discovered that he was a poet and to me, then at the age of seventeen the only poets I had known were all dead. And he was a real live one which fascinated and intrigued me to no end, and I really liked his way of teaching because I had come out of what was the equivalent of a classical college where things were rather doctrinaire and you know, you remembered things, you studied things, you memorized things and so on. But you didn’t voice too many opinions, and Louis was very good that way, he encouraged you to speak your mind. I went up, I was reassured by that.

In any case, so there’s Louis Dudek and he had come back from New York and he was becoming, just on the verge of becoming involved with Irving Layton and Raymond Souster in the editing of a little magazine called *Contact*, 1952. So I had started McGill 1951, so 1952 was the end of that academic year and they were starting *Contact*. And Louis brought in copies of *Contact* to the classroom, which... it was a mimeographed magazine and for the first time in my life I saw a mimeographed little magazine, bonafide it had all the qualities of the kind of ragged wonderful quality

that little mags had in those days. That was before you know, digital stuff and so on. So everything was rather crude and primitive but quite wonderful.

So I was kind of sold on the whole thing and in my subsequent years, that is my second year and my third year when I was still doing my science. In my second year I again had an arts option and I sought out a course being offered by Louis Dudek called Canadian literature, but the course was divided into two sections, the first part was taught by Louis Dudek which was Canadian poetry, and the second part was taught by Hugh MacLennan, Canadian prose. So I really lucked in, unbelievably so and I loved Louis' teaching and I loved MacLennan's teaching, and I had a hard time going back in my third year to do more science, I wanted to do literature and I decided to switch and my mother told me that if you want to switch you better write your father and tell him, because he won't be very happy. [Laughter]

So I did. I switched, I lost a year because I had to do make up courses including Latin which was mandatory for a BA [Bachelor of Arts] in those days, Latin or Greek. I chose Latin so I had to catch up a little bit and then I had a relatively free hand, although Canadian literature was not considered to be a serious dimension in the English department. You couldn't do it for example for honours or whatever, you had to do a general BA in order to do Canadian literature, but that was fine. And I was very lucky because there only was... I bumped into Louis Dudek, I bumped into Hugh MacLennan, but in those classes I encountered Leonard Cohen, Daryl Hine, various other people, Lionel Tiger who went on to careers in literature and writing and so on. So I was infected, it's as simple as that."

Patti: "How would you describe your own poetry at this time?"

Michael: Oh I was just fumbling away desperately trying to become a wannabe poet and definitely I... you know, I wrote and hoped for the best obviously but you know I didn't have any great illusions. I sent my poems in to the student paper, the *McGill Daily* or the student magazine called *Forge*. I wasn't having much success and I got to know, among other things in those classes, with Louis and Hugh MacLennan, I met Glen Seabrass and John Lax and we kind of began to talk a little bit about poetry and so on and John Lax we discovered lived in the same building as I did – an apartment building on Ridgewood Avenue in Montréal – so we became good friends and decided... all of us were trying to write. And so we felt uncomfortable... and this is usually the story with little mags and little presses, we don't like what other people are doing, so to spite them you're going to do your own thing.

And so okay we said, we're going to do our own little magazine and this was 1955, we spoke to Louis Dudek about this and he encouraged us, said, "Go ahead and do a little magazine." So we got to work and got ourselves a little bit of skill making mimeograph stencils because in those days you

had to type stencil out and then you put it on the mimeographic machine, and you crank the crank and it was inked inside and the finished product came out. So in 1956 our first issue came out, yes, April of '56 and at that time Louis had just produced his first book in the McGill Poetry Series which was Leonard Cohen's *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. I reviewed that book, I'm the first reviewer in the world to review Leonard Cohen, and I reviewed *Let Us Compare Mythologies* for our magazine from page proofs which he submitted to me, or to us. And I hoped that I would get a copy of the book, I never did.

So we decided to do the magazine, and we agonized over a name, which was very tough to arrive at a name, you know. We settled on... we were wanting to sound as positive as possible, we played with different possibilities, and I think it was John Lax who said, "Why don't we call it *Yes*." Positive and affirmative, and so on and so on. And we jumped on that immediately because overall reading T.S. Eliot, reading James Joyce, and of course there's a very beautiful Molly Bloom soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses* which ends on this wonderful magnificent phrase, "yes and I said yes I will *Yes*." We put it on the cover of the book, of our magazine."

Patti: "How did the *Yes* magazine differ from other little magazines in Montréal and Canada at the time?"

Michael: "There weren't any... there weren't any."

Patti: "There were none?"

Michael: "No, *Forge* at McGill... and there weren't any. There weren't any. *Northern Review* with John Sutherland but John was already very ill and I think that in May or April of... May of '56 when we were producing *Yes* he had moved or was moving... he had tuberculosis of the kidneys or something... terrible illness and he was moving to Toronto. He moved to Toronto and the last issue of *Northern Review*, his magazine which would have been the only one, came out in September of '56 and he died shortly thereafter. The only other magazine which would have been kind of a rival would have been – but it stopped publishing – *Contact*. Which was being done by Louis Dudek and Irving Layton and Ray Souster in Toronto. But *Contact* ran for about ten issues or ten or twelve issues from 1952 to 1954. And we started out in '55, so it had ended. Then in 1960 following the appearance of *Yes*, Ray Souster started his own little magazine called *Combustion*. So there wasn't anything in between you see."

Patti: "How would you describe the place of your little magazine in Canadian literary history?"

Michael: "Well I wouldn't dare let somebody else do that kind of placing and deciding you know, it's very hard to decide how good one is, not being too [inaudible], I think it was a typical little mag and

I'm happy because we had Leonard Cohen and Al Purdy and all sorts of people in it, so we always had served a purpose. By virtue of having a little mag, and of course we carried on... I graduated in '56 – we all did – except Glen Seabrass who dropped out, we... John went on to do a degree in philosophy an, MA [Master of Arts] in philosophy at McGill and then he went on to Yale to do a PhD. And I left the university and had to find a job with a BA with English and political science as my subjects, which was you know, not terribly marketable but I remember going to do some job hunting I should say and I went among other things, I went to DuPont to work in the advertising department and they offered me a job, and then I shopped around and I said, "I don't know if I want to go to [inaudible]" hair of the dog. My father wanted me to be a chemist so why would I want to go back to chemistry? I never voiced it of course because when I graduated and after the graduation ceremony, I got my BA we came home for dinner my parents and I, my father had already arrived. My father was having dinner and my father says, "Well what are you going to do now?" You know, here I'm sitting with a BA, its '56.

Anyway so I tried to find a niche for myself and I was walking in Montréal on the street, Beaver Hall Hill I remember, and I bumped into my friend from my university Michael Burston, the one who had told me not to be late for professor Olkham's lectures, who had become a friend he had gone on to... he finished his degree in chemistry and I said, "What are you doing?" So I had kind of fallen out of touch with him and he said, "I'm working in the insurance business, industry." He says, "Why don't you come and see if you want to work with us?" And I sort of said, "Well, I'll go and see." And I went to be interviewed, it was the Canadian Underwriter's Association and we were doing work for the insurance companies looking at properties and deciding whether they were risky or not and what kind of risk the underwriters could take.

So they hired me and so I became a member of the insurance business for a while. But then I also felt that I had wanted to you know, go on and went to do an MA, went to McGill and was interviewed by a professor there of the English department who said that I just had a BA and I didn't have honours and, what did I want to do? And I don't want to dump on McGill, my alma mater, but anyway... and I said well I want to do Canadian literature and he said well, "An MA in Canadian literature?" I said, "Yes." And he said with a visible distaste, he said, "We don't do that kind of thing here." It was if I had said that I wanted to go for a pee on the sidewalk there, you know... really. So I said, "Okay that's fine." So I went to the University of Montréal and they were glad to have me. Thomas Greenwood was writing in the department and was very nice. And he'd treat me terribly in classes and say, "How's our little boy from McGill doing these days?" [Laughter]

Patti: "So, can you describe a little bit more about the literary community during the '50s and '60s? You've touched on a few..."

Michael: "Well, there was this little gang of Seabrass and myself and John Lax and we saw something of Louis Dudek of course, obviously he was a kind of mentor guru. Then other people, and the scene was quite lively because Leonard Cohen was beginning to make a big name for himself, or a name for himself. And other friends who were kind of periphery interested in literature and you know, in '55, '56 the coffeehouse thing began to happen, the beat souls, so the Beat Generation, the beat meets the coffeehouses. You know, poetry readings in public for the first time, you know poetry reading was not a big kind of thing, it was now everybody could read either in a gallery or in a coffeehouse, so it was lively from that standpoint. And you know, you sort of hung around with people who were interested in literature and writing and poetry. You know, we all had jobs because I mean, then life was not... we couldn't kind of figure out... count on someone else to support us. Glen Seabrass went to work in the advertising business, I was working in insurance, John Lax had gone off to study at Yale. So basically it was just life and you know, parties and drinking a little bit and all the other stuff, girlfriend etcetera – who had helped us do the magazine.

Which is funny, because sometimes people say, "Well where were the women?" and I'm always puzzled, "Where were the women?" Yesterday I was doing my Learning in Retirement thing and I said, "You know I figured out..." because someone else asked, "Where were the women with the beat [inaudible]? You know there's Allen Ginsberg, there's Jack Kerouac, there's William Burroughs, there's Gary Snyder, there's Gregory Corso, where are the women?" They were there of course, just as our women were there as well. But they didn't take a back seat they just well, there were real problems that one had to confront. You know if you want to go out with your girl and if you want to go out and have kind of a literary thing, well you had to do a guy thing because the taverns didn't admit women. Simple. You know? Where do you go? You go to a nightclub where booze was much more expensive, you went to a tavern in Montréal you could get two beers for twenty-five cents. You went into a nightclub and a beer cost you a buck. We were poverty stricken, always poverty stricken, you know? So anyways we relied on not having... women were involved but you know, marginally I guess.

Patti: "You spoke a little bit about how you became involved in the little magazine small press movement in Montréal, what ultimately drew you to that?"

Michael: "Well once we started to do Yes, once it gets into your blood you can't get rid of it. You know, it's like malaria, its incurable. And for us it was clearly a logical sort of extension who would go on to do other things and I moved away from Montréal and I took Yes with me as I went."

[Interruption]

Michael: "So we'll do a little bit more I guess... you asked me... yeah I think... So anyway, I at this point... Yes began to limp a little you know, because you're working and you have a life it becomes much harder, you're no longer... and I was never really a bohemian you know in the sense that I... Leonard was a bohemian – Leonard Cohen – another too, but I was never a bohemian and I you know, had a job and did the serious stuff etcetera, etcetera. And then... that's '56, '57, '58... I went to Indiana, I had gotten a fellowship in Indiana at a university there where I again encountered people – Americans – who were people like Daniel Hoffman and others who were involved in the literary life in the states and so it was always kind of rubbing off you know, and kind of encouraging, and I suppose kind of pushing one in back and then in '61 I met Diana, we got married and I left the insurance business because my professor at Montréal said, "You know Michael you should decide what you're going to do in life," and he said, "I think you should become involved in the university life." And I had really no sense of what... my MA was not done yet and he says, "Go to Indiana, they'll give you a fellowship there... probably," you had to apply of course and he says, "You kind of perfect yourself and come back, finish your MA and then you'll be able to maybe get into an academic career."

And that's exactly what I happened because I finished my MA in 1960, and was in Indiana '57, '59 maybe... yeah. And I actually took Yes with me, and if you look at Yes you'll see a few issues come out of Indiana and the university gave us money there, which I found quite generous and charming of them. And there was a chap who was doing – this was the School of [Arts and] Letters in Indiana – there was a man called Don Winkleman from Cleveland, Ohio who became interested in what I was doing with Yes he said, "We've got to get this thing going again," it had kind of sagged a little, and the university gave us some money. There are two beautiful issues that came out of Indiana, maybe three as a result of the money that they provided us with.

But then I came back to Canada, the Indiana connection was broken and '61 I met Diana, I took a job at the University of Sherbrooke, my first academic appointment. I stayed there for a year, I didn't like the separatists' climate there. And I said, "Well we better get going from here," and so we went to the Lakehead which was starting up, the University of Lakehead... the university at that point was not quite yet there and they gave me money at the Lakehead to keep on doing Yes. So there were little charities like that that kept popping up, you know. And in '64 I guess I came back to Montréal, I had to come back to Montréal to do some research because I was going to do a PhD, and I had signed dup to do a PhD at the University of Montréal. And I was doing research in the summers in Montréal on little magazines. And I got a grant from the Atkinson Foundation to do a study of little magazines and to do indexes of their content, which I did. And came back to Montréal and had lunch with Louis Dudek one day and I said, "You know Louis let's start a little press." He was involved with

Contact press then, and I thought that we should start a little press. It wasn't Louis, it was I who thought of it and I roped Glen Seabass into it and we started *Delta Canada*.

Patti: “So before we talk about *Delta* a little more, can you tell me – you mentioned Louis Dudek – about any professors or coworkers who had particular impact on you up until this point, or even past this point?”

Michael: “Well Dudek and MacLennan, and of course the third major, major presence, figure in my life was Frank Scott, whom I met because of *Yes*. Frank was a wonderful guy, he had heard we were starting up a little magazine, so he sent us five dollars to help us with the magazine, sent us a poem or two. And I had known him because I had gone to readings where he was doing the readings or he was present or whatever. And I think as a matter of fact reading with him and Al Purdy and the Montréal Museum, the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, sometime in the '50s, '57, '58. So Frank became an important presence in my life as well. And he was terribly influential because... he was influential in a kind of... in a sort of large intellectual sense. I admired him greatly for the terrific stuff he was doing, you know he was a fearless that man, totally fearless. And he took on the government, he wrote poems – scathing poems – about Mackenzie King, which he had been writing for a long while. He fought the Board of Governors at McGill relentlessly, he helped found the CCF/NDP [Cooperative Commonwealth Federation/New Democratic Party], and took on the premier of the province, Duplessis with the padlock law and the Jehovah's Witnesses case. He went to the Supreme Court to make sure that we could read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* which was banned in this country, it was all Frank's doing, going to the Supreme Court with these cases. I found him totally admirable and a very kind of important influence in a way, not poetically or in poetry but in simply intellectually huge kind of eminence you know. I mean who else do I need, Dudek, MacLennan, and Frank Scott... you couldn't do better than that. I was just lucky.

Patti: “So can you guide me through how your career at *Delta Canada* progressed?”

Michael: “There was no career, we weren't a career. You know we founded *Delta*, we ran it as a small press and we had a regular fun doing books. We roped in Ron Everson who was also a poet living in Montréal at the time, he was older than Glen and I, but a very fine poet... now forgotten unfortunately. A very fine writer and it's ridiculous you know, Glen too was a very good poet – Glen Seabass – and in '64 when we met, I came back at Christmastime in '64 from Lakehead I remember driving to the North shore of Lake Superior in December which was really very risky business... the road wasn't paved. You know when I was setting out, the OPP [Ontario Provincial Police] in Port Arthur – it wasn't called Thunder Bay then it was called Port Arthur – it amalgamated with William eventually, two communities. Anyway, I went to see the OPP in Port Arthur to ask them about the road conditions and so on, and the OPP guy said, “Well make sure that you have a

blanket, that you have a thermos full of hot coffee, you have chocolate bars, and stuff like that because if you run off the road... God knows when you'll be found again." Which was as primitive I suppose as it was in those days.

Anyway, I drove back to Montréal with Diana, we had already had Francesca, our first daughter and I went to have dinner with Louis, Glen, Ron Everson, and a man called Colin Haworth, very fine artist, graphic artist. And he and Ron were partners in a public relations company. Ron is dead now, he too was involved in secret service work... I found out later. In any case, we met and had dinner in a Russian restaurant called Troika in Montréal – still exists – and we decided to establish *Delta Canada*. And we cast about for a name and Ron said, "Well Louis had a magazine..." Louis, by the way had started a magazine in '57 after we'd started *Yes* and he was piqued that we wouldn't let him kind of boss us around at *Yes* so he decided to go do a little magazine – he was always like that, overreacting. Anyway, Ron said, "Why don't you call it *Delta* because Louis is our leader," as it were. So we said okay, we'll call it *Delta Canada*, because the magazine was called *Delta Magazine*... you probably have copies of it in the archives.

So that's how *Delta Canada* came about and we said, "We're going to have four books," this is 1964... in '65 spring we launch the press... four books. The first one was going to be Ron Everson's book, Glen Seabrass's book, my book and the fourth one... I forget now. And so my book... my first publication really... what did I call it? I forget now... *Postscript of St. James Street*. And the reason we called it *Postscript to St. James Street* because on St. James street... off St. James street and Nicholas is where I worked in the insurance business. And so I went back and sort of, you know... tipped my hat to them. And that was it."

Patti: "So the purpose of *Delta Canada* was to produce four books?"

Michael: "No... to produce poetry."

Patti: "Oh, poetry..."

Michael: "Oh no, no we kicked off because we didn't have any manuscripts obviously... we were just starting out. And remember in those days, '63, '64, '65, the publishing business in Canada was not what it eventually became. Because the Canada Council [of the Arts] had not yet kicked in fully, you know. So... and when we did our *Delta* we pulled the money out of our own pockets. No one gave us any grants... there were no grants. Later on I think we got grants for a book or two. The only rival would have been *Contact Press*, and Louis had become disaffected with *Contact Press* because he felt that Irving Layton had become a bit too much, so Louis was open to the idea of going somewhere else which is why he came with us to do *Delta Canada*, he abandoned *Contact Press*. Layton was actually putting in stuff into *Contact Press* without kind of clearing it with the others, he

had scored some successes with his first book... not his first book actually, the first book came out with *Northern Review* with John Sutherland, which was First Statement Press. He had caught on this whole bit of poetic history there, Layton catching on with Black Mountain, Black Mountain Gang, Black Mountain who were a bunch of American poets mainly Creeley and Charles Olson who had established Black Mountain College, or were running Black Mountain College, somewhere South or North Carolina, I don't know where... Layton became associated with them. So that's a whole different chapter of Canadian poetry."

Patti: "Is... there was *Delta Magazine*, and then *Delta Canada*."

Michael: "Yeah."

Patti: "What's the difference between the two? One is..."

Michael: "Well the magazine was Louis Dudek."

Patti: "Okay."

Michael: "*Delta*... and it was only a magazine. Whereas *Delta Canada* was no magazine... books. Yeah, we did have about thirty or forty books in *Delta Canada*."

Patti: "What impact do you think that the magazine, and then *Delta Canada* had on Canadian literary history?"

Michael: "I wouldn't hazard a guess. I wouldn't... you see, the history of Canadian poetry – modern Canadian poetry – has not been written. And the only kind of... source would have been the *Literary History of Canada*, which came out in '65 I think... edited by Carl Fink and a group of co-editors for chapters and there are chapters on modern Canadian poetry and so on, but you know they're really compendio, they're not detailed looks at the history of the poetry. And Louis and I decided to do a kind of documentary history about this time. I went back to Lakehead and they asked me to teach courses that taught Canadian literature. And I said, "Well I would like to teach Canadian poetry." And the dean or whatever... the principal at that time, we didn't yet have a dean... the principal said, "Well what are you going to teach?" I said, "Canadian poetry." He said, "Okay fine, go and teach Canadian poetry... modern Canadian poetry," which was what I felt I was probably best equipped for.

I went to the library and the library was just starting up and it was very good, the librarian said to me, "Okay well here's the budget, there is X dollars... start buying the stuff. And I started to buy Canadian poetry, doing what you guys are doing... scooping up whatever is available and I went to some of the book sellers I knew in Montréal. I said, "Now what do you have? We want it." And I had a couple of thousand dollars a year to buy Canadian books. But also I just discovered that I'd had no

texts for my students so I hatched the idea that I was going to identify the most important physical articles and do a kind of course manual. And so I did that I assembled I think five or six articles, which I thought were keen, and I assembled them and I remember I had the secretary of the principal of the university type them out for me and we mimeographed them, or duplicated them... duplicated, I don't know how. But we duplicated them and so I had stuff for distribution in the classroom.

But when I came back to Montréal I told Louis this, I said, "Louis you know I working on this thing, we should do a book of some kind." And Louis said, "Well yeah it's a good idea, we'll work on a book. I'd come back to Montréal, took leave from the university there because Frank Scott had gotten in touch with me and he said – The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Multiculturalism had just started up – "I want you to join the commission to do some work for us." So I said, "That's fine." You know, that's interesting. And at the same time, the C.D. Howe Foundation isn't what it is now – now it's a political sort of bullshit – but at that time it was a funding group of businessmen who were honouring the memory of C.D. Howe, who had been minister of industry and so on in this country. They founded a series of fellowships... C.D. Howe fellowships and so Frank Scott, or maybe Louis said to me, "Apply for it." And I said, "Well I don't have a..." you needed to have a PhD, and I didn't have a PhD I was just studying for it so I applied for this and I got the C.D. Howe Fellowship.

So I had that and I had the Royal Commission so we came back and we went to live in Ottawa on Metcalfe Street and I worked for the Royal Commission doing research for them, briefing the commissioners and travelled to Montréal to do courses in my PhD... taught a course at Sir George [Williams University], very busy you know. Very busy. I came home in the evening by train from the station which is now not used as a station anymore, to Montréal and do my little shtick there and come back, saw Louis and of course had dinner with him always, went and did my course at the University of Montréal, went and taught my course at St. George, came back. Next morning I'd be back at the Royal Commission."

Patti: "Before we talk a little bit about Ottawa, what was the most satisfying part of your involvement in the literary circles of Montréal?"

Michael: "Oh well, like I just said one led to the other, one connected to something else and it was all kind of a part of the literary effort... or the literary undertaking and you know, you get to know publishers and so on and when we started to work on *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* with Louis, you know I had to figure out... we knew what we were going to do and I had finished my year in Ottawa at that point and I'd been offered a job at Sir George, offered a job at the University of Montréal, offered a job at Sir George and I oscillated between the two, took the job at Sir George, it

was more exciting. More exciting milieu, because there were wonderful people, George Bowring all sorts of writers and painters and so on. Sir George was a very lively scene... I used to tease Louis that he was teaching at a university that was kind of dead, while we were alive at Sir George. Poetry readings, we brought in people like Allen Ginsberg and so on.

We bought a house in [inaudible] in Montréal, in Pierrefonds and Louis and I would work every week on our book, he would come over on the weekend and we would sit in the backyard under the trees and work on our book and have lunch with Anna. And that's how we progressed, and the book was published in '67 – a centennial thing for us, the making of modern poetry. That's a whole story there too. Because by then I knew Frank Scott, I knew Arthur Smith, all sorts of people and Arthur Smith wanted me to come to Michigan State to teach over there, so you know I felt flattered in many ways."

Patti: "If you're up to it could we talk about Ottawa a little bit?"

Michael: "Sure. But I won't come back to Ottawa until '72."

Patti: "I know, I want to know about your work in presses. So why did you decide to found the Golden Dog in '72?"

Michael: "Oh, because I knew Rob MacDougall – this is contained in my little talk I gave at the CLS [Carleton Library Series] thing you know, which we had here to commemorate Carleton's founding... CLS founding. Rob MacDougall, who I had met before... I met Rob in the '60s and he came and stayed with us in '67, he went to expo [1967 International and Universal Exposition or Expo 67] and so on and I got to know him. And he invited me to come... I was teaching at Sir George and he said, "Well why don't you come and do a course with us at the Institute of Canadian Studies and I liked that very much, I used to travel once a week to do the Institute thing and in '71 I met Rob on the street I think – as I said, to you people and you were at that session – and he said, "Look, would you like to come to the English department at Carleton?"

Well things were done informally in those days, and so I thought about it and the FLQ [Front de libération du Québec] crisis had broken in 1970 and it was very uncomfortable with that personally because I had already lived through a year of separatist bullshit at Sherbrooke... it wasn't too bad actually but it was not pleasant. And it hung in the air... just hung in the air. I didn't want to leave Sherbrooke because we had a lovely property my parents and I in Knowlton, just twenty minutes or so from the University, and it was beautiful country in general. So when I left, I left because I didn't like the political climate, and 1970 the FLQ crisis, the computer riots – the burning of the computers at Sir George – I said, "I don't like this place, it's not healthy." And so low and behold I bump into Rob on the street, it's 1971 and he says, "Why don't you come?" and I said, "Okay." So I came and I talked to Davidson Dunton who interviewed me and again, very informal. He wrote me a letter saying

if you want the job, well you have a job here. So there we were. I accepted the job and I realized, oh my god, I had four MA students working with me at Sir George. I couldn't leave, so I wrote back and I said, "I can't take up the job until '72" so I told the students, you better get your arse in gear because I'm going to be gone by next year. So that's how I moved to Ottawa in 1972."

Patti: "And then the Golden Dog Press? What was that..."

Michael: "Oh well that was... we broke up *Delta*."

Patti: "Okay."

Michael: "I was leaving, and Louis said, "Well I don't think I want to continue, all you guys and I." So we broke up *Delta* and oddly enough... and I always wanted to have my own little press [inaudible], and Glen wanted to have his own and Louis wanted to have his own, so Louis started his own, *DC Books*, because *Delta*... Dudek, Collins – his wife Eileen Collins – formed *DC Books*. And Glen started something... he carried *Delta* on briefly, so... that's how it all fractured.

Patti: "And how did the Golden Dog Press differentiate itself from other presses in Ottawa? And the ones in Montréal that you had done? At all different?"

Michael: "I didn't think about the others, you know... my experience always was that we went and did things because we wanted to do things. And we didn't bother too much, I didn't... I never said, "Well what's the lay of the land? Who's doing what?" Let them do what they want, I've always believed that. And if you can do better than I am doing, by all means go and do it. You know, it's no skin off my nose I'm happy to do what I'm doing. And I've always been extremely independent that way, so when Rob offered me this opportunity to go and become the General Editor of the Carleton Library Series I said, "Oh that's wonderful." Because here was you know, another opportunity to jump yet again another step up as it were, but then of course when I came here to Carleton I also hoped that the Carleton Library Series could be expanded beyond the social sciences and I bumped my nose up immediately against Jack McClelland who didn't want anybody to do anything outside of the social sciences at Carleton. And I had already begun to organize... in '71 before I left I began to kind of organize stuff that I would take to Carleton you see... and start a literary component with the CLS. Well, it wasn't going to happen. Jack McClelland said, "No way," and I said, "Well that's too bad..." but I still wanted to do it.

So I got in touch with my friends... Ottawa U – I had a whole career there as well – I got in touch with my friends at Ottawa U, Frank Scott and Glen Clever, I said, "Let's start a literary press. I've got *Delta*, I've got *Golden Dog*, I've got the Carleton Library Series, I want another press." So I told Glen and Frank at Ottawa U, "Let's start a press." And I said, "I have titles already... all set." E.K Brown, *On Canadian Poetry*, W.E. Collins, *The White Savannahs*, and a third book, *New Provinces*... which

was an important anthology, and they said, "Sure." And we talked about names, etcetera and I was very conscious of the American influx of American academics and so on, so I said, "Why don't we call it *Tecumseh Press*?" Because Tecumseh the Indian chief had fought against the Americans, so we'll immortalize Tecumseh by calling it *Tecumseh Press*. We started up a little press and we did, we published E.K. Brown's *On Canadian Poetry*, we published a whole bunch of other books and I stayed for about twenty titles and I left."

Patti: "Why did you decide to found *Arc Poetry Magazine* in 1978?"

Michael: "Well I didn't found it, it was Chris Levinson. I just joined him, he asked me to come along and I said, "Sure, I'll go along for the ride." So I was very minimally involved with *Arc*... very minimally.

Patti: "And what impact do you think the Golden Dog Press and the poetry magazine and your *Tecumseh Press* had on various academic departments?"

Michael: "I don't know. I really don't know. And I'm not being modest in saying I don't know... it's up to literary history to decide if they feel it's of any worth. You know, I have no evidence that they're particularly crazy about what I did, but I mean again... it doesn't bother me too much."

Patti: "What would you say are your greatest accomplishments in regard to poetry and little presses? Your own opinion."

Michael: "I don't think I know. I'm not being coy. I don't think I know, I keep on doing things, you know. Like I've got the chapel now in Montréal."

Patti: "What are you most proud of? Which one?"

Michael: "I think all of them had a place and a [inaudible] you know, I'm telling you the story and I just rejoice in all the things I did. I feel like I was very lucky to have all these friendships, these connections and these possibilities. And all the things I was doing, you know... I had a chance to start, develop the Canadian literature program at Ottawa U as well, they invited me when I was still at Sir George to come and become a visiting professor in Canadian literature which I... because for twenty years or whatever and outlined the program etcetera, the program that it is now was in part my work.

Patti: "What matters most to you now on this topic?"

Michael: "Well you know, now I recognize the fact that it's a new time... its always new you know. I remember when we were starting up *Delta*, Louis Dudek... he was corresponding with Ezra Pound and... or had been corresponding, Pound died shortly after. And I remember Pound's letters to

Louis, in one of which he said something very profound and significant, it was a phrase... make it new. Always make it new. And I think that was very important... try to make it new. You don't always have to make it new – but that's the guiding principle that should underlie what you do."

Patti: "Is there anything that we didn't cover today?"

Michael: "Oh, lots."

Patti: "Anything that you would like to share?"

Michael: "Well... it'll come. It'll come. I think we've probably done enough damage for one day."

Patti: "Well, thank you very much."

Michael: "Oh, my pleasure."

Patti: "Until next time."

[End of transcript.]