invitation to
a party

Hunching up Sherbrooke Street
    peering from eyes slitted against
the snow, he calls his dog-team to halt —
    looking surprised to see
the gates and campus buildings there —
    and checks his invitation.

The city's changed since James McGill,
    that old fur-trader, died, leaving
ten thousand pounds and his Burnside
    estate to found a university.
He knew a fine quality
    fur — would feel the texture
with rough-fissured fingers
    pressing the pile; struck a hard bargain,
and disappointed wife and children —
    but, after litigation — learning
profited.

One hundred and fifty
    years later we're celebrating
his bequest by throwing
    a big party and inviting
his return as principal of many
    "big name" guests.
Perhaps he'll teach us
how to cut our coat according
    to quite another stuff — or prove
we have resources enough
    to withstand the economy.

He is our only "constant," for
    students, faculties, buildings
and administrations come and go —
    the name "McGill" remains —
a continuing process
    a pattern of behaviour.

So — roll over Beethoven —
    this is our sesquicentennial.
Make way! Wake up McGill!
    Sound a fanfare of trumpets.
All hard-pressed scholars in Montreal
    await a paraclete.