



# PREVIEW

9

P.K.PAGE N.SHAW B.RUDDICK P.ANDERSON F.R.SCOTT



MONTREAL, CANADA

NOVEMBER 1942

SOUNDS AND WRAITHS ON AN IRON FENCE

Perplexed, I lean against the iron bars, painted in sickening  
pea-soup green.  
A concatenation of decibels of no sure pitch pervades the gas-  
eous skin, the atmosphere.  
The noise of street-cars, like panzer divisions on the march.  
Street-cars, cheesy-white, flitting like wraiths through  
the city of tremendous night,  
Bearing their fated cargoes of zombies.  
Street-cars, huge white whales, swimming the unplumbed  
salt estranging sea  
Whales bloated with impotent Jonahs, ever and forever  
evaders of the Word.  
The sound of their twaddle as the car twitches to a stop--  
The twaddle of craven Zeros running away from the Word on  
journeys of no origin, no route, no end  
On spiral circumambient journeys, indifferent as long as  
they go not to the Elysian Fields, the Valley of Avalon.  
For in the haunted valley the Zeros fear they might see the  
overwhelming spook, the ghostly wraith, the ferociously hated  
ones: the forms of their inner selves.  
Their true and murdered selves, whom they interred many mill-  
ennia ago and still must needs inter nightly--  
I mean Socrates by the rocky Aegean, corrupting them,  
I mean Spinoza scrawling on the oppressive gate of Amsterdam  
"Ultima Barbari",  
I mean Jeremiah bearding the bloated kings of Judah,  
I mean Christ, the light that was the light of men but they  
understood it not  
I mean the transcendent Immanence who always has been and  
ever shall be  
Terrible but merciful, the Word that tried to shine among  
them but they desired the Plutonian vacuum, the demonic void.  
And on dreadful nights the street-cars wail in the shadows  
like the Flying Dutchman  
Doomed never to anchor at the City of God.

The noise of groggy youths  
Fuddled with spiked champagne  
Skating like witches' ice-boats along the curiously abrasive  
pavement.  
Fuddled whippersnappers, their fierce sensuousness an omen of  
their outrageous pride.  
For their voluptuary addiction is their fawning rapture toward  
their own motile cadavers  
and so also is refractory vain-glory.

And so their drunkenness is but an indicium of their proud hearts.  
And so they grovel in the furrows and eat the husks that the swine  
fain would eat.

I look around: welders with blow torches adumbrate an Edgar Varese  
fantasy in the cold night.  
For music is the sweetest inner rhythm of the mores:  
It comes from the deepest crags and highest cliff-sides of the heart  
It is fed by the radiations from the interacting of folk and  
environment  
And these absorbed radiations, inside the soul, are forged by the  
inner self out of its outrageous fortune  
Into an architectonic of the Holy Spirit that justifies the ways of  
God to man.  
But when the Rhythmus of the soma is choked at the root by the Ford  
Assembly line  
The inner self has no resource to build a pleasure-dome to the Holy  
Ghost  
And Edgar Varese procreates an assembly line in score-sheets  
And welders adumbrate an Edgar Varese fantasy in the cold night.

The popping of motor-cycle exhausts is redolent of rockets  
to the moon.  
Of palatial rockets with a bar at each gun-sight and a  
brothel on each floor.  
The moon is a dead planet, well-picked by the dead men within  
Swizzling Labatt's and floating bonds to pepper it with summer  
resorts.  
Dead men who still twitch as the legs of frogs twitch long after  
their somatic end  
Dead men who know not they are gone  
But persist in golf and bridge until the last trumpet is blared  
from an angry Valhalla  
And fly tropismatically like moths to the dead moon's gold and  
platinum  
Though there is no life on the Moon and the gold will be interred  
in Kentucky  
But dead men have always been so  
And they will infuriated choke to death any who show signs of  
life  
As they stoned Jeremiah and jailed Thoreau.  
Lord will these bones live?

The squeak of kitchen taps like a lovely Sibelius adagio  
The opening of tin cans like a lilting Bartok scherzo

An aeroplane whizzes overhead, a vulture to the dying men below  
whose ghats are in themselves.  
Nonplussed I turn to watch the night grass  
(Oh sweet hour of slimy earthworms after rain!)  
A bat plays a Strauss overture by the chimney  
A robin tootles Mozartian cadenzas in my ear.

Mark Edmund Gordon.

## A NOTE ON CANADIAN WAR POETRY

A live movement in poetry will reflect and often foreshadow the creative movements in its social environment. Poets sensitive to the growing forces of their age will give symbolic expression to those forces and will become a potent instrument of social change. The more revolutionary their epoch the more markedly will their writing differ from that of their predecessors, for they will be obliged to experiment with new form and imagery in order to convey their new ideas. Their style will thus at first appear crude and unpolished, and will shock the established taste. They will be laughed at for their clumsiness and obscurity. So the poets of the Romantic Revival absorbed the revolutionary fervour of regicidal France, threw overboard the outmoded classicism of the 18th century, and faced misunderstanding and sharp criticism until time had carried their contemporaries forward to the new positions. So too the American poetry revival in the first quarter of this century, with its greater freedom, variety and humanism, prepared the way for the new social thinking which emerged politically through the New Deal. Carl Sandburg's robust popular verse heralded the 'forgotten man' of the new politics and broke ground for the C.I.O. The English revival of the 1930's showed at least a deep dissatisfaction with the pre-war English society.

A dead tradition of poetic writing, on the other hand, reflects nothing but the attitudes of the past, expressed in the clichés of the past. It will fear and oppose the new in literature because the new spells death to itself. In Canada, where so much tradition, deprived of content, has become mere habit, this influence produces the kind of poem with which we are all too painfully familiar--neat, accurate, unambiguous, earnest and ordinary. The surprising thing is how long such sterility can live and go on reproducing itself. Ultimately, however, the gap between itself and life grows so wide that collapse occurs. Usually the well-established tradition is sanctified by state approval in some form. At meetings of its devotees medals are given, the 'moderns' are scorned, and tea is poured.

To read VOICES OF VICTORY, described as "Representative Poetry of Canada in Wartime" (Macmillans, 1941) is to find oneself buried in just this kind of tradition. In other days the inclination would have been to throw the book aside and waste no more time over it. In these days of critical choices for humanity, and for Canada as part of humanity, such a phenomenon as this anthology is perhaps worth a moment's analysis. We can all feel the uncertainty of the present world situation, poised as we are on a political watershed. Our doubt is not with regard to military victory, which we believe can be won, but with regard to the peace, which can so easily be lost. There has clearly been little change since the war began in the social outlook of some of the principal Allied powers, and least of all in Canada. Perhaps in Canada more than anywhere else the old traditions are still with us, as dominant as before. Wherever we look--in politics, in the churches, in education, in business, in the press--the pre-war Canadian social order survives, slightly modified but basically unreformed. Yet there are new forces stirring underneath the old crust,

moving deeply in the hearts and minds of men, giving us common cause with other races and nations. Of these forces a vital poetic movement might be made. VOICES OF VICTORY does not seem to be aware that they exist. It is bad enough to have so little external sign of these new impulses in Canadian politics, but this is partly understandable since the primacy of military effort over social reform appeals to many. What is more discouraging is the utter lack on the part of these Canadian writers of the sense of impending change, of the need for democratic advance, and of any new outlook on the contemporary world. Judging by this volume, nothing has altered in the realm of poetry or politics since 1914. Needless to say there is no new style or diction, no venture in original modes of expression.

These poems were selected from 766 entries to a contest organised by the Poetry Group of the Toronto Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association. The purpose of the contest, we are told, was twofold: first, to contribute the proceeds of sales to the Canadian Red Cross British Bomb Victims Fund, and secondly, to "let the poetic genius of Canada and the Canadian people sound a spiritual challenge to the brutality of enemy despots and tyrants". The frontispiece, a reproduction of a prize medal donated by the Athlone's and containing their effigy, prepares the reader for this priority of ideas. Then comes Charles G.D. Roberts' "Canada Speaks to Britain":

"She calls. And we will answer to our last breath."

This sets the tone for what follows. Canada's essential colonialism stands out everywhere in this answer to England's call. One would gather that before the call came all was right with the world, and after the call ceases no doubt the poets will return to their non-American nightingales. The prize poem, "Recompense", leads us through the "faery foam/ of blackthorn blossoms breaking" to "England's dower / of deathless loveliness". It has the lush glamour of a cricket match, all Gentlemen and no Players. The second prize goes to "Canadian Crusade", a poem which is at least free from nostalgia; its sentimentality is local rather than transatlantic. The third prize is given to a eulogy of Churchill.

There follow twenty poems receiving honourable mention, "in order of merit". After this the contributors are unranked. Most of the poems deal in traditional manner with the standard themes of sacrifice, suffering, death, with special reference to torpedoed children. Nowhere in the entire volume is there an echo, even faint, of a people's war or a people's peace, or of the war within the war represented by the great cry of exploited humanity for the promised four freedoms. Exception should be made for a poem by Kenneth Leslie (unranked) who has at least perceived the significance of Russia's part in the struggle. Nor is there any evidence that these writers perceive the profound drama of man's attempt to purge himself through suffering of his own making, or that they feel the profound tragedies of an age that threw away its last victory and hesitates now to make vital its war aims by an immediate application of their principles. All is apparently quiet on the philosophic front. So we get sentiment but no passion, loyalty but no dynamic assertion, Ministry of Information leaflets but very little poetry.

Of all the contributing factors that go to make up the state of mind reflected here the deepest and most dominant, in my opinion, is our Canadian colonialism. This has little (though some) relationship with outward governmental forms. It is more a cast of thought, a mental climate. The colonial is an incomplete person. He must look to others for his guidance, and far away for his criterion of value. He copies the parental style instead of incorporating what is best in something of his own. He undervalues his own contribution and overestimates what others can do for him. Old greatness is more to him than new truth. Above all he fears originality, which might cut him off from his secure base. The outside world of men seems foreign and hostile to him, and he will cling to ancient traditions long after they have been abandoned in his metropolis. No matter how great his sincerity or how devoted his attachment, he is incapable, while suffering from this political Oedipus complex, of rising above the ordinary. For the most perfect copy is second-rate, while the least originality is unique. And when the wave of any future reaches him, it is but a ripple. How a country can shape itself out of this state of mind I do not know, but the duty of the poet is to help in the enfranchisement, not to decorate the ancient chariot.

F.R. Scott

FOOTNOTE: Extract from "The Political Destiny of Canada", by Goldwyn Smith, 1878, P.61

When the Canadian Nationalists say that patriotism is a good thing, they are told to keep their wisdom for the copy-books; and the rebuke would be just if those who administer it would recognize the equally obvious truth that there can be no patriotism without nationality. In a dependency there is no love of the country, no pride in the country; if an appeal is made to the name of the country, no heart responds as the heart of an Englishman responds when an appeal is made in the name of England. In a dependency every bond is stronger than that of country, every interest prevails over that of the country. The province, the sect, Orangeism, Fenianism, Freemasonry, Oddfellowship, are more to the ordinary Canadian than Canada. So it must be while the only antidote to sectionalism in a population with strongly marked differences of race and creed is the sentiment of allegiance to a distant throne. The Young Canadian leaving his native country to seek his fortune in the States feels no greater wrench than a young Englishman would feel in leaving his country to seek his fortune in London. Want of nationality is attended, too, with a certain want of self-respect, not only political but social, as writers on colonial society and character have observed. Wealthy men in a dependency are inclined to look to the Imperial Country as the social centre and the mark of their social ambition if not as their ultimate abode, and not only their patriotic munificence but their political and social services are withdrawn from the country of their birth.

POEM

You on your man made rock  
turning the intellectual light like **Abelard**  
who was so schooled in love,  
the analysis like a song upon us--

young doctors, young professors,  
piercing the dark that hedges us about,  
the wasteful systems of romantic night,  
cut us with light and cut the cancer out--

catching with beams the hidden colours,  
explode on glasses and a lonely thought:  
the athletes muscle and the lovers smile  
collect to will, with science and delight.

Patrick Anderson

LOVE POEM

I lift my hand. The air is weightless.  
The falling boys drop without sound  
in the closing air around my haunted hand.

You move your head, your hair is falling  
over your brow, the facile use of snow,  
then a weak shadow's hanging on the wall.  
You move your head  
crammed with the dead, gracefully from side to side.

Only the running headlights, a long touch,  
like silver foxes in our ceiling's north  
light us to bed.  
O, love, your snowy limbs  
are galleries where blood and flesh are twisted.

We lie and our two bodies  
echoing those far-off tortures are deformed,  
and our heads lie on the pillow  
like bloody globes:  
and saying love our tongues toll inwardly.

Yet stand. You are tall as Europe.  
Yet stand. I am tall as Asia.  
Shall we have children?  
Shall our children live in slavery or in peace?

Patrick Anderson

BOY - 1942

He wanted to be a soldier of fortune, he said,  
And his words crawled between  
The hush drum cough of high machines  
Which leant across his stencilled soul.

More **romance**, more adventure, he said,  
While bullets leapt from lazy fingertip  
And eyes, the sudden walls,  
Were dead with others' deaths.

Watch me, he thought, in rigid ceremonial clothed  
Swing beyond the squatting sunset  
And reach with mile-long arm  
The easy scheming villain.

See the graveyards I shall make, he said  
And in his mind he reckoned  
Up himself in bodies,  
Told them all against his birth.

Behind his leather face blow winds of emptiness,  
And all the excuses of worlds  
Fall before the sad accusing stare  
Which they had coldly made.

See him leaning against the city's quietness  
Shaken by his bursting thought  
And in all his yearning  
Denying himself.

Neufville Shaw

### BANK STRIKE

When the time came,  
after the historied waiting,  
they were ready with their strikers' jackets  
and their painted signs "on greve",  
facing the known streets  
and the rough serge knees and elbows  
of police.

Time was bald on their skins;  
their desks and counters and cages  
cried in their eyes like a strategical retreat  
and the unrelieved picket line  
had a stained, for-all-time permanence  
on the distorted street.

In the foreground church  
the flames of the sacred candles  
burned, in their suddenly foreign homes  
their meals were stiff as religious paintings  
and the bullet of 'fired'  
was wedged in their skulls.

Yet from the cellar of certainty they came  
up the long escalator to defeat,  
their hearts hurting their ribs, their hands heavy;  
blew hot and cold  
and scratched the solid curb  
like weather worrying an iron city.

P.K. Page

SCENARIO

St. Peter street is still.  
Youville Square is empty.  
In the dark buildings  
green disinfectant is rolling  
up the dusty corridors.  
A spent frayed world surveys  
its navel and explores  
its hot dry nose.

Hunched in an uptown block,  
drop for a city, setting  
for a male documentary  
are the dull flat flanks of the Y.

Evenings directly  
from cafeteria and counter  
**the** down-town heroes  
sprawl in the brown rooms  
discarding the cleric face  
engorged with the two-bit special.  
At desk or in street-car  
the soul and the valued sex  
are swaddled in serge.  
But, here, in brilliant shorts  
the sthenic pinkly lolls  
waiting the calcified artery  
and the melancholic scrag  
stares at the transom.

Shall I sit smiling genially in the sun  
feeding pigeons and appraising legs?  
Or picking lint from my lapels  
admire the shining crescents of my nails?

Poorer than muttering monk  
are those whose pin-striped gods  
parade in limousines.

Bruce Ruddick

We would remind our readers that we welcome contributions, although we are not able to pay for them at present. Subscriptions (\$1.00 per year) and manuscripts should be sent to Mrs. Kit Shaw, 5593 Cote St. Luke Road, N.D.G., Montreal.

