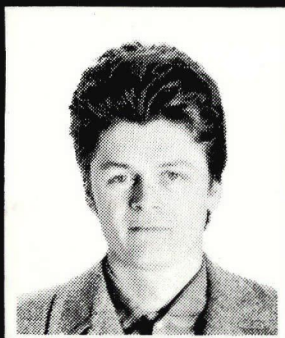


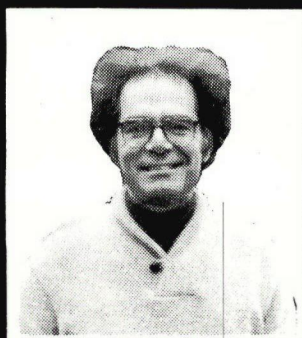
1

The
Three
Roberts

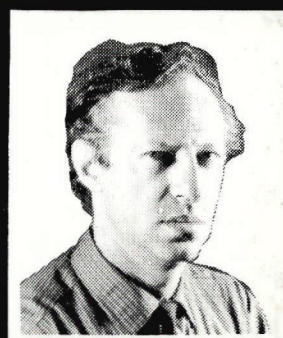
PREMIERE PERFORMANCE



ROBERT PRIEST



ROBERT SWARD



ROBERT ZEND

The Three Roberts

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

January 29, 1984
Grossman's Tavern, Toronto

Copyright © 1984 by Robert Priest, Robert Sward and Robert Zend.

All rights reserved.

Designed by Robert Zend.

Published and distributed by
HMS PRESS.
53 Lynvalley Crescent,
Scarborough, Ontario, Canada,
M1R 2V2

Distributed also by
SHADES MAGAZINE,
Box 310, Station B,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada,
M5T 2W2

Copyright © 1984 by Janine Zend, Robert Priest and Robert Sward. All rights reserved. Reproduced under license (Zend) and with permission of Robert Priest and Robert Sward.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

The Three Roberts

Poems written by Robert Priest, Robert Sward and Robert Zend.

V.1. Premier Performance

ISBN 0-919957-08-0

I. Priest, Robert, 1951 II. Sward, Robert, 1933

III. Zend, Robert.

PR9195.15.T46 1984

Table of Contents

LEFKO	Introducing the Three Roberts	4
ZEND	Prologue	5
SWARD	Hello Poem	7
PRIEST	An Advantage of the Identity Crisis	9
SWARD	Mr. Amnesia	10
ZEND	Mirrors	12
PRIEST	Insomnia	14
SWARD	Personal Stress Assessment	15
PRIEST	The Very Fashionable Bdu	16
ZEND	Romance on the Beach	17
SWARD	Alpha the Dog	18
PRIEST	Disguises	20
SWARD	Lagoon Goon	21
ZEND	Gigirogugla	22
PRIEST	What Ugly Is	23
SWARD	<i>From 'Scarf Gobble Wallow Inventory'</i>	25
PRIEST	In the Next War	27
ZEND	The Book of Macaroni According to Lancia	28
PRIEST	Christ Is the Kind of Guy	30
ZEND	Jesus in Town	32
PRIEST	Blue Pyramids	34
SWARD	The Three Roberts	36
ABOUT THE AUTHORS		39

Introducing the Three Roberts

Good afternoon, my name is Elliott Lefko and I am the organizer of the Poetry At Grossman Tavern Series. Today's reading is called The Three Roberts and features Robert Priest, Robert Zend, and Robert Sward. The reading is dedicated to Robert Frost and Robert Service as well as a half dedication to John Robert Colombo. The Three Roberts have told me that they hope to be interviewed on Robert Weaver and Robert Prowse's radio programs. They are also looking to be interviewed by Robert Fulford for a feature piece in The Toronto Star. Finally, the three Roberts agree that the next reading they give together should be at Major Robert's Restaurant.

Elliot Lefko is the founder of poetry-concerts in Toronto, "the mastermind of poetry cabaret" —JUDITH FITZGERALD
(GLOBE & MAIL)

Prologue

The day of the old spirit was over.
It was time to descend into his next dream,
onto the next planet of his pre-destination.
As he fell asleep,
he forgot everything
the same way as he had
in his previous millions of nights;
the same way as he will
in his millions of nights to come —
so that in his mornings
he would remember his dreams
and learn from them.

After falling asleep,
he woke up on Earth,
a small planet of his
universe-long life.
A new night, a new dream opened up
before the baby-eyes of the old spirit.
Everything was strange here.
He had to clothe himself
with a body which was symmetrical;
its left and right sides mirrored each other
and, on a round ball on its top, there were
sensitive spots to inform him
— through the channels of tongue, nose, ears and eyes —
about various waves and vibrations
coming from all directions.

The child looked around.
Cities and forests, rivers and mountains,
clouds and stars, people and relations,

animals and objects, words and fantasies,
forces and miracles surrounded him, temptingly.
How many things to see, to hear, to touch,
to smell, to taste!
How many things . . .

The boy was amazed.
He was filled with an eager desire
to embrace the whole, multi-sensuous
reality of the planet.
He was ready to absorb everything.
He was anxious to begin wandering and wondering.
He stood up,
and, greeting his new dream with joy and excitement,
he cried out:
“HELLO, WORLD!”

Hello Poem

Hello wife, hello world, hello God,
I love you; hello certain monsters,
Ghosts, office buildings, I love you. Dog,
Dog-dogs, cat, cat-cats, I love you.
Hello Things in Themselves, Things Not Quite
In Themselves (but trying), I love you.
River-rivers, flower-flowers, clouds
And sky;
 the Trolley Museum in Maine
(With real trolleys); airplanes taking
Off; airplanes not taking off; airplanes
Landing,
 I love you.

 The IRT,
BMT ; the London subway
(Yes, yes, pedants, the Underground)
System; the Moscow subway system,
All subway systems except the
Chicago subway system. Ah yes,
I love you, the Chicago El-
Evated. Sexual intercourse,
Hello, hello.

 Love, I love you; Death,
I love you;
 and some other things, as well,
I love you. Like what? Walt Whitman,
Wagner, Henry Miller;
 a really
Extraordinary, one-legged

Tijuana whore; I love you, *loved*
You.

The *Reader's Digest* (their splendid,
Monthly vocabulary tests), *Life*
And *Look* . . .

handball, volleyball, tennis;
Croquet, basketball, football, Sixty-
Nine;

draft beer for a nickel; Women
Who will lend you money, Women
Who will not;

Women, pregnant women;
Women who I am making pregnant;
Women who I am not making pregnant.
Women. Trees, goldfish, silverfish,
Coral fish, coral;

I love you, I
Love you.

An Advantage of the Identity Crisis

I was the great idealist
you may remember me
i wandered all the world
with a bag of filth
and everyone i met
i said:
'Here, take whatever you think
is your rightful share.'

well, all i got for my troubles
was a face full of spit, so

disillusioned with the backward
generosity of men
i took to saying:
'Fuck, Fuck, FUCK!'
over and over again
as though it were a password
that might make someone
let me in somewhere

so they threw me in a six foot cell
with sixteen other guys
all named Robert
and after seventeen years
i began to forget
which one i was

now, whenever anyone gets uppity
with me, and, in return, i puff up
majestically to say:
'DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM!'
when they say 'No.'
I get to say:
'Neither do I, Neither do I.'

Mr. Amnesia

Even an amnesiac remembers some things better than others.
In one past life I was a subway conductor
for the Chicago subway system.

In another I was — Gosh, I forgot!
Anyway, some years ago, I was run over
by a sports car. Ever since that time

I find I cannot go more than a few days
without leaving my body at least briefly
and then coming back to it. Again and again.

I can't seem to stay in Chicago or in any city,
for that matter, and in one body,
for very long.

I once wrote a forty-nine line poem
made up entirely of first lines, forty-nine beginnings.
“Forty-nine Beginnings” it was called.

I once met a young mother who had gone fishing
with her two children. Coming up from the bottom
of Lake Michigan, I got tangled up in their lines

and they pulled me out and saved my life.
The woman was my wife and the children were my children.
“Making love, it's always as if it were happening

for the first time,” I said after ten years of marriage.
“When a woman chooses an amnesiac as her husband,
she has to expect things like that,” she laughed.

“Still, there's a lot to be said
for ten years of foreplay.”
An Instructor in Modern Poetry, I once lectured

for four weeks as if each class was the first class
of a new year. When the genial Chairman,
manifesting polite alarm,

visited my classes the occasion of his being there
gave me the opportunity to teach
as if those classes, too, were new classes.

Promoted, given a raise, a bonus and a new two-year contract,
even I was confused. Each class I taught became one
in an infinite series of semesters, each semester

lasting no more than fifty minutes.
I don't know about you, but I hardly unpack
and get ready for this life and it's time

to move on to the next. I've been reincarnated three times
and am forty-nine years old and I don't even know my own
name.

History is just one of those things

you learn to live without. I live in a city
the entire population of which is made up of amnesiacs
so for the first time in three lifetimes I feel at home.

Mirrors

An average man went walking along the street

Along came a handsome man
who saw an ugly man

Along came an ugly female
who saw a handsome male

Along came a tall woman
who saw a short creature

Along came a short ugly man
who saw a tall handsome god

Along came a millionaire
who saw a measly worm

Along came a beggar
who saw a backer

Along came a fairy
who saw a pretty girl

Along came an oldster
who saw a youngster

Along came a little child
who saw a little old man

Along came a paranoid
who saw a monster

Along came a murderer
who saw a victim

Along came a wrestler
who saw a dwarf

Along came a sparrow
who saw a giant

Along came a germ
who saw a culture

Along came a speck of light
who saw a shot of darkness

Who went walking along the street?

An average short tall blonde black brown handsome
fair ugly young old poor rich pleasant awful man
woman went walking along the street

and all of those were this average man

Insomnia

It is the sound of mothers washing their children
that keeps me awake — the scratch of brooms across
so many floors

and sometimes I know that one hand
doesn't know what the other hand is doing
and the sound of them finding one another
the blind gallop of one towards the other
in an office handshake
deafens me

If they meet in the streets
if they fidget with coins
then I know I will be sleepless
that night

It used to be the hunger that kept me awake
I used to fidget about the silence —
how it was sustained by so many gunmen
Then I met commerce and politics
I stood up in auditoriums and heard
the clapping together of many hands
It is the envelopes now that get to me
the secret licking late at night
the scratch of pens — of nails along a back

I used to be kept awake by anger
by the loud gabble of people lying to themselves
I used to be wide-eyed at the prospect of success
Now I can't sleep for the sound
of one hand washing the other

Personal Stress Assessment

To be married and moderately unhappy is less stressful than to be unmarried and male and over 30.

To be happily married counts for "O" points.

If your spouse dies that counts for 100 points.

63 for going to jail. 73 for divorce.

Divorce is more stressful than imprisonment.

Getting married is 3 points more stressful than being fired. Marital reconciliation (45 points) and retirement (also 45 points)

are only half as stressful as the death of your spouse.

Minor violations of the law: 11 points.

Trouble with the boss: 23. Christmas: 12. But

sexual difficulties are less stressful than pregnancy (40 points versus 39).

A mortgage over \$10,000 is worse

than a son (or daughter) leaving home.

Trouble with your in-laws is as stressful

as "outstanding personal achievement"

which is only slightly more stressful

than if "wife begins or stops work."

Are you very happy and well-adjusted? 0 points

Very angry, depressed or frustrated? 20 points

Conclusion: With 25 points or more, "you probably will feel better if you reduce your stress."

The Very Fashionable Bdu

There was a Bdu named Ignorist
who wore a walrus round her wrist.
And everytime her hand got kissed
she'd give its nose a little twist.
When he cried and asked her 'why?',
she'd bat her eyes and smile a smile
and say, 'You're there 'cause you're in style.'

She wore that walrus a long, long time
'til it was nearly dead.
And then, when fashions changed a bit,
she wore an eagle on her head,
and then a rose on each of her toes,
and beagle blankets on her bed,
and rings of robins round her nose,
and pink cows painted red.

Then once she went to the sea to swim
and that walrus saw her there.
Remembering what she'd done to him
he grabbed her by the hair.
When she cried and asked him 'why',
as he dragged her off a-splashin',
he laughed out loud and he replied
'This year Bdu's are in fashion.'

Romance on The Beach

Sea shore . . . summer night . . .

under the moonlight's charm

a female and a male octopus

walk arm-

& arm-

& arm-

& arm-

& arm-

& arm-

& arm-

& arm-in-arm . . .

Alpha the Dog

It isn't enough that when I go off for three weeks to an artists' colony and phone home the first thing my wife tells me is there's a new addition to the family, a seven-month old poodle named Alpha and that Alpha has papers, an honest-to-God pedigree that includes not only aristocratic ancestors, but recent appearances in *The New York Review of Books* and a novel published by Houghton-Mifflin. And when I am somewhat less than ecstatic, Whoopee Dingle, my wife, asks me to at least say a few words to the new addition, and puts on Alpha the dog. "Speak, Alpha, speak," I hear her say. And Alpha who is, by all accounts, loyal and obedient, a noted storyteller, intelligent and amusing as Oscar Wilde, refuses to speak, to bark, or make some witty remark like, "What's the wheather like in Saratoga?" All I hear is Alpha's low doggy breathing and the tinkle of the elegant silver bell on her collar.

Whoopee Dingle comes back on and says, "I have an idea. You bark into the phone. Alpha will answer back."

Well, it's only costing a dollar ninety-five a minute and, good-natured soul that I am, devoted to my wife, guilty at running off for three weeks, I put myself into it, throw back my head and howl, barking, yowling, yipping like a real dog — a dog without papers, a dog with fleas, a dog like one of those mutts I knew growing up in Chicago and this happening, of course, on the public pay phone at Yaddo, the "artists' heaven," what the New York Times calls the Harvard of Artists' Colonies.

Looking up, sure enough, I see one of America's more distinguished composers with his mouth open, his pipe falling to the floor, waiting in line, no doubt, to speak to his wife and children and his cats and dogs.

“Well, Whoopee Dingle,” I say, “we’ve been talking for twenty-five minutes. This going to cost a fortune.”

At that moment, Alpha decides she wants to make her presence known to all concerned and she begins barking into the phone, answering me in kind, responding yip for yip, and yap for yap, lest there be any doubt in anyone’s mind as to who it is I have been speaking, me to Alpha the dog, Alpha the dog to me.

Disguises

There is a saying among pigs —
‘Be a pig to the very end.’
but sometimes just outside the abattoirs
you will see one of them break down
and start to wear a hat
others you might see dressed in habits
trying to sneak into church with the nuns
And it is not just the pigs
who have taken to wearing disguises
for who has not heard the tale
of those sheep
who wore grey suits and tried to enter
with the businessmen
who has not caught lately
a catfish in a cap
or a turkey
in a punk suit

In times such as these
we must observe our fellows closely
Always ask as the butcher slits another throat
‘Now who is putting on
a red tie?’

Lagoon Goon

The lagoon goon
hair like spaghetti, like blue metal, like wet Brillo
eyes like alphabet soup
teeth like disintegrating wood
ears like old tires
belly button like a peanut tube
legs like string beans
butterfingers
no arms
but wings like lettuce leaves
one giant foot that has nine toes
nose like an armpit
a tongue like a horseshoe
and if it sticks its tongue out at you
it's good luck.

Gigirogugla

My best friend is called Gigirogugla.
He is a dolphin.

We meet every day twice or thrice,
either on the ocean shore
where we play waterpolo,
or he takes me home on his back.

His father is a submarine commander,
his mother a housewife.
She makes fish every day for lunch and dinner,
nothing else — their menu is quite boring.

On Fridays, Gigirogugla
usually comes to my home
where he eats pork chops for variety
and plays chess with me.
He envies me for being able to play the piano
and likes to look at my books, mainly the pictures,
but after a short time he must go back.
He is sorry to leave, but his lungs are too weak
to stay any longer.

I walk him back to the shore.
He shakes his flaps for a farewell.
I think "so long" and he knows what I think
after all, that's how we communicate all the time,
for he cannot talk, only gasp in the air (which makes no sense),
nor can I talk in the water, only gargle (which is misunder-
standable sometimes).

What ugly is

i put on a man mask
and went among the people of earth
in search of what
ugly
means

many years the word had troubled
me, as i listened
over and over
to some of the approximately
four billion
mouth sounds
which these
animals
make

beauty i had come to understand
in stars
in eyes
the silver lapping of the oceans there
but ugly
what did it mean?

unrecognized
never speaking
but always listening
i walked their streets
and cities
i went into their starvations
their working places
deep in mines
i climbed a mountain
and looked into the writings
and holy codes
of their artists

but it wasn't until
i shared quarters with an actual family
and watched in shock
the upbringing of their young
that i realized
ugly
is what happens to something
you don't love
enough

From 'Scarf Gobble Wallow Inventory'

How hungry and for WHAT are the people this season
predicting the end of the end of the end of
I've only just come home after having been away
The world sends its greetings and the greetings send
greetings
Hello goodbye, hello goodbye
There are greetings and gifts everywhere
Children screaming and feeling slighted
The next minute we're walking along canals on the planet
Mars
Twenty minutes later we are earthworms in black leather
jackets, our pockets filled with hamburgers,
Voyage to the moon.
All I am really hungry for is everything
The ability to hibernate and a red suitcase going off
everywhere
Every cell in your body and every cell in my body is
hungry and each has its own stomach
Are your cells eating my cells? Whose cell is the universe
and what is it sick with, if anything?
Is the universe a womb or a mouth?
And what *is* hunger, really?
And is the end of the world to be understood in terms of
hunger or gifts, or the tops of peoples' heads coming off?
The most complex dream I've ever dreamed I dreamed in
London.
It involved in its entirety taking one bite of an orange.
'What do you want to be when you grow up?' she says.
I'm nearly sixty.
I want to be hungry as I am now and a pediatrician.
The truth is I'm 35 and hungrier than I was when I was
20 and a sailor.
I'm hungry for icecream made with icecream and not
chemicals or artificial spoons.
I've never been so hungry in my life.

I want one more bacon-lettuce-and-tomato-sandwich,
To make love and kiss everyone I know goodbye.
Tomorrow at half past four we will all three-and-half
billion of us walk slowly into orbit
If only one can do this breathing normally and not trip
on one's breath or have stomach cramps or clammy
hands or hysterical needs or a coughing fit or the wish to
trample or stomp someone, but stepping peacefully
There is ALL the time in the world
There is ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD
There is all the time in the world

In the Next War

In the next war don't drop the bomb
Drop the excess wheat
Drop the sacks of grain
and the powdered milk we have too much of
Send our best men over
in daring flights
their bombers full
of fish eggs huge cheeses
and birthday cake icings
Don't machine gun our enemies
Rather let us scrape off our plates
and pelt them with our leftover squash
We must inundate them with sauces and gravies
every day a new and better recipe
We have the technology to do this
We have invisible aircraft
Now we must make an undetectable fleet
a holy sky train that drops a mountain
of Kraft dinners and Coke
Bury the Kremlin in spaghetti
minute rice and mashed potatoes
This will be a new kind of war
It will take sacrifice and patience
Everyone will have to put something aside
for the enemy
starting
with the ham and eggs
saving for the very end
our big weapon
the Hamburger

The Book of Macaroni According to Lancia

I like to read the Bible because I find it fascinating. All those legends and miracles and prayers and psalms%I also like to read the Apocrypha, that is those pieces of religious literature which were NOT included officially in the Bible, or those which WERE included officially at one time, but were excluded at another time. During the research I conducted in the Vatican Library, I discovered an ancient scroll that describes the origin and the history of Macaroni. I find this piece of Italian religious literature quite remarkable because it clearly shows that the Italian people look back with great pride at their glorious pasta.

1) And these are the generations of Macaroni: Capellini d'Angelo, the thin, and henceforth he was nameth Angel's Hair. And Capellini d'Angelo begot Spaghetтини, who begot Spaghetti. And in the beginning, they were without hole.

2) But they became evil and they began sinning and they were punished. For their sins, a long hole was driven through their offspring, the great nation of Macaroni. And their sons, and the sons of their sons were marked by this hole. And lo, these are the generations of Macaroni:

3) Bucatini (the size of Spaghetti, but with a hole) who begot Perciatelli, who begot Mezzani. And Mezzani was kind in the eyes of Man who cooked it in two ways: either with meatballs and tomato sauce, or with just butter and cheese, and called it Pasta al Burro con Parmigiano. And, in the beginning, Mezzani was good and lungo, that is long, and therefore he was nameth Non-tagliati, that is un-cut. But later on, because he had sinned, he was cut up into small pieces and was re-nameth Mazzani Tagliati and he was floating in the hot turbulence of soups.

4) And Mezzani begot Macaroncelli, who begot Ziti, who begot Rigatoni the Great. And that's how the small nation became bigger and bigger in every generation.

5) But Rigatoni had sinned and henceforth he was punished

in his offspring. And his offspring were cut into little pieces and dispersed in the world as ditali, ditalini, penne rigati and shells.

6) Therefore I am saying unto you: Thou shall not confuse the small tribe of Spaghetti (without a hole for being innocent) with the great nation of Macaroni (with a hole for being sinful). For it is harder for a rich man to enter Heaven than for a camel to go through the hole of a Macaroni.

7) Yet still, I am saying unto you that whereas a tiny, tiny little camel can still go through the hole of an enormously huge Macaroni, there is no camel whatsoever which *could* go through a Spaghetti, for the Spaghetti is without hole because he has not sinned and he who has not sinned must *not* endure camels going through him, henceforth.

8) Those who have eyes shall see it; those who have ears shall hear it; and those who have mouths shall eat it. AMEN.

Christ is the Kind of Guy

Christ is the kind of guy
you just can't help hurting
No matter how much you love him
when you walk you stumble into him
you push him accidentally from a window
If you back the car out
you will find him squashed behind the wheels
broken on the door—all over the grate
Christ has the kind of skin
that when you hold him it bruises
The kind of face that kisses cut
He is always breaking open
when we go to embrace him
Christ the haemophiliac
even the gentlest people can't help
wounding Jesus Christ
They are always running for a band-aid
and then pulling open his old wounds
on a nail
If there is a cross in your house
you will find yourself bumping up against him
accidentally
moving him closer and closer to it
his arms continually more and more
widespread as he talks
Christ is the kind of guy
who can't help falling asleep like that
his arms spread wide as though over the whole world
You have a dream with a hammer
You are making a house
In the morning you awake
and find him up there on the cross beams
one hand nailed to the door-frame
'Look Jesus' you say

'I don't want to be saved like this!'
But then you hurt him extra
taking him down
You pry at the nails savagely
but it's no use
Christ is the kind of saviour
you can only get off a cross
with a blow torch
'Father forgive them' he says
as you begin to burn his hands

Jesus in Town

This morning Jesus came to town.
I quickly got dressed and ran to the park
where He played with the children not long ago.
They were still happy
and showed me the direction he departed.
I set off after Him, criss-crossed the streets,
but couldn't see Him anywhere.
From a telephone-booth I called
three of my friends.
Two of them thought I'd gone mad.
The third one had just got a phone call
from another part of the city
where a few minutes ago He was visiting.
I ran home and took my car
and drove to that street.
I spoke to an old man who this morning
was still blind, but now he saw me
because he was healed by Him.
In the Church
the priest was beaming. He'd also heard the news,
but didn't want to come with me
to find Him.
"I am quite satisfied," he said, "I don't need proof."
The rabbi threw me out of the Synagogue,
for my excitement filled him with hostility.
So I lost track of Him again.
I called the local newspaper, but
everybody was out tracing Him for an interview.
In a sidestreets, I met a young man whose face
radiated with fresh enlightenment,
I looked him in the eyes
with a questioning look,
he nodded yes, but couldn't say a word,
only his tears were running down his cheeks.
I drove on.

I kept telephoning.
Several flashes of hope quickly faded.
From one of the hospitals
a long queue of patients
stepped out and, walking erect,
dispersed.
I caught one of them,
but he had no idea where He could have gone.
I drove home again,
called the television station.
The line was busy for an hour,
and when finally it was free,
the girl at the desk told me:
"Jesus left town about ten minutes ago.
We saw Him ascending again.
You just missed him. I'm so sorry."

Now I am sitting here — writing this note
in my diary — I wasted my whole day —
I am exhausted — I feel helpless —
now I really don't know
whom to ask —

Blue Pyramids

We should build pyramids on Yonge Street.
Cut blocks out of blue mountain in Collingwood
by traditional methods
and have them dragged here on logs
by the "unemployed."
Pay them well.
Pay them \$17.50 an hour.
This would get them back to work
at a wage they could buy houses at.
Build pyramids and then build houses.
From all over the world
they would come to see these pyramids.
What a tourist attraction!
Blue pyramids in Toronto —
And look —
People with houses!

And let there be good cheer too
about the building of these pyramids
Coffee breaks and full benefits —
Let the builders of the pyramids have OHIP
and Daycare.
Yay, and I foresee ten thousand workers
gathered about a single blue Block.
They sing the word "LIFT!"
and it is raised into the air
on fingertips
They march with it to Toronto
with people dancing atop it.

We should build pyramids on Yonge Street
And keep on building them —
Great pyramids of peace to let the generations
wonder at
What is this about unemployment?
We could end unemployment today!

You know and I know
We must begin building
the blue pyramids of Peace.

Three Roberts

From heart to heart
from brain to brain
from Robert to Robert

Robert Zend phones Robert
Sward. *Ring, ring.*
“Robert, this is Robert.”

“Is this Robert?” “This
is Robert, Robert.” “Yes,
Robert?” I say, “This

is Robert, too.” “Ah,
excuse me, I need
to find a match,”

says Robert Zend putting
down the telephone
and rummaging for matches,

granting me, a non-smoker,
the status of accessory
to his addiction.

All this occurring a few
seconds into an otherwise
scintillating conversation.

“I had a very pleasant afternoon
while reading your poems,”
Margaret Trudeau once remarked

about Zend’s book, *From Zero to One*,
and I can fully understand
her saying that.

Zend translates serious things
into funny things
and funny things

into serious things
he also translates himself
into other people, and

other people into himself —
and where does one of us end
and the other begin?

And where does Zend begin
and where do I zend?
I mean, end?

And what about Robert Priest?
Is he a visible man,
an invisible man?

or the man who broke out of the Letter X
Is he a spaceman in disguise?
A blue pyramid? A golden trumpet?

A chocolate lawnmower?
An inexhaustible flower?
Or a reader who escaped

from some interstellar library?
Rock Musician in residence
at the University of the Moon?

And meanwhile Robert Zend
looks into his mirror
and sees not Zend

but Chicago-born Uncle Dog;
Half a Life's History;
Mr. Amnesia; Mr. Movies: Left to Right;

Mr. Transmigration of the Soul;
The poet as wanderer;
a forty-nine-year-old human violin . . .

Robert Zend the Nomad
gazing in like an acrobat
at the window in the sky.

Ring, ring. "Robert, this
is Robert." "Is this Robert?"
"This is Robert, Robert."

"Yes, Robert," I say speaking
to my friend Robert One,
"This is Robert Two."

Roberts . . .

Robertness . . .

Three Knights of a Roberthood.

Robert Priest

Robert Priest is a poet and singer-songwriter who writes for both children and adults. Born in England he emigrated to Canada at an early age and attended school in Toronto. In 1979 his first book of poetry, *The Visible Man*, was released by Unfinished Monument Press to widespread critical acclaim.

Of his second book of poems, *Sadness of Spacemen*, (Dreadnaught Press, 1980) Poetry of Canada Review wrote: "Priest is a perfect poet of the eighties."

His next project was the writing of a series of children's poems which were put to music by composer Bongo Herbert and eventually became a children's space opera called *Summer-long*. Together with Bongo Herbert and the illustrator Rudi McToots, he then formed a performance group for children — the Boinks.

In 1983 while writing the poems for his third book, *The Man Who Broke Out of the Letter X* (Coach House Press), Priest recorded his first solo project: *The Robert Priest E.P.*

At present Robert is working on a novel — *The Disappearance of the Invisible Man*.

Robert Sward

Writer-in-Residence at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, at Cornell University and at the University of Victoria, Robert Sward now lives on the Toronto Islands. A freelance writer and broadcaster, he is active in the Artists in the Schools program and is working on a new book of poems for children.

Sward is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, a Canada Council grant plus the D.H. Lawrence Fellowship. Author of 14 books, his most recent publications include: *Half A Life's History*, *Poems: New & Selected* (Aya Press, Toronto); *Movies: Left to Right* (South Western Ontario

Poetry, London) and *The Toronto Islands, an Illustrated History* (Dreadnaught Publishers, Toronto).

In one of his reviews, Earle Birney wrote that Robert Sward is "one of Canada's finest poets. Energetic, adventurous, versatile, he is by turns the surrealist, whimsical lyricist, meditative Swami, family man, and hardfisted satirist."

Robert Zend

Hungarian-born Robert Zend has lived in Toronto since 1956. He took his B.A. from the Peter Pazmany Science University at Budapest in 1953; his M.A. from the University of Toronto in 1969. In 1958 he was film-editor and radio producer. He created over 120 radio programs with such luminaries as Northrop Frye, Marcel Marceau, Marshall McLuhan, A.Y. Jackson, Andrei Voznesensky, Norman McLaren, Immanuel Velikovsky, Isaac Asimov, Jorge Luis Borges, Princess Ruspoli and the Dalai Lama. His series "*The Lost Continent of Atlantis*" was broadcast in Canada, the U.S., England and Australia. Visual artist: Fourth Prize, International Photo Contest; his chess set design was exhibited at the Stratford Festival and at the International Craft Show at the Ontario Science Center. He writes in both Hungarian and English. His poems, short stories and visual works have been published in numerous Canadian, U.S. and Australian periodicals and anthologies. Books: *From Zero to One* (Sono Nis Press), *My Friend Jerónimo* (Omni-books), *Arbormundi* (blewointmentpress), *Beyond Labels* (Hownslow Press) and *Oāb* (Exile Editions). He has given poetry readings all over Canada and was invited as writer-in-residence at the Writer and the Human Rights congress (Toronto), the 6th and 7th Great Canadian Poetry Festival (Collingwood) in 1981 and 1982, the David Bohm Symposium (Carlton University, Ottawa) and at Trent University (Peterborough) in 1983.

"Roberts — Priest, Sward, Zend — are three super-poets and super-performers."

—JUDITH MERRIL

"The three Roberts — whether separately or together — are marvellous."

—ELIZABETH SMART

"Only partially one-time because there are others to come in the series, the poetry reading at Grossman's in January was especially fine (by which I mean fun) in the "*Three Roberts*" segment. The three Roberts were Priest, Sward and Zend (and with names like that it could seem almost fated that they'd fit together), and though this was the first time they'd tried out the concept, it worked very well. Three voices — and quite different kinds of approaches — broke up hieratic monotonies in "poetry" "readings", while their (rough) conjugation of themes circled round and took off. Of course, it helps that they are all worthy poets and readers and much else besides; in their concluding, separate sections/performances, Priest sang some of his songs (which survived a solo acoustic rendition) and Zend showed the slides illustrating his long and abiding obsession with "action word" doodles, some of which were remarkably funny and beautiful."

—SHEILA WAWANASH
(SHADES MAGAZINE)

ISBN 0-919957-08-0