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FIRST

STATEMENT

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ARTICLES CRITICISMS & REVIEWS

AUGUST, 1943.

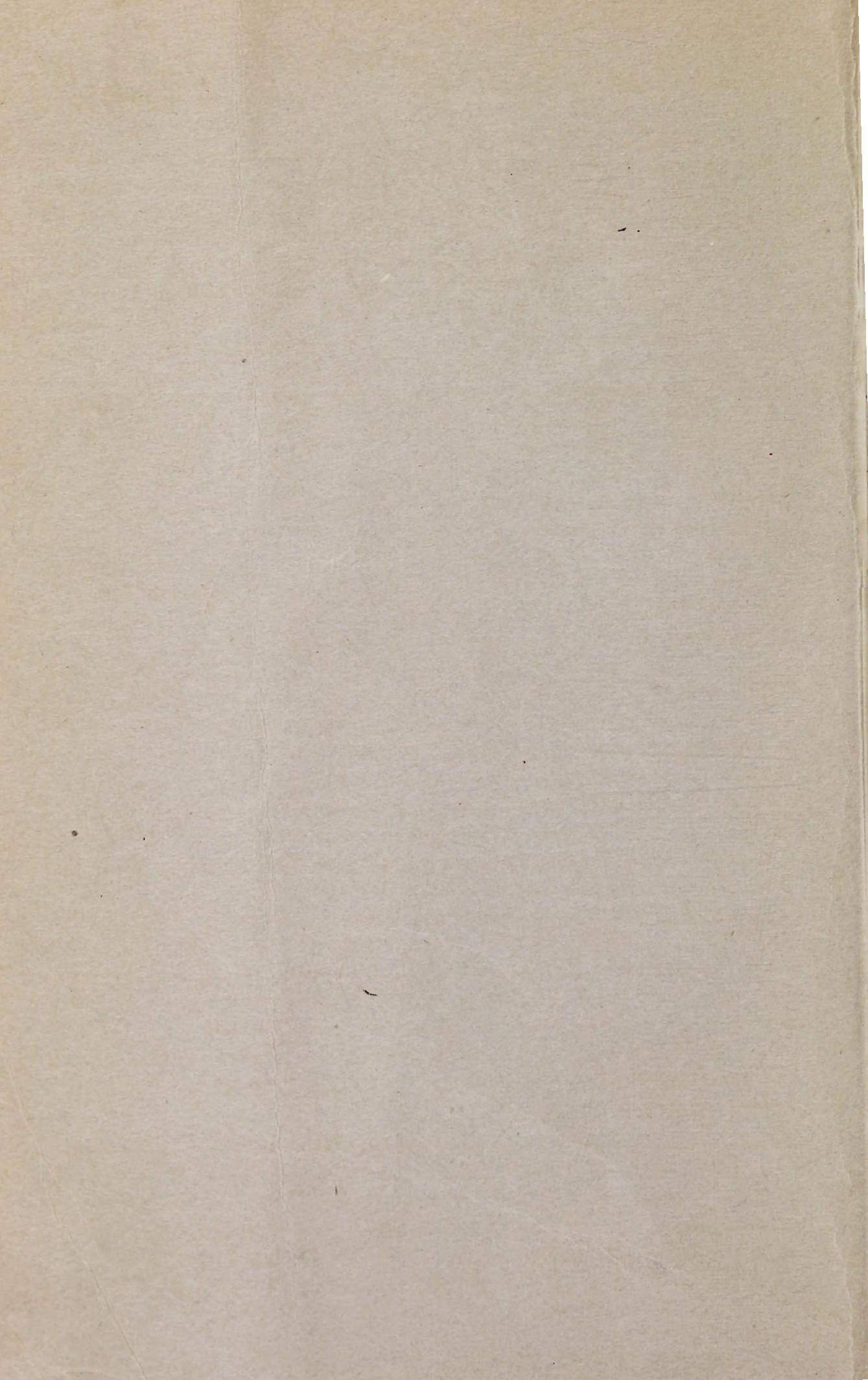
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CANADIAN PROSE & POETRY

PERIODICALS



The Two Schools

Editorial

When A. J. M. Smith declared in the Toronto Quarterly that the romantic tradition in Canada was dead, he must have meant that it had lost its power to stimulate poetry. He could not have meant that it was dead in any other sense. Of the several hundred manuscripts of verse that we received as a mimeographed magazine, about eighty-five per cent were directly in the romantic tradition. The idea that Canadians have of poetry depends upon the tenth-rate Tennyson that is dished out to them by a host of amateur writers. As long as the Canadian Authors' Association, the fecund womb of romanticism, remains as powerful as it is, the national imagination will be molded by stale modes of writing and thinking. This organization is not dead, nor is it in any danger of dying.

The writers appearing in the Canadian issue of the American magazine *Voices* are as much the members of a school as the C. A. A. writers are the members of another school. "Epithalamium in Time of War" by the editor, Mr. Gustafson, will serve to show the character of the collection. Mr. Gustafson produces a garbled version of Gerard Manley Hopkins, that is considerably less intelligible than the original. It will take the reader a good dozen readings to make sense of his poem—it will require a master feat of intellectual tight-rope walking. What meets the eye, once the covering of the style has been peeled away? Why nothing but the romantic tradition all over again! March is a wonderful month, says Mr. Gustafson, and in March it is impossible to believe in death. He has made no progress over those C. A. A. writers, at whom he so ardently thumbs the nose with these mangled Hopkinesque inversions, these rows of dead verbs like stone pigeons, and these bloated, parenthetical paragraphs, that now hold the reader suspended, now drop him flat in the gulf.

In general, *Voices* is made up of chamber poetry. In spite of its protesting concern for objective social facts, it beats its wings about in a literary vacuum. Those poets who can preserve balance and sanity in Canadian poetry—A. M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, and Anne Marriott, among others—are notably missing from the collection.

We believe that this first printed issue of *First Statement* indicates a more wholesome trend, that will make itself increasingly clear in the succeeding issues.

First Statement is published monthly at 207 Craig Street W., Montreal, Que. Subscription rate: \$1.50 a year. Editor, John Sutherland. Business Manager, Irving Layton. Associates, Audrey Aikman, and Louis Dudek. Although unable to pay, we welcome contributions.

The Hitleriad

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— A. M. KLEIN

(Editor's note: This selection consists of the first 110 lines of a long poem.)

Heil, heavenly muse, since also thou must be
Like my song's theme, a seig-heil'd deity,
Be with me now, but not as once, for song:
Not odes do I indite, I indict wrong!
Be with me as I perpetrate the sin,
Forsaking freshness of thy hippocrene,
To taste the poison'd lager of Berlin!

Happier would I be with other themes
(Who rallies nightmares, when he could have dreams?)
With other themes, and subjects more august —
Adolf I sing but only since I must.
I must! Shall I continue the sweet words
That praise the blossoming flowers, the blossoming birds,
While, afar off, I hear the stamping herds?
Shall I, within my ivory tower, sit
And play the solitaire of rhyme and wit,
While Indignation pounds upon the door,
And Pity sobs, and all hell's Terrors roar,
And, in the woods, there yelp the hounds of war?
I am the grandson of the prophets! I
Shall not seal lips against iniquity.
Let anger take me in its grasp; let hate
Of wickedness sit in me, and dictate!
And let the world see that swastika-stain,
That heart, where no blood is, but high octane,

That little brain —

So that once seen the freak be known again!

Oh, even as his truncheon'd crimes are wrought,

And while the spilt blood is still body-hot,

And even as his doom still seems in doubt,

Let deeds unspeakable be spoken out.

Wherefore, O Muse, I do invoke thy aid,

Not for the light and sweetness of the trade,

But seeing I draw a true bill of the Goth,

For the full fire of thy heavenly wrath!

Aid me, and in good time, for as I talk

The knave goes one step nearer to the dock;

And even as triumphant cannon boom

He marches on his victories — to doom!

See him, at last, the culprit twelve men damn.

Is this the face that launched the master-race

And burned the topless towers of Rotterdam?

Why, it's a face like any other face

Among a sea of faces in a mob,—

A peasant's face, an agent's face, no face

At all, no face but vegetarian blob.

The skin's a skin on eggs and turnips fed,

The forehead villainous low, the eyes deepset —

The pervert big eyes of the thwarted bed —

And that mustache, with spittle ever wet,

O that mustache, the symbol of the clown

Made emperor, and playing imperial pranks —

Is this the mustache that brought Europe down,

And rolled it flat beneath a thousand tanks?

Judge not the man for his face

Out of Neanderthal!

'Tis true 'tis commonplace,

Mediocral,

But the evil of the race

Informs that skull!

You ask is paragon'd

The Nordic in this thrall?

Why, chivalry's not found

In him at all!

And he's the beast not blond,
Nor is he tall.

His strength is as the strength
Of ten, and ten times ten;
For through him, magnified
Smallness comes to our ken—
The total bigness of
All little men.

The dossier, then; the facts, the untampered text:
Let *this* world know him, ere he goes to the next!
Where was he born? (Born is the word that I
Use, seeing *littered* is not poesy.)
Where was he born? In Branau at the Inn—
And Austria paid for that original sin!—
Born to a father, old and over-wined
Who had he slept one night, had saved mankind!
At first hight Shicklgruber—what a name
To herald through the mighty trump of fame—
Heil Shicklgruber! Shicklgruber, heil!
Methinks this lacks the true imperial style,
And certainly no poet's nor mob's tongue
Could shake from shekel-shackle-gruber— song!
The gods are kind. His father changed his name,
And saved, at least the Shicklgrubers' shame.
Soon he removed to Linz. Now, note this well,
This was the town where Rilke wove his spell,
Where Rilke dreamed the beautiful and good—
And on this *boden*, Hitler dreamed of *blut*!
His teachers have since died. How fortunate they
Who else had died ten deaths to see the day
The dunce of the corner corner better men,
And great wealth his who could not count to ten.
For he spurned doctrine, scholarship despised:
Let others win the palms so meanly prized—
The teacher's apple and the fiat lux—
Sheepskin for sheep, and for the bookworm books.
Let others learn to love their fellowmen;
He had no fellow, neither now, nor then.
Let others learn to love their neighbours. He
Hated his father and all Linz-ery.

(Forgive the young: he'd see his hate untwined
To take in, generously, all humankind.)
A boor, uncouth, untutored, unconcerned,
He left his school most thoroughly unlearned,
Fit for the plough—before it, not behind! —
And as time proved, the premier German mind!

Dear Mike

—MARG HUGHES

Sudden thunder cracked under the town. The houses rumbled, shook. All over Kirkland women jerked out of sleep, sat up, quivering. Which stope? Johnny, Bill, my husband, Dad, MIKE!

The travelling salesmen waked in the hotels thought Earthquake and rolled over into sleep. But the women started out of bed, running to the phones, quieting the children. Their hearts felt big to bursting and the blood pounded. Airblast. A bad one could hurl rock down on the heads of hundreds of men and there was no way out. Only the lucky ones whose husbands were on day-shift turned over drowsily in bed and flung an arm over the tired man. "Go back to sleep, don't worry, thank God you're home."

The woman in Mrs. Semych's rented room woke too. She sat up listening, in the same immediate unthinking fear. The sound rumbled away, the quivering of the house stilled, silence rolled back. She could hear the blood in her ears and the ticking of the alarm. MIKE.

Then in the middle of her terror she laughed. Her fear had been automatic—the inevitable reaction of any miner's wife. But Mike was not on graveyard—that was not why she slept alone. Mike was at the army camp in North Bay.

A vast feeling of relief swept through her. It was somehow amusing. If he were home at work she would be worried stiff. In the army he was

safe. For the time being. She could go back to sleep now.

But somehow she did not feel like sleep. She snapped on the light and lit a cigarette. No use phoning. The lines would be full. Women who had men down there. Maybe it was an abandoned shaft anyhow. Airblasts often went off in the old workings that weren't filled in again with sand. Her hand stiffened. It had better be. The men had suffered enough.

Remember, Mike? Remember the deaths? Remember Joe, Mike? Guess you don't get squeamish about bayonet-sticking drills, seeing what you've seen. You pulled him out, remember? What was left of him.

Just a simple rock-fall. Just one man killed. Almost got you, but you were lucky.

But it was the funeral that got me. They buried him here from Mrs. Semych's parlor because he had no relatives. She passed around that homebrew of hers and when the little boy her grandson came sidling down the stairs she gave him some too Guess it was the first time he'd ever seen a dead man. He'll get used to it.

You could see him thinking, "I could touch his face!" He crept close....he was too young for wine. The men laughed as he wavered unsteadily, but the old women clicked their tongues. Then—when he thought no one was looking—he put out his finger and touched the smooth dead cheek. Remember Mrs. Semych? She thought it was sacrilege—she tried to pull him away, and instead she pushed him, and his finger thrust against the face. And a deep black hole burrowed into the soft wax that had built up Joe's crushed face. No wonder the kid got sick.

A lot of things were like that, eh Mike? Nice smooth wax on the outside and hell underneath.

Like the silicosis that became TB and then it wasn't an industrial disease anymore, due for compensation, it was just your hard luck. Or the old line, "You're too sick for us to hire you but of course you're not sick enough for compensation."

One reason you fought so hard to help the Union, Mike. \$4.64 a day isn't riches. One reason for the strike. When I think of it, I think of soup—those big buckets we cooked for the pickets to unfreeze them. You don't picket in sixty below zero for your health.

You don't join the army for your health either. But when you believe in something hard enough, you fight.

But that strike time wasn't so bad. Everybody stood together

then. It was the spade work that was tough. The years before.

We went pretty low, Mike, remember? Remember the baby we didn't have?

Things had looked pretty good for a while. We had a little saved up, and we figured you can save quite a lot in nine months. Then the day I felt pretty sure, you came home looking low. Seven o'clock in the morning's a hell of a time to get bad news. You didn't eat much supper that morning. You said "Laid off...." Of course You went to the other companies and they weren't interested in anyone who talked Union, thank you. We worried a bit. Black lists meant a lot those days. I said, "Let's call the whole thing off"; and you were angry. "Don't be crazy...."

Then someone said "The Angel-Maker's in town." Angel-Maker. I knew why they called her that. She was a pretty good abortionist, but even so a lot of the women died. Sure I was crazy. We would have got along somehow. But I didn't want the kid to have it that tough. Now I dream of her nights. Snip, snip.

She was big and jolly and beaming. She rolled into the house in her fur coat as if she were going to a wedding, and had a present for the bride in her bag. Instead she had a long scraping thing like a soup ladle. Shut up shut up shut up. And when I held my hand up it was all white I thought I had no blood left, run out in horrible gurgling streams all over the table. And after, the pains....shut up, haven't you forgotten that yet? Try counting. Think of the good times. Yeah—the good time that was just starting when Mike left. Kirkland draining, rents tumbling. Men going down south into the war industries. Inco howling for men. (Still fighting the Union, Mike, but howling.) Even Kirkland mines discovering men were worth something—oh they didn't pay more but they were glad to get them. You could've walked into any mine you liked and got a job.

So what did you do, you big sap? You joined the army.

And I said sure go ahead. And I meant it. I still do. And I've never complained yet.

She stubbed out her cigarette and picked up his last letter. "...embarkation leave soon...I'll be glad to go...second front..."

She looked ahead. Nights and nights and nights of worry.

OK Mike. You can take it. You've been fighting all along. And for the same things really. And me—I can take it too. I've been worried nights before.

Remember what they did to the two Inco organizers?—walked

right into the office and beat them up. A.D. 1942. I've thought of things like that plenty, nights you came home late.

Damn the Angel-Maker and damn poverty and hating and war.

Suddenly she began to cry. If Mike could see me now she thought. He thinks I'm pretty tough. How'll I get through that leave without letting him know? Can't let him know. But dark alone night-terror pulsed through her. She felt as if she were staring into the jaws of the giant rock-crusher underground, and at any moment a hand might push Mike in.

Then there was a little crash in the kitchen. A dish falling. It must have hung tottering on the edge since the blast, and now it chose to fall.

She picked up her pencil and started her letter.

"Dear Mike" she mocked:

"I'm so glad you're in a nice safe occupation like the army. No fooling, now I can sleep nights."

She lay down with staring eyes.

Green, Wonderful Things

The green temple-dancers of the trees

Bend their fresh unspoiled arms

Above the living forests of the grass

Under the full-rounded moon

The frogs blink green-eyed moons

Evenings I do not wrestle

With maidens there will be still

The sinewy loins of my thoughts

To press open in wonder like a lanced star.

And the green wonderful things

Are enemies never to be forgotten, snapping shutters over lazy minds,

And hiding too easily the sight and smell of blood.

—RAYMOND SOUSTER

Indoors

The winter sky was cold outside
And the shadows of night fell over it
Like hair on a milky forehead.

The guests held forth in long debate
While the lamplight shone on the dark table
Like a soft tired operation.

It was one more day weatherbeaten
Trodden down on public paths
That criss-cross the muddy park.

One more day that I didn't see
The city move on its lighted wheels
And the toy trams with their small noise
Through the gothic vista of the arch
Framing old Saint Mary's.

—MIRIAM WADDINGTON

At The Fall Of Jerusalem

At the fall of Jerusalem we sat immutable,
We four, at our everlasting table,
And the clinking bracelets of the Babylonians
Were ice cubes clinking in our glasses.
The moment in amber is worn as a yellow bead
In time's necklace.

This is the Café Royal.

It is three o'clock for ever and ever,
And the bar-tender yawns eternally over his whisky bottles.
The angle of light at the corner of your jaw
Was established before the siege of Troy:
Our hands were hot together in primeval jungles
Before solipsism was invented.
Now, as we sit, and the clock ticks,
The bracelets of the Babylonians jangle faintly outside—
Listen—now, as we sit—now, listen....

—AUDREY AIKMAN

A White Paper

Butterfly wing,
silver diver of the air
held in my pocket,
who of free will danced
with the dancing wind,
was lost in a cloud
and then came down
to a lawn,
to a rooftop,
missing the rooftop,
to a street, to the edge of the sidewalk—

you, destined to return
to rest in my hand,
belong in a book to keep for a keepsake!
Shall I place you in a museum?
You are a record of me, as I of you.

Once, I traced with my finger
the delicate ribs
and bones of a dancer
who died in the sea
and buried his body in stone;
Dalmanites . . . today's museum piece, I saw
playing among corals
in a green sea,
dancing among sunbeams,
running from a shadow.

So you be a record of me,
a print I traced with my eye
one afternoon
that someone time hence
may lift like a layer, and see
me, white in the sunlight.

—LOUIS DUDEK

The Garden

— ANNE MARRIOTT

Her shoes with the wear-tipped heels had once been black, but now they were the colour of beaten stone, the colour of the stone-hard dirt road on which they moved. With their moving the loose prairie dust, that shuffled endlessly across the permanent-as-concrete ruts, altered into a pattern of rising circles.

Looking down, Jean could hardly distinguish her feet from the road. She seemed to be moving on long sun-browned stumps. She gave a small smile at the thought, then the smile was pressed away as she thought further, it wouldn't do to tell Steve that idea. Not the mood he's been in lately. He'd just snap, "I told you you ought to of got glasses." As if she didn't know she ought to of.

Grandmother Macdonald could still see Steve's place, six miles away, from the kitchen window and tell you whose truck was standing in the yard. Jean couldn't even see Petrowsky's barn, two miles this side of Steve's. But it didn't make any difference. Though last year had been the sixth year without a crop and there was still no money to buy glasses Jean could see more than Gran. She could look at the yellow-gray blur of prairie in the direction of Steve's place, and she could see Steve. She could see him tipping up the crumpled old aluminum dipper, filling it again from the alkali-crusted bucket. (That was one thing that wouldn't be so good when she and Steve got married. It wasn't only the taste of the water, it made her sick). She could see him rolling a scanty cigarette, see the pockets of dust in his neck as he came off the land. She could see him standing by the garden, with that awful twisted, knotted look in his brown-dark face and his blue-dark eyes.

"I've seen his father look like that after his mother died, "Grandmother Macdonald had muttered, one day when she stopped the old Ford by the barren piece of ground. "It's the Irish I figure—or maybe it's the Hungarian from Anna's side. It's a queer combination, that. If I was you Jean I'd be careful. I sure would."

"The Scotch aren't any better!" Jean had jerked back. "Didn't Grandpa go off and leave you when Pa was a baby? Well?"

Jean walked suddenly faster, her shoes trodden, slippery, slithering sideways off the razor-back edges in the track. The brightness of the day, as dazzling as dry white bones, was for a moment as dark as a dust-storm. She pushed her disquiet away. Maybe the garden would grow after all. Maybe. She watched her legs moving, letting odd waves of thought lap across her mind. She was glad she didn't have hairs on her legs like Lorna Petrowsky. If I did, she thought, I'd wear stockings even if I had to make them out of Pa's old underwear. Mabel Ritchie, the store-keeper's daughter, had them even worse than Lorna, but she scraped them off with something, and her legs were bristly on the fat white calves that never seemed to tan. Sitting on the ground with her at the Odd Fellows' Sports (the day Steve made the three homers in the ball-game) Jean had accidentally touched Mabel's leg. The feel of it, even in memory, made her squirmy.

There were buildings ahead, their long paintlessness dust-ground into the same colour as the land. Jean squinted, trying to see if smoke were coming from the chimney. She thought it was still too early for Steve and his father (if the old man had sobered up yet) to be in for supper. There was dust moving on the summer-fallow strip south of the tree-belt, she thought, but she couldn't tell whether it was raised by a team or just a dust-devil spinning along.

I guess I've got time to slip along and look at the garden first, she thought, then I'll fix supper ready for when they come in.

She passed the turn into the yard and went a little farther along the road, then crunched through a brittle mat of Russian thistles by a sagging telephone pole. When she reached the garden she squatted on to her heels and put her eyes near the caked surface, so she would be sure of seeing if—if—any of the seeds she and Steve had planted could be coming up.

There was one shoot cracking the cemented surface (Steve had tried to water it, bringing the dish-water and wash-water, if the old man didn't throw it out first). She moved on to her hands and knees, her mouth a little open, and dry. No, it was only a piece of stubborn pig-weed. She put out a hand to yank it up, but stopped. She might as well leave it, at least it was something green. It might even be food, if she and Steve got married as they wanted. It wouldn't be the first time she'd of eaten pig-weed leaves when nothing else had grown.

"Well?" said a dark bitter voice close to her.

"Steve!" she said, narrowing her eyes, "You scared me—I never saw you."

She laughed a little, moving quickly toward him. He was hunched

down in a hollow of the earth, a cigarette paper in his hand, but no tobacco. The pouch she had given him at the last Christmas-tree was open, empty, on the thistles beside him. His face had that terrible look again, was stiff with it. In spite of it she had the familiar, overwhelming sense of blessing in just being where he was.

She thought, I've known him for eighteen years. Since I was a new baby and he was three and they made him hold me, and I yelled. It was an old joke between them, she thought, I guess I yelled because I was scared someone would take me away from him. She thought further, I wonder if I'll always feel like this. Maybe I won't. Maybe in another eighteen years we'll hate each other like Mr. and Mrs. Petrowsky. But the wonder did not stir her. All her body and all her mind said, it wouldn't ever get like that with me and Steve.

"Did you go to the house?" he asked.

"No" she said, "I came here first. Is your Dad in?"

"I guess so," his voice was empty. "Sleeping it off, I s'pose. Hear about last night?"

"I heard he was at the Chinaman's," she said noncommittally.

Part of her remembered a day when he and Lorna had gone to the screen-doored cafe and Lorna had given the mysterious order "cold tea". Gravely, the Chinaman had brought cold tea. But to Joe Petrowsky to Steve's father, he would bring a cupful of the cheap, bootleg whisky.

"When I saw him he was outside Ritchie's hugging the telephone pole again," Steve flattened the cigarette-paper against the threading knee of his overalls, "slobbering on it— and calling it Anna—"

Jean made a little understanding sound. Joe Petrowsky and the rest thought it was funny, but she knew how Steve felt about it. And she remembered how his father used to be, when she was little. How he could play the accordion for the schoolhouse dances, how he'd even get shaved and go to church some Sundays. Now he'd got so that Steve was going to fix a granary for him to live in, after they were married, because he said he wasn't going to have him in the house with Jean. She made the understanding sound again, and moved closer to Steve so she could see the look in his face for certain. She felt him tighten against her.

"See that?" the words forced from him. He pointed at something. "See that?"

"What, Steve?" she pursed up her eyes again.

He leaned forward and flipped something out of the soft dark drift of soil against the thistles. He held it close to her face so she could see

it. Part of it was faded but the rest still vivid, the purple-red bulk of a giant beetroot, Prize Garden Variety printed above it. As she and Steve had put in the seed she'd said to him, "I'll make you Mrs. Ritchie's jellied beet salad some Sunday with these, Steve. It's good."

"See it?" he insisted. When she nodded he jerked his head forward, toward the garden. "See that?" His voice rose.

"There's a piece of pig-weed coming up," she said foolishly.

"Pig-weed," he said thickly. His face was almost black. His lips opened, she thought he was going to curse, then she thought, no, there isn't any word big enough or terrible enough for what's in him. He crunched the cigarette paper into a pellet and flung it away. The wind buzzed it across the garden, with the loose dust that was always moving, every moment, day and night. He stood up. He pointed at the plot.

"It's a grave," he said, "You're in it, our home's in it, everything I've ever wanted is in it. It's a grave as much as those up in the cemetery. One of these nights I'm going to take the big stone off old Ritchie's grave and set it up on here."

"Steve!" she stood up too.

"Sure I am," he told her, "Sure I am." Then without changing his tone, "I'm going away. Brandons up by town are going to the coast. I saw them last night after I'd tried to get Dad home. They asked me if I'd like to go along and I said I would."

"And—me, Steve?" she pressed close again to see his face.

"I'm going by myself," he said. His face tightened still more. There were lines around his eyes that were new, there was dust in them although it hardly showed against the darkness of his skin. He spoke carefully, as if he were listening to the words, making sure they were what he intended them to be.

"I'm leaving this country and I'm never coming back."

"Steve!" she snatched his arm, "Oh no, no, no Steve! Steve, wait! It'll rain soon. You know it'll rain soon. It has to. Next year, anyway!"

"Next year," he said. "Next year." He dragged his arm away. "If it does rain it won't make any difference. The land is dead, I tell you. The whole country's dead. There's nothing for anyone, anymore." His voice climbed further. "I'm leaving and when I've left I don't want to ever see or hear or speak about this country again. I don't want to think of it or anyone that belongs here." Tears came out of his clenched-up eyes. "Get out of here," he said fiercely, "Get out of here."

"All right, Steve," she said. She stumbled among the dim thistles. "Goodbye, Steve," she said. He stood looking at the garden. She could

hear him crying although she could not see the tears on his dusty face.

As she passed Petrowsky's Lorna came running out. "Here's that sugar-sack I promised you for fixing those old dresses for me," she said. "And if you still figure on making a tea-cloth out of it, Ritchies' new girl knows a cute way of doing the edges. Mabel was telling me last night. It'd be nice for your hope-chest." Then, "Say, what's wrong, Jean? Are you sick? Were you drinking Steve's water again?"

"I guess so," Jean said vacantly. She looked at the thick cotton sack; she thought, I don't want it now, then she thought further, I suppose I could make a slip out of it. I need a new slip. I deserve it, for fixing those old dresses. They smelled. Only a small part of her mind was thinking. She said, "Thanks, Lorna."

Joe Petrowsky was going through the yard. He called out, "Wind getting up awful strong, eh? Half my section'll be over on yours by morning, likely." He pointed out to where tumbling mustard was accelerating its endless progress across the land, bouncing along the blurring furrows of his summer-fallow. The two-foot-deep drift of dust, soft as ashes, along the limp fence by the road began to change its shape.

"There's clouds, Dad," said Lorna hopefully.

"Empties goin' back," he made a habitual joke, not bothering to smile at it.

"I'll get along," said Jean. The wind slapped her faded house-dress against her legs, banged against her eardrums. The blur of country she could see grew darker and browner, the whole moving and writhing from one horizon to the other.

At the house Gran and Pa were eating, and continuing an old familiar argument.

"What's the use of having pride?" Pa roared. "Pride won't hold down the dust! Pride won't squash the grasshoppers! I'm going to see Ritchie tomorrow and get him to fix up for us to get relief!"

"Not while I live, you won't!" Gran's sharp blue eyes sworded against his, "Not while there's a breath in me. One good rain and the land'll come back, you know it'll come back."

"And when will we have one good rain?" Pa asked. He got up from the table, "It's getting so dark in here with the dust blowing we need the lamp," he shook it. "No coal-oil? Well, by—"

"One good rain and the land'll come back!" Gran interrupted, hurling it at him.

Jean said, "The land's dead." Over the peeling oil-cloth of the

table Gran and Pa stared at her. "Are you sick, child?" Gran demanded.

"Yes." She turned and went up the steep stairs to the bedroom. It had been a nice room until last winter when they'd had to rip the lining off the south wall to burn in the stove. She rubbed the dust from her face, the grit that had collected in her eyebrows. Then she lay down, the sugarsack still unnoticed, tight in her hand. She shut her eyes. Presently Gran laid a comforter over her but she paid no attention. There was a strip of loose siding near the window and the wind kept slamming it against the wall, faster and faster, harder and harder.

"Jean!" said Gran, "Jean!" She shook her. She said, "What's the matter with you? A body would think you never wanted to wake up again."

Jean pushed the quilt back. The sugarsack fell on to the floor.

"Smell that!" said Gran. Her voice sounded funny; she moved away to the window, so Jean wasn't sure if she were laughing or crying. Then the smell reached her. She thought, what is it? It was something she knew, something she could remember. But it was something she had not smelt for so long that she wasn't certain about it. There was a noise, too, that was new but familiar. She got off the bed suddenly, stood by Gran. It was raining.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Gran. Jean could see, now, she was laughing and crying both. "It turned to rain, sudden, in the middle of the night. At eleven it was the worst blow we'd had yet, your Pa said. Then at twelve-thirty if it didn't thunder and then the rain began. Bucketsful, till dawn. And it hasn't stopped yet."

She leaned out of the window suddenly, to shout, "Are you crazy? Walking in the mud—barefoot?"

Pa's voice came up from below. It had a wet sound as if the rain had got into it. "I like the feel of the mud," he said, "It sure feels good. I sure didn't think I'd feel it again. "Gumbo," he said, "Gumbo," turning the word over as if it were the most beautiful he knew.

"Come on," said Gran to Jean, "Don't stand there staring. There's a tubful of water outside and I'm going to do some washing. Don't care if it won't dry, I'm going to get my hands into some soft water." She pounded downstairs.

Later, the sun began to shine again, hotly. The land steamed, acres of hot wet smoke rising. Broken barns and wind-splintered sheds had rows of glittering drops along their eaves. It was beautiful. It was terribly beautiful, because it was going so fast. On the line Gran's

washing began to stir, gently at first, as the wind started. Inside the house Gran was singing. I can't bear it, Jean thought, I can't. I've got to get away.

"I'll be back later," she said.

"Going to the garden?" Gran asked. "Will you leave that recipe for fixing macaroni at Petrowsky's as you go by?"

"All right," said Jean. It didn't make any difference where she went.

Lorna had washed her hair in rain-water, it was full of curlers. "I didn't believe it would rain again," she giggled. "Do you know what Mamma did? She went outside and stroked the dirt, like as if it was the cat, just to get the feel of it." She giggled again.

"Oh, Lorna!" said Mrs. Petrowsky; her neck and face reddened. She had come to the new country as a child, but still was unsure of the language and did not say much.

"I'll walk part of the way to Steve's with you," Lorna said. The mud caked under their shoes, making grotesque soles two or three inches thick before they broke away and new ones began to form. Walking was hot and heavy; Lorna tired soon and turned back. Jean laboured on. She didn't know why.

There was still water deep in the Russian thistles where she turned off the road, and it sprayed on her ankles. When she saw the garden she stood still. She thought, it's just because I can't see right. It must be just because of that.

"Bend over, Jean," Steve's voice was calling; he was coming from the house, running awkwardly through the muddy yard. "Bend right down and you'll see it." He was close beside her, pushing her down. She did not look into the garden, she looked into his face. It was all fluid and easy, the tightness and horror dissolved. She said whispering, "Steve. Steve, what's happened?"

"Look at the garden!" he was laughing, scolding, hugging her. He took hold of her head, lowering it until her nose was almost against the loosened surface. "Jean, can you see it now?"

"Yes," she said, "Yes." She thought, it's kind of like a resurrection.

The bony crust had been broken in a thousand places by green shoots. Some were thin and straight like Mrs. Petrowsky's embroidery needles, some were thick and stubby like Mabel Ritchie's legs, some were curled over like Gran when she was tired. Jean thought without convincing herself, it can't be true. She raised her head and leaned back against Steve. The garden blurred again to a faint green film

over a long stretch of dark soil.

She said, before she could relax into the comfort and sharpness of having Steve, "The wind's getting higher. Maybe they won't grow any more."

"I know." His face was behind her head, but from his voice she knew how it looked, "I know. But Jean—don't you see what's happened?" he stopped, and she could sense him feeling for words. "I guess I was wrong—about the land," he stopped again, then awkwardly, "You know—if a fellow can hope—if he feels there's any sense in hoping—he can go on." Then irrelevantly, with a little laugh, "What do you think, the old man fetched in some rain-water and got shaved!"

Forecast

To the seer alone
 Permit the savage, disastrous rumour
 Since touching the bone
 Of each man's humour
 For men astigmatic, prone
 He bares an epoch's tumour;
 Illusionless, plain,
 Stark, individual as pain.
 And irritant as an alien's tread
 Behind our own,
 He gives the vital and the dead
 An implacable moan:
 Seeing in all our indifferent glory
 An old, disfigured story
 Where the surest backwards grope
 From rotted moorings hurled,
 Tumbled and thrown
 Upon a beggared Europe
 A beggared, buried world.

—IRVING LAYTON

Politics and Poetry

—IRVING LAYTON

For many reasons England has become poetry-conscious. A sign of the times is a recent story that one editor received over 26,000 manuscripts in answer to his request for contributions from unknown poets. Numerous anthologies, usually a safe index to popular demand, have begun to blossom out in book-stalls and libraries: *Poems of this War*; *Poems from the Forces*; *Poetry in War-Time*; and many others less publicized.

The people have taken the poets out of the libraries and put them in the bomb-shelters.

Surely this points to an intense intellectual ferment. To find a parallel in English history for the present mood of earnest bewilderment one must go back to the seventeenth century. Today, as then, the intellectual fabric reveals the familiar symptoms of an age in transition. Today, as then, the dominant note in the politics, ethics, religion and literature is one of criticism and impatience for change.

If it's true that romanticism always accompanies a social upheaval, recent developments in English poetry provide an interesting commentary. A well marked reaction has set in against the triumvirate of Auden, Spender, and Lewis which dominated the poetry of the thirties. A whole new school of poetry has arisen that repudiates both in theory and practice the conventions of the older group. The latter's was largely a poetry of social criticism and frustration, a sustained attempt to signal the intellectual and moral confusion that was pushing their country into conflict.

Apart from Freud and a few minor prophets, Marx contributed most to the formation of their thought. From him they derived a sense of history and an awareness of the massive contradictions within their society. They understood the nature of fascism far better and far sooner than statesmen did: and they lectured economists on the reserve army of the unemployed, on poverty and slums. Gone was the insularity of the nineteenth century; their outlook was internationalistic and cosmopolitan. George Barker wrote a poem on the murder of the Vi-

ennese Socialists, while Stephen Spender celebrated the struggle of the Spanish democrats. To Auden, England was "an old cow", afraid and conservative before the winds that were blowing in from the continent.

Politicians, like Byron and Shelley before them, they injected into their verse an urgency and a moral fervour that marked an important advance upon the poetry of the previous decade. Even when they were expressing their own maladjustments they indirectly exposed the crippling malaise of the period. It is at this point that a fusion takes place between psycho-analysis and politics, between neuroticism and a moribund economy. Introversion and extroversion; Freud and Marx.

To summarize: the poets of the early and middle thirties were diagnosticians and prophets; they were critical of the prevailing institutions and temper of the people; they strove to explain to their fellow-men the implications of a collapsing social order.

The outbreak of the war, by proving them truthful, also helped considerably to clear the air. The shift became one from problems to issues. History took a sudden lurch forward. It is not too much to say that in 1940 England experienced a renaissance of the democratic idea. Certainly, she recovered her soul. In so doing, she made the further discovery that to attain power she must suppress privilege. The masses began to see that democracy, to be effective, must be social as well as political. Men were content in the hour of danger, to emphasize their identities rather than their differences. The lost sense of community was regained. Also there was a job for everyone to work at.

It's this change in mood and situation, I believe, which accounts for the present reaction to the poetry of Auden and Co. At the risk of over-simplifying: much of their poetry is no longer relevant. Whatever else Englishmen might be at this moment, they are not frustrated. On the contrary they are busy, confident, and preparing for the victory which tomorrow must yield them. A silent revolution has taken place in people's thoughts and feelings. Already much of Auden's verse sounds unreal and somewhat hysterical:

"Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable itch,
The exhaustion of meaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown viginity."

The new poetry is being created in the factory, in the mine. or at the battlefront. "Soldier-poet" has ceased to have the faintly romantic

tinge it had in the last war. There are too many of them. Also, life and culture, dream and action have coalesced, are flowing into each other. A rich moisture has soaked into the dessicated coteries that flourished in the thirties, dissolving them. Where the older generation of poets was hostile to their society and rejected it, this generation derives its main vigour from an identification with it. In temper and technique, their poetry is as different from that of the earlier group as the politics of Churchill differs from that of Chamberlain.

“We have put off the pack of childhood,
lifted our eyes to a fiercer sun for god;
we have mastered the ambiguities and the loneliness
of little rooms to which no daylight comes.”

Clearness and intelligibility have been restored to English poetry. As poets like Alan Rook, Henry Treece, M. J. Tambimittu, and H. R. Rodgers trek back to naturalism they are leaving behind the dry, puritanical exercises of Auden and his imitators. They feel, rightly so, that they have an audience, and they want passionately to be understood by it. This fact of an audience, if I mistake not, is one of the chief reasons for the difference in poetic technique between the two generations. The older generation never had one; not, at least, in any vital sense that mattered.

In one important way, however, they are continuing the tradition of the Auden, Spender, Lewis group: they believe intensely in the social function of the poet. They differ from them in seeing that function not in terms of any set political programme and ideology, but as an expression of the common fund of reasonableness and goodwill in any community. Their temper is fabian rather than revolutionary. I quote again from another poem by Captain Alan Rook:

“But they, the vast unloved, shall have their day.
Maybe not now, not yet; but near at hand
I see victorious banners light the sky,
I hear the murmur rise; I understand
all they aspire to. No use now deny
your first responsibility.”

In an essay, “The Poet and the New Era”, H. L. Senior writes: “We do not want any more little coteries of conceited young men writing little notes to each other disguised as reviews, and calling attention to a widespread influence that reaches no further than the points of their pens. We want poets who are able to fight the battle of personality against selfishness. . . . I can see no nobler vision for the poet than to be on the side of the dispossessed. He must be if he is serving

beauty, because he must fight the possessors of material wealth. Those men have reached the goal of riches through the jungle of selfishness. It is not possible to amass riches without the practice of Selfishness. It is this vice alone which makes great possessions such an ugly thing."

The foregoing quotations make it clear that the newer poets are no less aware of the social issues than the older poets were. Where, then, lies the difference? I think the difference is one of mood and emphasis, of philosophical temper. For the doctrinaire Marxism of the 30's, they have substituted a willingness to observe and experiment; for metaphysics, science; for rationalism, empiricism; and for a narrow dogmatism, an active skepticism. The search is still for a formula, a synthesis, but the formula and synthesis must be broad enough to include the many facets of the human personality. This emphasis upon personality, which borders upon the religious, is all the more significant since it directly contradicts the arid intellectualism of the earlier poets. Hence it is not surprising to find a return to the lyric. The note of individualism which T. E. Hulme and Eliot thought they had banished forever has crept back into English poetry.

To round off this discussion of recent tendencies in English poetry two further comments are necessary. Just as the French Revolution of 1789 produced the Romantic movement of the last century so, I suggest, the resurgence of a democratic élan is creating a new romanticism. The analogy could be carried even further. The entire complex of ideas, modified, to be sure, to the needs of the moment, which we associate with that great historical event, is now being reproduced. I have already touched upon romanticism: individualism and naturalism are two other important aspects of the new poetry. The explanation for this phenomenon is rather obvious; we ourselves are living through a revolutionary period.

Men's hopes for a social order freed from marring inequalities are as generous today as when they inspired the early poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Men have begun to dream again, but this time with only one eye shut: the other eye is carefully focussed on the doings of their rulers. Romanticism, yes, but within the context of the machine age and power politics.

Class relationships are altering; new groups and parties are being thrown up. It is tempting to see in the reaction to the poetic rigidities of the earlier poets, and the experimenting with loose, transitional forms, a reflection of the fluid social realities of the moment. The clipped, tortuous style which has held English poetry in a straight-jacket for over a decade has disappeared. To it has succeeded a style which is

personal, free-flowing and which, while retaining some of the lessons of the older poetry, is more elastic and colorful.

In politics and poetry the present happenings in England are full of promise.

Book Reviews

Arenas, by Tom Boggs. Toronto, Longman's, Green and Co. 56 pages \$2.00

It is clear enough what the American poet Tom Boggs has attempted to do in this volume of poems, *Arenas*. He has wanted to write a series of lyrics that would appeal to the average reader as the essence of simplicity. He has wanted to give you poems that were as natural as the texture of your skin or the color of your eye.

It is also clear enough why Tom Boggs has wanted to do so. He cannot forget the god Pan, standing with his naked body in the Grecian thicket. He thinks of the good old days in the groves of Thessaly, when the shepherd poet piped a merry tune upon his oaten flute. He has turned away aghast from the confusion and tragedy of modern poetry wherein nothing is simple and nothing "natural".

In fact, he has worked so hard at being simple that he has sterilized his lines of sense and feeling. He has tried so hard to be natural that he has made himself laboured and prosaic. He has tightened the noose of technique around the throat of his poems — gradually — until he has squeezed all the life out of them. For what reason his volume has been published will not be discernible to any average mind.

J.S.

This England, by James Edward Ward. Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company. 47 pages. \$1.00

Every war, it seems, resuscitates the tradition of the sentimental-heroic. It has its uses. By mellowing the sadistic emotions of Everyman which government propaganda must necessarily stimulate, it persuades him of their righteousness; by a literary trick he is enabled to carry murder in his heart and still remain a kind husband and a devoted

father to his children.

Mr. Ward's contribution to the war effort is to work his muse overtime ladling out a thin syrup. His verses are smooth, nicely-cadenced, and competent; each line is scanned so meticulously for the proper number of syllables that it sounds almost churlish to ask for something like genuine passion. The sentiments expressed in them are as delicate as tissue paper, as fragrant as one of the English lawns on which his muse rolled over and fell asleep. If the author ever had a moment of disgust or anger, he has contrived manfully for 47 pages to keep his secret from us.

To those who are heartsick at what the Nazi bombers might have done to rural England, Mr. Ward brings re-assurance. Despite war's darkness and wanton destruction, there are still the larks and thrushes, the hedges, and the "saucy cowslips blowing". Also, there's "the love call of the nightingale" in this "dear little land of lusty loves", and the sheep are brought in to browse and nibble on every other line or so. One turns the pages fruitlessly for an original observation, for an idea other than trivial, for a single hint that the shock of war has ploughed deep into old habits and convictions. From an England scarred, hurt, savage, and not a little unsure of itself, Mr. Ward turns discreetly away. The conventions of the sentimental-heroic must be observed: Mrs. Minniver must have her poet.

The bombs have fallen and Mr. Ward, well-educated and dignified, has written a nostalgic pastoral. That is all.

I. P. L.

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