

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor Adam Vaughan

Seconded by: Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Jean Jay Macpherson on March 21, 2012.

Jay Macpherson was one of Canada's great poets and a widely admired scholar and teacher. She won the Governor General's Literary Award for her 1957 collection, *The Boatman*, and for nearly four decades from 1957 to 1996, she was a professor in the English Department at Victoria College in the University of Toronto. Jay was fully engaged in the political life of Toronto and joyfully composed songs of political protest.

Macpherson was born in London, England, in 1931 and emigrated from England to Newfoundland with her mother and brother in 1940. She attended high school at Bishop Spencer College, St John's, and Glebe Collegiate, Ottawa. In 1951 Macpherson received a B.A. from Carleton University, followed by a B.L.S. from McGill University; she then completed her M.A. and Ph.D. at Victoria College, University of Toronto, both supervised by professor and critic Northrop Frye.

She began publishing her poems in 1949, at the age of eighteen, and her first pamphlet, *Nineteen Poems*, was published in 1952 by Robert Graves's Seizin Press. In 1954 Macpherson began her own small press, Emblem Books, which published her second volume, *O earth return*. Between 1954 and 1963, Emblem Books published eight chapbooks featuring the work of Canadian poets, including Dorothy Livesay, Alden Nowlan, and Al Purdy.

Macpherson's two earlier collections were incorporated into *The Boatman*, which gained her an international reputation. Dedicated to Northrop Frye and his wife, *The Boatman* is highly original and technically dazzling in its combination of pathos, comedy, and tough-minded wit, in a re-writing of classical mythology. In 1974, she followed this with *Welcoming Disaster*, a journey through crisis, equally original and compelling. They were combined later in *Poems Twice Told*.

In addition to poetry, Macpherson published scholarly and critical work, notably *The Spirit of Solitude: Conventions and Continuities in Late Romance*, as well as *Four Ages of Man: The Classical Myths*, written for younger readers. At the time of her death, she was working on a book about *The Magic Flute* and a collection of her lively protest songs.

Macpherson was included in the recent U.K. anthology, *Modern Canadian Poets: An Anthology of Poems in English*, edited by Evan Jones and Todd Swift. Earlier, she was one of two Canadian poets chosen by Harold Bloom for his anthology of *American Women Poets*, the other being Margaret Atwood. Her poem "Ark Apprehensive" was set to music by Gene Kondusky for his 2010 Kites Overhead album, "You are a secret, and you must never tell it." Along with her Governor General's literary award, Macpherson won *Poetry* (Chicago) magazine's Levinson Prize and the University of Western Ontario President's Medal in 1957.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to the family of Jean Jay Macpherson, and friends, fellow poets, and colleagues at the University of Toronto.

April 10, 2012