

15 CENTS A COPY

FIRST STATEMENT

IN THIS ISSUE—

STORIES IRVING LAYTON, JACK HAKAAR.

POEMS DOROTHY LIVESAY, IRVING LAYTON
JOHN SUTHERLAND, MURRAY BONNYCASTLE.

ARTICLES CRITICISM & REVIEWS

APRIL, 1944.

VOL.2, NO.6.

CANADIAN PROSE & POETRY



FIRST STATEMENT

Canadian Prose and Poetry

Editorial

Since the appearance of Ralph Gustafson's Penguin Anthology in 1942 modern poetry in Canada has been having a field-day. Mr. Gustafson has added two more collections to the Penguin volume; A. J. M. Smith has produced **The Book of Canadian Poetry**, and at least two other anthologies are being prepared for publication. Changes have taken place that throw a great deal of light on Canadian literature in general.

For example, nothing could illustrate better the lack of any stabilizing national tradition than these recent developments. It is amusing to see how we manage to bar modern poetry in Canada for such a long time only to reverse our judgment with a lightning-like rapidity. It is the lack of a vital tradition that explains how, in Canada, a die-hard conservatism acts as the counterpart of a desire to ape the latest fashion.

It is apparent also that the cosmopolitanism of the modern poets has not altered our literary provincialism. The writer is as dependent as ever on limited groups that are no more able to base themselves on a native tradition than they are to break free from the narrow viewpoint that belongs to the clique. There have been no events that would provide Canadian literature with unity or create more than a semblance of a national attitude. We have continued to produce minor writers, but we have failed to produce a writer important enough to give direction to our literature.

Most important of all, perhaps, is the manner in which the new development has emphasized the divorce of the Canadian writer from the Canadian reader. While editors and critics have set the seal of their approval on modern poetry, no visible impression has been made on a national audience. Some notice has been gained for Canadian poetry in the United States, but this is only a matter for satisfaction if one fails to realize its implication. This implication is that we are, perhaps, farther than ever from solving the main problem of securing an audience in Canada for writing in Canada. If the Canadian writer has any duty today, it is the duty of helping to secure a responsive audience in this country.

—J. S.

First Statement, issued monthly, is a non-profit magazine, printed co-operatively at 207 Craig St. W., Office 18, Montreal, Que. Editorial Board: John Sutherland, Editor, Audrey Aikman, Irving Layton and Louis Dudek. Agents: Myron J. Galloway, 83 Cambridge St. Halifax; Lois Darroch, 147 Bloor Ave., Toronto; Katherine Marcuse, 4715 4th Ave. W., Vancouver; Geoffrey Ashe, 107 4th Ave., Ottawa. No payment can be made for manuscripts. Subscription, \$1.50 a year.

We Have Taken The Night

We have taken the night
 Like a Persian black cat
 Into bed with us:
 Your fingers stoking my body's heat
 Are the red-irradiated
 Glassware of my childhood,
 Are decoded scents suddenly
 Familiar and pungent.
 Dark rivers flow under your hair
 As under remote bridges.
 I feel with my hands
 The cool rain-bark of your trunk.
 I bring my white candle to your water-lily.
 Afterwards, lying on our backs,
 We decree space
 And allow thought and the room's objects
 To separate us:
 Abstract and personal
 We turn in the round cavity of sleep.

IRVING LAYTON

Variations On A Theme By Thomas Hardy

I

O stranger with the arms outstretched
 Lamenting rain drives in between
 Today's demand, what might have been.
 Eternal lover on the Cross
 Reaches only with his voice
 The lovely creature of his choice

And no summation even holds
 Completion in its still embrace:
 If of the flesh, the spirit's trace

Is gone; if spirit, there is never known
 Burden of breath. Lamenting rain
 Drives and separates the twain.

II

And sunlight has a brittle snap
 Even in spring. We walk the roadway of our dream
 Together; but the willow's pace in wind
 (Gathering gold on bough)
 Is lonely, willow in wind
 Is separate, sealed earthward, out of range.

III

Eternal lover is the one
 Who seeks no marriage of the bone
 Borrows his raiment from the spring
 Owns no roof, bestows no thing
 With his insignia; more free
 To range than willows be.
 Eternal lover will not clutch,
 But waits; waits the returning touch.

IV

"How is your bed so cold?"
 "It lies by the outer wall."
 "How are your limbs so rigid, then?"
 "I have grown tall."
 "Why is your heart so still?"
 "It's tuned to upper air."

"Your eyes are icy stones."
"So do the stars stare."
"How was your breath blown out?"
"At lightning's pace."
"Where are you love . . . my love?"
"Look. In the sky's face."

DOROTHY LIVESAY

The Flood

The tall walls marshal into files:
Shuffling, the chairs and tables move
To block our path, or wrapped in sighs
Hang at our heels like animals.

The frosted light that clouds the air
Rocks past us in a startled arc
Of rays as sharp and cold as stars
With wheeling shadows on the floor.

But while we shrivel in our fear,
Frost-killed and crushed by bruising walls,
Peeled from our vision like a skin
Air crumples backward as it falls;

And, wrestling with the shrunken room,
Fast in its suit that smothers breath,
We wrench the swelling seams that burst
In tunnels through the startled cloth:

In thoughtful distance by the wall,
The flood that comes by stealth, and tilts
The unsuspecting tables, shines
In its pretense of innocence.

JOHN SUTHERLAND

The Philistine

IRVING LAYTON

One afternoon I was drinking my coffee when a neatly dressed individual whom I had never before encountered sat down at my table facing me. As he ordered his victuals, he removed his hat and put it back immediately upon his head. He had a thick bushy mustache that was already quite grey, a high complexion, and eyes that were two charcoal smudges above a thickish nose. He seemed anxious to enter into a conversation with me for several times he mumbled something inaudibly, fingering the brim of his felt hat as he did so. Finally he ventured: "You come here very often, don't you?"

I was taken with the man's appearance and so I replied casually:

"Yes I do. But I didn't think people would notice it. The fact is I'm interested in crowds and I should walk a hundred miles to see a dangerous mob." I leant over to whisper in his ear. "A strange face is better than a legacy."

At this the man's eyes almost fell out of their sockets; his yellow tongue stuck out of his mouth as though he had been dazed by a sharp blow. For a moment I really thought that he was going to be unwell. When he had recovered himself he stuttered excitedly, "Why . . . yet . . . why that's exactly what he would say. It's so! It's so!" It seems that I had touched a hidden spring of his being, for he pushed his unfinished dinner before him, turned his face towards me, and took off his cap only to put it back again.

"You're interested in faces, eh? You say that faces interest you? Well, that's what he would say. And, ho, we laughed at him. Listen. We were then a group of young men who would meet at one another's homes to discuss the latest books and news of the day. Intellectuals, you might call us. But at that time the word was not under a shadow as it is today. Kropotkin, Marx, Lombrosa,

Haeckel, Darwin, those were the gods we worshipped, the idols to whom we offered up our keenest moments of passion and sacrifice. You young men get your dialectical pleasures in comfortable debating societies, go home, eat well, and sleep soundly afterwards. But we... we would tear each other's throats out for a line of Marx or Kropotkin. And always there were the watch-dogs of the Government. We had to be careful... However, that's not part of my story.

"Lev Purkin alone would keep silent during those stormy discussions. He never had anything to say, but would sit in a corner by himself, staring at us with open mouth like a child that has fallen asleep on his stool. As he sat there without stirring, he seemed like a little animal that is desperately trying to think. Do you get my meaning? I tell you, my friend, you wouldn't have given two cents for him if he had been offered at that price. Short, with undersized shoulders, an abnormally large head, his feet dangling from his chair like an infant's, his nose scratched and dirty, he seemed to have been poured out upon the world and collected afterwards by some thoughtful rag-picker. A stained yellow cigarette always in his mouth, of one colour with his skin, gave to him sometimes the appearance of a mocking gnome.

"Anyhow he had nothing to say to any of us and just why he joined our circle no one could tell. Mordecai used to declare that it was in order to have a place to sleep. For at that time Lev's father was dead and the husband that the widowed mother took one year after the funeral threw Lev out of the house. His sister, who had married well and could afford to keep him, could not abide him for, 'Looking at him,' she said, 'drove away her appetite.' And so at the conclusion of all our arguments and debates, one of us would literally pick him off his stool and carry Purkin home with him. He was such a poor, sorry, helpless and ill-treated creature and we knew him to have such a warm heart, although he had nothing to give, that our hearts melted at the sight of him. Had we not read Marx? Had we not read Kropotkin? Did we not know the books of Tolstoi by heart? You may be sure that Lev Purkin, yes Lev Purkin, lacked for nothing. If it was not at Mordecai's house that he slept and ate, it was at mine; if it wasn't me it was Pincu or Velvil. And sometimes at important holidays, we all came together and each contributed according to his means to buy him a suit of clothes, a new hat, a pair of shoes.

Then, perched upon his stool, he looked like a child that has grown old suddenly, and when the smoke from his cigarette made him cough too violently he fell upon the floor like a heap of new garments.

"As I say, we took good care of him, we treated him like a brother, and saw that he wanted for nothing. Mordecai, who was the best employed and was earning bigger wages than any of us, naturally assumed the greater responsibility with regard to his upkeep. But we all . . . we all contributed something and we did it without the asking and as though our future bliss lay in the doing so. By degrees we grew to be very attached to him and took him with us wherever we went. For you must know that although we were up to our necks in Darwin and Haeckel, we had other interests as well. Many were the fine picnics and outings that we arranged. To these Lev Purkin came too, though he had nothing to say to any of the girls nor, indeed, to any of us but would lie sprawled out upon the grass, gazing at the sky and shading his eyes with his hand if the sun was too strong. Or he would sit up, a familiar cigarette in his mouth, and pick his nose and scratch his neck. Then, tired of our play, we all surrounded him and teased him for his unsociableness; but he would only laugh a childish laugh that endeared him to everyone. He would turn over and bury his head under his hands and soon he was fast asleep.

"Now, how shall I describe to you what happened? It came so unexpectedly, it caught us so completely off our guard, that for days we said nothing but just watched and watched. Whether it was the effect of the literary evenings we had had and which he had overheard from the corner of his room or whether it was something else entirely, we could not say. But our Lev . . . our Lev Purkin suddenly began to walk and talk as if he were an uncrowned Chekov, another Gorki, or an Anatole France. His pride and egotism grew from day to day until at length they became insufferable. He, who had always been so polite, so self-effacing, would now interrupt us on all occasions. 'You don't know anything about the matter,' he would shout, 'so why do you keep on talking?' Or he would turn to Mordecai and say, 'You Mordecai, run out into the winter and buy me another coat. It will give you a holy glow of doctrinal purity.' Or ask of Pincu, 'Pincu, is there an idea in your head which you can call your own?' Naturally, at first we all thought that he was having his little joke and even

welcomed this surprising show of esprit. But as he persisted, the matter became more serious and we attempted to reason with him. To all our arguments he would block up his ears and whistle a tune loudly, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

"We also began to say to one another that Lev Purkin had gone out of his mind; that the strained relations with his mother and the unnatural treatment of his sister had been too much for his sick, nervous body. And so instead of becoming vexed with him, we spoke soothingly to him, telling him that he was right while we . . . we were all wrong. This procedure, instead of calming him as we had hoped, made him shout all the louder. Do you know what he shouted, my friend? 'I am a genius,' he shouted. He would stand upon his stool in the corner and shout, 'I am a genius,' so that we had to leave off our discussion and find out what the fool wanted.

"Then for a whole week he resumed his former silence and everyone congratulated him that the fit had passed. But we noticed that he did not slink against the wall as formerly, but would walk through the centre of the room and with firm steps. We all felt that a new spirit had entered into him; that he was no longer the affectionate, slightly contemptible Lev, but a man to be reckoned with. It was about this time that he used to stare up at us and say quietly: 'Faces . . . Faces . . . There's nothing more god-like than a human face.' And the way he said it, with such an inexpressible feeling and depth, made us listen despite ourselves, would crush the laugh, and tear the smile away from the lips. Only Mordecai would answer roughly, 'Faces? Souls? Souls can usually be found at the bottom of the gall bladder.' Mordecai was always exceedingly clever with his phrases. 'Fish for them there, my little Tartufe, if you want them. Besides you're an ignorant poseur! Do you ever read a book? A newspaper or a pamphlet? Philistine!' And Pincu who had said nothing now chimed in irrelevantly, 'Why, Lev, it is the class struggle that has made you what you are.' At this we all felt somewhat ashamed; some for the reason that we did not like to have Lev's dependence mentioned, and some because we thought that Marx could be quoted with greater profit elsewhere. But Lev Purkin took no notice of all this. He just stood there, very quiet, his mouth pushed up as though he were trying to blow a soul into us from between his thin bloodless lips.

"After a while, he took to stuffing his pockets with papers.

Every scrap of paper he could lay his hands on; papers that had rolled in the dirt and mire; whenever he saw a dirty bit of paper he would pick it up and carry it about him for weeks. At one time he looked as if he had broken out in lumps, or like badly kneaded dough that rises unevenly. We were all surprised anew at this strange behaviour of Lev's and asked ourselves uneasily whether his mind was indeed unsettled. When we demanded of him, 'Lev, what can be the meaning of this?' he only puffed up his cheeks but made no answer. I, who was a little more intimate with him than the others, told him bluntly that his conduct was disgraceful. I asked him whether he wasn't unwell, whether he wouldn't like to see a physician or perhaps (he could tell me) he had done something bad and wanted money. He turned upon me with an expression I shall never forget. He seemed like an ugly, vicious child; his eyes held hatred, they held contempt and a pitiless scorn that left you feeling wet and unworthy. I thought he was going to strike me. Instead, he said sadly, 'Your're an idiot, Dave . . . A complete idiot. . . But a good-natured idiot.' With that he left me and walked ahead with such rapid strides that I could not overtake him.

It wasn't long before the mystery of the torn bits of paper was solved. One day, of his own accord, he pulled out a thick brown piece of paper — the kind that's used for wrapping — and showed it to us. It was at Vera's house. We all crowded about Lev and almost tore the sheet to little bits in our eagerness to see what it contained. It was Mordecai who finally seized it held it up to the light. 'What's this! What's this!' he exclaimed and burst out laughing, 'Lev wants to be a — a writer!' The brown slip fell from his hand and he bent himself double and the tears stood in eyes from laughter. I stooped to pick up the crumpled sheet and read to the surprised assemblage, 'We always go to sleep in the hope of waking to find a better world,' and scrawled underneath that, 'The world owes every genius a living.' Then Purkin pulled out another torn scrap of paper which he handed to us with an air of sly embarrassment. It held eight lines of poetry and I remember them yet.

'Come, my love, since life is short
And stormy as the ocean's breast,
We'll anchor safely at love's port
And loudly laugh at fortune's jest.

'Soon will our toiling lives be spent
And dust and ashes be our clay;
So, dearest, to our heart's content
We'll live and love this very day.'

"The sentiments expressed in these verses were so at variance with the character and appearance of their author that we all exploded with laughter.

'What a sly dog you are!' shouted one.

'Who is she?' demanded another.

'Is she obliging?' came from a third.

"From all sides arose cries and shouts, while Mordecai was unable to stop laughing and lay stretched out upon the sofa and kept pressing his hands to his stomach. But Purkin merely cocked his head towards the lamp and the light slanted down upon his malicious lips as he whistled his tune. He left us, still laughing and crying, to go into the kitchen where Mrs. Yeppov, who was a good, kind woman and pitied him, gave him a warm bun, freshly buttered."

I had listened to the story-teller with impatience and I thought to end it quickly by asking him if he cared to have some coffee. He brushed aside my query, and pressing the brim of his felt hat, went on:

"The climax, however, came afterwards; although his madness had been taking different forms, they all seem to have led up to this point. Lately he had been going about thrusting soiled bits of paper into the hands of everyone, saying, 'Keep this, 'tis a gift from the heavens.' Then he would rush ahead, a mawkish figure, a deformed body set upon twinkling legs. Mordecai was for getting ourselves rid of him, for letting him starve and freeze in the gutter. But while we all agreed that that was the best thing we could do, none of us had the courage to carry out our intentions. A great coolness had developed between us and him, and while we still managed to provide for him, it was no longer with love but as a hated obligation that we had to fulfill. We had given up reasoning with him or trying to make him see his folly, contenting ourselves with calling him an ignoramous and a philistine or begging him to keep his fiddle's screeching to himself until he had learned to play. Only Mordecai would lose his temper; the rest of us merely laughed in Purkin's face sarcastically and called him a fool.

"One evening, he was at Vera's home and it so happened that no one else of our circle was there. It was that which brought matters to a head. She told us the story the next day and that was responsible for what happened, as you shall see. She turned to him and said, 'What is the matter with you, Lev? As your friend, let me tell you that you are ridiculous in everyone's eyes. What strange behaviour is this? What madness is this? You don't work, you don't write, but you throw up stupid scraps of paper as if to rain down glory upon your head with them.' Then she said more kindly, for like all of us she pitied him, yes, she even loved him, although he was as ugly as sin, 'Lev, make up with your friends . . . before it is too late.'

"He only looked at her with that expression on his face which I have already described and said. 'Listen, let me tell you a story.' Then he went on to tell her some fantastic tale that had no salt nor pepper nor beginning nor end. At least that is what she told us, but in our group no one considered Vera a good judge of literary values. It may be that this time he had really said something. When he was done, he shouted at her, 'Isn't it truly great? Isn't it a masterpiece? It's all my own, Vera, all my own! Then sliding down upon the floor, he entwined his arms around her legs and said rapturously, 'I want to be a writer, Vera. I want to be a great writer such as the world has never seen. When I go for long walks in the rain I exult and cry, "I shall be the greatest master of all." And the small escaping sounds from the ditch-pools with music echo back, "You shall be the greatest master of them all." And the slow falling rain between the tall trees and I seem to understand each other and pass like silent friends and bow and know that we shall meet again.' In his excitement and frenzy he had clasped her legs so tightly that Vera cried aloud with pain and thought that he was going to do her an injury. She exclaimed angrily, 'Get up! Get up, Lev! You must be unwell!'

"When Vera told us what had taken place, we were speechless with anger and astonishment. 'Ho! Ho!' we said, 'This time he's gone too far.' No doubt you will laugh at our blindness and folly. We were not ignoramuses, you understand. We had read Andreyev and Baudelaire and Verlaine and knew that each had had his eccentricities. But they were geniuses and that men of extraordinary sensibility should have their defects and oddities was not at all surprising. Well, that night we were in Pincu's room

and a warm debate had just begun between Mordecai and me when Lev entered. We left off immediately and he seemed to understand that something was amiss for he went up to his corner more quietly than usual. From there he nodded quickly to each one of us but we — we turned our backs to him and answered nothing. Mordecai, however, strode up to him, I following quickly behind because I was afraid he would do him some harm. Mordecai was always sudden-tempered, yet a more golden-hearted fellow there never was. This time he looked so angry that even Lev forgot his usual insolence and tried to squeeze himself into the corner.

“Well, my little genius! Well, my little beggar! Well, my fine darling of the ladies! So it has come to this at last! Lev Purkin made no attempt at an answer; indeed, no answer was possible since Mordecai was again asking him with a white taunting fury, ‘Tell me, Monsieur Chekov; tell me, Monsieur Anatole France, do you ever so much as read the newspapers? Do you ever read the literary reviews? I want to know, do you ever read anything — anything, you silent blockhead?’ And then it must have seemed that a thousand hands were stretched out to tear him from his pedestal for by now we had all gathered around him and were demanding with Mordecai, ‘Do you ever read the newspapers? Do you ever read the literary reviews?’ It may have been that the collective excitement had mounted to Mordecai’s head, or it may have been that Lev’s disdainful look had infuriated him afresh; whatever it was, Mordecai struck him a heavy blow upon the face so that he fell off his stool and lay upon the floor like one dead. At this we were all ashamed and Mordecai more than any of us. He quickly ran for a wet towel to put around his forehead and as he ministered over him he kept saying heart-brokenly, ‘Lev, do you hear? Lev, I say, do you hear me?’ And when Lev opened his eyes and blinked like a child who has slept badly, Mordecai almost wept with joy and lifted him up and carried him gently to a bed.

“Well, I have come to the end of my story. It may have been that the blow Mordecai struck him decided him for good and all; it may have been the singing pools and the slow falling rain that he had promised to meet. I am not a poet and do not know about such things. How could we have fathomed that such an ugly, misshapen vessel might contain such wonderful dreams of beauty? The afternoon is over and you can see those long, thin shadows creeping against the walls. Now they cover the table and soon from the

floor they will climb the chair beside it. Lev Purkin passed by us like a quick shadow and we heard from him no more. We were sorry that he had gone, for despite ourselves, when we listened to him, he made us greater than we were, and restored something to us that had been taken away by we knew not whom. At first we jested and when we met each other on the street we asked, 'Any news from the philistine?' And the boldest would say, 'I wonder what virgin that blasphemer is sleeping with now!' But after a time the jokes grew old and silly, and since nothing more was heard about Lev, nothing more was said. He had disappeared and taken with him even the memories of men.

"Well, you know what Bandelweiser of the Literary Review called him. He has named him one of the foremost writers in that particular genre. 'His words,' says Bandelweiser, 'cut your heart like a whip and make it bleed. They are tipped with flame.' . . . What you have never heard of Bandelweiser? Bandelweiser, who contributes a weekly article to the Literary Review and one a month to World Literature?"

"No," I answered coldly for the man's voice had begun to exasperate me. "No, I have never heard of Bandelweiser. Nor," I continued ruthlessly, "have I ever heard of your Lev Purkin."

"What!" he ejaculated. "You have never heard of Bandelweiser?" He ran his fingers nervously around the brim of his felt hat. "Nor of Lev Purkin? Then you are a phil--." But he checked himself and seemed to swallow something with great difficulty. I swear that man's face held a look of hatred as he turned to go.

Juke Box

Infernal lifting gaiety
 creeps in again,
 its surreptitious meretricious beat,
 and that old easy satin laugh
 returns.

A dancing snake
 in a cloud of apple flowers

chants with a sharp sigh
in the haze of sweet scent.
No sick wind
mewls near my ears
through an endless twilit empty street.
Containment of bright blurred light
now surrounds pulsingly
in this floating artificial island.

—MURRAY BONNYCASTLE

Why George Left College

A SKETCH

—JACK HAKAAR

Let us call him George Jones and let us, without further ado, plunge into this brief description of his character. Quite against his own wishes, George always found himself doing irresponsible things that astonished everyone around him. This was well illustrated in the fact of his going to college and in the fact of his leaving it. For a whole summer, George had argued with his father that he be sent to college and, although he and his father had always felt a genuine affection for each other, this was changed into something close to hatred by the time the summer was over. George in the end got his way because he was the more fanatically stubborn of the two, but he did not escape without the inevitable penalties. He went away to college convinced that he was committing a heinous crime against himself, his family and society. Therefore, since a heavy burden like this gives one an acute awareness of one's responsibilities, it may seem strange that after a brief four months George decided to leave college, and quit abruptly without his father's permission. This was so unexpected, even by George himself, that, although he had many solutions, he could never find the reason for it. Other people, not involved in his com-

plexes, found the familiar one that people always do in these cases: not without some justice, they said that George was mad.

George for three years had been an invalid, or perhaps to call him an invalid is not exactly to state the case. For three years George had not suffered from the type of disease that wastes one away physically and makes one utterly wretched; for three years he had not lain upon his cot and fought against incredible pain; for three years, on the orders of the doctors, he lay in bed in order to build up energy to fight against the disease that was now only potential but might some day become actual. As an invalid, he played a castrated part, and if you have ever been caught in a similar situation, you will know exactly how George felt. You will know why he argued so long, and why he did irresponsible things that he didn't want to do. "An invalid" of this kind appears to resemble a flea rather than a human being: he hops about from place to place with a series of involuntary movements that are altogether unexplainable. If other people, or if he himself, try to get this insect under their thumb-nail to squeeze out the poisonous substance, he hops up again with the suddenness of a released spring. And unless he learns that art, which could be described as the art of hopping crooked straight, he continues to live a haphazard and dangerous existence.

George, as I said, although he knew a hundred reasons why he had left college, was never able to guess at the real reason. He shared the belief that human motives are innumerable, and that the human character is illimitable. To have the first belief one must adopt the second one as a premise: if one is to pour motives inexhaustibly into the mould of human character, one must imagine this character as a reservoir without any boundaries in the shape of a giant saucer whose edges can never be seen. In short, one must identify the individual with infinity and also with God. And although I hate to rely upon a stale proverb, this seems to me due to the fact that nature (using the word in its broadest sense) abhors a vacuum. When we stop believing in God, we begin to imagine ourselves as a pin-point under the stars: but the other side of this is the fact that when we have created a great empty space in the heavens, it is (according to the law) irresistibly filled by the shape of our own personalities. It may be wrong to make a general rule, but this at least is what happened to George. He began to regard his own smallness as gigantic and his own greatness as monstrously

inferior.

So George left college because he was too ambitious. As if anxious to perpetuate his wretched life as an invalid, he set an objective of ten hours' study a day to which he adhered during his first four months at college. And for a time, hard work had good results, but never quite the results that he expected. It brought him to the top of the class, or nearly to the top of the class, but it certainly did not take him sensationally in advance of the others as he thought it would. But partly, also, the cause of his failure was that he knew too much. He had learned so many facts that it was impossible for him any longer to speak or write them. He could find no relation between what he had learned and the way he had learned it and what was expected of him at college. In the sanatorium once he had a passion for the sonnets of Shakespeare, and was determined to memorize one of these a day. This he did at first in company with another chap, who was under his sway in literary matters and was ready to follow his lead in any plan. But it was not long before his enthusiasm got the better of him, and he began learning two or three Shakespearian sonnets a day, ending his partnership with the other fellow, whom he now regarded as a hindrance. The Shakespearean sonnets revolve on a series of set themes and are bound closely together in a pattern of ideas. They bear, in addition, such a close resemblance to one another melodically and rhythmically that after his endeavour passed a certain point he was not able to distinguish one of them from another. Finally he was unable to go on memorizing, and had a sick feeling in his belly. I can only explain this by saying that somehow, by fanatically hard work, he pulverized the atoms of reality until they were squashed together in an indistinguishable mass. As reality became nothing, his self became everthing, and he had a frightening feeling of being alone and powerful in a desert that he had created of his own free will. He whipped himself into the same impossible circumstances, and in approximately the same manner, as he did later on at college.

But this self that isolate itself on the excuse of high ambitions was not a new self for him. Actually, it was only a throw-back to the stratosphere breathing person that he had been as an invalid. He could not pursue at that time the life that everybody else did, and he had to find some kind of compensation. So what he did was to set before him ambitions of a specially lofty character, hitched

his wagon to a higher star than anyone knew existed, and, by a personal decree, granted himself the powers to reach this objective. Actually the objective varied from time to time, so that one year he was content with being a Rhodes Scholar and a politician, and the next with being a great writer. But his basic conception of his own genius never altered. So that, instead of trying to go into the Arts Building of his University as everyone else did — by the door — he was determined to get through the stone wall of the building with the battering-ram of his ego. And, as he could only have succeeded by destroying the whole structure and crowing in triumph on the ruins, which he discovered to be impossible, in spring he made himself a shadow and disappeared completely from the scene. Technically he lost the battle, because he refused to continue it, but both he and the University remained intact in a stone isolation.

But just as important in its results for him as his attack on the University, was the attack that the University made on him. This attack was on the sensitive side of him, that lay in wait for sneers and criticism and treasured them up for a long time to come. It penetrated so far into his defences that even when he walked in the corridors he felt as if heads were turned aside from him in rebuke and disgust. Although in distant anticipation he had imagined his arrival greeted with cheers, now when he entered a class-room it seemed to him that he was met by a chorus of almost audible boos. When he sat on the bench it seemed hot, like wood that is blistered by heat in summer: its iron back pressed into his spine with the sharpness of a spike, and made him shift progressively farther away from the other students. When he was asked to read he was so afraid of a mistake that would cause laughter, that he had no control over his voice. Partly because he had not been with people for such a long time, or had only been with people he disliked, he felt nothing but enmity in the college atmosphere. Anywhere at the time it would have been the same, but most of all in the college buildings, where it seemed necessary to wear a straight-laced expression and to walk with a formal gait. His fear was painful, precisely because he had to put a high wall of egotism between himself and other people. He could find no connection between the real self that he assumed he possessed, and the imaginary self that he had dreamed about: neither one of them seemed real. He walked about the corridors on these two

selves like unsteady stilts that did not match.

This is the awkward situation that George was in, and it is easy to see that he left college because he drove himself out of it. It is just as clear that George had nobody to blame but himself as that he could have done nothing to avoid it. But to review the situation *in petto*, let us say a word about George and his appreciation of alcohol. I will not say that he had never taken a drink before he came to college, but I will say that it came to mean something quite different to him there. Just about the time his career at college was coming to an end, it came to mean something almost divine to him. If it is a miracle that Our Lord walked on the waters, it is no less a miracle that George walked out of college on alcohol. Or, to put it more exactly, caught in a tower of liquor like a waterspout, he revolved out through the swivel doors of the main building of the University . . . But don't misunderstand me: George was no drunkard. He was only drunk half a dozen times while he was at college, and it was always a special sort of experience. He managed to fuse his old character with the new and more licentious one, and to keep his drunkenness on a high moral plane. It was almost a mystical experience for him: he established a oneness with all life, living or unliving, and yet found his own wobbly legs planted upon solid ground for the first time. And he shed his fears and complexes as if they were snake-skins. He had such a splendid vision of freedom in one or two nights of carousal that he burst out of college in joyful pursuit of it.

Ostensibly, George left because he wanted to become a writer, and he wanted to have time in which to write. I don't know how successful he has been in his new career, or whether divine spirits have guided it. But I am reminded, when I think of George, of the truth of Samuel Butler's idea that progress is due to alcohol. The first progress George ever made was due to that.

Book Reviews

NEWS OF THE PHOENIX, by A. J. M. Smith. Ryerson Press, Toronto.
\$1.50.

"If it is a good, it is a good in itself". This dictum, one which Smith cherishes, is not set down for refutation. We accept it. In

the same way we accept the clarification of a mind which this book gives, as a good in itself. For who would not wish to be included in this journey

“And walk again the wild and sweet wildwood
Of our lost innocence, our ghostly childhood?”

Or be caught in this snare of perfect, pointed wit

“For fragrance here has grown to form
And Time is fooled, although he storm?”

Many such intimate, intellectually exciting adventures are here, dressed in a technique which is always interesting, often flawless. More: there is irony, self-criticism . . . qualities sorely needed in present day poetry:

“Is there no katharsis”
But “song” for this dull
Pain, that every Saul of Tarsus
Must pant himself into a Paul?

Lastly, the keynote mood is sensitivity: awareness of small man in an infinite universe. Perhaps this is most beautifully expressed in the “Ode: On the Death of W. B. Yeats” where creation is the swan “crying To the tumultuous throng Of the sky his cold and passionate song.”

Cold and intense also is A. J. M. Smith; analytical and magical. These are his contributions.

His failure is not of his own making. For he has chosen a small corner of poetry, and encompassed himself within it. But this limitation means: lack of range, absence of rhetoric, an attitude of withdrawal. It means that the poetry is dated as of the twenties and early thirties; that it is cosmopolitan, without a grain of native, salty flavour; and that it speaks to a coterie of Eliot and Yeats devotees.

In the present mood of the world, such poetry will not give sustenance nor direction. It is the poetry of an exile, and an exile in a retreat. Canadians, emergent now from that sequestered life, are not likely to pause here. They demand a more virile, challenging art to express the possibility of things to come. But perhaps, by our children’s firesides we may turn to Smith again, and be fully refreshed.

DOROTHY LIVESAY

THE BOOK OF CANADIAN POETRY ed. *A. J. M. Smith*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. In Canada, W. H. Gage, Ltd., Toronto. 452 Pages

In the short space of a review it is hardly possible to discuss this comprehensive anthology in any detail. Instead, I propose to deal with the editor’s thesis that Canadian poetry falls into two categories — the cosmopolitan and the native — and that the future belongs to the writers of the cosmopolitan tradition.

The editor states in his introduction that the native tradition reached its highest development in the work of Isabella Crawford.

He comments that: "the spirit of the northern woods under the impact of the changing seasons has passed into the imagery and rhythm of her verse." It is a true fact that Miss Crawford bears the same relation to Canadian poetry as the Group of Seven do to Canadian painting. Like the Group of Seven painters, she concerns herself with the simple presentation of the most colorful and impressive aspects of Canada. All of them are pioneer artists, making the initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment.

But are we to accept the statement of Dr. Smith that the native poetry is most genuine in the work of Miss Crawford? As one of the principal "exporters of maple sugar" she should logically become the object of his criticism as well as the recipient of his praise. In contrast to her, modern poets such as Pratt, Birney and Livesay have fused the landscape with the content of their verse in the indirect way that is essentially poetic. If Miss Crawford has left us a superior tourist catalogue, they have created the poetic symbols of the maturing Canada. It would seem significant that, in doing so, they have acquired a degree of cosmopolitanism that the earlier poet did not possess.

A Toronto reviewer believes that E. J. Pratt's poetry can be linked with early Teutonic poetry. His poems have "a sense of space — they shift from earth to heaven, from nadir to zenith, but seek oftenest the dark stretches of air or water." This comment, which is so true of Dr. Pratt, is true in their respective ways of Birney, Livesay and Marriott. In the work of all four writers there is a sense of space — as if their imaginations were conditioned by the dimensions of the Canadian landscape. The same reviewer sums up the mood of Dr. Pratt's poetry in this fashion: "Gloom is forgotten only in the fervour of conflict, and humour itself is fierce and bitter." Again this is best illustrated by the narratives of Dr. Pratt, but it is also true of Birney's **David**, Livesay's **Outrider**, or Marriott's **The Wind our Enemy**. These poets have developed a style with a vigor and directness that reflects a northern landscape, and they have tended to deal with subjects of a heroic kind.

Dr. Smith, in his haste to prove that the future belongs to the cosmopolitan writers, fails to see the native tradition in its proper perspective. He fails to see precisely what the native qualities consist of, and he does not take into account the cosmopolitan elements in the modern writer of the native group. Not only is the distinction, as he has made it, a vague one, but it is hardly possible to imagine a Canadian Literature of the future that lacks either native qualities or cosmopolitanism of outlook. The editor's thesis is not convincing because it does not notice that a blending of the two traditions is already taking place in Pratt and in Livesay, and in a group of younger writers who have recently appeared in Canada.

The divisions in this anthology are therefore somewhat misleading, but it deserves praise as the most comprehensive collection of Canadian poetry that has so far appeared