# Poetry

## A Magazine of Verse

25¢

APRIL 1941

## Canadian Number

New Poems by DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT
E. J. PRATT • A. J. M. SMITH • A. M. KLEIN
ROBERT FINCH • F. R. SCOTT • LEO KENNEDY
LOUISE MOREY BOWMAN • DOROTHY LIVESAY
ANNE MARRIOTT • MARY ELIZABETH COLMAN
L. A. MACKAY • FLORIS McLAREN



*The Development of Poetry in Canada, 1880-1940*
by E. K. BROWN

Reviews by PELHAM EDGAR, W. E. COLLIN,
and LEON EDEL

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# POETRY

*A MAGAZINE OF VERSE*

VOL. LVIII NO. I


# Canadian Number

*Edited by E. K. Brown*

*To*

JOHN W. DAFOE
Editor-in-chief of the *Winnipeg Free Press*
Architect of the Canadian Future


**APRIL 1941**


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## TWO POEMS

### THE INVADED FIELD

THEY brought their youth up on the lore
Of the Phoenix and the pyre,
Of birth from death and gold from fire
And the myth of the Aryan spore.

They measured life in metric tons,
Assessed both man and beast,
And with their patriot sweat they greased
The breechlocks of their guns.

They took their parables from mud—
*How pure the crocus grows!*
*See how the fragrance of a rose*
*May spring from buried blood!*

So, on the promise of this yield
The youth swung down the road,
Goose-stepping to their songs, and sowed
Their bodies on the field.

. . . . .

Now if a brier should here be born
In some ironic hour,
Let life infect both leaf and flower
But death preserve the thorn.

## COME AWAY DEATH

Willy nilly, he comes or goes, with the clown's logic,
Comic in epitaph, tragic in epithalamium,
And unseduced by any mused rhyme.
However blow the winds over the pollen,
Whatever the course of the garden variables,
He remains the constant,
Ever flowering from the poppy seeds.

There was a time he came in formal dress,
Announced by Silence tapping at the panels
In deep apology.

A touch of chivalry in his approach,
He offered sacramental wine,
And with acanthus leaf
And petals of the hyacinth
He took the fever from the temples
And closed the eyelids,
Then led the way to his cool longitudes
In the dignity of the candles.

His mediaeval grace is gone—
Gone with the flame of the capitals
And the leisured turn of the thumb
Leafing the manuscripts,
Gone with the marbles
And the Venetian mosaics,
With the bend of the knee
Before the rose-strewn feet of the Virgin.
The *paternosters* of his priests,
Committing clay to clay,
Have rattled in their throats
Under the gride of his traction tread.

One night we heard his footfall—one September night—
In the outskirts of a village near the sea.
There was a moment when the storm
Delayed its fist, when the surf fell
Like velvet on the rocks—a moment only;
The strangest lull we ever knew!
A sudden truce among the oaks
Released their fratricidal arms;

The poplars straightened to attention
As the winds stopped to listen
To the sound of a motor drone—
And then the drone was still.
We heard the tick-tock on the shelf,
And the leak of valves in our hearts.
A calm condensed and lidded
As at the core of a cyclone ended breathing.
This was the monologue of Silence
Grave and unequivocal.

What followed was a bolt
Outside the range and target of the thunder,
And human speech curved back upon itself
Through Druid runways and the Piltdown scarps,
Beyond the stammers of the Java caves,
To find its origins in hieroglyphs
On mouths and eyes and cheeks
Etched by a foreign stylus never used
On the outmoded page of the Apocalypse.

*E. J. Pratt*

## POWER

The wave plunges and the sea-birds cry;
Power is in the ocean and the sky.
The wind-driven tide
That would come whispering on still days
With a long ripple breaking in a sigh,
Now crashes down;
The wind-blown gulls
That stood in tranquil days
Like metal birds fixed on the lobster-floats,
Mirrored gray-silver in the glass tide,
Rush with the gale and, when they turn,
Struggle upright, tossed again back.

Heart that, once as still as they,
Idled with an unmeaning sigh,
Or gazed at bygone days in memory's glass,
Now with hard passion buffeted,
Beats up against the gale,
Or crashes on the shattered glass of memory,
And cries that there is power in destiny
As well as in the ocean and the sky.

*Duncan Campbell Scott*

## THE PSALTER OF A. M. KLEIN

### PSALM 151

From pastures green, whereon I lie,
Beside still waters, far from crowds,
I lift hosannas to the sky
And hallelujahs to the clouds,

Only to see where clouds should sit
And in that space the sky should fill
The fierce carnivorous Messerschmitt,
The Heinkel on the kill.

They'll not be green for very long
Those pastures of my peace, nor will
The heavens be a place for song,
Nor the still waters still.

### PSALM 154

*To the chief musician upon Shoshannim, A Song of Loves*

Well may they thank thee, Lord, for drink and food:
For daily benison of meat,
For fish or fowl,
For spices of the subtle cook,
For fruit of the orchard, root of the meadow, berry of the wood;
For all things good,
And for the grace of water of the running brook!
Yea, in the hallelujah of these joys
Not least is my uplifted voice.

But this day into thy great temple have I come
To praise thee for the poisons thou hast brayed,
To thank thee for pollens venomous, the fatal gum,
The banes that bless, the multifarious herbs arrayed
In all the potency of that first week
Thou didst compose the sextet of Earth spoken, made!

Behold them everywhere, the unuttered syllables of thy breath,
Heavy with life, and big with death!
The flowering codicils to thy great fiat!
The hemp of India—and paradise!
The monkshood, cooling against fever;
And nightshade: death unpetalled before widened eyes;
And blossom of the heart, the purple foxglove!
The spotted hemlock, punishment and prize,
And those exhilarators of the brain,—
Cocaine;
Blood of the grape; and marrow of the grain!

And sweet white flower of thy breath, O Lord,
Juice of the poppy, conjuror of timeless twilights,
Eternities of peace in which the fretful world
Like a tame tiger at the feet lies curled.

## PSALM 155

*To the chief musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of Abraham; when one sent, and they watched the house to kill him*

When I in prayer beseech thy benison,
Many are they thy favours I could seek:
A long and worthy life for my only son,

A happy hearth for my wife, and for my mother
Health, and untroubled waiting in the sun,
(A golden crown in Eden for my father!)
And for my several kin, I could also speak,
Of this one's need, desire of that one,
And ask for each of thy abundant grace:—
Save that today I ask no blessings, no,
I am but one of many almoners
Who ask for him thy devastating curse!

May his flesh fall from him, and may he, living, rot
Until he is not sure he is, or he is not.
May he be flung from fever into an icy cold
And may his days be long for him, but he not old.
May strange diseases take him, doctors come
From far-off lands to twitter over him,
Matter-of-factly, without pity,
As over a strange new scum.
O may his brain be peopled by grim ghosts,
And may he wake from sleep, in sweaty fear,
Fearing four murderers at the four bed posts!
And after a fortnight of convulsions may he finally die,
And be remembered, if remembered at all,
In the name of some newly found, particularly disgusting fly,
Or in the writing on a privy wall.

*A. M. Klein*

# THREE POEMS

## SURREALISM IN THE SERVICE OF CHRIST

Twisted Cross stands almost erect
With a smile on his well-turned corners
Inserting avuncular punctuation
In an immaculate maidenhead
Responding in the hollow church.

Subdiaconal Fissure
Doffs a couple of maces and a tennis net,
Descending from the cabbage
To the terror made of fonts.

Collars are worn reversed across the privates
Or screwed to the navel with scallops of crepe:
You ought to see Judas in samite!

Anyway, they stoned the roll away,
And what do you think?
Only two storm troopers had the right time:
    Three merry widows in three
    Quarter time
    For you and
    Time for me and
    Three heil Marys on St. Stephansplatz.

Rubber Stocking came in with a lilt
And a penetrating skewer

And the headsman in black.

The controlled press agreed that she died rather well.

The Angelic Doctor, on the contrary,
Shows, that having no form,
And, consequently, no life,
Neither had she, therefore, any death,
Either good, bad, or indifferent.

Likewise also Twisted Cross, Immaculate Maidenhead,
Subdiaconal Fissure, Judas in Samite, Storm Troopers
A and B, Agnes, Mabel, Becky, Three-Quarter Time,
Penetrating Skewer, and the Hangman in Black
In Limbo only
Unlive and undie: God is not mocked.

### THE MERMAID

Dark green and seaweed-cold, the snake-bright hair
Streams on the golden-sun-illumined wave
That sways as gently as two bells the grave
Small coral-tinted breasts to starboard there
Where salt translucency's green branches bear
This sea-rose, a lost mermaid, whose cold cave,
Left lightless now, the lapping seatides lave
At base of Okeanos' twisted stair.

She's come where bubbles burst, crisp silver skims;
Where the tall sun stands naked; where he shines;
Where live men walk the shrouds with fork-like limbs.

She smiles: and the head of the shipmite swims;
But the bo'sun bawls for the grappling lines,
And the Chaplain fumbles in his book of hymns.

## THE CRY

We have come a long way riding! Is it this
Granite overgrown on no sweeetsmelling vale
Only to gain? No more? O look how pale
His heart is, blue his lips! Ah, this it is
—White for his ruthless love, see, Maryblue
For his heart's lips' cloudless song—that shall prevail:
So have the Fathers writ; this is no tale
Of worldly flies stuck in a kiss's glue.

A tired boy, at midnight probing a sore,
Sobs, lifting the word from a touched lung.
Where are the flashing limbs? They bloom no more.
Only the thin dust stiffens the pricking tongue.
He cries out: *Jesus, show me thy grass, thy green,*
*Else how shall I keep this thing I have not seen!*

*A. J. M. Smith*

## TWO POEMS

### I

When I see the falling bombs
Then I see defended homes.
Men above and men below
Die to save the good they know.

Through the wrong the bullets prove
Shows the bravery of love.
Pro and con have single stem
Half a truth dividing them.

Between the dagger and the breast
The bond is stronger than the beast.
Prison, ghetto, flag and gun
Mark the craving for the One.

Persecution's cruel mouth
Shows a twisted love of truth.
Deeper than the rack and rope
Lies the double human hope.

My good, your good, good we seek
Though we turn no other cheek.
He who slays and he who's slain
Like in purpose, like in pain.

Who shall bend to single plan
The narrow sacrifice of man?
Find the central human urge
To make a thousand roads converge?

II

From those condemned to labour
For profit of another
We take our new endeavour.

For sect and class and pattern
Through whom the strata harden
We sharpen now the weapon.

Till power is brought to pooling
And masses share in ruling
There will not be an ending
Nor any peace for spending.

*F. R. Scott*

## FIVE POEMS

### TIME THAT WEARS GRANITE THIN

Time that wears granite thin, and sucks
  Staunch iron back to rust,
And circumvents the work of hands
  And annotates our lust,
Shall put its sickness on this bone,
  And crystallize the vein,
And blunt the pulse, and halt the gait,
  And winnow out the pain.

What form your beauty shall assume,
  Transmuted like the rock
By time's alchemic enterprise
  With neither roil nor shock,
Will not concern the ebbing heart
  That slows its motion down,
Nor urge distress upon the soul
  To note its vesture gone.

And yet my heart demurs the change,
  Makes outcry against time,
That this dark head I so much love
  Shall perish out of mind;
That your slight hands and narrow breast,
  These thews so sweetly knit,
Shall fumble back to lime and salt,
  And none shall question it.

Out of this passion and these fears
  We make an ecstasy
Shall sing defiance from the grass
  When we have ceased to be,
Shall name your beauty on a page,
  And praise your careful talk,
And plait a legend from your hair,
  And memorize your walk.

## THREE SONNETS IN SEQUENCE

### *Fall Horoscope*

#### (the meeting)

What twist conspired our meeting, ushered in
Magnetic hunger of the lip for lip,
Hand's reach to hand, blood's tremolo to thin
Blue vein in cheek, mind's urgency to strip
Conceit from bone and find the marrow sweet;
What mechanism's gear and counterpoise
Sprung to its function in an instant's heat,
As eye confronted eye, ear heeded voice?

The year, the season, or the day, perhaps,
The rootward pull of sap, the tawny drift
Of leaves in spiral at the fall's relapse,
The hint of frost to come and bind and rift:
It does not matter what the reason was,
Considering how and when it came to pass.

### *Afternoon of the Damned*

(the jealousy)

This petulance implicit in the flesh,
This eager contour native to the bone
Perils the plot, the sequence planned, the mesh
Of guile contrived to liquidate the bane;
Passionate frailty turns the hazard loose,
And strays the purpose, urges wildly on
The baited tiger in the vein, obtuse
With hate, with fury hurling logic down.

Recalled, refractory, the willful I
Mimics the motion of a sober rule;
Is placid, dutiful, with downcast eye
Like any hypocritic child at school:
Then breaks its pandemonium on the air,
That you are equally as false as fair!

### *Winter Solstice*

(the parting)

I think that in another time and place
We might have loved, who briefly kiss and go
Our private journeys with a similar woe:
You wear a singular and stony face,
And I, to patience never quite resigned,
Cry malediction on the hour that brought
Two souls together with no loving thought,
And speech from no to yes not more than kind.

This frosty season when no leaf puts out,
No root fulfills its need, nor blossoms show,
(And tubers snug in gravel do not grow)
Defines the time when love endures its rout:
This wan desire connotes the wintry lag
When sparks no ember out of ash and slag.

### END OF EPOS

Thus love that grit between the teeth
Grows smooth as pebble to the hand:
The heart that with small tumult beat
Is staid as marble in the end.

*Leo Kennedy*

## THERE WAS A BRIDGE

There was a bridge of smooth moss-slippery stone
across the creek; and on the other side
green bog-moss laid an oozing rug;
and there in the deep shade
blue monkshood stood.

This was another country, and we crossed
its borders cautiously, because the moss
was greener there: and wind-bent alders threw
strange darting shadows: and the monkshood grew
too blue

*Floris Clark McLaren*

# FOUR POEMS

## SCROLL-SECTION

You who practise the four elegant occupations
tea music calligraphy and checkers
follow me over the snow in search of plum blossom.

Leave kingdom breakers
to juggle nations,
and care's broad
cloud
to the white hare that with mortar and pestle
sits in the moon by the cassia tree,
leave your lacquer trestle
of puppets, your aviary
of pets in petrified wood,
your malachite lion with its ball of brocade,
your clique to scribble the past
on dust,
and with no inlaid saddle,
no jewelled bridle,
follow me over the snow in search of plum blossom.

The leaping salmon rainbows the cataracts,
the dragon in chase of a pearl skips space
and the phoenix, alighting, first selects a place
to arrange its tail. Emulate in a degree these agreeable acts.

Silent though peach and plum
a path is trod to them.
Every rustic talent
till seen is silent.

Even the hollow bamboo
has leaves that droop.

Come back over the snow,
set up
wrist-rests, paint in ink
mountains trees creepers clouds
gorges rivers cascades
the brink
of wind, monasteries in mist,
beauties that have no best,
that through your purpose a longing be learned, earned,
the seal of your mind borrowed and not returned.

### WORDS

There are words that can only be said on paper.
It is fortunate they are few. All others shrink
On paper to the thinness of dried ink
And fade at the mind into forgotten vapour.

There are words that can only be said once
And have all been said before that fact is plain.
In a sense no word can ever be said again
And none can be said again in the same sense.

There are words that have to be said or written,
Answers and questions, times to be observed,
But most words die in a cause they have not served
Or bite forever what never should be bitten.

And then there are the words that are left unsaid
And the undetectable words used in their stead.

### BEING REMEMBERED

All that counts they say is being remembered,
But remembrance stretches from love remembers all
To the penny post-card for which there was no call.
Remembrance is a lottery of numbered

Slips where the numbers rarely correspond
With the prize your heart is bet on: there are prizes
That look that way till won, there are surprises
That look that way until you look beyond.

Perhaps some heart recalls you every minute,
Or a silent journal tells you off at night,
Out of mind is not always out of sight,
And a frame on a wall may have your photo in it.

Anyhow being remembered is all that counts
The pounding hours and the prone-falls between rounds.

### THE FORMULA

*I understand,* they say, *I understand.*
They have read books and studied human nature,
And they are sure experience was their teacher,
And tell you so and clasp you by the hand.

They are afraid. Some silence can be heard
Until a formula has barred it off.
*I understand* is the infallible stuff
To cancel every feared unspoken word.

They do not understand. For if they did
There would be two instead of one adrift.
To understand is to have shared the shrift,
To have won or lost with someone, side by side,

And all the understanding on the earth
Can never light a fire on a cold hearth.

*Robert Finch*

## ANSWER

Hungry unnumbered since the birth of time
Question the dusty sky
In vain: no answer there.

Gone, gone, as darkness floods the day,
Fled, sped, unsatisfied—
Ashes to ashes; dust to dust.

(The scabbard falls, yet the bright sword
Guardian no longer
Speeds, speeds to the Horseman's hand.)

Still time arrogant, invincible, is armed with death;
Still the unregarding worlds roll on;
The universe expands—is dumb.

With no stone hunger be fed, but quickening bread
When tall-sceptered time at last
Is whipped, stripped, done and dead.

*Mary Elizabeth Colman*

## TWO POEMS

### STUDY IN FRAGILITY

The Private View—that exclusive function—
No privacy and no view!
I watched them enter together.
She—in a white lace gown, with her shining hair—
Her eyes remind me always of two black panthers.
He—with his weary mariner's gaze sea-blue and so piercing.
They seemed walking together upon Eternity's desert,
With the shifting sand of convention drifting over
Her small satin slippers,
And the winds of scandal blowing that dry dust abroad
In tall spirals.
Such a picture in black and white!
Protector—Protected!
Then we met, and she said to me lightly,
"Have you seen the Camel? No? It's the thing of the show.
It is done so greatly. It's a still life—
'Shell Flowers with Camel'—I think—Where's our Catalogue?
The Camel is porcelain and quite devastated—So sad!
Unbroken you know but anaemic and hopeless,
Leaning up exhausted against a most masterly jar—
Such divine primrose yellow! And the shell flowers!
You never saw such a spray of shell flowers—
Utter smugness! Oh the whole thing's perfection!"
"But," I said, "My dear Child! Story pictures! Today? In art?
Ideas that are logical? Anathema!"

She smiled and waited for him to answer, watching him.
In her eyes was the confident faith of some blessed child angel
Watching, expectant. She waited!
"Now God," I said to myself, "What have you let happen?"
Dust swirled about her. He said, "Why not ideas?
Why not sentiments even, with such painting as that?
Come and look at it!"
We moved across to the opposite wall, there we stood,
And we stared
  At the Camel,
    the shell flowers,
      the masterly yellow jar,
        the enchanting grey curtain.
We talked of them. He said, absently,
"Grey means negation and question"—
He lowered his eyes to the dust that swirled
Past her ankles. Then I knew.
I had found two standing in time and in space
Where there is no negation nor question.
A wind passed over the picture. I swear my hair lifted!
And faintly, from far far away, those shell flowers
Tinkled
As if they were shattered,
In a very deep silence.

## HOUR

Tea things of gleaming silver, porcelain,
Green curdled like unfolding leaves of Spring,
The rust-red honey jar—long treasured shapes
In vases, fabrics, leather, copper, wood—
With Spirit brooding cloud-like over all.
Fire burned. Symphony poured from radio.
Melodies stole, above deep throbbing drums,
From heaven-tuned strings, from wood-winds on a hill
Seas thundered—far resounding murmurs caught
In great brown mists of power through golden horns.

Then, when our beating hearts might bear no more,
That small blue cadence, mystic and aloof,
Soothing, elusive as June morning's dew.
And the fire followed it! A small blue flame
Floated and burned above illumined caves
In the firm lichened logs, laid parallel
And singing through their voiceless fervent glow.
Great allies these—the music and the fire!
O lovely hour of mine, with chords unknown—
"I will not let thee go except thou bless . . ."

*Louise Morey Bowman*

# TWO POEMS

## POLYPHEMUS MADDEN'D

. . . . . Looked up, to see
Showering fountain-stars in the soft-piled night
Close curved above him in a low familiar dome
Over the upturned faces of quiet folk and pale flowers,
Showering with a faint hiss and a silvery patter
Into the shining level of the mist-sea'd lowland
Lipping against the sheer-down mountain edge below him.

Thought of broad day blazing on blue jewelled water
On the sharp sea breaking to million wingy arrow-heads
Into a shifting spilling glitter sparkling and spattering hastily.
Slowly rose, not a stone's throw out from the shore,
Galatea alone, with cool disdainful arms.
On her smooth still body the bitter sea fawning,
Pressing along her slender length with hurried caresses insatiable
Drifted her heavy hair, and danced in the tresses' ends.
So she rose, and lay along on the winking water,
Looked to the land, and the long blue hills, and the silly shaggy
monster sighing,
Saw him unseeing, with so great disdain,
She would not even turn her eyes away.

Slowly fades the sun and the mocking ocean; only
The black rock about, and the misty valley under him,
Only and always above the slow smoke sliding
Steadily out of the hill far overhead to the northward, only
In a level line far to the north the gray smoke trailing.

AUBADE

Sleep on, my love, nor rouse to see
The dawn's abhorrent pageantry,
The shame that never should be seen,
How the chill East in glassy green
Has drowned the little friendly stars,
And the bright comely stature mars
Of tall Orion and the Bull.
But little pallid flecks of wool
Stand bleakly, waiting for the day
That slowly drags his lagging way
Out of yon sodden rumpled bed,
Lifting a blear and haggard head
From coverlets of sullen red
And musty purple, dully spread.
The trees are dark and stiff and still,
And all along the carven hill
No living sound, only the spill
Of a spring trickling, small and chill.
This is the awful death of Dawn.
Heed it not, love! sleep on! sleep on!

*L. A. MacKay*

# TWO POEMS

## PRAIRIE GRAVEYARD

Wind mutters thinly on the sagging wire
binding the graveyard from the gouged dirt road,
bends thick-bristled Russian thistle,
sifts listless dust
into cracks in hard grey ground.
Empty prairie slides away
on all sides, rushes toward a wide
expressionless horizon, joined
to a vast blank sky.

Lots near the road are the most expensive
where heavy tombstones lurch a fraction
tipped by splitting soil.
Farther, a row of aimless heaps
names weather-worn from tumbled sticks
remember now the six thin children
of a thin, shiftless home.

Hawk, wind-scouring, cuts
a pointed shadow on the drab scant grass.

Two graves apart by the far fence
are suicides, one with a grand
defiant tombstone, bruising at the heart
"Death is swallowed up in victory."
(And may be, God's kindness being more large
than man's, to this, who after seven years

of drought, burned down his barn,
himself hanged in it.)
The second, nameless, set around
with even care-sought stones
(no stones on this section)
topped with two plants, hard-dried,
in rust-thick jam tins set in the caked pile.

A gopher jumps from a round cave,
sprints furtively, spurts under fence, is gone.
Wind raises dead curls of dust and whines
under its harsh breath on the limp dragged wires,
then leaves the graveyard stiff with silence, lone
in the centre of the huge lone land and sky.

### TRAFFIC LIGHT

Steel-tipped whistle bores a jagged hole
through this hard square of noise—the intersection's
gargle, hammer, scream of clanging traffic.
A harsh round rose,
the red light bursts to bloom.

Now you must halt,
you the young man,
one foot off the sidewalk
body pulled elastic
taut to spring,
halting, consider
in this small moment
where are you going?

Why are you hurried?
And you, the old woman,
spread feet in tipped-over shoes,
easing the dragging bag's
threading black handle,
you the full-chinned manager,
smooth round face and overcoat,
you the waitress
blank-eyed between mascara,
run out from the cafe
sweater on your blue smock,
you the soldier,
you the old Chinaman,
you the parson
who should know the answer
for all who enquire it—
all of you, grouping
like flotsam on water,
thrusting, impatient,
why are you hurried,
where are you going
here and hereafter?

The whistle blows cruel travesty of pipes
heard in soft afternoons,
the light turns blaring green
of flowerless, cold synthetic spring.
People run, trot, trundle to the other kerb
not knowing the question has been asked, nor which
can give the answer when it is required.

*Anne Marriott*

# TWO POEMS

## LORCA

*For Federico Garcia Lorca, 20th Century Spanish poet shot by Franco*

When veins congeal
And gesture is confounded
When pucker frowns no more
And voice's door
Is shut forever

On such a night
My bed will shrink
To single size
Sheets go cold
The heart hammer
With life-loud clamor
While someone covers up the eyes.

Ears are given
To hear the silence driven in
Nailed down.
And we descend now down from heaven
Into earth's mould, down.

*While you—*
*You hold the light*
*Unbroken.*

When you lived

Day shone from your face
Now the sun rays search
And find no answering torch.

If you were living now
This cliffside tree
With its embracing bough
Would speak to me.

If you were speaking now
The waves below
Would be the organ stops
For breath to blow.

And if your rigid head
Flung back its hair
Gulls in a sickle flight
Would circle there.

*You make the flight*
*Unshaken.*

You are alive!
O grass flash emerald sight
Dash of dog for ball
And skipping rope's bright blink
Lashing the light!

High in cloud
The sunset fruits are basketed

And fountains curl their plumes
On statue stone.
In secret thicket mould
Lovers defend their hold
Old couples hearing whisperings
Touch in a handclasp, quivering.

For you sang out aloud
Arching the silent wood
To stretch itself, tiptoe,
Above the crowd . . .

*You hold the word*
*Unspoken.*

You breathe. You be!
Bare, stripped light
Time's fragment flagged
Against the dark.

You dance. Explode
Unchallenged through the door
As bullets burst
Long deaths ago, your breast.

And song outsoars
The bomber's range
Serene with wind-
Maneuvered cloud.

*Light flight and word*
*The unassailed, the token!*

## NOCTURNE

Out of the turmoil mustered up by day
We may not free our hands, nor turn our heads to pray—
So tight the knot our sunlight ties.

So firm the hold of voices, thoughts are drowned
The river's chant is lost, in splintering gunshot sound:
Or from its song the essence dies.

Brightness was all, when earth lay primitive
Fair to the hands' fresh touch, ready to burst and live:
Now in her womb corrosion lies.

Therefore we search alone the shuttered dark
Where faces of the dead shine luminous, a spark
Of lightning from encircled skies.

Therefore we seek the peace of broken ground
After the wars have buried all the young, and found
Dark remedy for shining eyes . . .

Therefore we hide our faces; make no sound.

*Dorothy Livesay*

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF POETRY IN CANADA, 1880-1940

THERE IS a Canadian literature, sometimes rising to effects of great beauty, but it has stirred little interest outside Canada. A few of our writers have made for themselves large and even enthusiastic audiences in Britain and the United States: a century ago the works of Thomas Chandler Haliburton were widely read on both sides of the Atlantic, and his Connecticut watch-maker Sam Slick has left a perceptible stamp on American humour; at the close of the last century and the beginning of this C. G. D. Roberts's tales of animal life extended the range of North American prose writing in a direction acclaimed by critics and common readers alike; more recently the Jalna chronicles of Mazo De La Roche, the short stories and novels of Morley Callaghan, and the humorous sketches of Stephen Leacock, have acquired for their authors both in Britain and the United States settled reputations of distinction. Still, to the reader outside Canada such works as I have mentioned have not been read as reflections of phases in a national culture: the interest in the work has not in any degree spread to become an interest in the traditions and movements in the national life from which it emerged.

Even within the national borders the impact of Canadian literature has been relatively superficial. The almost feverish concern with its growth on the part of a small minority is no substitute for eager general sympathy or excitement. To one who takes careful account of the difficulties which have steadily beset its growth, its survival as something interesting and vital seems a miracle.

Some of these difficulties, those of an economic kind, can be

simply and briefly stated. A Canadian publisher must remain primarily an agent for British and American houses, making of his Canadian books a sideline in which he is rather more likely to lose money than to make it. A Canadian reader, unless he lives in a large city not far from Toronto or Montreal, cannot find in a local bookstore a large range of books: unless a book is almost certain to sell, the cost of shipping across the vast distances in this sparsely populated country dissuades the retailer from placing an order. The distribution through Canadian publishers of British and American books by authors of proved readability and importance makes it hazardous for a Canadian author to depend wholly or mainly on the domestic market if he lives by his pen. About one third of the population, from the time of our Confederation in 1867 to the present, has spoken the French language, read little in any other (except for a small minority that studies the classics), and developed scarcely any curiosity about the culture of English-speaking Canada. These are disagreeably hard and apparently unchanging facts: they indicate how insecure is the economic basis of a Canadian literature.

Other difficulties, of a psychological kind, cannot be stated so briefly. Among these the chief is Canadian colonialism. Constitutionally Canada is not a colony: by a series of enactments since the beginning of the First World War Canada has risen to a status of parity with Britain. Emotionally, however, much of the colonial posture of earlier times endures. The overwhelming majority of Canadians (always excepting those who speak the French language) do not readily believe that in religion, in philosophy, or in the arts, great originality or power is at all likely to develop at home. The imprint of a

London publisher or of a British university press is a sounder guarantee of a book or an author than any Canadian sponsorship, even a Governor-General's. Of late Canadians have also looked with profound, if often unconfessed, respect, to New York: a Canadian book published or eulogized there will sell more rapidly than if it had had merely local support. The slight decline in the warmth of our colonial feeling towards Britain has been matched by an at least equal rise in our feeling of cultural colonialism towards the United States.

Another psychological factor of intense power is the survival in the national character of qualities which in our pioneer past have been tried and found precious. No nation is more practical than ours: admiration is readily stirred, even more readily than south of the border, by the deft surgeon or the smoothly running factory. On the other hand the parents of the boy who would be a sculptor or the girl who would write short stories are profoundly disturbed: such activities do not seem wholly natural, do not seem to deserve the whole energy of a life, seem to put their victim in an insecure niche in the margin of the national pattern. The preoccupation in all the contemporary arts with elaborate techniques, fierce or airy criticism, and abnormal psychology, intensifies the disturbance, which would exist in strength even if the artist were as straightforward as Burns or Dickens, both of whom are Canadian idols. Art should be for leisure only—the aesthetic life is not a recognized form of the good life.

Nor, a third factor, is Canada an integrated whole. Regional identities and loyalties are strong. There is little eagerness to read books or look at pictures which present distant parts of the country. I do not believe that a typical Toronto or Ottawa

reader would select a novel dealing with the wheat farms of Saskatchewan or the fishing villages of Nova Scotia in preference to one about a strike in Chicago or a religious revival in Wales.

Canadian literature has come into existence without any real impulse from the national life. It has been the succession of achievements of a small number of gifted and ardent men, most of them heavily engaged in the professions, the universities, and the civil service, and giving to letters the first place in their love but only the second in their strength. It is to be expected that such a literature will have limitations, unless, as has not happened in Canada, the irresistible power of "genius" shows itself. It will not often deal powerfully with the great conflicts between classes, or dramatically with the mainsprings of individual action. In general it will not be notable in originality or breadth. Often, however, it may show a high degree of technical expertness, pure taste, fine scholarship, clarity of emotion, charm of reverie.

Moreover, on the side of hope and faith, it must be said that the future of Canada is almost singularly incalculable: none of the factors, for instance, that now tell so strongly against the growth of a national literature and culture is eternal, and many of them are certain to diminish in strength. It was undoubtedly a piece of unguarded optimism when Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the greatest of all Canadians and Prime Minister of the Dominion from 1896 to 1911, asserted that if the nineteenth century was America's, the twentieth would be Canada's. But nineteenth century America and twentieth century Canada have in common at least the unpredictableness of their evolution, and the plasticity of their character, society, and culture. Every reflective Canadian must feel a mixture of disturbance and delight in the

inability to foresee even the main stresses in the Canada of the future. A literature which began in dream, which has gone on to relatively isolated experiments, may end in—what? Epic national myth? In the direction of this the greatest of our poets is now moving. Veritist regionalism? This is the tenor of our most scrupulous novelist. The future cannot be charted, even roughly.

II

Our poetry has had two flowerings. The first began in 1880, with the appearance of Charles G. D. Roberts's collection *Orion and Other Poems,* and began to fade soon after the turn of the century. Roberts was one of four men born between 1860 and 1862 whose works were the chief performances in our first distinguished period. The others were Bliss Carman, a cousin of Roberts, who announced himself in 1893 with *Low Tide on Grand Pré;* Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott, civil servants in Ottawa and close friends, whose first collections, *Among the Millet* and *The Magic House and Other Poems,* appeared in 1888 and 1893 respectively. Lampman died at the peak of his power in 1899, Carman died worn out thirty years later, Roberts and Scott are still writing vigorous poetry.

Nature has been the central theme of all these poets. Roberts and Carman, born in New Brunswick, early came under the spell of the transcendentalist movement in adjoining New England. Carman, who studied philosophy at Harvard and lived much in the United States, ran the gamut from an Emersonian stress on the over-soul to an imagist's delight in minute phenomena. Much of his poetry has its worth in an authentic if

rather slight emotion about Nature the Mother, and Nature the garment of Spirit. Roberts has been less philosophic, and more robust: much of his poetry reminds one that he is the author of a long and original series of sketches of life in the wilds. Scott, whose career has led him from a third-class clerkship in the federal department of Indian Affairs to its headship, fuses with a Wordsworthian attitude to nature a fine awareness of the past civilization of those whom in his active hours he has done so much to aid. Lampman, by far the most pictorial of these poets, has set down in clear images the swift rivers, the mild hills, and the snow-bound fields of the Ottawa region.

A vehement reaction against the poetry of this group set in at the end of the First World War; and in the radical journals of opinion they were punctually insulted as the "maple tree school." The bitter vengefulness with which they were pursued by the generation of their grandchildren is at first impossible to understand. Any one could see that these four men brought to poetry a high concern with craftsmanship, an insistence on genuineness of feeling, a modesty of aim, and a wise conviction, not shared when they began to write by the majority of their English-speaking compatriots, that the development of a distinctive Canadian consciousness of life was underway.

In them the younger poets and critics chiefly disliked two things. The elder poets had dealt rather flaccidly with individual human character. Surprisingly little of their work is dramatic or psychological. When they abandoned nature it was to meditate with tranquility on the general nature of life or to deal in hortatory fashion with political movements. In none of them can one find anything in the manner of Frost's *Death of the Hired Man* or of Robinson's *Tasker Norcross.* What the younger

writers did not sufficiently remember was that even in fiction and in biography Canadian letters had failed to deal firmly and vividly with character. The second objection was against the form of the elder poets. To read what was written about it in the twenties one would suppose that the elders had held primly aloof from any measure more modern than the rime royale and the Spenserian stanza. The truth is more complex. All the elder writers, and notably Scott and Carman, were experimental; but they had all come under the spell of the rich music of Swinburne and later of Verlaine, and accordingly abominated grit or any roughness of texture. Moreover their long established prestige, supported by some of the most vigorous of the elder critics, made it painfully hard for younger men who had been penetrated by the method and tone of Eliot, Pound and Hopkins to get a hearing.

Much of what the younger generation deplored arose from a cause of which they still seem strangely unaware: the silence and sterility of the generation between. In the period from 1893 to 1923 only two new voices of any notable power sounded: Marjorie Pickthall, born in 1883 (in England) whose first collection came out in 1913 and Tom MacInnes, born in 1867, but not very generally known as a poet until his *Rhymes of a Rounder* came out in 1912. MacInnes, at once a mystic and a zealous experimentalist in old and delicate forms such as the rondeau and the villanelle, has been to the end of his career a lonely figure moving along a side alley of great beauty and oddity. Miss Pickthall, who died young, was powerfully affected by the Celtic Renaissance and seemed in most of her poetry an unhappy exile from Europe. In two or three of her dramatic monologues, however, she showed if not Browning's penetration into character—

she had none of that—at least a little of his feeling for a situation. In her treatment of nature, and much of her work is nature-verse, she was an acceptable continuator of the elder poets who, with their usual courtesy, welcomed her warmly. The younger poets have liked her work as little as theirs.

III

Not until, in 1923, Mr. E. J. Pratt published his first collection, did the second flowering of our poetry begin; indeed 1926, when he published his short Melvillian epic *The Cachalot,* is the true point of beginning, for the collection of 1923 scarcely indicates the direction in which he was to move and gives very imperfect illustrations of his power. It is partly the immense geniality of Mr. Pratt's temperament, but partly also the balance between old and new elements in his verse that has made him the link between the generations of our living poets. As editor of *The Canadian Poetry Magazine* he has been hospitable to all sorts of poetry and has provided a forum of discussion where incompatible opinions can be set forth side by side with some opportunity for authors and readers to perceive where the main currents in our poetry and criticism of poetry run.

The central trait of his verse is his preoccupation with the heroic: his concern with planes of being more spacious and more exalted than the normal life of man. Born on the rock-bound coast of Newfoundland, brought up in a village of fishermen and whalers he has most often sought the heroic in terms of the sea. But the sea—the theatre of *The Cachalot, The Titanic, The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*—is not his sole theme. In *The Fable of the Goats* he found a primitive world prior to the creation of man; and in his latest poem *Brébeuf and His*

*Brethren*[1] he has turned to the heroic exploits of man in the early period of Canadian history. Mr. Pratt's heroic temper expresses itself in his form as well as in his themes. He has developed a bounding resonant tetrameter, so characteristically his that if one came on a passage in the midst of Pound's cantos one would at once exclaim: "That's Pratt!" His choice of words from the rutilant monosyllable to the crashing Latin term of endless length, the spaciousness of his verse-paragraphs, the nervous energy of his structure as well as his rhythm—all these constant traits point to the power of that heroic temper which commands him to the choice of mastodon, cetacean, and martyr-priest.

Heroism, for him, usually goes along with exuberance. His humour is rich, the humour of delighted exaggeration and formidable strength. Even in the solemnity of *Brébeuf* it peeps out in a word or a metrical turn. The marriage of heroism with exuberance awakes no surprise: to these, however, he unexpectedly unites a strong scholarly concern with accuracy. As Thackeray wished to know the color of the breeches General Wolfe wore when he stormed Quebec, Mr. Pratt has been a scrupulous student of ship-construction, marine biology and the *Jesuit Relations.* The intellectual conscience developed through his training in theology, philosophy, psychology and literature has served his heroic temperament admirably, never cowing it, simply furnishing it with rich material thoroughly dominated.

Canadian critics are well aware that none of our poets today is known in Britain and the United States as Carman, and even

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[1]Reviewed on pp. 48-50 by Pelham Edgar, the most catholic of the elder Canadian critics, and a principal factor in the growth of the poetic reputations of Pratt, Marjorie Pickthall and D. C. Scott.

Lampman, used to be. British and American indifference to Mr. Pratt's narratives we find it hard to understand. In him we seem to note a temper, a metrical tendency, a choice of theme all unique, and, if in many ways quite unmodern, nevertheless vital, exalting, and significant. When I solicited for this collection the help and counsel of the best poets in Canada, more than two or three said to me: "Make Pratt's work known in the United States, that's the great thing to aim at." It must be said that distinguished as some of his lyrics have been, his originality and strength are more notable in the narratives,—poems too long for inclusion in such a collection as this.

IV

In Montreal, shortly after the end of the First World War, a vigorous group of undergraduates conducted an excellent magazine, *The McGill Fortnightly.* In it appeared the poems of A. J. M. Smith, Leo Kennedy, Abraham Klein, and Frank Scott, all experimenters, eager to naturalize in Canada the kind of poetry then being written by Eliot and Pound, all zealots for the metaphysical verse of the seventeenth century and for Emily Dickinson. From their fellowship there was to come long afterward the anthology *New Provinces: Poems by Several Authors* (1936), in which two Toronto poets, Mr. Pratt and Robert Finch also appeared. Two of the Montreal group have brought out volumes of their verse, Leo Kennedy *The Shrouding* (1933), and Abraham Klein *Hath Not a Jew* (1940). Poetry of the same sort as theirs is to be found in Dorothy Livesay's *Signpost* (1932) and in Anne Marriott's *The Wind Our Enemy* (1939).

For a number of years Abraham Klein was under the Eliot spell; in such poems as *The Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger* and

*Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens,* which represented him in *New Provinces,* he used Eliot's conversational formula and allusive erudition, combining with them a rich Jewish background. His later work has become more and more Jewish: in the volume reviewed in this number[1] he ranges from the most light-hearted Jewish song to the grimmest Jewish satire. His constant use of Jewish material has not been a limiting but rather an enlarging influence: he has made for himself a world of characters, images, actions, and ideas which give a solidity and an intensity to his poetry very rare in our literature.

Frank Scott, now professor of Constitutional Law in McGill University and one of the leading humanitarian idealists in Canada, began with delicate lyrics of exquisite imagery and muted sound; he has since filled his verse with a warm and angry concern for social injustice and social reform. Sometimes, wishing to appeal to a large and relatively uneducated audience, he has striven for a simplicity which is almost unpatterned; again he has contrived to find for his social ideas forms at once simple and beautifully designed. Leo Kennedy, whose Catholic training combined incongruously but effectively in his earlier poems with his fascination by *The Golden Bough* and the books of Jessie Weston, has come in his maturity to a more original manner, exhibiting a power of lusty song in which imagery and diction recalling the metaphysical poets is at the service of strong feeling and eager thought.

Recognized from the outset as the central figure in the group, A. J. M. Smith proceeded from McGill to Edinburgh where he undertook graduate studies in the poetry of the seventeenth cen-

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[1]On pp. 51-53, by Leon Edel, a critic sympathetic to all the recent movements in Canadian literature, and a contemporary of Klein at McGill University.

tury with the counsel of Sir Herbert Grierson. A professor of English at Michigan State College, he has shown the most acute critical sense of all Canadian poets; and in an article contributed to what is perhaps the main critical journal of Canada, *The University of Toronto Quarterly,* he sets forth the critical tenets of the younger poets with vigorous simplicity:

> Set higher standards for yourself than the organized mediocrity of the authors' associations dares to impose. Be traditional, catholic and alive. Study the great masters of clarity and intensity. . . . Study the poets of today whose language is living, and whose line is sure. . . . Read the French and German poets whose sensibility is most intensely that of the modern world. . . . Read, if you can, the Roman satirists. . . .
>
> And remember lastly that poetry does not permit the rejection of every aspect of the personality except intuition and sensibility. It must be written by the whole man. It is an intelligent activity, and it ought to compel the respect of the generality of intelligent men. If it is a good, it is a good in itself.

This pronouncement, with which his article concludes, would, I believe, satisfy almost all the younger poets, those in the Montreal group and most of the others yet to be considered.

The principles he sets forth are embodied in Mr. Smith's own verse. Much of this is acutely religious, sometimes in the metaphysical manner, sometimes more in the tone of Hopkins. Some of it is coldly satirical, some politically intense, more politically disillusioned. Little of it has to do with nature, athough Mr. Smith has an eye not far inferior to Lampman's for natural detail. Whatever the theme, the execution is beautifully deliberate, and the feeling or thought fully mature and intense.

Loosely attachable to the Montreal group is Robert Finch of Toronto. A professor of French literature, a delicate and deliberate painter, an enthusiast for modern music, his preoccupations have been rather different from those of his Montreal contem-

poraries. His verse is full of suggestions of French poets from Mallarmé down, and his range and use of imagery has unusual originality and purity. No Canadian poet in our time has had in greater degree the love of the word or of design as an autonomous value. His poetry, always solicitous of musical effect, has steadily moved towards spareness and simplicity. Some of the qualities in his most recent work appear, too, in another Toronto poet, Eustace Ross, unfortunately not represented in this collection, but capable of brief lyrics, sometimes perfect in their timeless simplicity.

Two young women, both with emphatically radical social enthusiasms and preoccupations, have written experimental verse of high interest and on occasion of great distinction. From a mood of delicate introspection and a concern with refined patterns, Dorothy Livesay passed first to deliberately simple verse, packed with social exhortation and invective, and addressed to an unsophisticated audience; and then to a combination of social concern with elaborate modes of expression which suited her individuality, but now the expression was suppled and purged. The first shift was sudden and violent; it struck many friendly critics as a conscious renunciation and accordingly an aesthetic impoverishment justifiable only in extra-literary terms. The second shift while it has shown that the first was both conscious and impoverishing has also shown that no permanent harm was done by it. A younger writer, coming too late to feel the full impact of metaphysical verse or of Eliot's earlier manner, Anne Marriott[1] readily found an idiom which was conversa-

[1]Her brochure, *The Wind Our Enemy,* is reviewed on pp. 53-57, by W. E. Collin, the author of the subtlest study of Canadian poetry, *The White Savannahs* (1936).

tional without grit; and has always seemed at liberty to combine with her social concern a manner which was a full expression of her individuality. Her preoccupation with society seems to be that of a total person in whom the critical intelligence has been in harmony with the other elements, never rising to rebuke or dictate, never submerged. Poems somewhat similar in fibre, but more lyrical, have come from Mary Colman.

More conservative strains have been abundantly represented in the poetry of the past twenty years: a glance through the best anthology of recent Canadian verse, Mrs. Ethel Hume Bennett's *New Harvesting* (1938), will show that the majority of competent verse-writers in Canada have been little affected by the movement which began with the *McGill Fortnightly*. Although Mrs. Floris McLaren's reflective lyrics are not traditional, their fine suggestive simplicity is without any likeness to the work of the poets in *New Provinces*. Some of the conservative writers have struck notes of power, if not of originality: Mrs. Louise Morey Bowman has written imagist poetry of real distinction, Mr. A. S. Bourinot and Mr. Kenneth Leslie have written sonnets of musical sweetness and, often, of intense and finely controlled feeling; Mr. L. A. MacKay—as well as being our most angry and clever satirist—has written rich descriptive pieces recalling Hérédia and the middle manner of William Morris; and many members of the Roberts family have written nature verse accurate, musical, and striking, if never approaching the excellence of their chieftain—with whom our poetry began.

*E. K. Brown*

# REVIEWS

## AN EPIC OF THE JESUIT MARTYRS

*Brébeuf and His Brethren,* by E. J. Pratt. Macmillan, Toronto.

MR. PRATT'S previously published work is of sterling quality. His latest production stamps him as a poet who would not suffer by comparison with any narrative poet of our age. Canadians naturally respond to it as a thrilling representation of our history at a period when France was striving to dominate the continent, and Catholics the world over will find their satisfaction in the fact that a Protestant has been inspired to write the noblest Catholic poem of modern times. The period presented is the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the locale the country surrounding the present towns of Midland and Penetanguishene on the Georgian Bay, and the actors in the drama are the Huron and Iroquois Indians with the eight martyrs who are now inscribed as Saints in the Roman Calendar. Since they stand alone in North America their names are here given: Brébeuf, Lalemant, Garnier, Jogues, Chabanel, Daniel, Goupil, Lalonde. The poem is fitly named *Brébeuf and His Brethren,* but the towering figure among them all is Brébeuf.

The poem opens sonorously with a description of the religious fervour that swept through France in the early days of the seventeenth century. Stirred by the ecstasy of vision and profound meditation, the young Brébeuf dedicates himself to service in the New World:

> Forests and streams and trails thronged through his mind,
> The painted faces of the Iroquois and Huron,
> Nomadic bands and smoking bivouacs
> Along the shores of western inland seas,
> With forts and palisades and fiery stakes.

> The stories of Champlain, Brulé, Viel,
> Sagard and Le Caron had reached his town—
> The stories of those northern boundaries
> Where in the winter the white pines could brush
> The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes
> Under the gold and green of the auroras
> Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.

We are now carried through the early years of Brébeuf's Canadian life, journeys into the wilderness, contacts with friendly and hostile Indians, the painful but complete mastery of their language, and with the aid of his devoted associates the conversion of the Huron tribes to the Christian faith. This was the goal of all their effort, yet it was not conversion alone that was aimed at, but with conversion an initiation into the principles of the good life. The Jesuits could never forget that they were not missionaries only but teachers as well. We cannot see that political intentions entered into their strategy. Champlain nourished great plans for the triumph of France in the New World, and that triumph necessitated the crushing of the Iroquois power. The Jesuits were, at the most, unconscious instruments in his scheme, and they viewed the encroachments of the Iroquois not as a menace to political dominion but as a threatened dissolution of their Christian effort. The crash came, and eight of that Jesuit band suffered martyrdom with all the torture that was its prelude.

These are the circumstances that give movement and vitality to Mr. Pratt's great poem. He is not concerned with apportioning praise or blame, but he succeeds in avoiding the passionlessness of a too serene objectivity, for we are left in no doubt as to his throbbing sympathy with his martyr heroes. The savages are in the conventional sense the villains of the piece, and for them the poet has if not full sympathy at least a sympathetic

understanding. As individuals they do not exist, but in the mass they are most convincing, and, as the Jesuits found them, not wholly unloveable.

This poem is Mr. Pratt's first long effort in blank verse, a form which admittedly exhibits most patently the virtues or defects of a poet's rhythmic sense. He has come through his first trial with success, and even with distinction. The slower movement of the line precludes of course the nimbleness of the rhymed tetrameters which he had made so characteristically his own, but in this, his first sustained venture into another medium, a strong individual quality asserts itself beneath the traditional form. He moves along the heights with power, and when the tension of his theme relaxes his language is crisp and expressive with no attempt at a simulated grandeur. It seems to be true that a poet who can achieve grandeur is almost incapable of flatness. This statement may be tested by reference to the several letters that Pratt has included in his narrative, and most satisfactorily by Brébeuf's letter to the neophyte missionaries from France.

It will be noted that as the tragic climax of the poem approaches the rhythm shifts to the anapaestic key, with occasional passages of blank verse that have a faint anapaestic quality.

It seems a pity to have a poem of this high value available only to Canadian readers, since our history of that period is your history also, as Parkman knew. In its own country it has already passed into a second edition, and a third will soon be called for. There are plans also in hand for making the poem the basis of a musical and dramatic pageant to be held at the Shrine of Fort Sainte Marie, where the scenes were enacted more than three hundred years ago. *Pelham Edgar*

*Hath Not a Jew . . .* , by A. M. Klein. Foreword by Ludwig Lewisohn. Behrman's Jewish Book House, New York.

The poetry of Abraham Moses Klein springs from the roots of a consciousness where Hebrew and legal lore have become strangely and exotically intermingled with Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot. Mr. Ludwig Lewisohn, in a preface to these verses, calls him "the first Jew to contribute authentic poetry to the literature of English speech." Certainly Klein, heir to an authentic Jewish tradition, reflects that tradition in every line he writes. His verses are declamatory because far back the prophets too spoke as from the rooftops and because down the centuries Jews have, like Klein's Reb. Levi Yitschok, lectured to God. His wit is the dry wit of the medieval scholar; his reasoning is legalistic, not because he happens to be a lawyer, but because the talmudists were great reasoners and hair-splitters. His use of language is wholly Jewish in his search for high-sounding, pontifical words which, cunningly employed (as exemplified in Disraeli's classic reference to the gentleman "intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity") is exciting and exotic, but runs the risk of surfeiting the reader. One can almost hear Mr. Klein smacking his lips over

> Of yore yclept in old Judaea Zvi;
> Cognomen'd Cerf where Latin speech is carolled,
> Dubbed Hirsch, a transient, in wild Allmany,
> For sweet conformity now appellated Harold . . .

A decade ago, when he was a young law student, he wrote of the "little Jew"—the junk dealer and the second-hand clothes man, the Jewish women at the market in Montreal's St. Lawrence main, and brother Velvel, who nightly played cards in the back rooms of delicatessens and "garrulous barber shops," dreaming

of the Rolls Royce he would like to own and the jewels for his wife

> . . . as large as wondrous eyes
> The eyes of Og, the giant king of Bashan.

These poems were close to the modern ghetto and therefore close to life; they were filled with witty observation and a delightful mixture of the real and the fantastic; they were pungent, vigorous and above all true.

Now he has collected a series of "Jewish" poems, built around quaint conceits and elaborate whimsicalities; poems of prayer for the fate of Israel, Chassidic dances, the legends and lore of the ghettos of Prague and Warsaw. It is clear that the Hitlerian era of persecution has driven Klein far into the past. In his eloquent *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* the beginning of which I have quoted, he comes to an ending of bland resignation:

> This only is mine wherewith to face the horde:
> The frozen patience waiting for its day,
> The stance long-suffering, the stoic word,
> The bright empirics that know well that the
> Night of the cauchemar comes and goes away,—
> A baleful wind, a baneful nebula, over
> A saecular imperturbability.

Klein is waiting for the Messiah.

"The stoic word" and the "bright empirics" make good reading, and entertaining reading; but one tires after a while of intellectual firecrackers and asks for a little more of the reality which A. M. Klein sees around him every day, as he must, for instance, in the echoing corridors of the court house on Notre Dame street east. In some of these poems an airy lyricism emerges, only to be smothered in euphuisms. The verse is always robust and there is much technical virtuosity; there is depth of feeling, as when he writes of Spinoza, and a lively sense of the incongruous. He tells pretty stories of kings and beggars—but

they are all resigned beggars. The lack of discipline, which in his younger verse gave the sense of a rich vein of poetry flowing unchecked, now becomes a defect. There has been insufficient self-criticism. Lines such as

> He will go to the synagogue of Berditchev,
> And there sieve out his plaints in a dolorous sieve.

have been allowed to stand. One wishes that Klein had pressed a little harder.

The collection does Klein a distinct disservice in that it is not sufficiently representative of his remarkable gifts, the gift above all of eloquent rebellion. He quotes Shylock: "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands?" without Shylock's fierce defiance, closing his eyes and folding his hands and dreaming sweet dreams of a glamorous ghetto. He forgets that in Shylock there was no "frozen patience," for his passion and pride of race burned with a clear, angry, consuming flame.

And yet, despite their flaws, these poems are a poetic key to an ancient, deep-rooted, emotional and intellectual tradition. As such they can lay claim to vitality and importance.

*Leon Edel*

### DROUGHT ON THE PRAIRIES

*The Wind Our Enemy,* by Anne Marriott. Ryerson Press, Toronto.

The Ryerson Press, of Toronto, has, for many years now, issued inexpensive little publications called Chap-books, which have brought to our notice the work of our younger poets. It is to be congratulated for publishing Miss Marriott's poem, *The Wind Our Enemy,* in this series.

Without a doubt this dramatic narrative is an important poem,

not merely because it dramatizes a moment of our human story, here in Canada, but also by virtue of its intrinsic poetic power. The vast prairies of Western Canada, known the world over for their abundant wheat harvests, have recently suffered a widespread drought. Rain failed them, the parched soil became dust which, blown by the wind, settled upon everything, so that the landscape was nothing but wind and dust and a metallic sky. There was no water for the cattle and horses. Eventually they had to be left to wander about until they fell exhausted. The eastern provinces, more favoured by nature, sent carloads of provisions to relieve the distress of the Western farmers. But it is evident from the poem that they only imperfectly realized that distress.

Miss Marriott tells the story from the inside. Its poetic power derives partly from the use of literary devices which have entered the stream of Canadian poetry as a consequence of familiarity with poets like T. S. Eliot and created a new tradition. Instead of giving us all the objects in the field of vision, Miss Marriott selects those—wheat, granaries, Russian thistles, sky, land, wind, dust—which have dramatic meaning, which are characters in action, not things to be described. The prologue is good because it is a picture of what wind *does*. It is our enemy, a beast of prey which stops at nothing:

> Wind
> flattening its gaunt furious self against
> the naked siding, knifing in the wounds
> of time, pausing to tear aside the last
> old scab of paint.

And it contains the whole dramatic gesture: hunger and the howling of the wind as of a wolf at our vitals. The same instinct chooses, out of the many moments of the history, only the sig-

nificant ones, moments of consciousness, we might call them, which compose the "scenes" of the spectacle; we feel the tragedy through them. There is the first consciousness of drought: "Crops dried out—everywhere—"; the clinging to hope: "Sure, it'll rain next year!" Then, as the reality begins to possess his mind, the farmer wistfully contrasts the past:

> Wind tangling wild manes, dust circling wild hoofs,—
> Then heart thrilled fast and the veins filled with glory—
> The flying, the rhythm, of untamed, unshod feet!

with the present:

> Dull—heads sagging—crowding to the trough—
> No more spirit than a barren cow.

The old mare . . .

> Saw a water-drum, and staggering to its rim,
> Plodded around it—on and on in hard
> Madly relentless circle. Weaker—stumbling—
> She fell quite suddenly, heaved once and lay.

The newspapers tell of relief cars; but also of wars and wrecks, and, by comparison, he thought: "Maybe we're not as badly off as some—" The supper-dance in the schoolhouse, designed to silence sorrow, is but a mirage the next morning. Then, in the deepest distress of soul, sadly reflecting that others are occupied with their own troubles, dust is felt as a wall cutting off human communication. These moments of consciousness are conveyed by typical speech-fragments and other devices, but most forcibly, perhaps, by surprising similes. The poet gives merely a part of an object: "white hoofs and brown," "the sweaty cap," "red eyes," "greying the hair"; objects, isolated in themselves, but significant elements in the dramatic economy: "bitter dust soiling the water pail"—empty of water. This power of suggestion is impaired when too many pictures compress themselves into one line:

> Frail threads needled by sunshine like thin gold.

But it is strong in this striking and very apt simile:

> But sky like a new tin pan
> Hot from the oven
> Seemed soldered to the earth by horizons of glare.

Although the feminine mind may continue an image after its poetic strength is exhausted:

> (Two-ninety-eight, Sale Catalogue)

Perhaps the farmer's wife's mind did so jump, but the reader's mind, more aesthetically occupied, sulkily turns from black earth and wheat and granaries to Eaton's Catalogue.

Thus, by a logic of sense impressions and a marriage of sensation with feeling, converging their functions into that of symbol:

> Presently the dark dust seemed to build a wall
> That cut them off from east and west and north,
> Kindness and honesty, things they used to know,
> Seemed blown away and lost
> In frantic soil.

the drama is brought to its final issue. The *mise en scène:*

> The sun goes down. Earth like a thick black coin
> Leans its round rim against the yellowed sky.
> The air cools. Kerosene lamps are filled and lit
> In dusty windows. Tired bodies crave to lie
> In bed forever. Chores are done at last
> A thin horse neighs drearily.

is an excellent example of the impressionistic art I have touched upon, every image, noun, and adjective telling the same tale. And against these shapes, as it were ghosts of real things:

> —against the yellow sky, a part
> Of the jetty silhouette of barn and house
> Two figures stand, heads close, arms locked,
> And suddenly some spirit seems to rouse
> And gleam, like a thin sword, tarnished, bent,
> But still shining in the spared beauty of moon,
> As his strained voice says to her, "We're not licked yet!
> It must rain again—it *will!* Maybe—soon—"

Perhaps this scene is the epitome of the human spectacle, of the eternal spirit of man and woman, eternally hoping, pledging an eternal troth, while all the universe about them is disintegrating in the teeth of relentless wind and everlasting drought.

*W. E. Collin*

## NEWS NOTES

ALTHOUGH POETRY has devoted several issues to the work of English poets, and at least one issue to Latin American poets, this is the first Canadian number in our history. It has been assumed, by editors and readers in general, that the work of Canadian writers would make itself known in this country through the usual publishing channels; that it would be as readily available for publication as the work of European writers. For various reasons, however, this has not been the case. New poets are "discovered" almost simultaneously here and in England, their careers are fostered by magazines and book publishers in both countries, but there is as yet no comparable interchange between the United States and Canada. Our textbooks and anthologies which are supposed to give a broad general idea of modern poetry (including a host of minor talents on both sides of the Atlantic) rarely contain any mention of the leading Canadian poets. It would take too long to explain how this situation has come about; at all events, we have felt for some time that it should be recognized and corrected. The first need was to provide readers and students with a brief survey article on Canadian poetry, a critical and historical summary, and in this connection we have thought that a special number of POETRY would be useful. When Mr. E. K. Brown consented to write such an article and to edit the number, we knew that an effective beginning would be made.

Four of the contributors to this issue, Louise Morey Bowman, Leo Kennedy, A. M. Klein, and A. J. M. Smith, have published previously here; the others appear for the first time. Since our guest editor has given some information about all the poets and reviewers in his essay, we have not included the usual notes on contributors. However, we should like to supply one omission: E. K. Brown was born in Toronto in 1905, educated at the University of Toronto and the University of Paris (*Docteur-ès-lettres,* 1935), and was later Chairman of the English department in the University of Manitoba. He is now Professor of English at the University of Toronto. Among his books are *Edith Wharton, étude critique; Studies in the Text of Matthew Arnold's Prose Works; Representative Essays of Matthew Arnold;* a translation of Louis Cazamian's

*Carlyle;* a symposium, *Canadian Literature Today* and an anthology, *Victorian Poetry,* the latter being now in press. He contributes the annual survey of poetry to *Letters in Canada* (an annual review published by *The University of Toronto Quarterly*), and has written a large number of articles on modern poetry and fiction.

We hope that we shall have the pleasure of presenting future work by all these contributors.

Two summer opportunities for young writers require notice this month:

The trustees of the Cummington School announce a series of conferences under the leadership of distinguished American writers, including Alfred Young Fisher, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Katherine Anne Porter, and Delmore Schwartz. A competitive scholarship for this course is offered. Candidates must have completed secondary school and have done "considerable serious writing." The scholarship provides living and instruction for ten weeks, and is open to young men and women alike, but only to those who cannot finance their study without full aid. All applications must be filed complete before May 1st. Candidates should send for application blanks and instructions; they should not send examples of their work until notified to do so. Address Registrar, Cummington School, Cummington, Mass.

A group of "determined but not yet established writers" is being formed to hold conversations about poetry and prose, and to have their manuscripts criticized, at Hanover, N. H., July 9th to August 16th, under the direction of the famous teacher, Sidney Cox. There will be personal conferences and three group meetings a week. Mr. Cox is Professor of English at Dartmouth, and has taught writing at Bread Loaf, Columbia, the Cummington School, and elsewhere. He has told something about his way of teaching in an article in the Fall 1940 issue of *Kenyon Review.* Members of the group will be selected on the basis of specimens of their work, not in excess of 5,000 words, submitted not later than June 1st. For other particulars address Mr. Cox at Hanover, N. H.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

ORIGINAL VERSE:

*Rhymed Ruminations,* by Siegfried Sassoon. Viking Press.
*Open House,* by Theodore Roethke. Alfred A. Knopf.
*Angle of Earth and Sky,* by David Morton. Macmillan Co.
*Under the Sun,* by Arthur S. Bourinot. Macmillan Co., Canada.
*Androscoggin,* by Marsden Hartley. Falmouth Pub. House, Portland, Me.
*The Broken Span,* by William Carlos Williams. New Directions.
*The End of a Decade,* by Harry Brown. New Directions.

[Remaining books will be listed next month.]

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