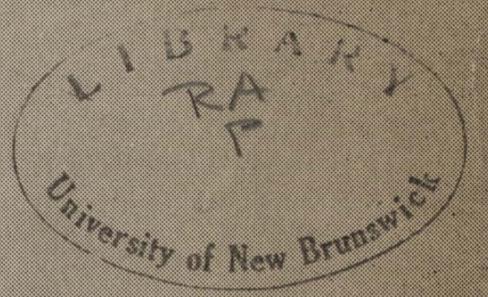


# PREVIEW



**17**

**P.K.PAGE**

**B.RUDDICK**

**P.ANDERSON**

**F.R.SCOTT**



THE MAPLE LEAF IS DYING.

A REVIEW BY NEUFVILLE SHAW.

A.J.M. Smith's *THE BOOK OF CANADIAN POETRY* is the most complete survey of English Canadian verse we possess. Its completeness is not, in itself, a virtue for this has forced the inclusion of much trash whose only worth is historical and even this only in a special sense for to understand any particular level of our poetry's history one must make tangential reference to English or American influence so that much of the work here reproduced is only confirmation of the lack of any national continuity in the growth of the country's literature. Further, its completeness is rather extenuated for the logic which includes Carman (a Canadian who spent most of his life in the U.S.A.) includes Anderson (an Englishman who has spent a few years in Canada). However this latter is of no importance except to illustrate the fallaciousness of a national consideration of our verse.

With the exception of the Indian which possesses the strength of unique and (for them) contemporary myth the early verse is frankly derivative. Its eulogies of the "simpler virtues" are an inevitable result of a strenuous pioneering environment in which anything more subtle would have appeared unforgivable luxury and in which the demands on individual fortitude were so great that complex social analysis was entirely out of the question. The result is such verse as:

"They saw a strong-built mother boiling porridge,  
All in a chamber somewhat bare but neat  
(The goodman with his gun had gone to forage,  
While the goodwife kept home alive and feat),  
And, helping her, six barefoot little spartans,  
All clad in homespun grey instead of tartans."

Duvar. "The Emigration of the Fairies".

Such hymning of ecstatic simplicity can be left to the sentimental curate. It is a rather tawdry example of a verse which, like propaganda, pays tribute to necessary action by gushing over it. A similar castration of a nature which must have been as awesome as it was terrible has occurred in such familiar Landseers as:

"And near yon bank of many-coloured flowers  
Browse two majestic deer, and at their side  
A spotted fawn all innocently cowers;  
In the rank brushwood it attempts to hide,  
While the strong-antlered stag steps forth with lordly stride,..."

Sangster. "The St. Lawrence and The

Saguenay".

The newer "Golden Age" poetry was written in an age which was determined to find the gold and little else. While expanding Canadian industry was merrily chasing the dollar across a thousand miles of prairies, the poet drearily painted golden sunsets or found Pan and Eurydice under every Maple Leaf. He had become civilized (at Oxford) and had reluctantly returned his soul carefully wrapped in a poultice compounded of Empire and Olympus. Out of the hodge-podge of nationalist and pre-Raphaelite verse arises only more derivative if somewhat sophisticated thought. As minor poets must, much reliance was placed on nature description. From the picturization of a sunrise one is supposed to derive the feeling of the rhythmic appearance of hope, of a lake (always solitary) the feeling of devastating solitude, etc. Instead of using nature as an illustration for a more

important theme as a greater poet might, the phenomenon with the aid of the best imported larks and Grecian deities was left to impose itself with the superimposed addition of a cumbersome emotional directive dragged in by the heels along with the inevitable exclamation mark. This surrender to empty landscape is a curse which persists today in our painting but happily one which the next generation of writers was able to overcome.

The one exception to these generalizations is found in the work of Isabel Valancy Crawford which, while seeming heavy and shapeless beside the relative elegance of her contemporaries is not afraid to draw themes from its immediate environment. Her enthusiastic acceptance of industrialization, her realization of the role of the tool as the concrete manifestation of activity and the genuine surprise of her images set her far apart from her co-nationals. Lines like:

"The lean lank lion peals  
His midnight thunders over lone, red plains,  
Long ridg'd and crested on their dusty waves,  
With fires from moons red-hearted as the sun,..."

remind one of the strangely incisive quality of a Rousseau night scene. If guilty of a heavy uneven technique, her statement embraces without seeming decorative and creates of sincerity rather than artificiality.

Proust has said somewhere that of each of the things we know we possess a double; that is with our recollection of it as facsimile there exists also the reality of its significance, a reality which exists far beyond the limits of its sensory definition. It is with this second element that modern poetry has concerned itself and pushed by its search for meaning has attained a range and a sense of evaluation which is far in excess of its predecessors. It is, perhaps, as A.J.M. Smith asserts, a bias for the contemporary that makes one appreciate modern Canadian writing far more than the rest of the work in this book; perhaps, also because it is more difficult to detect influence and thus estimate originality, but whatever the cause there can be little doubt that these people have placed an a priori art on the dust heap. We can no longer judge their work by its approximation to a model (this is good Tennyson, that is bad Swinburne, etc., etc.) but rather by the success with which the poet has released his experience and the degree in which his form reveals his content. Their work is national in the best sense of the word-- that is, an assertion of the value of their own attitude rather than one overshadowed by the awareness of the superiority of foreign cultural reaction.

I find that my estimation of them differs sharply from Smith's. Thus I can hardly agree that "Pratt is the greatest of contemporary Canadian poets for he is the only one who has created boldly and on a large scale", which is as true as saying that a poem about an elephant is greater than one about a flea. Pratt's DUNKIRK comes unchanged from the propagand mill, and his description of a whale at play or an eagle sadly considering the first aeroplane merits consideration for National (or rather Canadian) Geographic Magazine. Excitement sustained by exclamation points, expletive and tenuous extenuation do not constitute poetry despite the critics Smith so characteristically drags in to justify his judgment.

His work is in striking contrast to much of the last sections of this anthology where writers like Finch, Hambleton, Anderson, Page or Smith himself have concentrated on economy of form and have, with a care (which is not the deliberateness of effeteness) selected images which spring from the trend of the theme without losing their relationship to it.

"In their eyes I have seen  
the pin-men of madness in marathon trim  
race round the track of the stadium pupil."

or

"on the shore the lion waves lay down on their paws"

contain images which explode without our being aware of the frantic gasp of a creator who

attempts by his exertion to hide his mediocrity.

A.M. Klein is a writer who, while being both "large" and "bold", has recognized the exigencies of form. His verse, dictated by a sense of tender indignation--reminding one of the work of one of the notable omissions from this anthology, Bruce Ruddick,--is at its best in his AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL in which the richness and warmth of Jewish custom are revealed to us in a vividly decorative manner which combines exoticism with strong social assertion.

Robert Finch's and A.J.M. Smith's glittering inconsequentialities will impress anyone who has a place for that intellectually conditioned lyric which is, to a large extent, a focus on matters apart from the great issues of personality and which is disconcertingly attractive to all save those obsessed to the point of mania by a continual demand for political sloganing. Finch's THE SISTERS or Smith's SHADOWS THERE ARE possess the cool tranquility of relatively unimportant phenomena which calmly assert themselves assured in their remoteness from fiercer problems.

It is the verse of Scott, Anderson, Page and Wreford which makes us quite contentedly proclaim the death of the Maple Leaf for here we find a complete disregard for a dictated chauvinism and a didacticism which, while not constituting political directive, is a ruthless analysis of social falsehood. It is on this tide of affirmation that the future of Canadian verse rests for it is by a union with the great wave of social protest which is, at present, sweeping the country that a universalised statement can be made which carries within its scope all the proud and sweeping ramifications of mankind itself.

POEM

BY MIRIAM WADDINGTON

ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRAIN

As the Rocky Mountain train carved its track  
Through wilderness I was surrounded  
By dusty soldiers faces smudged with tragedy;  
Dislocation of the center was implicit  
In the wavering faces over khaki shirts,  
In the swaying and the lurching on the track.  
Under us the wheels hurried out a warning  
And the wheel lever elbowed in persistent rhythm,  
Never let children be born, never let children be born.

Outside the mountains lifted  
And the sky dipped, while under us  
The earth spun on its perfect center.  
The mountains lifted clear to the tall sky  
And the fir trees folded  
Close on their secret of deer lairs and doe paths;  
The mountains sang up and down their distance  
Of sons as thick as cedars, daughters fair as birches,  
Children still to grow like smooth strong forests  
To hold the slipping soil and force their roots  
Into the slopes of future.

COLD

Stand still  
And let the wind blow through you--  
And have greatness of cold and gravel  
Knowing the cold gravelly substances,  
The steel runners of aloneness.

SOUNDS

The trees shake a froth of sound  
Like the sound between the teeth of a Spanish dancer.  
The little children are quiet in their crowded room.  
The hissing of trains in the long night  
Is like the rush of young nervous horses.

HEAVY.

This savage sadness  
Is like a flower under water.  
Is ponderous and turns over,  
Glazing the still center.  
This grief like hair  
Moves this way and that  
Like leaves sliding and sliding.

LITTLE

O entice me with the sound of swish,  
The curled frond of the rain sound.  
O tickle me with feet patterns.

Little sounds do not disturb me,  
Are light flutings through Venetian,  
Patterning the senses with a flat delicacy.  
O fishtail ecstasy.

Print the forehead of a fawn or the ear of a doe  
With voile care.  
Stencil yourself a dream.  
Be pretty and happy.

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

BY P.K. PAGE

"Go on, sweet cow," he said in a tone which anyone overhearing would have thought he was directing in mockery at a woman.

But it stood there, the great bony beast with its dung splattered shanks waving its harsh cord of a tail like a bell rope.

He leaned against its rump in meditation--delivering it a swift backward kick in its side suddenly. The animal jumped and its rubber udder swayed.

"Come," he reached up, clasping a horn, while the creature merely surveyed the field with bored eyes. "Your hunger or mine," he said as it lowered its head to munch. "Your hunger or mine," he said. "Our hunger." And he bent down and plucked a tuft of grass and put it in his mouth. "Cold comfort," he said as he spat it out. "What are green pastures to me that I should be led beside them? Answer me, cow."

And for answer the cow stretched its neck, raised its head and mooed so close in his ear that it nearly deafened him.

"So that is the taste of green, then," he said, as the cow unexpectedly co-operative, moved a few steps forward with him. "Rough and sharp--such as I would have thought," he said, and he hooked a finger round his tongue to remove a final green splinter.

"Bossie, Bessie or Mollie," he said, addressing the animal when they reached the gate, "look, I unlatch this for you and we walk on the road. There you must move like a lady for you move in the public's gaze. None of this bobbing backward and forward as though you had ball-bearings in your head that turn you into a sailor on a deck of hills. From now on we walk together like any pair of friends taking an evening constitutional."

The long road stretched pale before them--its sides white with blowing daisies, the fine dust muffling all sounds of their movement except to give off a thick whisper and sigh.

"My name," said the man, "is Murray. Yours I have never known. But for all that and for all that, I could tell you things if I felt so inclined that would put some expression into your sepia eyes."

They continued in silence for a time, the light going with a sudden hush almost as it does in the tropics--evening taking its place at once without warning.

"Your knees in this light," said the man, "are white and dimpled like those of any woman who may at this moment be dipping them in scented water or beguiling who knows what man with their glimmer," he said.

A soft glow approached behind them as they walked, increasing like a pressure. Leaped on them both then and a horn ripped the bolt of smooth air through which they moved.

"Look out!" said the man, grabbing the cow's halter until his armpit burned. "You fool among fools--move or your hide's a pelt and your great shanks beef." Heaving, he pulled her down into the ditch on top of him as the car went by in wind and dust.

Her weight was hot upon him and large, but she smelled sweet as any hayrick, he was pleased to discover.

Feeling the need to rest, he did not move immediately, but the cow began to stumble to her feet in a jerky fashion and he followed, finding his legs and arms trembling.

This made him angry with the cow and he struck it across its backside with a hand which felt black with blood. The impact hurt his flesh.

"Cow," he said, and he nudged her in the ribs with his elbow, "cow--indeed, cow."

Not quite understanding what had happened, his mind flashed him pictures obviously meant to explain his behaviour. But still he could not understand. Besides which,

for no reason, the cow began to run and her loose underside made a flapping noise in the night. He forgot his emotion in the effort to keep up with her; but as he ran he kept a hard hand on her halter and looked behind him every few yards for the first signs of a light.

TWO POEMS

BY P.K. PAGE.

OPPORTUNIST

When he took the pole at a leap  
 it burned his legs.  
 Helmet for hope, he took  
 from the smiling hook  
 and (for emergency) at his waist, the axe.  
 Almost a fire himself on his flaming reel  
 he tunnelled the night and ate the sparks at a gulp;  
 arriving, he entered the very heart of the blaze.

But he had never intended to put it out:  
 and quick as an actor in the wings he strode  
 onto the stage when the scenery called his clothes.

PHOTOGRAPH

They are all beneath the sea in this photograph--  
 not dead surely--merely a little muted:  
 those two lovers lying apart and stiff  
 with a buoy above which could ring their beautiful movements;

and she with the book, reading as through a bowl  
 words that were never written, f's like giraffes  
 and vowels distorted and difficult as code  
 which make her lazily turn away and laugh;

he with hands so pale they might be dying  
 sits with paints and paper, painting sand  
 and wears a skin of corrugated water  
 which stillness opens on his sea-scape mind.

And all their paraphernalia a pretense:  
 cigarettes, matches, cameras and dark glasses  
 and the pair of water wings which refuse to float  
 are idle in their submarine oasis.

While overhead the swimmers level waves,  
 shrinking the distance between continents  
 and closer inland from the broken weirs  
 the fishermen are hauling giant nets.

A NOTE FROM MY JOURNAL.

BY PATRICK ANDERSON

'Say, how would you like to come from a country where the villages have names like St. Joan's Without, and Topsail, and Twillingate?'

'I guess I'd like it fine.'

'...And where the people are called Noseworthy and Spracklin and a cove is a tickle?'

'A tickle?'

'Sure. A tickle. And you come through the partridge berries and the chuckly pears onto a field that's all piled and livid with squid.'

'That's octopus, isn't it?'

'Sort of. A small one. You see, they go jiggin' for squid in their dories at the mouth of the harbour. The jiggin' is the movement of the hook up and down. A squid comes up and squirts ink all over them.'

'Yes. But what are they doing in the fields?'

'Manure. They're sort of white at first, then they go pink, then they turn blue. Strewn all over the fields. Boy, what a colour! And the great green-blue flies seething over them. That's agriculture for you. What colour, what life, what flies, what a helluva stink!'

'Squid...that must be something.'

'You're telling me. There's no country like it. All it needs is a painter and a revolution. Full of carnivorous plants, too. And bug beer.'

'What was that you said? What kind of beer?'

'Bug beer. Quite simple. Beer made with bugs. Of course, it's comparatively rare nowadays. You don't find it everywhere. It's kind of special.'

'It really has bugs in it?'

'Certainly. Fermented bugs. I'm telling you, it's an amazing country. What it needs is a genius to describe it.'

'And I suppose you don't produce geniuses.'

'Our geniuses have a way of going crazy. Francis Lyman...he was a darn good violinist. Drank rum and never did a stroke of work. He was a genius. Got a job with the Agriculture Reconstruction Bureau and they put him on a farm--but he just refused to milk cows. Cows, he said, were not in his line. Cows were definitely not inspiring.'

'Well, one night I was up playing the piano at my parents' house. My father was away, but I had the key. About one thirty A.M. Francis began to ring the bell violently. I let him in and went on playing and I kind of heard him rooting around--he went into the kitchen for a glass of water. Then he persuaded me to go for a walk. So we walked along Middle Street where the tarts are. They all knew him. They used to call at him in an imitation of his Anglo-Irish accent. And he would go by mouthing replies into each dark doorway. He was a pretty arrogant chap. Drabs, he would say: low down shameless hussies. Scum, he would say--fallen women. Doxies. And they would jeer back at him, How's his lordship tonight? God, it was terrific.'

'He was a tall gangling fellow, with long blond hair and an hysterical laugh. He was always getting into rows. One day he came out blind onto the street with a big bottle of rum in which there was only one drink left. He saw a man standing there--stevedore, I guess. Bum, he said: Have a drink, bum. You poor lousy bum, have a drink, he said. Well, the guy took the bottle and tipped it up and drank it, very coolly, taking his time. Then he smashed it against Francis's face. Francis got a nasty cut that time.'

'But what about the walk? Go on about that.'

'Well, we were strolling along amongst all this back chat and then Francis said

for me to go ahead a bit, as he wanted to talk with one of the women. So I went on to the next street lamp. I heard sundry whisperings and such. Then suddenly there was an awful rumpus, a woman screaming and something tinny clattered on the pavement. Turned out Francis had been trying to make her with a couple of cans of sardines he'd snatched from our pantry. What a man!

'Is that all? All about him, I mean?'

'No he was shut up in an asylum later. He fell in love with Beethoven's Pathetic Sonata and used to wander around asking people to play it for him. Piano, organ-- he even got somebody down at the docks to do it on an accordion. He wrote poems to it, describing his moods. He carried the music round with him and it got dirtier and dirtier. He was playing bass viol in a night club that time. First job he'd held in years. One night he jumped on it.'

'Did he ever get out of the asylum?'

'O, yes, he was released.'

'How old were you then?'

'When I knew Francis? About sixteen.'

'You left when you went to Mount Allison University?'

'Yes, but I went back summers. I'm telling you there's no country like it for painting--or graft. And the language! Did you ever hear of gaffling fish? It's sorting them into grades. They jig the cod and remove their sounds and lights and split 'em and dry them on flakes, and then they gaffle them and they get cheated on the fish like they get cheated on everything else. On the blueberries, for instance.

'I was often down there at the harbour. It's some place. The streets are terraced for it's very steep and there's lots of rock. Steps and gangplanks and hovels on stilts--that sort of thing. Every now and then a hydrant where the women get their water. No sewers. That's why we have the Night Cart.'

'The Night Cart?'

'Yes. Sounds evil, doesn't it? And it is a sinister looking object to come upon after midnight, with its torch flaring up in front and its wheels clanking as some dim abject old man goes around collecting the sewage they have left out in pails.'

'You mean to tell me you weren't glad to get away?'

'I was and I wasn't. It's a powerful country.'

'Did you ever visit at Government House?'

'My parents used to go. I went once or twice. It wasn't exactly my style. The last time I was there I didn't go. That was the occasion of the Royal Visit and it involved too much dressing up and shaving and such. A lot of funny things happened that time.

'There was the question of the Royal Car. Newfoundland felt it didn't have the right type of car to carry the King the few miles from the boat to the reception. The American Consul offered his beautiful Packard. But--well, a Packard's an American car and the government decided to turn the offer down. They sent all the way to England and ordered a hug Daimler. It must have cost them about fifteen thousand dollars.

'So the King arrived in his Daimler amidst great popular demonstrations only the Daimler was a closed car which the Consul's wasn't, and some people got quite mad that they couldn't see properly. One band of veterans from the last war was standing in one of the little villages on the route and the beautiful new Daimler went by so fast that they couldn't see a thing.

'When the King and Queen arrived at the garden party the chauffeur drove the Daimler into the garage and apparently fell asleep, he was so proud. Fell asleep basking in the sunlight of his own glory. That would have been alright if it hadn't been for

Harry-boy. Harry-boy was a local half-wit. He was a nice little man, quite popular with his pals in the Salvation Army and the Temperance League and at the brick yard where he worked, but he had one fault--he was awful curious. He loved to touch.'

'Yes...?'

'Well, Harry-boy nipped over the fence and stole the Royal Standard from the bonnet of the car!'

'He did!'

'Sure. I think he explained afterwards that he thought it was just one of the decorations. He rolled it up in his very dirty pocket and took it home and everyone was very pleased. He pinned it up in the parlour and the neighbours came in and had a little celebration. They looked upon it as a patriotic souvenir. A good substitute for being at the garden party or crowded up against the iron railings outside.

'When it was time for the King to go, the authorities found that he had no Royal Standard. There was a terrific to-do. After getting the Daimler and everything, it was terrible. It might give Newfoundland a bad name--not that bankruptcy and graft hadn't done that already.

'In the end, the King left without it. I'm sure he didn't mind. I expect a king has as many Royal Standards as an ordinary fellow has handkerchiefs. It was several days before they found it. By that time, Harry and his friends were probably charging admission.'

'What happened to Harry?'

'O he lost his job and his membership in the Salvation Army and the Temperance League, and he was sent to gaol. It was finis for him. They posted if off to England, I imagine.'

'And the Daimler?'

'I expect the Daimler is still there.'

'Well, you certainly have some country. No wonder you're going to a psycho-analyst. It's going to be fun for him. I bet you got your neurosis in a field of squid. What a beautiful childhood!'

'But it is beautiful! The colours. The ruggedness. The out-ports.'

'And the bug beer.'

'Say, did I ever tell you the story about when the first railroad was built in Newfoundland? It goes like this. The first train arrived at a primitive village at the end of the line. The very first train. So the inhabitants went up to the local sage, an old man with a long white beard, to ask for his opinion. He stood looking at the train for a long time. He looked at the engine. He looked at the three carriages. He looked at the guard's van. Well, he said, it's a mighty good thing that train came here head on. If it had come sidewise, it would have swept the country!'

A POEM

BY PATRICK ANDERSON

FOR A SPANISH COMRADE

. . . a las cinque de la tarde  
(Lorca)

Amazed and bewildered  
by death's veronica  
a las cinque de la tarde

his cape that was full  
of the bulls of Miura  
laid aside folded

and drawn away  
from his athlete's body  
the petals of daring

and the little winds also  
that the bulls made  
at his thigh and his armpits--

there in the arena  
before the heartless world  
the torero is hunted.

Already he smells the tomb  
like a pale flower  
of Andalusia,

a flower so white and cold  
its heart is where  
blood loses its colour.

The caudillo Franco  
and the five archbishops  
and the aficionados

line the arena  
in the afternoon of Madrid  
with the ash of their eyes.

Once at the fiesta  
the butterfly pass,  
the quite of the mariposa--

tubercular, tasting the blood in his mouth,  
in that mountain air  
gracefully, the estocade.

He was already dying  
of the occupational disease  
of his courage.

He was already racked  
with the red sickness  
of his pride.

But clever and fancy  
his flesh curtsied  
to the great blow of the horn.

And now the aficionados  
weep for him with their cigarettes--  
the torero is hunted.

And now the caudillo Franco  
weeps for him with the Bank of Spain--  
the torero is hunted.

And the priest leans down on his neck  
with the sharp pic  
of his crucifix

there in the ring of blood.

Tell this in Glasgow  
in the mountains of Shensi.

\* \* \*

NOTE

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