

SIX MONTREAL POETS

A. J. M. Smith

Irving Layton

Louis Dudek

Leonard Cohen

F. R. Scott

A. M. Klein

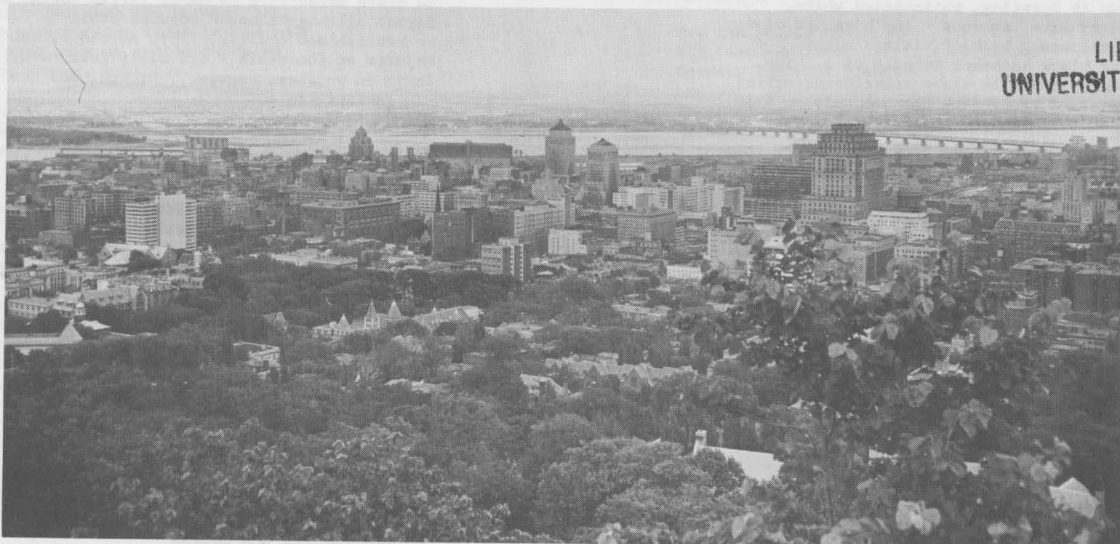


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SIX MONTREAL POETS

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Since the days when Eliot, Pound and other 'modern' poets were first making their influence felt in Canada, Montreal has been the most active centre of poetic writing and publication in the country. Groups of poets have formed and re-formed, usually around some little magazine, from the days of The McGill Fortnightly Review (1925), founded by A. J. M. Smith, down through the Canadian Mercury, Preview, Northern Review and CIV/n. Besides the six poets represented here, others who have lived and written in Montreal during this period and have been associated with some group or magazine, are Leo Kennedy, Patrick Anderson, P. K. Page, Miriam Waddington, Phyllis Webb and Daryl Hine. These names are exclusive of the French-Canadian poets, yet a list of their best-known contemporary names would show an even greater concentration in Montreal. This is more to be expected, since Quebec is the only other city in the Province of comparable importance and its population is far smaller; it is not so easy to explain for English-speaking Montreal, which forms a relatively small enclave in the metropolitan area. One reason may be found in the cosmopolitan character of the city, and notably in the literary contribution of the Jewish community; another, more intangible, in the sudden appearance at McGill, soon after World War I, of a group of young poets attuned to the new movements in English and American poetry.

To say that Montreal has been a centre of creative writing is not to say that there is a recognisable Montreal style or tendency. The poems recorded here show a wide variety of manner and outlook. It is but natural that they may reflect the influence of contemporary masters, whose voice expresses the spirit of the age in which these poets also live. Canada is an integral part of the Atlantic community, and has only recently begun to make significant contributions to the cultures she has inherited. How distinctive those contributions will be has yet to be determined, yet something which may properly be called Canadian is reflected in the poems which follow.

F. R. Scott, Editor

SIDE I, Band 1: A. J. M. SMITH (1902 --)

Born in Montreal and educated at McGill University and the University of Edinburgh, A. J. M. Smith is now professor of English at Michigan State University, East Lansing. He has contributed criticism and verse to a number of magazines in England, the United States, and Canada. News of the Phoenix, a selection of his verse was brought out in 1943 and received the Governor-General's Medal for that year. A second collection of verse, A Sort of Ecstasy, appeared in 1954. He has edited an anthology of English and American poetry, Seven Centuries of Verse, published in 1947 by Charles Scribner's Sons, an anthology of 'serious light verse', The Worldly Muse, New York, 1951, a standard collection of Canadian verse, The Book of Canadian Poetry, Chicago, 1943, 1948, and 1957. He is at present preparing a new edition of The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse. With F. R. Scott he has edited an anthology of Canadian satire and 'disrespectful verse', The Blasted Pine, (Macmillans, Toronto, 1957).

LIKE AN OLD PROUD KING IN A PARABLE (1928)

A BITTER king in anger to be gone
From fawning courtier and doting queen
Flung hollow sceptre and gilt crown away,
And breaking bound of all his counties green
He made a meadow in the northern stone
And breathed a palace of inviolable air
To cage a heart that carolled like a swan,
And slept alone, immaculate and gay,
With only his pride for a paramour.

O who is that bitter king? It is not I.

Let me, I beseech thee, Father, die
From this fat royal life, and lie
As naked as a bridegroom by his bride,
And let that girl be the cold goddess Price.

And I will sing to the barren rock
Your difficult, lonely music, heart,
Like an old proud king in a parable.

A HYACINTH FOR EDITH (1927)

Now that the ashen rain of gummy April
Clacks like a weedy and stain'd mill,

So that all the tall purple trees
Are pied porpoises in swishing seas,

And the yellow horses and milch cows
Come out of their long frosty house

To gape at the straining flags
The brown pompous hill wags,

I'll seek within the woods' black plinth
A candy-sweet sleek wooden hyacinth-

And in it creaking naked glaze,
And in the varnish of its blaze,

The bird of ecstasy shall sing again,
The bearded sun shall spring again,

-A new ripe fruit upon the sky's high tree,
A flowery island in the sky's wide sea-

And childish cold ballades, long dead, long mute,
Shall mingle with the gayety of bird and fruit,

And fall like cool and soothing rain
On all the ardour, all the pain

Lurking within this tinsel paradise
Of trams and cinemas and manufactured ice,

Till I am grown again my own lost ghost
Of joy, long lost, long given up for lost,

And walk again the wild and sweet wildwood
Of our lost innocence, our ghostly childhood.

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NOCTAMBULE (1930)

Under the flag of this pneumatic moon,
-Blown up to bursting, whitewashed white,
And painted like the moon - the piracies of day
Scuttle the crank hulk of witless night.
The great black innocent Othello of a thing
Is undone by the nice clean pocket-handkerchief
Of 6 a.m., and though the moon is only an old
Wetwash snotrag - horsemeat for good rosbif-
Perhaps to utilize substitutes is what
The age has to teach us,
Wherefore let the loud
Unmeaning warcry of treacherous daytime,
Issue like whispers of love in the moonlight,
-Poxy old cheat!
So mewed the lion,
Until mouse roared once and after lashed
His tail: Shellshock came on again, his skin
Twitched in the rancid margarine, his eye
Like a lake isle in a florist's window:
Reality at two removes, and mouse and moon
Successful.

THE PLOT AGAINST PROTEUS (1930)

This is a theme for muted coronets
To dangle from debilitated heads
Of navigation, kings, or riverbeds
That rot or rise what time the seamew sets
Her course by stars among the smoky tides
Entangled. Old saltencrusted Proteus treads
Once more the watery shore that water weds
While rocking fathom bell rings round and rides.

Now when the blind king of the water thinks
The sharp hail of the salt out of his eyes
To abdicate, run thou, O Prince, and fall
Upon him. This cracked walrus skin that stinks
Of the rank sweat of a mermaid's thighs
Cast off, and nab him; when you have him, call.

BUSINESS AS USUAL (1946)

Across the craggy indigo
Come rumors of the flashing spears,
And in the clank of rancid noon
There is a tone, and such a tone.

How tender! How insidious!
The air growa gentle with protecting bosks,
And furry leaves take branch and root.
Here we are safe, we say, and silly smile.

In this delightful forest, fluted so,
We burghers of the sunny central plain
Fable a still refuge from the spears
That clank - but gently clank - but clank again!

FEAR AS NORMAL (1954)

But gently clank? The clank has grown
A flashing crack-the crack of doom.
It mushrooms high above our salty plain,
And plants the sea with rabid fish.

How skilful! How efficient!
The active cloud is our clenched fist.
Hysteria, dropping like the gentle dew,
Over the bent world broods with ah! bright wings.

We guess it dazzles our black foe;
But that it penetrates and chars
Our own Chist-laden, lead-encased hearts
Our terrified fierce dreamings know.

THE ARCHER (1954)

Bend back thy bow, O Archer, till the string
Is level with thine ear, thy body taut,
It's nature art, thy self thy statue wrought
Of marble blood, thy weapon the poised wing
Of coiled and aquiline Fate. Then, loosening, fling
The hissing arrow like a burning thought
Into the empty sky that smokes as the hot
Shaft plunges to the bullseye's quenching ring.

So for a moment, motionless, serene,
Fixed between time and tide, I aim and wait;
Nothing remains for breath now but to waive
His prior claim and let the barb fly clean
Into the heart of what I know and hate -
That central black, the ringed and targeted grave.

SONNET (1957)

How all men wrongly death to dignify
Conspire, I tell. Parson, poetaster, pimp -
Each acts or acquiesces. They prettify,
Dress up, deodorise, embellish, primp,
And make a show of nothing. Ah, but metaphysics
Laughs: she touches, tastes, and smells

-Hence knows - the diamond hold that make a net.
Silence resettled testifies to bells.
"Nothing" depends on "thing", which is or was:
So death makes life or makes life's worth, a worth
Beyond all highfalutin' woes or shows
to publish and confess. "Cry at the birth,
Rejoice at the death," old Jelly Roll said,
Being on whiskey, ragtime, chicken, and the
scriptures fed.

MY DEATH (1957)

"I carry my death within me."
Who was it said that? - *St. Denys Garneau?
It's true. Everyone - free
Or enslaved, Christian or Jew,
Colored or white, believer or
Sceptic or the indifferent worldling -
Knows death, at least as metaphor.

But this says more. My death is a thing
Physical, solid, sensuous, a seed
Lodged like Original Sin
In the essence of being, a need
Also, a felt want within.

It lies dormant at first,
Lazy, a little romantic
In childhood, later a thirst
For what is no longer exotic.
It lives on its own phlegm,
And grows stronger as I grow stronger,
As a flower grows with its stem.

I am the food of its hunger.
It enlivens my darkness,
Progressively illuminating
What I know for the first time, yes,
Is what I've been always wanting.

*One of the finest of the modern French Canadian
poets, drowned 1943.

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Like An Old Proud King in a Parable

From A SORT OF ECSTASY, Michigan State College Press,
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A Hyacinthe for Edith
Noctambule
The Plot Against Proteus
Business as Usual
Fear as Normal
The Archer

Unpublished

Sonnet
My Death



SIDE I, Band 2: LEONARD COHEN (1934 --)

Born in Montreal, Mr. Cohen attended school in that
city, receiving a B.A. at McGill University. His Let
Us Compare Mythologies was the first book to inaugu-
rate the McGill Poetry Series publications. He has
appeared in CIV/n, Contact, The Forge and other publi-
cations of limited circulation. He is now devoting
his full time to writing and his entry on this
recording introduces a new important name to readers
of Canadian poetry. A second book of poems, A SPICE-
BOX OF EARTH, Contact Press, Toronto and a novel
A BALLET OF LEPERS are his most recent works.

FOR WILF AND HIS HOUSE (1955)

When young the Christians told me
how we pinned Jesus
Like a lovely butterfly against the wood,
and I wept beside paintings of Calvary
at velvet wounds
and delicate twisted feet.

But he could not hang softly long,
your fighters so proud with bugles,
bending flowers with their silver stain,
and when I faced the Ark for counting,
trembling underneath the burning oil,
the meadow of running flesh turned sour
and I kissed away my gentle teachers,
warned my younger brothers.

Among the young and turning-great
of the large nations, innocent
of the spiked wish and the bright crusade,
there I could sing my heathen tears
between the somersaults and chestnut battles,
love the distant saint
who fed his arm to flies,
mourn the crushed ant
and despise the reason of the heel.

Raging and weeping are left on the early road.
Now each in his holy hill
the glittering and hurting days are almost done.
Then let us compare mythologies.
I have learned my elaborate lie
of soaring crosses and poisoned thorns
and how my fathers nailed him
like a bat against a barn
to greet the autumn and late hungry ravens
as a hollow yellow sign.

BESIDE THE SHEPHERD (1956)

Beside the shepherd dreams the beast
Of laying down with lions.
The youth puts away his singing reed
And strokes the consecrated flesh.

Glory, Glory, shouts the grass,
Shouts the brick, as from them the cliff
The gorgeous fallen sun
Rolls slowly on the promised city.

Naked running through the mansion
The boy with news of the Messiah
Forgets the message for his father,
Enjoying the marble against his feet.

Well finally it has happened,
Imagines someone in another house,
Staring one more minute out his window
Before waking up his wife.

POEM (1955)

I heard of a man
who says words so beautifully
that if he only speaks their name
women give themselves to him.

If I am dumb beside your body
while silence blossoms like tumors on our lips
it is because I hear a man climb stairs
and clear his throat outside our door.

LOVERS (1955)

During the first pogrom they
Met behind the ruins of their homes -
Sweet merchants trading: her love
For a history-full of poems.

And at the hot ovens they
Cunningly managed a brief
Kiss before the soldier came
To knock out her golden teeth.

And in the furnace itself
As the flames flamed higher,
He tried to kiss her burning breasts
As she burned in the fire.

Later he often wondered:
Was their barter completed?
While men around him plundered
And knew he had been cheated.

THE SPARROWS (1955)

Catching winter in their carved nostrils
The traitor birds have deserted us,
Leaving only the dullest brown sparrows
For spring negotiations.

I told you we were fools
To have them in our games,
But you replied:
They are only wind-up birds
Who strut on scarlet feet
So hopelessly far
From our curled fingers.

I had moved to warn you,
But you only adjusted your hair
And ventured:

Their wings are made of glass and gold
And we are fortunate
Not to hear them splintering
Against the sun.

Now the hollow nests
Sit like tumors or petrified blossoms
Between the wire branches
And you, an innocent scientist,
Question me on these brown sparrows:
Whether we should plant
Our yards with breadcrumbs
Or mark them with the black, persistent crows
Whom we hate and stone.

But what shall I tell you of migrations
When in this empty sky
The precise ghosts of departed summer birds
Still trace old signs;
Or of desperate flights
When the dimmest flutter of a coloured wing
excites all our favourite streets
To delight in imaginary spring.

WARNING (1956)

If your neighbour disappears
O if your neighbour disappears
The quiet man who raked his lawn
The girl who always took the sun

Never mention it to your wife
Never say at dinner time
Whatever happened to that man
Who used to rake his lawn

Never say to your daughter
As you're walking home from church
Funny thing about that girl
I haven't seen her for a month

And if your son says to you
Nobody lives next door
They've all gone away
Send him to bed with no supper

Because it can spread, it can spread
And one fine evening coming home
Your wife and daughter and son
They'll have caught the idea and will be gone.

LES VIEUX (1954)

Northeastern lunch,
With rotting noses and tweed caps,
Huddling in thick coats
And mumbling confidential songs
To ancient friends -
The public men of Montreal;

And in parks
With strange children
Who listen to sad lies
In exchange for whistles
Carved from wet maple branches;

In Phillips Square,
On newspaper-covered benches,
Unaware of Ste. Catherine Street
Or grey and green pigeons
Inquiring between their boots -

Public men,
Letters of reference crumbling in wallets,
Speaking all the languages of Montreal.

ELEGY (1955)

Do not look for him
In brittle mountain streams:
They are too cold for any god;
And do not examine the angry rivers
For shreds of his soft body
Or turn the shore stones for his blood;
But in the warm salt ocean
He is descending through cliffs
Of slow green water
And the hovering coloured fish
Kiss his snow-bruised body
And build their secret nests
In his fluttering winding-sheet.

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All poems from LET US COMPARE MYTHOLOGIES, Contact
Press, Toronto



SIDE I, Band 3: IRVING LAYTON (1912 --)

Educated in Montreal; Mr. Layton attended McDonald College, B. Sc (Agr) 1939, and went on to receive an M.A. in Economics & Political Science from McGill University, 1946. He now teaches in a High School and lectures at Sir George William College, giving courses on contemporary British & American poetry, Canadian literature; and seminars on Eliot, Auden and W. B. Yeats. One of the most prolific and perhaps the most fluent Canadian poet, Mr. Layton has published over a dozen books of his poems. In 1954 two volumes of verse were published, The Long Pea-shooter, a collection of mainly satirical poems, and In The Midst of My Fever, entirely serious. In 1955, he also published two volumes; and again one is chiefly satirical The Blue Propeller, while the other The Cold Green Element is lyrical and dramatic. A collection of selective poems, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams, was published in 1956 (Stephens Press, Asheville, N. C., U.S.A. and Contact Press, Toronto, Canada), under the title of The Improved Binoculars.

THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY (1953)

And me happiest when I compose poems.
Love, power, the huzza of battle
Are something, are much;
Yet a poem includes them like a pool
Water and reflection.
In me, nature's divided things -
Tree, mould on tree -
Have their fruition;
I am their core. Let them swap,
Bandy, like a flame swerve
I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve.

And I observe how the sensual moths
Big with odour and sunshine
Dart into the perilous shrubbery;
Or drop their visiting shadows
Upon the garden I one year made
Of flowering stone to be a footstool
For the perfect gods:
Who, friends to the ascending orders,
Will sustain this passionate meditation
And call down pardons
For the insurgent blood.

A quiet madman, never far from tears,
I lie like a slain thing
Under the green air the trees
Inhabit, or rest upon a chair
Towards which the inflammable air
Tumbles on many robins' wings;
Noting how seasonably
Leaf and blossom uncurl
And living things arrange their death,
While someone from afar off
Blows birthday candles for the world.

THE FERTILE MUCK (1955)

There are brightest apples on those trees
But until I, fabulist, have spoken
They do not know their significance
Or what other legends are hung like garlands
On their black boughs twisting
Like a rumour. The wind's noise is empty.

Nor are the winged insects better off
Though they wear my crafty eyes
Wherever they alight. Stay here, my love;
You will see how delicately they deposit
Me on the leaves of elms
Or fold me in the orient dust of summer.

And if in August joiners and bricklayers
Are thick as flies around us
Building expensive bungalows for those
Who do not need them, unless they release
Me roaring from their moth-proofed cupboards
Their buyers will have no joy, no ease.

I could extend their rooms for them without cost
and give them crazy sundials
To tell the time with, but I have noticed
How my irregular footprint horrifies them
Evenings and Sunday afternoons:
They spray for hours to erase its shadow.

How to dominate reality? Love is one way;
Imagination another. Sit here
Beside me, sweet; take my hard hand in yours.
We'll mark the butterflies disappearing over the hedge
With tiny wristwatches on their wings:
Our fingers touching the earth, like two Buddhas.

MAXIE (1953)

Son, braggart, and thrasher,
Is the cock's querulous strut
In air, an aggression.

At sight of him as at the sound
of 'raw' my mind half-creates
Tableaus, seas, immensities.

Mornings, I've seen his good looks
Drop into the spider's mitre
Pinned up between stem and stem.

All summer the months grovel
And bound at his heels like spaniels.
All seasons are occult toys to him,

A thing he takes out of the cupboard
certain there are no more
Than two, at the most four.

I suppose, spouse, what I wanted
Was to hold the enduring folds
Of your dress. Now there's this.

This energetic skin-and-bones. You'll see,
He'll pummel the two of us to death,
Laughing at our wrinkled amazement.

Yes, though his upthrust into air
Is more certain
Than delight or unreason,

And his active pellmell feet
Scatter promises, elations
Of breast and womb;

Yet his growing up so neighbourly
To grass, us, and qualifying cobwebs
Has given me a turn for sculptured stone.

THE BULL CALF (1955)

The thing could barely stand. Yet taken
From his mother and the barn smells
He still impressed with his pride,
With the promise of sovereignty in the way
His head moved to take us in.
The fierce sunlight tugging the maize from the ground
Licked at his shapely flanks.
He was too young for all that pride.
I thought of the deposed Richard II.

"No money in bull calves," Freeman had said.
The visiting clergyman rubbed the nostrils
Now snuffing pathetically at the windless day.
"A pity," he sighed.
My gaze slipped off his hat toward the empty sky
That circled over the black knot of men,
Over us and the calf waiting for the first blow.

Struck,
The bull calf drew in his thin forelegs
As if gathering strength for a mad rush...
tottered...raised his darkening eyes to us,
And I saw we were at the far end
Of his frightened look, growing smaller and smaller
Till we were only the ponderous mallet
That flicked his bleeding ear
And pushed him over on his side, stiffly,
Like a block of wood.

Below the hill's crest
The river snuffled on the improvised beach.
We dug a deep pit and threw the dead calf into it.
It made a wet sound, a sepulchral gurgle,
As the warm sides bulged and flattened.
Settled, the bull calf lay as if asleep,
One foreleg over the other,
Bereft of pride and so beautiful now,
Without movement, perfectly still in the cool pit,
I turned away and wept.

THE COLD GREEN ELEMENT (19540)

At the end of the garden walk
The wind and its satellite wait for me;
Their meaning I will not know
Until I go there,
But the black-hatted undertaker

Who, passing, saw my heart beating in the grass,
Is also going there. Hi, I tell him,
A great squall in the Pacific blew a dead poet
Out of the water,
Who now hangs from the city's gates.

Crowds depart daily to see it, and return
With grimaces and incomprehension;
If its limbs twitched in the air
They would sit at its feet
Peeling their oranges.

And turning over I embrace like a lover
The trunk of a tree, one of those
For whom the lightning was too much
And grew a brilliant
Hunchback with a crown of leaves.

The ailments escaped from the labels
Of medicine bottles are all fled to the wind;
I've seen myself lately in the eyes
Of old women,
Spent streams mourning my manhood,

In whose old pupils the sun became
A bloodsmear on broad catalpa leaves
And hanging from ancient twigs,
My murdered selves
Sparked the air like the muted collisions

Of fruit. A black dog howls down my blood,
A black dog with yellow eyes;
He too by someone's inadvertence
Saw the bloodsmear
On the broad catalpa leaves.

But the furies clear a path for me to the worm
Who sang for an hour in the throat of a robin,
And misled by the cries of young boys
I am again
A breathless swimmer in that cold green element.

THE IMPROVED BINOCULARS (1954)

Below me the city was in flames:
The firemen were the first to save
Themselves. I saw steeples fall on their knees.

I saw an agent kick the charred bodies
From an orphanage to one side, marking
The site carefully for a future speculation.

Lovers stopped short of the final spasm
And went off angrily in opposite directions,
Their elbows held by giant escorts of fire.

Then the dignitaries rode across the bridges
Under an auricle of light which delighted them,
Noting for later punishment those that went before.

And the rest of the populace, their mouths
Distorted by an unusual gladness, bawled thanks
To this comely and ravaging ally, asking

Only for more light with which to see
Their neighbour's destruction.

All this I saw through my improved binoculars.

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All poems from THE IMPROVED BINOCULARS, Stephens
Press, Asheville, North Carolina; Contact Press,
Toronto, Ontario.



SIDE II, Band 1: F. R. SCOTT (1899 --)

F. R. Scott was born in Quebec City and was educated at Bishop's University, Oxford, and McGill, where he is now professor of constitutional law. A former Rhodes Scholar and Guggenheim Fellow, he has a distinguished reputation as a writer on Canada's constitutional and social problems, and was National Chairman of the CCF (Socialist) Party 1942-50. His first poems were published with those of A. J. M. Smith and Leo Kennedy in the McGill Fortnightly Review (1926-27), and he was largely responsible for the publication of the group anthology, New Provinces (1936). His best work is perhaps in the field of satire, but the directness and intensity of his love poems and the sense of social responsibility in his more recent verse are indications of the variety and complexity of his interests. Overture, the first collection of his poems was published in 1945, Events and Signals in 1954 (both Ryerson Press, Toronto) and The Eye of the Needle in 1957 (Contact Press, Montreal). He was co-editor with A. J. M. Smith of The Blasted Pine (Macmillans, Toronto, 1957).

SURFACES (1935)

This rock-bound river, ever flowing
Obedient to the ineluctable laws,
Brings a reminder from the barren north
Of the eternal lifeless processes.
There is an argument that will prevail
In this calm stretch of current, slowly drawn
Toward its final equilibrium.

Come, flaunt the brief prerogative of life,
Dip your small civilized foot in this cold water
And ripple, for a moment, the smooth surface of time.

LAKESHORE (1945)

The lake is sharp along the shore
Trimming the bevelled edge of land
To level curves; the fretted sand
Goes slanting down through liquid air
Till stones below shift here and there
Floating upon their broken sky
All netted by the prism wave
And rippled where the currents are.

I stare through windows at this cave
Where fish, like planes, slow-motined, fly.
Poised in a still of gravity
The narrow minnow, flicking fin,
Hangs in a paler, ochre sun,
His doorways open everywhere

And I am a tall frond that waves
Its head below its rooted feet
Seeking the light that leads it down
To forest floors beyond its reach
Vivid with gloom and Beebe dreams.

The water's deepest colonnades
Contract the blood, and to this home
That stirs the dark amphibian
With me the naked swimmers come
Drawn to their prehistoric womb.

They too are liquid as they fall
Like trumbled water loosed above
Until they lie, diagonal,
Within the cool and sheltered grove
Stroked by the fingertips of love.

Silent, our sport is drowned in fact
Too virginal for speech or sound
And each is personal and laned
Along his private aqueduct.

Too soon the tether of the lungs
Is taut and straining, and we rise
Upon our undeveloped wings
Toward the prison of our ground
A secret anguish in our thighs
And mermaids in our memories.

This is our talent, to have grown
Upright in posture, false-erect,
A landed gentry, circumspect,
Toed to a horizontal soil
The floor and ceiling of the soul;
Striving, with cold and fishy care
To make an ocean of the air.

Sometimes, upon a crowded street,
I feel the sudden rain come down
And in the old, magnetic sound
I hear the opening of a gate
That loosens all the seven seas.
Watching the whole creation drown
I muse, alone, on Ararat.

LAURENTAIN SHIELD (1946)

Hidden in wonder and snow, or sudden with summer,
This land stares at the sun in a huge silence
Endlessly repeating something we cannot hear.
Inarticulate, artic,
Not written on by history, empty as paper,
It leans away from the world with songs in its lakes
Older than love, and lost in the miles.

This waiting is wanting.
It will choose its language
When it has chosen its technic,
A tongue to shape the vowels of its productivity.

A language of flesh and of roses.

Now there are pre-words,
Cabin syllables,
Nouns of settlement
Slowly forming, with steel syntax,
The long sentence of its exploitations.

The first cry was the hunter, hungry for fur,
And the digger for gold, nomad, no-man, a particle;
Then the bold commands of monopoly, big with machines,
Carving its kingdoms out of the public wealth;
And now the drone of the plane, scouting the ice,
Fills all the emptiness with neighbourhood
And links our future over the vanished pole.

But a deeper note is sounding, heard in the mines,
The scattered camps and the mills, a language of life,
And what will be written in the full culture of
occupation
Will come, presently, tomorrow,
For millions whose hands can turn this rock into
children.

THE BIRD (1947)

Fluffed and still as snow, the white
Bird lay in a crumple of death
Far, far below the flock which, sailing, heard
But did not feel, the shot.

And the lonely boy suddenly grew afraid
As from his feet the doubt took wing and rose
Up from the feathered hurt like a black bird
Darkening the whole sky in the empty land.

CARING (1947)

Caring is loving, motionless,
An interval of more and less
Between the stress and the distress.

After the present falls the past,
After the festival, the fast.
Always the deepest is the last.

This is the circle we must trace,
Not spiralled outward, but a space
Returning to its starting place.

Centre of all we mourn and bless,
Centre of calm beyond excess,
Who cares for caring, has caress.

BONNE ENTENTE (1954)

The advantages of living with two cultures
Strike one at every turn,
Especially when one finds a notice in an office
building:
"This elevator will not run on Ascension Day";
Or reads in the Montreal Star:
"Tomorrow being the Feast of the Immaculate
Conception,
There will be no collection of garbage in the city";
Or sees on the restaurant menu the bilingual dish:

DEEP APPLE PIE
TARTE AUX POMMES PROFONDES

MEMORY (1954)

Tight skin called Face is drawn
Over the skull's bone comb
Casing the honey brain

And thoughts like bee-line bees
Fly straight from blossom eyes
To store sweet facts in cells

While every branching nerve
Performs its act of love
And keeps our past alive

Within the waxy walls
Lifetimes of sounds and smells
Lie captive in the coils

Till some quick trigger word
Tips off a memory rush
And turns Face bright in a flash

WILL TO WIN (1948)

Your tall French legs, my V for victory,
My sign and symphony, Eroica,
Uphold me in these days of my occupation
And stir my underground resistance.

Crushed by the insidious infiltration of routine
I was wholly overrun and quite cut off.
The secret agents of my daily detail
Had my capital city under their rule and thumb.

Only a handful of me escaped to the hillside,
Your side, my sweet and holy inside,
And covering there for a moment I drew breath,
Grew solid as trees, took root in a fertile soil.

Here by my hidden fires, drop your supplies-
Love, insight, sensibility, and myth-
Thousands of fragments rally to my cause,
I ride like Joan to conquer my whole man.

CONFLICT (1942)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Laurentian Shield
The Bird
Caring
Bonne Entente
Memory
Will to Win



SIDE II, Band 2: LOUIS DUDEK (1918 --)

Born in Montreal of Polish-Canadian parents, Louis Dudek grew up in the French, east and industrial end of the city. The landscape of an "iron pastoral" is reflected in the imagery of his city poetry, which, at its best, combines a native and tender feeling with a sensitive power of observation that is usually directed at objects not often made poetic. There are radical, political and moral implications in many of the poems, and Dudek is generally successful in allowing these to grow naturally and inevitably out of the poetry. No young Canadian poet has shown a quicker and surer development into technical and emotional maturity than Dudek has in the progression from the group of poems he contributed to Ronald Hambleton's Unit of Five (1944) to the poems published in his first book, East of the City (1946). Since that time he has published several notable books: Europe (1954) The Searching Image (1952) and The Transparent Sea (1956) being the most recent of these. After graduating from McGill University, Dudek worked for five years in an advertising agency; he then took his Doctoral degree in English at Columbia and is now teaching modern poetry at McGill University.

POEM 19 FROM EUROPE (1953)

The commotion of these waves, however strong, cannot disturb the compass-line of the horizon
Nor the plumb-line of gravity, because this cross co-ordinates the tragic pulls of necessity
That chart the ideal endings, for waves, and storms and sunset winds:
The dead scattered on the stage in the fifth act-Cordelia in Lear's arms, Ophelia, Juliet, all silent-Show nature restored to order and just measure.
The horizon is perfect,
And nothing can be stricter
Than gravity; in relation to these
The stage is rocked and tossed,
Kings fall with the crowns, poets sink with their laurels.

POEM 95 FROM EUROPE (1953)

The sea retains such images
 In her ever-unchanging waves;
 For all her infinite variety, and the forms,
 Inexhaustible, of her loves,
 She is constant always in beauty,
 Which to us need be nothing more
 Than a harmony with the waves on which we move.
 All ugliness is a distortion
 Of the lovely lines and curves
 Which sincerity makes out of hands
 And bodies moving in air.
 Beauty is ordered in nature
 As the wind and sea
 Shape each other for pleasure; as the just
 Know, who learn of happiness
 From the report of their own actions.

TO AN UNKNOWN IN A RESTAURANT (1952)

Thank you for sitting,
 Though the picture I have made of you
 Will not be an action
 But a meditation, like frost on a window.
 You have been very obliging, and patient,
 Not only to me, but to everyone, the world;
 Therefore I will not think of you
 With a gun to your temple, nor crying out
 Like Philoctetes, but make you the lonely figure
 In a meditative portrait,
 Almost lost in your background-not the sufferer
 Who wakes up to find he has been crucified, but like
 those
 Caged animals, born in captivity, who do not know
 Why they are unhappy.

A CRACKER JACK (1954)

If you and I ceased to exist, my dear,
 And all other ghosts,
 Would the Manifold of Space and Time
 Collapse in its cupboards?

Would the quivering fiction of being
 Joe, Paul, Patsy, May
 Be folded up like their Snakes and Ladders
 And be laid away?

As if we had not been? Not only 'as if'
 But as it is.
 Nature destroys itself: we are and are not.
 Are now like this,

Then never have been, when we cannot remember
 And no one is there to see
 Where shadily swarms go after rainstorms
 Or flies in a laboratory.

Our summer of strongest sunlight recalls
 The greatest sadness;
 And the quiet contemplation of our extinction
 Is called beauty, dearest.

THE POMEGRANATE (1949)

The jewelled mine of the pomegranate, whose hexagons
 of honey
 The mouth would soon devour but the eyes eat like a
 poem,
 Lay hidden long in its hide, a diamond of dark cells
 Nourished by tiny streams which crystallized into gems.

The seeds, nescient of the world outside, or of
 passionate teeth,
 Prepared their passage into light and air, while tender
 roots
 And branches dreaming in the cell-walled hearts of
 plants
 Made silent motions such as recreate both men and
 fruits.

There, in a place of no light, shone that reddest
 blood,
 And without a word of order, marshalled those
 grenadiers:
 Gleaming without a sun - what art where no eyes were!-
 Till broken by my hand, this palace of unbroken tears.

To wedding bells and horns howling down an alley,
 Muffled, the married pair in closed caravan ride;
 And then, the woman grown in secret, shining white,
 Unclothed, mouth to mouth he holds his naked bride.

And there are days, golden days, when the world
 starts to life,
 When streets in the sun, boys, and battlefields of
 cars,
 The colours on a barnister, the vendors' slanting
 stands
 Send the pulse pounding on like the bursting of
 meteors -

As now, the fruit glistens with a mighty grin,
 Conquers the room; and, though in ruin, to its death
 Laughs at the light that wounds it, wonderfully red,
 So that its awful beauty stops the greedy breath.

And can this fact be made, so big, of the body, then?
 And is beauty bounded all in its impatient mesh?
 The movement of the stars is that, and all their light
 Secretly bathed the world, that now flows out of flesh.

LINE AND FORM (1949)

The great orchestrating principle of gravity
 Makes such music of mountains
 As shaped by the mathematical hands
 Of four winds, clouds
 Yield in excellent and experimental sculpture;
 Mushrooms, elephants
 And women's legs, have too their form
 Generated within a three-dimensional space
 Efficiently.

And so the emotions
 Combine into exquisite
 Counterparts of the mind and body
 When the moving principle and the natural limits
 imposed
 Give in, and resist.

The form is then the single body
 Of love that no wrestlers make.
 But has each one his own?
 Or is one?
 What essential form has
 A wind or the sky
 That cutting into each other
 They mimic living arms?

Eternal forms.

The single power, working alone
 Rounds out a parabola
 That flies into the infinite;
 But the deflected particle
 Out of that line, will fetch a frisk
 Of sixes and eights
 Before it vanishes:
 An ocean arrested
 By sudden solid
 Ripples out in the sand.

So this world of forms, having no scope for eternity,
 Is created in the limitation
 Of what would be complete and perfect,
 Achieving virtue only
 By the justness of its compromises.

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A Cracker Jack
To An Unknown in a Restaurant

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The Pomegranate
Line and Form



SIDE II, Band 3: A. M. KLEIN (1909 --)

Abraham Moses Klein was born in Montreal and educated at McGill University. At the University he contributed some of his earliest poetry to the McGill Fortnightly Review (1926) and later to the Canadian Mercury and the Canadian Forum. Two of the best of his early poems, "Soiree of Velvel Kleinberger" and an impassioned rhapsody on Spinoza, "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens" appeared in the anthology New Provinces (1936). Meanwhile a number of his finest Jewish poems were beginning to appear in the Menorah Journal and the American Caravan. He is the author of four volumes of poetry, Hath Not a Jew (1940), the Hitleriad, a satire (1944), the Poems (1944), The Rocking Chair and Other Poems, and of The Second Scroll, a novel, (1954). His readings on this recording were made when he was Visiting Lecturer in Poetry at McGill.

PSALM XXII (1944)

A Psalm to teach humility:

O SIGN and wonder of the barnyard,
More beautiful than the pheasant,
More melodious than nightingale!
O creature marvellous!

Prophet of sunrise, and foreteller of times!
Vizier of the constellations!
Sage, red-bearded, scarlet-turbaned,
In whose brain the stars lie scattered like well-
scattered grain!

Calligraphist upon the barnyard page!
Five-noted balladist! Crower of rhymes!

O morning-glory mouth, O throat of dew,
Announcing the out-faring of the blue,
The greying and the going of the night,
The coming on,
The imminent coming of the dawn,
The coming of the kinsman, the brightly-plumaged sun!

O creature marvellous - and O blessed Creator,
Who givest to the rooster wit
To know the movements of the turning day,
To understand, to herald it,
Better than I, who neither sing nor crow
And of the sun's goings and comings nothing know.

PLUMAGED PROXY (1940)

O ROOSTER, circled over my brother's head,
If you had foresight you would see a beard
Pluck little feathers from your neck, a blade
Slit open your alarum, and a thumb
Press down your gullet, rendering it dumb.
My brother sends you to a land of shade,
Hebraically curses your new home,
And sets his sins upon your ruddy comb,
Atonement for the gifts of Satan's trade.
O rooster in a vortex of repentance,
Proxy of my little brother's soul,
You speed into a land where death pays toll;
Where no sun rises to evoke a crow
You go.

Be you not lonesome. I will send you thither
Each year a new companion for each year
My brother lets his peccadilloes wither.
Be you intrepid, therefore; do not fear.
May six score roosters in the course of time
Be cooped with you upon your nether stage.
And may my brother live to a ripe age.

THE ROCKING CHAIR (1948)

IT seconds the crickets of the province. Heard
in the clean lamplit farmhouses of Quebec,
wooden, - it is no less a national bird;
and rivals, in its cage, the mere stuttering clock.
To its time, the evenings are rolled away;
and in it peace the pensive mother knits
contentment to be worn by her family,
grown-up, but still cradled by the chair in which
she sits.

It is also the old man's pet, pair to his pipe,
the two aids of his arithmetic and plans,
plans rocking and puffing into market-shape;
and it is the toddler's game and dangerous dance.
Moved to the varandah, on summer Sundays, it is,
among the hanging plants, the girls, the boy-friends,
sabbatical and clumsy, like white haloes
dangling above the blue serge suits of the young men.

It has a personality of its own;
is a character (like that old drunk Lacoste
exhaling amber, and toppling on his pins);
it is alive; individual; and no less
an identity than those about it. And
it is tradition. Centuries have been flicked
from its arcs, alternately flicked and pinned.
It rolls with the gait of St. Malo. It is act

And symbol, symbol of this static folk
Which moves in segments, and returns to base,-
a sunken pendulum: invoke, revoke;
loosed yon, leashed hither, motion on no space.
O, like some Anjou ballad, all refrain,
which turns about its longing, and seems to move
to make a pleasure out of repeated pain,
its music moves, as if always back to a first love.

POLITICAL MEETING (1948)

(For Camillien Houde)

ON the school platform, draping the folding seats,
they wait the chairman's praise and glass of water.
Upon the wall the agonized Y initials their faith.

Here all are laic; the skirted brothers have gone.
Still, their equivocal absence is felt, like a breeze
that gives curtains the sounds of surplises.

The hall is yellow with light, and jocular;
suddenly some one lets loose upon the air
the ritual bird which the crowd in snares of singing

catches and plucks, throat, wings, and little limbs.
Fall the feathers of sound, like alouette's.
The chairman, now, is charming, full of asides and wit,

building his orators, and chipping off
the heckling gargoyles popping in the hall.
(Outside, in the dark, the street is body-tall,

flowered with faces intent on the scarecrow thing
that shouts to thousands the echoing
of their own wishes.) The Orator has risen!

Worshipped and loved, their favourite visitor,
a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockers,
full of wonderful moods, tricks, imitative talk,

he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome,
not snobbish, not of the Grande Allee! Un homme!
Intimate, informal, he makes bear's compliments

to the ladies; is gallant; and grins;
goes for the balloon, his opposition, with pins;
jokes also on himself, speaks of himself

in the third person, slings slang, and winks with
folklore;
and knows now that he has them, kith and kin.
Calmly, therefore, he begins to speak of war,

praises the virtue of being Canadian,
of being at peace, of faith, of family,
and suddenly his other voice: Where are your sons?

He is tearful, choking tears, but not he
would blame the clever English; in their place
he'd do the same; maybe.

Where are your sons?
The whole street wears one face,
shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
the body-odour of race.

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The Rocking Chair
Political Meeting
For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu
Montreal

Photos:

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IRVING LAYTON: Canada Wide
F. R. SCOTT : Wm. Notman & Son
A. M. KLEIN : Garcia Studio

FOR THE SISTERS OF THE HOTEL DIEU (1948)

IN pairs
as if to illustrate their sisterhood,
the sisters pace the hospital garden walks.
In their robes black and white immaculate hoods
they are like birds,
the safe domestic fowl of the House of God.

O biblic birds,
who fluttered to me in my childhood illnesses
-me little, afraid, ill, not of your race,-
the cool wing for my fever, the hovering solace,
the sense of angels -
be thanked, O plumage of paradise, be praised.

MONTREAL (1948)

O city metropole, isle riverain!
Your ancient pavages and saited routs
Traverse my spirit's conjured avenues!
Splendor erabic of your promenades
Foliates there, and there your maisonry
Of pendent balcon and escalier'd march,
Unique midst English habitat,
Is vivid Normandy!

You populate the pupils of my eyes:
Thus, does the Indian, plumed, furtivate
Still through your painted autumms, Ville-Marie!
Though palisades have passed, though calumet
With tabac of your peace enfumes the air,
Still do I spy the phantom, aquiline,
Genuflect, moccasin'd, behind
His statue in the square!

Thus, costumed images before me pass,
Haunting your archives architectural:
Coureur de bois, in post where pelts were portaged;
Seigneur within his canded manoir; Scot
Ambulant through his bank, pillar'd and vast.
Within your chapels, voyaged mariners
Still pray, and personage departed,
All present from your past!

Grand port of navigations, multiple
The lexicons uncargo'd at your quays,
Sonnant though strange to me; but chiefest, I,
Auditor of your music, cherish the
Joined double-melodied vocabulaire
Where English vocable and roll Ecossic,
Mollified by the parle of French
Bilinguefact your air!

Such your suaver voice, hushed Hochelaga!
But for me also sound your potencies,
Fortissimos of sirens fluvial,
Bruit of manufactory, and thunder
From foundry issuant, all puissant tone
Implenishing your hebdomad; and then
Sanct silence, and your argent belfries
Clamant in orison!

You are a part of me, O all your quartiers-
And of dire pauvrete and of richesse-
To finished time my homage loyal claim;
You are locale of infancy, milieu
Vital of institutes that formed my fate;
And you above the city, scintillant,
Mount Royal, are my spirit's mother,
Almative, poitrine!

Never do I sojourn in alien place
But I do languish for your scenes and sounds,
City of reverie, nostalgic isle,
Pendant most brilliant on Laurentian cord!
The coigns of your boulevards - my signiory-
Your suburbs are my exile's verdure fresh,
Your parks, your fountain'd parks-
Pasture of memore!

City, O city, you are vision'd as
A parchemin roll of saecular exploit
Inked with the script of eterne souvenir!
You are in sound, chanson and instrument!
Mental, you rest forever edified
With tower and dome; and in these beating valves,
Here in these beating valves, you will
For all my mortal time reside!