



BROWSE

 **Jay Macpherson**

Jay Macpherson

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ARTICLE

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388 JAY MACPHERSON JAY MACPHERSON ... I know where I learned about allusion from, anyway. I spent most of the war years living with a Canadian family in Newfoundland, and the BBC radio news was my major link, if mainly symbolic, with home Hampstead where I was born and the countryside northwest of London where my family lived during 1939-40. One day, I think a Sunday at midday, when the news was rather gloomy, it was followed by - I think - Michael Redgrave reading - definitely - Lycidas. I knew I had Lycidas in the Oxford Book of English Verse that my mother left with me, along with the Nonesuch Donne, when she left for Montreal; from then it became in effect my book of exile. It had England and the countryside in it, and it had all those enthralling names that one could spend time in the library looking up, or in my window-seat on the stairs looking over Duckworth Street turning over pages of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. I was always going to write a book on Lycidas, and 10-12 years later that became my MA thesis, though by then not very dependent on the little file of cards I carried around with me for years, one for each line of the poem. It's possible that being hooked so early (ten or eleven, about) had something to do with my eventual practice, though of course poems don't come from anything deliberate like 'alluding.' A poem of mine first titled 'Absence,

Havoc' (its opening I was aware at the time versified a bit of 'A.B. Lord on the plot of the Iliad'), ends, '... only dreams our / Wandered , wandered loves restore': after writing it I noticed the coalescence of Rossetti's 'Still with our lives our loves restore ... / And day and night yield one delight once more' with Congreve's Semele - 'Oh Sleep ... / To my arms restore my wandered love': I notice only much later, namely this morning, Blake's 'fallen, fallen light renew.' I enjoy the presence of all those other things, but don't expect the reader to pick up more than a slightly echo-y, haunty quality. ... You know the story of Queen Victoria and the old cottage-woman who gave her soup and patie Itly repeated, 'Yes, Ma'am, I'm telling you, there's pease intil't and cabbage intil't and ...' while Victoria kept asking, 'But what's "intil't"?' If one's a bookish writer and reader, that sort of allusion is part of the mysterious but nourishing intil't. ...

JAY MACPIERSON

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