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ALAN CRAWLEY,  
CONTEMPORARY VERSE

AND

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN POETRY  
IN THE FORTIES

by

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## ABSTRACT

The development of modern poetry in Canada is presented by the critics in essentially a straight line progression beginning with the Montreal Group in the twenties and culminating in the 'Renaissance' of the forties which was fostered largely by the Montreal little magazines Preview and First Statement. This presentation is distorted in several ways. It suggests that modernism was established in Canada in the twenties and gives a disproportionate amount of credit and influence to the Montreal Group; it neglects the confused and uncertain period of the thirties; and it almost entirely ignores the important contribution made to the establishment and development of modernism in Canada by Alan Crawley and his west coast magazine Contemporary Verse.

The work of the Montreal Group was extremely important to the development of modern poetry in Canada. It was through their efforts that the influences of Yeats and Eliot were introduced to Canada, and these influences provided an exhilarating antidote to the excesses of the nineteenth-century genteel romanticism that dominated Canadian poetry at the time. But it is a mistake to think that the ideas and techniques of the Montreal Group became current in the twenties or the thirties. A review of poetry published before the forties indicates indisputably that nineteenth-century styles and attitudes were dominant and that modernism came in a very weak second. The kind of poetry that was fashioned after Eliot and Yeats seemed too intellectual, too abstract to be relevant to a people in the midst of a major social dislocation--

the Depression.

It was not until the forties under the stimulus and direction of the social realism poetry of Auden and his group that modernism really became established in Canada. Preview was an important part of this development because it made Auden's ideas and techniques current.

First Statement helped to temper this new poetry by focusing on its imported, derivative quality. But it was Alan Crawley's Contemporary Verse which began it all in 1941. This thesis will make the contents of Contemporary Verse more accessible and better known by means of an index; and will explore the contribution that Alan Crawley made to the development of modern poetry in Canada by editing of Contemporary (1941-1952), by criticizing and counselling poets, and by generally fostering an interest in poetry through lectures, radio talks, and poetry reading tours. As much as possible Crawley and his contemporaries will speak for themselves through their letters. Chapter I will lay the ground work by exploring the development of modern poetry in the pre-forties period as it is presented in the literature; Chapter II will discuss the beginning of Contemporary Verse; Chapter III the magazine and Alan Crawley's allied activities during the war years; Chapter IV the post-war years; and Chapter V will offer concluding remarks on the significance of Alan Crawley's work to the development of poetry in the forties.



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My family endured the writing of this thesis for an unconscionably long time and I thank them for their patience.

# ABBREVIATIONS

Personal correspondence is used extensively in this thesis. The following abbreviations are used in referring to this correspondence:

Holder of the letter--	AC	Alan Crawley
	JMcC	Joan McCullagh
	FMcL	Floris Clark McLaren
	JM	Jay Macpherson
	UT	University of Toronto

(Since this thesis was written some of the correspondence held by Alan Crawley has been transferred to Queen's University.)

Date of letter--	Jan,	January
	Feb.	February
	Aug.	August
	Sept.	September
	Oct.	October
	Nov.	November
	Dec.	December
	nd	no date

(March, April, May, June, and July are not abbreviated.)

## INTRODUCTION

Not many people know Alan Crawley's little west coast magazine Contemporary Verse. Even serious students of Canadian literature may not know it, although it ran for more than eleven years and spanned the period of the 'renaissance' of the forties. Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse have not been entirely ignored. There are polite, usually respectful references to them in the literature, generally just preceding the meaty discussions of the magazines that most people do know--Preview and First Statement. Desmond Pacey was complimentary in Creative Writing in Canada: "Alan Crawley founded Contemporary Verse in 1941 with the specific object of encouraging the new poetry in Canada, and showed almost impeccable taste in the choice of good poetry and in providing sympathetic and perceptive reviews of the current output of verse"<sup>1</sup> (Pacey worried that Crawley might miss the tribute and wrote to him June 25, 1952 "I hope you noticed the brief and inadequate but very sincere tribute I paid you and your magazine?"<sup>2</sup> Munroe Beattie was more generous, devoting a full paragraph to Crawley and his magazine in the Literary History of Canada. He called Crawley a "gifted editor", and said "To read through the files of this small, neat magazine, is to feel sustained respect for Mr. Crawley's judgment and catholicity, and astonishment at the number of good Canadian poets who sent him their poems."<sup>3</sup> Contemporary Verse fared less well in Dudek and Gnaruski's highly regarded The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada. Raymond Souster

is quoted as saying to Dudek "I think you're probably as fed up with Contemporary Verse and Northern Review as I am, and I know there are plenty of others who feel the same way;"<sup>4</sup> and in their discussion of little magazines, the authors relegate Contemporary Verse to the "largest category" of little magazines--"the uncommitted or eclectic magazines". "Good Literature" is their "pious hope" and Alan Crawley's Contemporary Verse is a "notable example" of this type of magazine.<sup>5</sup> Dudek was more specific in his article "The Role of Little Magazines in Canada," but the deprecatory tone is still present. Crawley was "handicapped by blindness and cornered in the far west," Dudek said; and he condemned Contemporary Verse for not being a fighting magazine with a policy:"

It was concerned only with publishing 'good poetry'--which, in itself, can embody an affirmation--but it did not in addition work out any program of ideas which this poetry could fire. It lasted for ten years, however, carrying sparks from any source which might show a flicker in that period.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to a consideration of the development of modern poetry in Canada, Contemporary Verse and Alan Crawley have had a bad press. There is Floris McLaren's very good article, "Contemporary Verse: A Canadian Quarterly" in Tamarack Review, but few people know it.<sup>7</sup> Canadian Literature has tried to rectify the situation with two articles avowing the importance of Crawley and his magazine to modern poetry--Ethel Wilson's "Of Alan Crawley" in 1964<sup>8</sup> and George Robertson's "Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse" in 1969.<sup>9</sup> These articles made Alan Crawley a little better known, but they did not explore or establish the significant contribution Contemporary Verse made to poetry during the forties. They are basically

testimonials, impressive but lacking the detailed evidence that literary history thrives on. In spite of the fact that Alan Crawley edited the first modern poetry magazine in Canada and continued it throughout the decade of the forties (probably the most exciting period for poetry in Canada), set and maintained the high standards essential for the growth of new poetry, and was influentially involved with a number of major poets of the period--he and Contemporary Verse have been largely ignored by the critics. With Contemporary Verse not a factor to be considered, the development of modern poetry in Canada is presented in the literature as an Eastern and, even more specifically, a Montreal accomplishment. Modernism in poetry began in the twenties in Montreal with the "Montreal Group" critics state; developed steadily to become "the dominant mood of Canadian poetry" by 1936 with the publication of New Provinces,<sup>10</sup> and was finally tempered by the conflict between the two Montreal little magazines Preview and First Statement in the early forties. It is the purpose of this thesis first to make the contents of Contemporary Verse more accessible and better known by means of an index; and second to explore the contribution that Alan Crawley made to the development of modern poetry in Canada by editing of Contemporary Verse (1941-1952), by criticizing and counselling poets, and by generally fostering an interest in poetry through lectures, radio talks, and poetry reading tours. As much as possible Crawley and his contemporaries will speak for themselves through their letters.

## CHAPTER I

## MODERN POETRY BEFORE THE FORTIES

"It all began in 1925 in the environs of McGill University", wrote Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski in their influential The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada.<sup>11</sup> "Montreal poets include the key figures in the development of modern poetry as a definite tradition in Canada", Dudek went on in "The Montreal Poets:" "To the envy of less happy cities--Toronto, Halifax, Victoria--one of the particularities in the development of English poetry in Canada over the past thirty years has been the dominant role of Montreal as a center of activity and a source of new poetry."<sup>12</sup> In "Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry", Dudek took a wider look but arrived at the same conclusion: "From 1927 (Scott's and Smith's beginning) to 1949 (the date of Reaney's 'The Red Heart'), the modern movement was almost entirely centered in Montreal." "There may be no 'school' in Montreal; but the poets of Montreal seem to share a few principals on the social direction and on the experimental direction--toward natural speech--of modern poetry; and in this they must inevitably provide the central drive to the national literature in its movement away from nineteenth century modes."<sup>13</sup> Munro Beattie agreed with Dudek and Gnarowski in the definitive Literary History of Canada. "In the history of twentieth-century Canadian poetry two Montreal publications (the McGill Fortnightly Review and Canadian Mercury) are documents of peculiar importance." "The aims

of the young editors and contributors were both critical and creative... They would be, these young critics and poets of Montreal, the importers of new influences, and they would demonstrate in their own writings how the new influences might reinvigorate Canadian poetry.<sup>14</sup> Later on, discussing the 'renaissance' of the forties and the little magazines Preview and First Statement, Beattie referred to Montreal as "still headquarters for the modern movement in Canadian poetry."<sup>15</sup>

Desmond Pacey was a little less categorical in Creative Writing in Canada. In his chapter "Modern Canadian Poetry 1920-1950" he mentioned other poets from other places--Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, W. W. E. Ross, Raymond Knister--and worried that "the actual creative performance of the whole group of Montreal poets has been less than might have been expected."<sup>16</sup> Still, his summation follows the general trend:

The thirty years from 1920 to 1950, then, saw much activity in Canadian poetry. The emergence of E. J. Pratt and of the Montreal School in the twenties marked the beginning of the modernist movement; in the thirties there was a slackening caused largely by the depression and the difficulty of finding publication; but in the forties Pratt and the Montrealers were joined by a whole host of new poets. Never before had there been so many interesting poets writing in Canada at a time.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Stevens' The McGill Movement is further evidence of the dominant role assigned to the Montreal Group in the development of modern poetry in Canada.

No one would seriously argue with the important part Eastern writers and publications have played in naturalizing modernism to Canada. One agrees when Earle Birney writes of the McGill Fortnightly Review that "Short-lived, it yet existed long enough to launch some



of the best poets to write in Canada in this century, and eventually to influence, by stimulus or reaction, most of what poetry has succeeded it in the country;<sup>18</sup> or when Wynne Francis suggests of Preview and First Statement that "The tension set up between the two magazines generated much of the poetic activity that went on in Montreal and made the 'Forties Canada's most exciting literary decade."<sup>19</sup> The danger, however, is that this kind of categorical approach oversimplifies the developmental course of modern poetry in Canada and ignores the important part played by writers and publications from places other than Montreal (and Toronto). Earle Birney added to his above statement about the McGill Fortnightly that its "effects were by no means immediate. It is a measure of the isolation between east and west in Canada in the twenties that we at U. B. C. were unaware of the existence of the 'Fortnightly Review', until we were graduated and it was defunct."<sup>20</sup> And in the forties the best poetry being written was consistently recognized and published, not by Preview and First Statement in the east; but by Contemporary Verse in the west--and what better 'generator of poetic activity' is there than being published in a quality magazine? Modern poetry did not develop in quite the smooth, straight line that criticism has suggested from the "Initiators" in Montreal in 1926 to the Preview-First Statement "Renaissance" in the forties. The strength of modernism in Canadian poetry in the thirties and beginning forties has not been established,<sup>21</sup> it has been assumed; and the exclusion of Alan Crawley's Contemporary Verse from serious study has resulted in a distortion of the development of Canadian poetry during the forties. What then really happened to modernism in

Canadian poetry during the thirties?

In The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, Dudek and Gnarowski divide the development of modernism into three stages--Beginnings, The Early Forties, and Resurgence. After a quarter century of 'Beginnings' ("Precursors" 1910-1925 and "Initiators" 1925-1936), there is a leap to 'The Early Forties' where "the development of modernism in Canada had reached the point of 'cell division', showing a conflict of generations within the modern movement and a clearly marked diversification of trends."<sup>22</sup> Writings from the thirties when, presumably, the newly begun poetry would have become firmly established preparatory to its forties 'cell division', are conspicuously absent; yet critics are unanimous that modern poetry was firmly established by the mid-thirties. Munro Beattie wrote in the Literary History of Canada "By the mid-thirties the new poetry was well established in Canada."<sup>23</sup> Gnarowski agreed--with the publication of New Provinces in 1936 he said, "It was evident that modernism had become the dominant mood of Canadian poetry:"

Following the death of The Canadian Mercury in 1929, there was a period roughly of ten years when little magazine publishing seems to have temporarily lost its impetus.... Creative energies, however, had suffered no relapse, and there was no real lull in the actual writing of poetry. In 1936 all the activity which may be said to have begun with The McGill Fortnightly Review was brought into focus in an anthology entitled New Provinces.<sup>24</sup>

New Provinces, the thin anthology of modern work planned for publication in the twenties but not brought out until 1936 (and then only by a private printing of about 100 copies), seems to be the foundation on which the critics base their conclusions about modern poetry in the thirties. W. E. Collin's perspicacious 1936 study

The White Savannahs is usually brought in as support (he read the New Provinces poets in manuscript). If modernism was the 'dominant mood' and was 'well established' during the thirties, then modern poetry might well have been ripe for 'cell division' by the early forties (Preview and First Statement both fostering and being the result of this division). But there is scant evidence to support this conclusion.

E. J. Pratt was unhappily aware that (in Gnarowski's terms) "Creative energies...had suffered no relapse, and there was no real lull in the actual writing of poetry" in the thirties. In 1938 when he wrote "Canadian Poetry-Past and Present," Pratt estimated that there were at least "ten million versifiers" in the Dominion; but they were not writing modern poetry. "Nine and a large fraction out of every ten in the astronomical total belong to the sentimental type, uttering little stomach cries, toying with fragile illusions, or whispering the consolation wafted into their souls by the zephyrs."<sup>25</sup> Most of this kind of verse did not get published; but a surprising amount (it is a shock to realize how much) of romantic nature poetry of the Carman-Roberts variety did get published, contrary to the popular belief that publishing came almost to a standstill during the depression except for tracts on social problems.<sup>26</sup> Dozens of books of poetry (as devoid of social concerns as daisies in the field or ambrosial nectar) were published. Audrey Alexandra Brown, Mary E. Colman, Charles G. D. Roberts, Carol Coates, A. M. Stephen, Edna Jaques, Gordon Le Clair, Watson Kirkconnell, Robert Service, Arthur S. Bourinot, A. G. Bailey, Charles Bruce, Kenneth Leslie, Wilson MacDonald, Duncan Campbell Scott,

Floris Clark McLaren, Leo Cox, Alan Creighton and Brian Gustafson (this list is not complete) all had at least one volume of poetry published and several had more than one. In addition, annual yearbooks of poetry from various branches of the Canadian Authors' Association continued through the depression with discouraging regularity; and a number of very traditional anthologies appeared to supplement W. Garvin's 1926 Canadian Poets and A. M. Stephen's Golden Treasury of Canadian Verse of 1928. There was Nathaniel A. Benson's Modern Canadian Poetry (it was not "modern") of 1930, Bliss Carman and Lorne Pierce's revised edition of Our Canadian Literature: Representative Verse, English and French in 1935, Bertram Brooker's Yearbook of the Arts in Canada in 1936, and, in 1938 Alan Creighton and Hilda M. Ridley's New Canadian Anthology and Ethel Hume Bennett's New Harvesting. E. K. Brown praised Bennett's collection as "the best anthology of recent Canadian verse."<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, little modern poetry was published during the thirties--certainly not enough to support the claim that modernism was the 'dominant mood' at that time. There was New Provinces (the only anthology of modern Canadian poetry before the forties), three collections from E. J. Pratt (which are more 'individualistic Pratt' than modern), Dorothy Livesay's slim Signpost (1932), W. W. E. Ross's little known Laconics (1930) and Sonnets (1932), Leo Kennedy's The Shrouding (1933), L. A. MacKay's Viper Bugloss (1938), and Anne Marriott's chapbook The Wind Our Enemy (1939). In most of these collections the modernism is tentative and uncertain. New Provinces is by far the most accomplished and even here in the work of the Montreal Group vestiges of Canada's particular brand of late

romanticism still linger--particularly in diction and tone. There is a self-consciousness about many of the poems--a 'see how different I am' tone--and the language is too adjectival, sometimes lacks clarity, and frequently fails to capture a natural Canadian idiom; for example Robert Finch's "Window-Piece:"

Old willows in spun copper periwigs,  
and many-fingered firs smoothing white stoles  
beside the drained rococo lily-pool  
whose shuddering cherub wrings an icicle  
from the bronze gullet of his frozen swan.<sup>28</sup>

A. J. M. Smith's opening lines in "Shadows There Are" are as vague and abstract as the usual Canadian Poetry Magazine offerings:

Shadows there are, but shadows such as these  
are shadows only in the mortal mind,  
Blown by the spirit or the spirit's wind.<sup>29</sup>

Scott's "Surfaces" suffers from tired language and imagery, and from abstractions:

This rock-borne river, ever flowing  
Obedient to the ineluctable laws,  
Brings a reminder from the barren north,  
Of the eternal lifeless processes.<sup>30</sup>

Periodicals, generally a more sensitive indicator of new trends than other forms of publication, were remarkably unadventurous in the thirties and early forties. After the two early, short-lived periodicals which were directly involved with the beginnings of the Montreal movement (the McGill Fortnightly Review November 1925-April 1927, and Canadian Mercury 1928-1929) no other journal favoured the work of moderns until the equally short-lived New Frontier of 1936-1937 which was primarily interested in left-wing social realism poetry. Canadian Forum maintained a liberal policy toward modern poetry, but its contribution to the development of modern poetry has

been overestimated. The Forum was not primarily a poetry magazine and in spite of its willingness to print modern poetry, traditional poetry preponderates in most issues. In 1935, for example, the Forum printed 28 poems in its 279 pages, averaging less than half a page of poetry per issue. The March number carried a full page of F. R. Scott's poems and his "Canadian Authors Meet" is in the December issue; otherwise the poems in this volume are unimaginative space fillers. Only Scott, Pratt, and Kennedy are modern in their approach, although the other 21 poets represented avoid the worst of the romantic excesses. Five years later in January, 1940 the poets featured in the Forum were Amelia Wensley, Donald Stevenson, Alan Creighton, V. House, L. Joselyn, and Alan G. Brown--hardly evidence of a viable modernism. After its promising beginning in 1936 (Dorothy Livesay's "Day and Night" was featured, and F. R. Scott, Finch, Kennedy and Anne Marriott were represented) Canadian Poetry Magazine quickly settled into mediocrity as the official organ of the Canadian Authors' Association.

Looking retrospectively at the period of the twenties and thirties in Canada, it is apparent that the 'McGill Movement' was a twenties movement, revolutionary but not particularly accomplished. The brand of modernism produced by the Montreal group was largely derivative of Yeats and Eliot--an exciting antidote to the excesses and irrelevancies of romanticism in the twenties; but quickly rendered obsolete by cultural changes and new trends in British and American poetry in the thirties. When it was published in 1936, New Provinces was not the manifestation of a viable modern poetry movement as the Montreal group realized. It was very much an after-the-fact publication,

intended more as a memento of a poetic breakthrough in technique rather than the chronicle of a movement, and more for the personal interest of the poets involved than for public consideration. F. R. Scott wrote, almost apologetically in the Preface that "New Provinces contains work which had had significance for the authors in the evolution of their own understanding;" and that the poems in the collection "were written for the most part when new techniques were on trial, and when the need for a new direction was more apparent than the knowledge of what that direction would be." Scott described the achievement of the 'new poetry' as "a development of new techniques and widening of poetic interest beyond the narrow range of the late Romantic and early Georgian poets:"

Equipped with a freer diction and more elastic forms, the modernists sought a content which would more vividly express the world about them.

This search for new content was less successful than had been the search for new techniques and by the end of the last decade the modernist movement was frustrated for want of direction.<sup>31</sup>

A. J. M. Smith (whose energetic work as critic and anthologist has been largely responsible for securing the position of eminence accorded to the Montreal group) admitted in his emphatic "A Rejected Preface" to New Provinces that "a large number of the verses in this book were written at a time when the contributors were inclined to dwell too exclusively on the fact that the chief thing wrong with Canadian poetry was its conventional and insensitive technique. Consequently, we sometimes thought we had produced a good poem when all we had done in reality was not produce a conventional one."<sup>32</sup> Smith agreed with Scott that new directions must be found for poetry in Canada in 1936. Detachment and self-absorption are becoming impossible, Smith wrote; "the artist who is concerned with the most intense of

experiences must be concerned with the world situation." The poet "must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing mental and emotional attitudes that will facilitate the creation of a more practical social system." But in 1936 there is in Canada "only the faintest foreshadowing" of poetry such as this.<sup>33</sup>

In his unpublished dissertation "The Development of Canadian Poetry Between the Wars and Its Reflection of Social Awareness," Peter Stevens commented that "Canadian poets of the 1930's were faced with two almost insuperable problems: firstly, there was no real audience for modern poetry; secondly, there was no cohesive intellectual core of political thinking."<sup>34</sup> Add to this the lack of direction Scott and Smith's confessions in their New Provinces Prefaces and you have the mood of modern poetry in the thirties.. It must, then, have seemed an almost new low for modernism in 1936 when Canadian Poetry Magazine began--it had the distinction of being Canada's only poetry magazine and it was controlled by the bastion of traditionalism (and of mediocrity), the Canadian Authors' Association. "We believe," editor E. J. Pratt wrote in the second number, "that the long-established modes are far from their point of exhaustion and are everywhere giving evidence of fresh vision and vitality."<sup>35</sup> The combination of the retrospective New Provinces collection and the beginning of Canadian Poetry Magazine was too much for Leo Kennedy. The June 1936 issue of New Frontier carried his frustrated outburst "Direction for Canadian Poets." Turning his back on his own "Shrouding" poetry along with that of the rest of the Montreal group, Kennedy insisted that "We need poetry that reflects the lives of our people,



working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity. We need satire--fierce, scorching, aimed at the abuses which are destroying our culture and which threaten life itself."<sup>36</sup>

"There is a placid flatness to the run of Canadian poetry whether of 1882 or 1936 which invokes a smile of tolerance from the uninvolved observer, and makes the concerned participant--who looks for the work of adult minds--to squirm and suffer at so much documented obeisance to the namby-pamby," Kennedy went on. Neo-metaphysical verse "is still being ardently re-written" by A. J. M. Smith and others, "Though classicist Eliot has retired into Anglo-Catholicism, and his leadership has been generally renounced." Robert Finch's poetry reflects that of Edith Sitwell, "delicate, graceful as a glass crocus, and just about as useful for the task now confronting Canadian poets;" and Klein, "doughty Zionist, is most praised for those poems in which he displays his considerable Biblical knowledge, and which re-create the ghetto history of European Jewry:"

Changes have taken place in modern English poetry; the United States has experienced a sequence of upheavals since the first crusading days of Harriet Monroe. In England and in the States those younger poets with anything to say have forced their way out of the back-water of the '20's. They have analysed the forces making for social disintegration, and have allied themselves with the progressive movement that offers freedom of function and hope of life. Reading Canadian poetry, you would hardly suspect this.<sup>37</sup>

Scott had hoped, in his New Provinces Preface, that the depression might give some guidance to poets:

In confronting the world with the need to restore order out of social chaos, the economic depression has released human energies by giving them positive direction. The poet today shares in this release, and contemporary English and American verse as a consequence shows signs

of regaining the vitality it had lost.<sup>38</sup>

But it had not. Knister was dead, but even before his death had turned most of his energies to prose; and W. W. E. Ross did not noticeably alter his imagist verse as a result of the depression. The poetic output of A. J. M. Smith, Robert Finch, and Leo Kennedy sharply declined during the thirties and all of these poets left Canada. Scott's satiric jabs at the faults and weaknesses of society began before the depression and remained his most characteristic voice during this period. Pratt continued to develop his own individual primarily religious and narrative poetry apart from the mainstream of Canadian poetry. Even in his shorter poems, where he explores social themes, Pratt's orientation is essentially religious--seeing man's suffering in terms of his own sin or fault--rather than political or economic.

Dorothy Livesay and A. M. Klein did change direction as a result of the social situation of the thirties; although with Klein, whose chief impetus and sustaining vitality came from the Jewish tradition, it was more of an enrichment--a new theme to explore--rather than an actual redirection. Livesay gave up writing poetry entirely for a time after her 1932 Signpost collection; then reappeared in new proletarian dress in the mid-thirties with such poems as "Day and Night" and "The Outrider". She wrote more personal, lyric poems of social realism too, obviously influenced by the work of Auden and his group; but her total poetic output during the thirties was small. Earle Birney had been on the literary scene in Canada since the mid-thirties--he was an editor of Canadian Forum from 1936-1940--but he did not write poetry in any amount until the forties.

Modern poetry had the techniques, the idiom, and the desire to

reflect and to interpret man's situation in the contemporary world; but the right combination of these elements for Canada was slow in evolving. Neo-metaphysical poetry, which had been so influential in the twenties with the Montreal group, did not have the same relevance to the thirties and forties. Neither Eliot's early 'wasteland' despair nor his later advocacy of authoritarian creeds provided direction for Canadian poets at this time. The complexity and the intellectual quality of neo-metaphysical verse which had seemed such an exhilarating antidote to the excesses of romanticism in the twenties, now seemed too cerebral and difficult, too aloof and cold. W. E. Collin recognized this in 1936 in The White Savannahs when he wrote: "Although the newer poets were brought up under Eliot, he can no longer lead them. The economic and social realities of life have hounded them, driven them to bay and they have had to face them."<sup>39</sup> Imagist poetry which probed with such clarity, simplicity, and precision into the 'thingness' of things was limited by its very aims; it did not interpret, it did not comment, it did not inspire men to action. It simply did not say enough to a people struggling to cope with massive social disorder. Conversely, proletarian poetry--such as Livesay's "Day and Night"--spoke too obviously and too didactically. Inspired by Marxist and humanitarian ideals and anxious to right the injustices of an unjust society, this poetry too often lapsed into overt moralizing, exhortation, and propaganda. Auden, Spender, MacNeice, and (to a lesser extent) Dylan Thomas were revitalizing poetry in England and the United States during the thirties. Their influences did not filter through to Canada really until the forties.

Except for a few of Dorothy Livesay's poems, some of the Montreal group's, the work of W. W. E. Ross, and the original voice of E. J. Pratt, Canadian poetry before the second World War was essentially derivative. In a long letter to the Editors of New Frontier in October 1936, Alan Calmer (an American critic) confronted Canadian poets with this fact:

I get the feeling from New Provinces and The White Savannahs that you have been largely content to take over these transformations in American and English verse at their face value, without rooting them very deeply in your own native patterns. It seems to me that you have not dug into the varied meanings and shades of meanings which these new tendencies must have for Canadian poetry alone, or the particular relevance which Canadian poetry must have to these new ways of writing. My impression is that you have welcomed these new attitudes in an altogether uncritical fashion, that you have been inflexible and unthinking, and even smug, towards them--that you have not hammered away at them, gripping them with all your might, squeezing out of them the sustenance which your poetic growth requires. I feel that you have adopted the new modes of literary expression almost as meekly and blindly as your predecessors imitated the tones and moods of English Romantic poetry.<sup>40</sup>

Nothing has changed at the end of the decade. Both E. J. Pratt and A. J. M. Smith assessed the situation of Canadian poetry for the University of Toronto Quarterly and neither have anything new to say. Pratt tried to keep on the good side of both traditionalists and modernists with his middle-of-the-road article--"Tradition and revolt are inevitable compliments like rain and sun: the first by itself mildews; the second burns or explodes." "Excellent work is done by writers following the liberal tradition," Pratt wrote; and "a group of young writers relatively small in numbers, but compensating by their intensity of conviction and by their study of experimental forms, are infusing new energy into our literature."<sup>41</sup> In his discussion Smith

is still touting as "our best poetry" the early thirties poetry of Kennedy, Livesay, Ross and Pratt supplemented by "careful craftsman, such as F. O. Call, Leo Cox, Arthur S. Bourinot, and A. M. Stephen" and poems "here and there in the files of the Canadian Forum."<sup>42</sup>

In 1941, E. K. Brown was invited to edit a special Canadian number for Poetry (Chicago) and prepare a critical and historical summary to accompany his selection of poems. The thirty poems that Brown chose as the best current Canadian work are from the New Province writers, Dorothy Livesay, D. C. Scott, Floris Clark McLaren, Mary Elizabeth Colman, L. A. Mackay, Louise Morey Bowman, and Anne Marriott. He concluded his analysis ("The Development of Poetry in Canada, 1880-1940") stating that the "more conservative strains have been abundantly represented in the poetry of the past twenty years: a glance through the best anthology of recent Canadian verse, Mrs. Ethel Hume Bennett's New Harvesting (1939), will show that the majority of competent verse-writers in Canada have been little affected by the movement which began with the McGill Fortnightly."<sup>43</sup>

This, then, was the situation of poetry in Canada in the early forties when Alan Crawley started Contemporary Verse. Modernism had been introduced to Canada in the twenties but it was essentially grafted stock that bore little fruit in the thirties when the whole cultural climate changed. New roots were needed, new shoots that could produce a tough, socially relevant indigenous poetry. The first sign of this new growth in Canadian poetry was the appearance of Alan Crawley's little magazine in the fall of 1941. For the next decade Crawley and Contemporary Verse were significantly involved with the development of modern poetry in Canada.

## FOOTNOTES

## INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>2nd ed., rev. (1961; rpt. Toronto, 1967), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>All further citations of letters will be included in the body of the text immediately following the quotation. The following information will be given: initials of the holder of the letter, the writer and receiver of the letter, and date of the letter. When part or all of the preceding information is included in the text it will be excluded from the citation.

<sup>3</sup>Carl F. Klinck, ed. (Toronto, 1965), p. 766.

<sup>4</sup>Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, eds. (1967; rpt. Toronto, 1970), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup>Dudek and Gnarowski, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup>Canadian Forum (July, 1958), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, p. 208.

<sup>7</sup>No. 3 (Spring 1957), pp. 55-63.

<sup>8</sup>No. 19 (Winter 1964), pp. 33-42.

<sup>9</sup>No. 41 (Summer 1969), pp. 89-96.

<sup>10</sup>M. Gnarowski, "The Role of Little Magazines in the Development of Poetry in English Montreal," rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup>P. 24.

<sup>12</sup>Culture, 18 (1957), rpt. in The McGill Movement (Toronto, 1969), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Culture, 19 (1958), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, pp. 276, 278.

<sup>14</sup>Pp. 730, 731.

<sup>15</sup>P. 766.

<sup>16</sup>P. 142.

<sup>17</sup>P. 154.

<sup>18</sup>"AJMS," Canadian Literature, No. 15 (Winter 1963), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>"The Montreal Poets," Canadian Literature, No. 14 (Autumn 1962), p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>"AJMS," p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Peter Stevens unpublished dissertation "The Development of Canadian Poetry Between the Wars and Its Reflection of Social Awareness" (University of Saskatchewan, 1968) explores modernism in the thirties period in a careful, factual way and should be better known.

<sup>22</sup>p. 45.

<sup>23</sup>p. 751. A few pages later (p. 754) Beattie refers to the thirties as "the most barren period in the history of modern Canadian poetry."

<sup>24</sup>"The Role of Little Magazines," rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, pp. 220, 219.

<sup>25</sup>University of Toronto Quarterly, 8, No. 1 (October 1938), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Desmond Pacey in Literary History, pp. 485-86.

<sup>27</sup>"The Development of Poetry in Canada 1880-1940," Poetry (Chicago), (April 1941), p. 47.

<sup>28</sup>(Toronto, 1936), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>p. 65.

<sup>30</sup>p. 53.

<sup>31</sup>p. v.

<sup>32</sup>Canadian Literature, No. 24 (Spring 1965), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>Smith, Canadian Literature, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup>University of Saskatchewan 1968, p. 165.

<sup>35</sup>1, No. 2 (April 1936), p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>1, No. 3 (June 1936), p. 24.

<sup>37</sup>Kennedy, "Direction," pp. 21, 22-23.

<sup>38</sup>New Provinces, p. v.

<sup>39</sup>(Toronto, 1936), p. 158.

<sup>40</sup>"A Hope for Canadian Poetry," I, No. 6, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup>"Canadian Poetry--Past and Present," 8, No. 1 (October 1938), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup>"Canadian Poetry--A Minority Report," 8, No. 2 (January 1939), pp. 135-36.

<sup>43</sup>58, No. 1 (April 1941), p. 47.



## CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY VERSE: BEGINNINGS

A surge of poetic activity in the early forties followed the bleak thirties. "Perhaps there never was a time in Canada when so many poets of promise appeared simultaneously or when...there was so much creative variety, as in the early years of the forties," John Sutherland wrote in 1951 in "The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry." "The phenomenal development of Canada during the last war...gave a marked impetus to poetry as it did to the arts generally. There was an excitement in the air to which no one--least of all the poet could fail to respond."<sup>1</sup> Three little magazines devoted exclusively to modern work; Earle Birney's David and Other Poems, Ralph Gustafson's Anthology of Canadian Poetry and Little Anthology of Canadian Poets, and A. J. M. Smith's Book of Canadian Poetry and News of the Phoenix all appeared within a year or two from late 1941 to 1943. Before the war ended A. M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, F. R. Scott, Patrick Anderson, Miriam Waddington, and Irving Layton had books published, Birney had a second, Now is Time; and two more magazines Direction and Northern Review and the anthology Unit of Five had appeared. Canadian poetry had entered a new phase--the "Renaissance of the Forties."

It all began with Contemporary Verse. "I date the beginning of this decade from the first publication of Contemporary Verse in 1941," John Sutherland (not a man to give up glory easily) wrote:

*removing  
these lines*

...many of the poets who appeared during the forties were introduced in the early issues of that magazine. Shortly afterwards, some of the same writers came together in Montreal and began producing publications of their own-- Preview and First Statement, ~~and~~ but Contemporary Verse has already stolen part of their thunder, and it deserves the first credit.<sup>2</sup>

The first issue of Contemporary Verse, small, thin, and unpretentious, was delivered to a handful of subscribers and a few indulgent newsstands early in October 1941. It contained fourteen lithographed pages, nine poems, and a brief foreword by the editor explaining its purpose. Alan Crawley explained:

Conviction was added to my belief that beauty and truth is not all-told; that there are many writers of our own times who can speak to us in words and images and forms that interest and appeal; and that, for most of us, their writings are too hard to come by. A small group of readers and writers, sharing these feelings, send out this first issue of CONTEMPORARY VERSE, A CANADIAN QUARTERLY, in high hope that it and succeeding numbers may play a worthy part in the building of Canadian literature. (1, 2)<sup>3</sup>

The issue has a strong early forties flavour. Not all the poems can be termed modern, and the majority have a rawness about them that is characteristic of this transition period as poets worked to naturalize modernism to Canada. Social themes of war and of man's alienation in a meaningless world predominate. There is an attempt at informal language and natural speech rhythms (derivative of Auden), and uncomplicated, realistic imagery; but a not yet exorcised sentimental traditionalism and adolescent self-consciousness hover around the edges of the poems. Western writers dominate and the members of the founding committee each have a poem in this first issue of Contemporary Verse. Earle Birney, P. K. Page, Floris McLaren, Leo Kennedy, Dorothy Livesay, A. J. M. Smith, Doris Ferne and Anne Marriott

are the contributors. This regional, small group aspect of the first issue made Crawley a little uneasy and subsequent numbers of the magazine have a broader representation. Some of the poems in the first issue are not new work--Smith's "The Face", Livesay's "The Child Looks Out" and, one suspects, Kennedy's "Carol For Two Swans"--which suggests that modern poets had a scanty store of poems for publication that summer of 1941. All of the poems attempt to deal with the real world and man's situation in it, and in this sense they are modern; but they are uneven in quality.

Earle Birney's poem "Hands" is good and deserves its position of eminence as the first poem in the issue. His juxtaposition of nature and war images (a technique frequently used by Canadian poets at this time) startles as he explores man's alienation from nature:

Cold and unskilled is the cedar, his webbed claws  
 Drooping over the water shall focus no bombsight  
 Nor suture the bayoneted bowel, his jade  
 tips alert but to seadew and air and the  
 soundless touch  
 Of the light winked by the wind from the breathing ocean,  
(1, 3)

Man's hands "nimble Young digits at levers and triggers," are "the extension of tools," a "splayed fist...gloved with steel." The 'message' of the poem--early forties poetry is characteristically didactic--is sombre:

We are not of these shores, we are not of these woods,  
 Our roots are in autumn, and store for no spring.  
(1, 3-4)

Birney's command of sounds and rhythms is impressive; he uses vibrant, shifting alliterative tones and extended, piled up rhythms. Obviously Birney has been influenced by old English verse and by the new romantic movement of Dylan Thomas and his followers, but his sound

is fresh and distinctive and natural. A. J. M. Smith's facile

Audenesque "The Face" is not so successful:

Look left and look right,  
Whose hand will you bite  
With the safest delight?  
Whose safe will you crack  
With a pat on the back?  
(1, 11)

The poems of Floris McLaren, Anne Marriott, and Doris Ferne all have the same failing. The poets tell the reader about the disintegrating effect of the war on the human sensibility, rather than creating the 'objective correlative' of the experience so the reader can come to it directly. This is characteristic of poetry of the late romantic tradition in Canada and indicates that these poets have not yet found their voice in the modern idiom. Page's two poems are gauche and self-conscious. She spoils her imagist poem "The Crow" with too much weight, and "Ecce Homo" flounders as she attempts to depict superficial responses through dialogue:

'Lovely weather we're having.'  
Or, at the most,  
'I wish I hadn't read  
that awful book by Cronin, it's obscene.'  
(1, 5)

It was a quiet beginning for Canada's first modern poetry magazine but noisy enough to be heard across Canada. In a not too charitable review of Alan Crawley's new little west coast magazine (which also considered Preview and First Statement) P. K. Page, a Previewer, stated just that:

The first--Contemporary Verse--did not say a particularly loud 'boo' to the pink tea pretties but it was loud enough for one of their wags to dub it Contemptible Verse in a moment of irritation. That was possibly its first real victory.<sup>4</sup>

The real beginnings of Contemporary Verse antedated this first issue by several months. "The beginning was in the best tradition: enthusiastic, unpremediated, and by any standards except those of little magazine publication, wildly unbusinesslike," Floris McLaren reminisced in her Tamarack Review article on the magazine.<sup>5</sup>

Dorothy Livesay was visiting Floris McLaren in the spring of 1941 in Victoria and they talked of starting a modern poetry magazine.

The need was there: "The chances of publication in Canada for an unknown writer, or for a writer experimenting with new verse forms, or concerned with social or political themes, were almost non-existent," McLaren wrote. "In England and the United States small literary magazines sprouted freely, welcoming new writers, encouraging fresh techniques, fighting vigorous battles with the mass-guardianship of public taste. They had in 1941 no relatives in Canada."<sup>6</sup>

Dorothy Livesay had been an editor of New Frontier and knew a little bit about magazines, and Doris Ferne and Anne Marriot were willing to help. It was quite a talented group. Dorothy Livesay was the most active and the most modern of the four, but the others (who fall into the category of 'transition' poets) were serious and enthusiastic about poetry. E. K. Brown praised their work in "Letters in Canada: 1941." "An astonishing number of the most original and accomplished of the younger Canadian poets are in British Columbia, and among the most promising are in relation with the Victoria poetry group. Of special distinction in this collection [Victoria Poetry Chapbook] are the poems of Miss Anne Marriott, Miss Doris Ferne, Mrs. Floris Clark McLaren, and Miss Pauline Howard."<sup>7</sup>

Still it seemed a risky venture. "We poked tentatively at the edges

of the idea and it began to seem possible," McLaren remembered. They decided to try. To avoid "the inevitable compromises" of an editorial board and give the magazine "a personal life and flavour;" the founding committee decided to ask Alan Crawley to act as editor.<sup>8</sup>

Crawley was well qualified to edit a modern poetry magazine. He had been a serious student of contemporary poetry since a chance meeting with Harold Munro in Munro's Poetry Book Shop in London in 1917. Crawley described the meeting in a few notes he has put together as a "Personal History:" "Mr. Munro was alone at that time and finding I was a Canadian talked to me for some time and questioned me on my reading and interest in writers, and after an hour or so of this friendly chat made me think that I could find a new interest in the Georgian poets and the young war poets and I came away with three books, the first books of poetry I had ever bought.(AC)." Crawley was so taken with this poetry that he returned to the Poetry Book Shop for more poetry and more talk. "I was so interested with these and in other talks with Mr. Munro and the hearings of poets, Hodgson, de la Mare, Davies and others I had the good chance to hear that my interest in English poetry and especially in its reading aloud has grown and continued"(AC). From 1917 Crawley collected books of poetry and formed the habit of reading a poem each day and memorizing many of them. It was through this habit that he collected his phenomenal storehouse of sounds, rhythms, moods, and images which form the basis of what Desmond Pacey calls Crawley's "almost impeccable taste." During the late twenties and first few years of the thirties Crawley gave a series of talks on poetry in Winnipeg (some of them broadcast) a practice he continued when he moved to

the west coast in 1934. In 1938 Dorothy Livesay introduced Crawley to Canadian poetry, and from then on he included Canadian poems in his studying, memorizing, and poetry 'sayings' (since his blindness Crawley has referred to his poetry recitals as 'sayings').

Alan Crawley was interested. He liked modern poetry and he had astute critical judgement. He saw the need for a liberal, intelligent modern poetry magazine in Canada and he had the time and the enthusiasm to edit such a magazine. But there were problems. Alan Crawley was blind and he lived in Caulfield (now part of West Vancouver); Floris McLaren, who had agreed to the heavy job of publication and business manager, lived in Victoria. A large amount of reading and corresponding would be required. Crawley could manage informal correspondence but more official letters required greater typing accuracy than he had. Manuscripts would have to be read several times until Crawley had memorized them, or typed into braille for his future reference. Dorothy Livesay lived in Vancouver and could help a little but her time was limited by her young family and her own writing. Obviously, the bulk of this kind of work would fall to Jean Crawley, Alan's wife, who was also a busy housewife and not particularly interested in poetry. Finances were bound to create problems too. Canadian Poetry Magazine was in continual financial difficulty in spite of the support of the Canadian Authors' Association, and modern poetry could claim only a fraction of the readers of Canadian Poetry Magazine. In fact, with the War in its second year and the outlook for the Allies anything but favourable, would anyone read poetry at all? But most worrisome of all--was enough modern poetry being written in Canada to warrant a magazine

devoted exclusively to modern work?

By June Alan Crawley had made his decision and his letter of Tuesday, June 3, 1941 brought it to the Committee members in Victoria--"to the conspirators" who "started all this:"

In spite of the distress of the times and the prospect of continued disquiet and unsettled days to come, I feel that the idea of the publication of a magazine of Canadian poetry is a worthwhile and reasonable venture that could if properly managed and edited do much to help modern Canadian writers for I know of no publication that is now giving this possible help to writers. I am willing and enthusiastic to what I can for it.

(FMcL)

The decision made, the magazine took shape. Crawley proposed a working arrangement which was accepted by the committee. The board of founders--Alan Crawley, Floris McLaren, Dorothy Livesay, Anne Marriott and Doris Ferne--would decide matters of policy and management; the editor would read all manuscripts submitted and "have the sole right of rejection or acceptance," and would determine the content, the arrangement of material, and the "policy of type of material of each issue." "This would not of course mean," Crawley added, "that I would not take part in any discussion and be ruled by majority decision on policy of magazine as a whole" (FMcL, 3 June 1941). As it worked out, there were no disputes either over policy or selection of poems during the course of the magazine. From the first issue to the last, Contemporary Verse was Alan Crawley's magazine. The magazine was named Contemporary Verse: A Canadian Quarterly. Some of the members of the founding committee felt that manuscripts from outside of Canada should not be accepted, but in Crawley's mind the designation 'Canadian' simply indicated that the magazine was a Canadian venture. He wrote to Dorothy Livesay after



the second number was out:

Re 'Canadian' as I wrote you I do completely disagree with Sedgewick that Canadian in subtitle suggests limitation. The three in Victoria are a bit wavery about taking MSS from outside Canada and left it pretty much to my editorial judgement. Already we have used work by Kennedy, Smith and Gustafson all in U.S.A. and I have accepted several MSS for future numbers from writers in U.S.A.

(AC,nd)

"A magazine, once established, sets up a sort of magnetic field; like attracts like, and writers find their way to it, but the first numbers must set the pattern."<sup>9</sup> The immediate problem facing Crawley now was finding good copy for the first issue of Contemporary Verse. Perhaps offering a gentle hint to the founding members, Crawley wrote in his letter accepting the editorship: "I am most anxious that this should not be a boost to friends of the founders and certainly not a magazine of work by a small group." (FMcL, 3 June 1941). If the magazine were to have any real value, high standards must be set and maintained. Crawley discussed this again with Floris McLaren in a later letter:

I do truly feel that after so many years of study and trying to understand I know something about writing and poetry in particular and that I have something to offer in my line of appreciation and criticism and I do not want to let that go or to release any of my standards and that if C.V. is to have to be just another channel for middle class and the lesser verse then we are wasting time which could be much better used....

(FMcL, Oct. 1941)

"We could count on work from British Columbia", McLaren stated, "but we felt that it was important that the magazine...should not begin as a regional publication."<sup>10</sup> To avoid this Crawley and Livesay wrote directly to poets across Canada asking for work. P. K. Page was one of the poets solicited and she described her reaction to Crawley's

request in Canadian Literature:

I was living in New Brunswick at the time...and had had very little published. And then this letter arrived...would I be prepared to send in something for Volume One of Contemporary Verse. This was a very revolutionary sort of thing to happen because ...there weren't poetry magazines much in those days--this was the dim dark ages...and certainly nobody ever asked you for a poem. So this was quite exciting.<sup>11</sup>

As the September deadline for the first issue of Contemporary Verse approached, Crawley had serious doubts about the quality of the poetry he had accepted; so little poetry had been submitted (in spite of his letters soliciting work) that he wondered if there were modern poets in Canada. A modern poetry quarterly began to seem more and more like a revolutionary venture. He confided his worries to Floris McLaren:

Also take it from the letter that you are not so discouraged by the MSS in hand as I was and still sneakily at times still am. How I should have liked to have so much and such good stuff that I was raring to go and just could not keep the things to myself and had to print them but that bunch may come and in the meantime I shall keep most of my pessimism and let it be tempered with optimism and hope as my temperament will allow.

(FMcL, Sept. 1941)

Cheered by McLaren's optimistic reply and determined to make a beginning, even though the copy disappointed him, Crawley sent his selection of poems for Contemporary Verse 1 to Victoria for printing. One hundred copies were made in late September and seventy-five were mailed to subscribers in the first week of October 1941. Sounding much more assured with a copy of the magazine actually in hand, Crawley wrote to McLaren:

First so many thanks for your letter which came Saturday and bucked me no end, that and Anne Marriott's equally cheering and heartening letter of the same

mail helped me a great deal for I was being chicken hearted about the whole thing and especially of my ability to do what was expected of me. Now I feel the sword is unsheathed once more and I am able to at least hold and brandish it even if the thrusts are timid and unconvincing. What I said in the foreword was not idle chatter on my part and I still think there is good stuff if we can find and get it. That is the job just now. We seem to have made a fine start and with interest and subscribers and so it is up to us.

(FMCL, Sept. 1941)

Reaction to Contemporary Verse 1 was immediate. Earle Birney was enthusiastic but not uncritical in a letter to Crawley:

Kennedy's 'carol' is as finished as anything he's done and gave a necessary light-relief to the issue, and Dorothy Livesay's is a fine piece of imagination, which shows how to be 'tight' without being knotted. I can't say the same for Art Smith's. It has his vigorous stamp, but the two opening lines still have me gravelled. Am I being obtuse? I don't know whether I like the Auden-ish coda. But the two middle verses are grand satire.

(AC, 22 Oct. 1941)

More officially, Northrop Frye praised Contemporary Verse in the Forum. "No poem is flat or bad, and all show considerable literary experience," Frye wrote. Leo Kennedy's poem is "graceful" though facile, Smith's is sharply conceived" though "somewhat metallic in sound," Birney's is "arrestingly beautiful," and Floris McLaren's "poignant even if too heavily accented." "If you buy this little pamphlet, you will get wit...satire...music...imagination...where else can you get all that for two bits?"<sup>12</sup> A generous, though defensive, welcome came from E. J. Pratt and Canadian Poetry Magazine:

We welcome the appearance of this little sheaf of verse which constitutes Vol. 1, No. 1 of another Canadian quarterly. It is not brought out in competition or conflict with the Canadian Poetry Magazine, as its main concern is with contemporary

techniques while our own magazine...has tried to preserve a balance between tradition and modernity. Moreover, we hail any progressive effort which would freshen the quality of our national verse.<sup>13</sup>

Not a bad start for an unknown little magazine.

The second issue of Contemporary Verse--longer but less impressive, less bold than the first--was ready by December. It was pretty much a mixed-bag, beginning with an effusive poem by Audrey Alexandra Brown (a politic rather than aesthetic choice, one feels) and including work by Ralph Gustafson, H. A. V. Green (a friend of Crawley's from Winnipeg), Carol Cassidy, Kay Smith, Ronald Hambleton; and further work from Kennedy, Livesay, McLaren and Page. Floris McLaren's "No More the Slow Stream," with its implicit war theme and richly sensuous lines, is the best in the issue:

No more the slow stream spreading clear in sunlight  
Lacing the swamp with intricate shining channels  
Patterned by wind and the dipping tall marsh grasses:  
(2,17)

Birney's reaction in Canadian Forum is surprising; "The second number of the mimeographed verse-magazine which a group of younger writers has initiated in Vancouver shows an advance in quantity and quality over the promising first issue."<sup>14</sup> With the third issue of Contemporary Verse (March 1942) Crawley hit his stride. There are still some traditionalists among the contributors, but what gives the issue its particular flavour is the presentation of a group of poems by a single writer (with the poems arranged together). The broader representation benefits the poet and gives coherence and depth to the magazine. Years later James Reaney wrote in Alphabet, "In looking over CV myself I think the reason for its continuing impression, despite the multilith typed production is that the poems are published

in groups--Four Poems by so-and-so, Five Poems by etc. so that one gets a chance to see each poem in a field of relatedness, also a fair look at each poet."<sup>15</sup> Miriam Waddington and Raymond Souster made their first appearance in Contemporary Verse in this issue and helped to counteract the impression made by A. M. Stephen, Gordon LeClaire, Amelia Wensley, and Helen Geddes--none of whom appear again in the magazine..

With three issues out and additional publicity from reviews, modern poets must have known of Contemporary Verse by the spring of 1942. Yet Crawley was having a difficult time getting enough good poetry to fill fourteen small pages quarterly. Readers were supporting Contemporary Verse but not writers. Crawley wrote to Birney in April:

Progress with CV has been rather remarkable and if we can add fifty more subscribers and retain a fair percentage of the ones we have through another year we should be able to finance but what really worries me is the paucity of good work that comes through the mill. There has been no dearth of mediocre, traditional writing, church monthly stuff, God about us and feathered birds etc. but far too little exceptional work. Also, I have been struck by the discovery that few of our writers, contrary to the old ideas of poets, send in love poems and none of them sound a note of fortitude and encouragement.

(UT, 1942)

Too often Alan Crawley had to use poetry which did not meet his standards in order to get an issue out, and throughout the course of the magazine Crawley was forced to delay issues while he waited for good poetry to arrive. "Have had three poems from A. M. Stephen," he wrote to Floris McLaren while he was working on the third number, "unremarkable but two of them think I may use" (FMcL, March 1942). The established poets did not seem to have poetry to submit, or perhaps they were adopting a 'wait and see' attitude to Contemporary Verse.

Earle Birney had written to Crawley in the fall:

Thanks very much for the invitation to submit to  
your next number. I'll send some things along as  
soon as I have seen your first issue and get some  
notion what length and type of verse you might prefer.  
(AC, 6 Oct. 1941)

Still Crawley was hopeful of finding good material and was not limiting his search to established poets. He confided to Birney in April that "I am on the track of some work from really unknown writers and am hopeful of a find" (UT, 1942). Birney seemed more confident of the calibre of Contemporary Verse after the third number and submitted two poems for the next issue ("Nocturne" and "War Winter"), and three from James Wreford. The outlook for number four improved, but the future of the magazine was very uncertain. "Floris McLaren came over for a weekend with us," Crawley related in his May 28 letter Birney, "and we discussed the affairs of the quarterly and it seems possible it may be able to keep going and for that we will do our best." Crawley thought the March issue of Contemporary Verse was "different" and "interesting" and "quite up to the standard of many of the verse magazines of other places," but he was anxious that it "should be better and show improvement as the numbers add up" (UT, 1942). A few months later Crawley commented to Birney that "there is sincerity and straightforward thinking and writing turning up in some places," but that "contemplation is the terribly lacking element" (UT, nd).

An active correspondence between Earle Birney and Alan Crawley began with Crawley's request for poems for Contemporary Verse and continued throughout the course of the magazine. Crawley and Birney did not know one another at the beginning of the correspondence but

they quickly developed a mutual liking and respect. Crawley encouraged and criticized Birney's work, and Birney provided a friendly ear to share the tribulations and triumphs of the magazine with. Birney frequently wrote specifically to comment on an issue of Contemporary Verse or on an individual writer or poem giving Crawley a valued opinion to measure his own standards and choices against. In addition, their general comments on the literary scene bring the period alive in a down-to-earth and intimate way. Birney's news from Toronto in his letter of October 1941, for example, suggests a quickening of interest in poetry in Canada, a new liveliness after the waffling of the thirties. He wrote:

A. J. M. Smith was here for a few days and I got to know and like him. He has a book of his verse under consideration with a New York publisher: I saw the MS and I think it's going to be one of the best volumes of verse a Canadian has yet issued. He's still a bit too obviously in the Eliot school, but his later work, some of which you may have seen in 20 Cent. Poetry, etc., has a highly concentrated and half-bawdy kind of humor which is very individual and effective. As you probably know, he is preparing a critical anthology of Can. poetry under a Guggenheim award.

He commented on Pratt's soon to be issued Dunkirk and Other Verses:

The 'Dunkirk' itself, if it is all like the passages I have heard Ned read, is perhaps the best I think he's done--despite the popular patness of the theme--and makes Masfield's dutiful performance look sillier than ever. Ned's gusto, which the Brebeuf theme scared out of him, is back, and he manages even to find occasion for a few private jokes concerning some Toronto personalities, who turn up in Channel rowboats, with slightly altered names.

"A special cheap issue of the Dunkirk alone," Birney added, "is being rushed for the Christmas trade, and, with Simpson's buying 2000 copies in advance, it looks as if at last a Canadian poet may make

some money without losing his soul" (AC, 6 Oct. 1941).

In an April 1942 letter, Crawley sent Birney some round-about praise from L. A. MacKay who had given a talk on Canadian poetry for a University extension course. "After the talk someone pinned him down with the question of whose writing he thought the best in Canada today," Crawley wrote, "and I understand he said that your work was the most remarkable" (UT). In May a hurried letter came back from Birney with the news that "At any moment I expect to enter the army." "I'm trying frantically to wind up my civilian affairs," Birney wrote, "I will have to delay the pleasure of meeting you myself until the war is over. If I ever get time to write anything before that happy date (which is unlikely) I shall keep in touch with you" (AC, 21 May 1942).

Contemporary Verse 4 came out in mid-summer more substantial and finished with its "Editor's Note" at the beginning and "Notes on Contributors" at the end. There are fewer and larger groups of poems--three each by James Wreford and Anne Marriott, four by Nathan Ralph, and two by Earle Birney--satisfying chunks to chew and digest. Variety is the keynote, both in subject matter and technique. Wreford's left-wing statements are balanced by Ralph's refreshingly undidactic descriptive poems; Birney's vigorous alliterative rhythms in "War Winter" by Marriott's deliberately prosaic and mundane tone in "Rest Room." Social themes dominate the issue as they do throughout the war years. "I consider number four the best by far of all the issues," Crawley wrote to the founding committee, "and so hope to think of each succeeding number. There's a goal my lad to strive for" (FMCL, Oct. 1942).



With Contemporary Verse less than a year old, Alan Crawley was already embarked on the mammoth correspondence that became as important to poets in the forties as the magazine itself. Instead of rejection slips--"I thought that with this new magazine having no established standard or reputation a formal letter such as used by most editors seemed too formal and a bit swanky" (FMcL, nd)--Crawley decided to comment on manuscripts he returned, giving his reasons for rejecting the poem or making suggestions for revision. It turned out to be an enormous amount of work for Crawley, since he received about five hundred manuscripts a year, but a valuable service to poets who came to rely on Crawley's astute, impartial judgement. If a poet showed promise, Crawley offered to read and criticize his work on a more intensive level. P. K. Page was an early find and when Crawley offered to comment on her work, Page wrote back "I am 'post-hasting' an answer off to you to say by all means.... At the moment I am on my own in Montreal knowing practically no one who writes and having no critical eyes scan what I am writing and should welcome anything you have to say" (AC, 1 Dec. 1941). In May 1942, Page wrote:

How grand of you to write to me about the poems. You've no idea what a stimulating thing it has been--this contact with you, even across so many miles. It is doubly good to get praises from someone who is unafraid to damn. And your letter yesterday arrived with two others which told me I was ruining my chances by publishing such stuff and they hoped I would not continue in that vein. All of which gives one cause to think.

(AC)

By then Page was a member of the newly formed Preview group and she added in the letter: "I'd love to know your ideas on the Preview

crowd. It is a strange group to be associated with--especially as I am the only non-political member" (AC). Even though she was a Preview writer, Page continued to rely on Crawley for criticism and support. In 1945, for example, she writes about "Round Trip" (which A. J. M. Smith judged the most impressive poem in As Ten As Twenty):

I have made a number of changes in the poem--working from your letter and at this point the whole thing seems to be on such an incredibly pedestrian level that I can hardly bear it. That is one of my major problems--rewriting. None of my work can stand such scrutiny. While I polish the carvings on the archways the archways crumble!

(AC, 25 March)

In 1946, Page sent a copy of her first collection of poems--As Ten As Twenty--to Alan and Jean Crawley, and wrote: "Whether you like it or not, I feel this is partly your book. Alan's criticism, help and encouragement since CV's beginning have contributed more than any other thing to what progress I may have made in the last few years" (AC, 4 Nov.).

Seasoned poets benefited from Crawley's criticism too. Dorothy Livesay's poetic output was down to a trickle in early 1940 when she started visiting Alan Crawley and discussing poetry with him. "Soon I began to write again, I think under his influence; then I began showing him the poems, getting his criticism of them. He helped me a bit--he tried to make my language more what he called 'modern'."<sup>16</sup> And Earle Birney often discussed poems with Crawley and relied on his suggestions for revision. "Man on a Tractor" (it is in Now Is Time) just wouldn't take shape and Birney wrote to Crawley: "I won't object to any cutting you want to do in making use of that piece--I should in fact be grateful if someone would do a good pruning job on it for me!" (AC, 15 Oct. 1945). The poem was awkward, mainly because of jarring

shifts from colloquial to more formal language, and Crawley concentrated on diction and transitions. Birney wrote back after seeing the changes:

I was trying to slide back into his language...for variety and directness. Perhaps this time it rings awkwardly. I don't think I changed it in the proof, but if you feel it better the other way, i.e. indirect speech, go ahead.  
(AC, nd)

As Alan Crawley rounded out his first year of editing Contemporary Verse, the literary climate of Canada was changing. Preview, the coterie magazine from Montreal, had begun in March and its rival First Statement would appear in the late fall. Preview may have been one of the reasons why there was not more poetry coming across Crawley's desk in the spring and summer of 1942. The magazine appeared monthly and devoted roughly half of its space to poetry (it worked out to about six poems per issue in the first year). Certainly Preview had snared P. K. Page who disappeared almost entirely from Contemporary Verse during the period of Preview. The Montreal magazine could not have been more unlike Contemporary Verse. It was partisan, militant, esoteric, and self conscious. "This is no magazine," the much quoted "Statement" in Preview 1 reads, "it presents five Montreal writers who recently formed themselves into a group for the purposes of mutual discussion and criticism and who hope, through these selections to try out their work before a somewhat larger public." The Preview writers proposed to write from a common political stance:

All anti-fascists, we feel that the existence of a war between democratic culture and the paralysing forces of dictatorship only intensifies the writer's obligation to work. Now, more than ever, creative and experimental writing must be kept alive and there must be no retreat from the intellectual frontier.

They advocated a particular literary approach: "the poets amongst us look forward, perhaps optimistically, to a possible fusion between the lyric and didactic elements in modern verse, a combination of vivid, arresting imagery, and the capacity to 'sing' with social content and criticism."<sup>17</sup> The poetry in Preview has a strong left-wing political flavour; and it is apparant that Auden, Spender, and Dylan Thomas have arrived in Canada. Patrick Anderson's "New Dead" is patterned after Spender:

I think of those who falling between my words,  
burn out unnoticed like a summer's bee;<sup>18</sup>

His "Summer's Joe" owes a debt to Dylan Thomas:

Then sudden in the scope of sea  
with the delight of found  
he saw his treasure island,  
he saw his milk white fathom.<sup>19</sup>

Bruce Ruddick favours Auden in "Brother, You of the City:"

O you in line buying  
Your bargains and liquor  
Your balcony tickets  
To watch men play dying,<sup>20</sup>

Obviously in reply to Preview's political, coterie stance, Crawley hurried to clarify the policy of Contemporary Verse in the June 1942 issue. "A glance at the notes on contributors at the back of this number shows that CONTEMPORARY VERSE is not the chapbook of a limited or local group of writers," Crawley wrote; and he pointed out very definitely that "The contents of each number will at once dispel any charge that it exists to press political propaganda, particular social readjustment or literary trend" (4, 3). "Chapbook of a limited or local group of writers," "press political propaganda;" these are, for Crawley, argumentative and militant statements. Crawley

believed that the work of a poetry magazine was to publish poetry, and he had no particular literary approach to eschew and no axes to grind. He wanted to encourage and publish poetry that was alive and fresh and relevant; poetry that was sensitive and honest and of the best possible quality. He hoisted his own liberal banner:

The aims of CONTEMPORARY VERSE are simple and direct and seem worthy and worthwhile. These aims are to entice and stimulate the writing and reading of poetry, and to provide means for its publication free from restraint of politics, prejudices and placations, and to keep open its pages to poetry that is sincere in theme and treatment and technique.  
(4,3)

The first four numbers of Contemporary Verse reflect Crawley's eclectic editorial policy. There are fifty-five poems as various in treatment as in theme, from established and unknown poets, from across Canada and parts of the United States. Crawley was not yet satisfied with the standard of poetry that he published, but he was confident that he had chosen the best available and he hoped the quality would improve now that poets had a place to try out their work. He and the founding committee decided to continue Contemporary Verse for another year:

More than three hundred and fifty manuscripts have been read and in many of these there is an richness of thought, diction and imagination that strengthens my conviction that a considerable national contribution to creative art in Canada may be made in the continuance of publication of a quarterly of CONTEMPORARY VERSE.  
(4,4)

Hardly had Alan Crawley made his decision to continue Contemporary Verse when a third little magazine appeared in Canada. First Statement began with self conscious and coy talk of "gestures" and "displays of activity" and "ceremonies of bread breaking." The editor, John Sutherland, announced:

We are going on a diet of cheap, mimeographed paper, a kind of literary bread and water. We intend asking no charge for the magazine, to prevent the petty hope of making a profit. We are going to rid ourselves of practical encumbrances, to have freedom in which to move.<sup>21</sup>

The magazine was produced by John Sutherland, Betty Sutherland, Robert Simpson, Keith MacLellan, and Audrey Aikman; and was, ambitiously, to appear every two weeks. By the third issue Sutherland had become much more practical. He announced that there would be a fee charged for the magazine (one dollar per year), that contributions would be paid for at a rate of half a cent a word, and he defined the policy of the magazine. "We believe that the business of a Canadian magazine, in a country where the literature receives a minimum of publicity, is to serve Canadian writers only, and to direct its attention primarily to the Canadian public." First Statement will, therefore, try to print "the various modes and types of writing as they are found in Canada;" and Sutherland hoped the magazine would "become the mirror of this variety" and in so doing "provide the Canadian reader with the freedom of choice that he requires."<sup>22</sup>

First Statement did print a variety of writing--but the writing came almost exclusively from eastern writers and because of this geographical bias the picture mirrored by the magazine is distorted, or at least limited. Not too much poetry was published in the first few months of First Statement (about three poems per issue) and it is unimposing. Preview writers Patrick Anderson and P. K. Page were frequent contributors and prevent the poetry section of the magazine from being completely mediocre; and Audrey Aikman and Kay Smith have several poems published too. After combining with Western Free Lance--a Vancouver magazine that had published its first, and only, issue in

September 1942--Sutherland thought that First Statement would be a truly representative national magazine but there is no apparent change in its strong eastern bias. Earle Birney, for example, never appeared in First Statement (or in Preview), and neither did Dorothy Livesay.

Livesay has commented on the eastern bias of First Statement:

In Canada we've been rifled by cliques, and we still are you know. Every city has its circle and its fans and its...self-adulation going on, but Alan was completely free of this. And he did get people from all parts of the country writing...I mean the Montreal group around First Statement was a fascinating group, but it was a clique. For instance, I never got into any Montreal magazine, but anyone from there could and did write for Contemporary Verse and get published; so I would say it was due to his impartiality and universality.<sup>23</sup>

Alan Crawley was both pleased and worried about this proliferation of little magazines. They were evidence of interest and activity in poetry writing, but there was so little good poetry being written in the fall and winter of 1942. He wrote to Birney:

I am greatly encouraged at the very evident interest in Canada in what is being done in the arts...the two latest Preview and First Statement are so well worth while and seem to have a character of their own and a vigour that is growing in spite of what they have to contend with. Whether there is room and support for them and for CV remains to be seen.

(UT, nd)

"We suffer from some handicaps that they appear to have not met with yet," Crawley enlarged, "The isolation of this western coast is hard to overcome, there are too few young people here who are willing to lend a hand and I am so disabled that what I can do seems sometimes so pitifully little to what I would do and wish to accomplish" (UT, nd). The 'isolation' of the west coast was a problem, everything had to be done by mail. Even if Crawley had lived in Vancouver (Caulfield seemed

quite distant from Vancouver in the early forties) it would have been easier for him to get to poets--to talk to them, to suggest changes in poems, clarify obscure lines, encourage more writing, relay news and comments from other poets; in sum to create that climate that stimulates writing.

Added to the limited amount of good poetry available for publication and Crawley's isolation, was the additional problem of the prevailing antipathy to modern poetry in Canada. As modern poetry became naturalized and relevant to Canada support grew, but readers were justified in their impatience with the awkward imitations of British and American poetry that dominated 'modern' Canadian poetry in the early forties. And not only was early forties poetry derivative, it was also pessimistic. Lionel Stevenson, a traditionalist but not unsympathetic to new approaches in poetry, was discouraged by the first few issues of Contemporary Verse. He had supported this new poetry magazine but he is visibly upset in his letter to Floris McLaren at the "mood of whining and self-pity and frustration which has dominated the 'modern poetry' of the present generation" and which he has found too much in evidence in the magazine: "I can therefore not summon up much enthusiasm for a selection that continues to harp so monotonously on this single string," he wrote. Stevenson found the poetry in Contemporary Verse 1 derivative and depressing. "The techniques of the new school, with its mutings and discords and 'dead string' noises, are effectively employed by your contributors, and form a further barrier between their poetry and the service of ordinary people" (FMcL, 29 Nov. 1941). Looking back on his reaction to Contemporary Verse 1 in a recent letter Stevenson enlarged on why he



felt so disappointed:

I hoped that a new venture in Canadian poetry, such as this one, would show a fresh and native talent that was not dominated by alien models as earlier Canadian poets had been in their day. Instead, I found the fashionable tones and moods of Eliot-Auden, which I was beginning to find tedious in English and American periodicals.

(JMcC, 3 Aug. 1970)

But, he added, "As the subsequent issues came out, I soon changed my opinion as to the magazine's merits, and with the advantage of hindsight I realize that the first number marked the debut of a periodical that was of outstanding significance in modern Canadian poetry."

Stevenson's criticism that the poetry of this early modern period was derivative is justified--most of it was.

Resistance to the kind of poetry being written by the majority of modern Canadian poets in the early years of the forties did not come only from traditionalists. W. W. E. Ross, perhaps the most accomplished though least known of the modern poets of the period, read Contemporary Verse for a year, then wrote to Floris McLaren to cancel his subscription:

To speak frankly, I have seen very little of interest in the magazine since Earle Birney's 'Hands' and a few other pieces in the first two or three issues. It may seem all right to keep on republishing Auden, but why try to repeat Eliot as well? Isn't the time for that passing? Anyway, this perpetual whining about the terrible state of things has lost its freshness. One might say it did so some time since. Satire, with some bite to it, and specific objects of attack, might be of more interest--as positive, rather than negative,--than these fragments from the slightly crumbling Eliot-Auden wailing-wall.

(FMcL, 7 June 1943)

Probably Ross's own progress toward an individualistic, natural, native idiom and approach made him even less tolerant of the general derivativeness of Canadian poetry at this time.

But there were pluses on the ledger too for Alan Crawley and for

modern poetry in the fall of 1942 when Contemporary Verse celebrated its first precarious year of publication. The magazine was known now and was rapidly establishing itself as a quality, eclectic magazine; and Preview and First Statement were stirring up interest in the east. With three publication outlets available modern poets were assured of being heard--if they had anything to say. Klein's Hath Not a Jew, Birney's David and Other Poems, and Gustafson's Anthology of Canadian Poetry were available and were being read. Canadian poetry was finally swinging around to modernism. In the next few years modern poetry lost its blatant derivativeness, overcame much of its gaucherie and rawness, and most important found a native, natural, effective idiom. Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse played a significant part in this naturalizing process, and the changes in Canadian poetry are graphically shown in the magazine.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Northern Review, 4, No. 2 (December-January 1950-51), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, pp. 118-19.

<sup>2</sup>Sutherland, Northern Review, pp. 116-17.

<sup>3</sup>Citations of material quoted from Contemporary Verse will be included in the body of the text in parenthesis immediately following the quotation. Information given will be: first the issue number, second the page number. For example, a quotation from the first issue, second page would be cited (1,2).

<sup>4</sup>"Canadian Poetry 1942", Preview, No. 8 (October 1942), p. 8. P. K. Page was troubled about the review and wrote to Crawley: "You were generous about my article. I no sooner saw it in print that I wanted to disown it--send out letters to everyone saying 'there has been a mistake.' Actually I still agree on the whole with what I said but it was so condensed that it seemed distorted. And the fact that I was a Previewer and a would-be poet seemed to make it worse--as if I were setting myself above everyone else, which I was not doing" (AC, nd).

<sup>5</sup>"Contemporary Verse," Tamarack Review, No. 3 (Spring 1957), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>McLaren, Tamarack Review, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup>University of Toronto Quarterly, 11, No. 3 (April 1942), p. 294.

<sup>8</sup>McLaren, Tamarack Review, pp. 56-57.

<sup>9</sup>McLaren, Tamarack Review, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup>McLaren, Tamarack Review, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup>George Robertson, ed., "Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse," Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer 1969), pp. 88-89.

<sup>12</sup>21 (December 1941), p. 283.

<sup>13</sup>6, No. 1 (December 1941), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>22 (April 1942), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup>"Editorial," No. 16 (September 1969), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Robertson, ed., "Alan Crawley", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer 1969), p. 87.

- <sup>17</sup>No. 1 (March 1942), p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup>Preview, No. 1 (March 1942), p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup>Preview, No. 2 (April 1942), p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup>Preview, No. 1 (March 1942), p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup>First Statement, No. 1, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup>First Statement, No. 3, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup>Robertson, ed., "Alan Crawley" Canadian Literature, No. 41  
(Summer 1969), p. 92.

## CHAPTER III

MODERNISM NATURALIZED: CONTEMPORARY VERSE 1941-1946

The forties movement in Canada had two phases. The first, which John Sutherland anthologized in Other Canadians 1940-1946, naturalized modernism to Canada; the second, amorphous, less pragmatic, saw poets individually exploring their own worlds as the centrifical force of the war and the need to create an indigenous literature passed.

Contemporary Verse reflects these phases. Numbers one to twenty show a marked concern about the war and about the situation of poetry in Canada. Each new volume of poetry is greeted with the enthusiasm pioneers give new arrivals but also with wariness: 'Is it really the stuff of modern poetry?' The poetry gained enormously in poise, flexibility and assurance. Numbers twenty to thirty-nine have greater variety--both in theme and technique--better quality verse, and the victory of new finds. But there is uneasiness too, a 'Where do we go from here?' tone; and heaviness in some poets as they tried to shake off public utterances for more private speech, and obscurity in others.

In matters of technique--rhythm, imagery, verse forms--forties poetry is markedly varied; but a generally lyric approach, an overriding social concern and the focus of the war give it a distinct and recognizable flavour. In the 1948 edition of the Book of Canadian Poetry A. J. M. Smith wrote:

The poetry of the forties grows out of a sense of being involved in the whole complex life of our time--its politics, its society, its economics--and of being involved in it in a deeply personal way that touches the sensibilities, the mind, and the physical being of the poet. This is perhaps the common attitude which unites all the very different individual poets into a single recognizable school.<sup>1</sup>

The great accomplishment of poetry in the first half of the forties was naturalizing modernism to Canada. At the beginning of the decade of the forties, modern poetry in Canada was predominately derivative; by the end of the War, Canadian poets had worked through to a natural, idiomatic, relevant poetry. This development is clearly reflected in Contemporary Verse poetry. It is a measure of Alan Crawley's eclecticism that Contemporary Verse captures all of the moods and trends of Canadian poetry in this period; however, only the major poets and the general movement of poetry will be discussed.

Alan Crawley's efforts to prevent Contemporary Verse from being a "chapbook of a limited or local group of writers" (4,3), were successful--every modern poet in Canada had work published in Contemporary Verse with the exception of W. W. E. Ross and Patrick Anderson. Still, major figures emerged. In the 1941-1946 period Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, Miriam Waddington, P. K. Page, Floris McLaren, and James Wreford contributed the largest number of poems; supported by substantial contributions from L. A. Mackay, Anne Marriott, Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, and Kay Smith. Their approach to their themes of war, alienation, mechanization, and lost certainties--the inevitable human reactions to social and cultural change--is realistic, lyric, and didactic. The overall tone of the poetry is pessimistic; but it is a comfortable, intellectualized pessimism with

most of the poets (not with Birney). Problems are seen as 'out there' in society, caused by the War and by inequitable, inefficient political and economic systems. Contemporary Verse writers did not hold out any easy answers to the problems of social dislocation--no salvation comparable to Preview's left-wing political solutions--but there is implicit in many poems the feeling that 'things will be better' when the War is over.

Earle Birney is not so sure. Birney's war poems are the best of this genre to appear in Contemporary Verse (and in Canada). Poems such as "Hands," "War Winter," "Nocturne," "Letter Home," "Within These Concerned Days" and "Time Bomb" have authenticity, immediacy and universality. Birney never adopts a patriotic stance; he writes as a humanitarian anguished at the suffering man was inflicting upon man, even more anguished at the knowledge that something in man himself had caused this incredible holocaust: "Within the statesman's ribs, / Within my own, the time-bombstick" (15,7). Man's destructiveness alienates him from the rest of nature which is creative:

Too poignant  
Even in the dead days of peace was this benison,  
The leaves' illogical loveliness. Now am I frustrate,  
Alien. Here is the battle steeped in silence.  
The fallen have use and fragrantly nourish the quick.  
My species would wither, away from the radio's barkings,  
The headline beating its chimpanzee breast, the nimble  
Young digits at levers and triggers.

(1,3)

In "Letter Home" the harmony and vitality of natural things--blue skies with "pasturing clouds," buttercups "babied up the breeze"--are in sharp contrast to the destructive cacophony of the war which forces the poet

to beat with blasted beaches in the D-day tempo,  
 to throb maestoso with the mightiest oratorio  
 in all the long wrong music of man's mind.

(12,3)

Raymond Souster lacked Birney's ability to universalize the experience of his poems; and resultingly, they bog down in sentimentality and contrived effects. In "Home Front" he describes one man's evening out--movies, dancing, loving--

While you were lying burnt crisp as a cinder,  
 Or your chest ripped, waiting for the bugs.

(3,13)

Floris McLaren's poems are troubled by sentimentality too. Both "Dark Departure" and "These are the Boys" have soap-opera overtones in spite of the obvious sincerity of the poet. The appeal to the emotions is too facile for the bereaved mother, "the tired-faced fumbling woman"

Packing her life away in the moth-proof cedar  
 With the catcher's mitt and the microscope and the test-tubes.

(11,4)

When McLaren presents the effects of war in metaphorical terms, as she does in the powerful "No More the Slow Stream" (quoted in Chapter II), the result is honest and moving. But even an experienced poet can lose the ability to synthesize art out of experience if he becomes too personally involved with his material. A. M. Klein's poem on the horrible theme of the extermination of the Jews, "Not all the Perfumes of Arabia," is so personal and so raw that the reader turns aside in pity not for the Jews, but for the poet. James McDermott's ironic understatement in "As Regards Detonating," carries more impact as an outraged protest at the wholesale, impersonal killing that characterized World War II:



Bombs, it seems, do lack discrimination  
 Regarding sex or guilt or nationality,  
 And shrapnel plans no destination  
 Except expansion; quite possibly  
 Scotching small and undeveloped limbs  
 (9,11)

There is a pervading sense of the war in Dorothy Livesay's poems, though few of them overtly discuss the war. The child is hemmed in on all sides by the fear and tensions associated with war (and urbanization) in "The Child Looks Out:"

his room laid waste when radios  
 Are tuned, and rumour's blatant voice hits nerve,  
 Dries tissue, brittles down  
 The new un moulded bone.  
 (1,10)

Livesay describes the peace of the morning in terms of the absence of War in "Early I lifted the Oars of Day:"

Early morning is heart alone  
 No man shouting, no one  
 No planes soaring, death destroying  
 No shattered street a ruin.  
 (5,7)

Like Birney, Livesay sees the order of nature as normal and advises man to reestablish communication with the natural world. Livesay's poem "West Coast" (written for Earle Birney) is in the journalistic style of her thirties poems "Day and Night" and "The Outrider," but it is not successful. With its uncritical acceptance of the war and exhortative tone, it slides into propaganda:

The hum, the drive of it!  
 The roar, the strive of it!  
 Each single soul to his own labor bent  
 Yet welded to his neighbour, for the toil  
 Fits all together in an endless chart.  
 (9,5)

The two basic ironies of the poem--the war playing the role of saviour to the desperate Canadian economy and people of many nationalities

working gratefully together building ships destined to help destroy their native countries--go unnoticed (or are avoided) by the poet.

The rapid urbanization and industrialization of Canada during the war years radically altered the pattern of life. Life became depersonalized, mechanized, and materialistic. Canadians lost touch with the land, with nature, with their pioneer roots and withdrew into little islands of fear and isolation, unthinking, unfeeling, and inhumane. Anne Marriott attempts to capture the boredom and meaninglessness of this kind of life in "Rest Room", where there is no rest for the "taut clock-watcher:"

Seeking the clock-face, seeking the stairs, elevator,  
Scrambling back to the clock-face, staring  
To see only a minute has passed while you strained an hour.  
(4,10)

The people who gather on Nathan Ralph's "Six O'Clock Car" and "fold a journal about a bearded face," are not seen as real people but as impersonal, impermanent colours:

And colors on the car  
of green and mauve, black and brown  
leave off quietly...empty...  
the car goes on.

(4,13)

In a mechanized society, people who do not measure up in terms of productivity are punished--even if they are ignorant, poor, or ill.

In "Sorrow," Miriam Waddington exposes the government's callous treatment of such people. "Sorrow is not a kind sister Trailing dispensation in her wide sleeves", it is "the strict almshouse, where comfort is doled by government regulation; and "Only the pious adepts, practiced at talking poormouth / Are granted the foursquare peace" (5,12). People who are 'different' are punished too; Jews, in "the Bond", and immigrants

in "Immigrant, Second Generation." The "oiled words" of "this low anglo-saxon conference" alienate even the immigrant's Canadian children:

Child of a lonely traveller in a strange country  
I live towards my doom  
Closed in a small tight room.

(3,12)

P. K. Page is more psychological in her approach to the isolation of the individual. Her people often are 'permanent tourists' in life, onlookers not participators; locked within themselves and behind masks. The journey motif is used in two of Page's war period poems in Contemporary Verse, "The Traveller" in the December 1942 issue, and "Round Trip" in April 1945. Cullen, in "The Traveller," never finds a meaningful relationship with another person, nor a meaning to life:

he volunteered at once and went to war  
wondering what on earth he was fighting for.  
He knew there was a reason but couldn't find it  
and walked to battle half an inch behind it.

(6,9)

The tone of "Round Trip" is more introspective and malignant. The white, neat, flat, incredibly well prepared traveller boards the train, leaving behind:

the tightly frozen rivers of his blood  
the plateaux of his boredom  
and the bare  
buttonholes that his pallid eyes had cut.

(13,3)

But his fantastic journey is circular. He ends back at the start where "everything's the same; Forever, everywhere for him, the same" (13,7).

The swift movement away from the merely derivative, from gaucherie and self-consciousness in these early forties poems to assurance and flexibility in handling the poetic medium, to greater objectivity, and

to a natural idiomatic voice is an impressive accomplishment. In the twenties and thirties a handful of Canadian poets had evolved a modern sensibility; in the early forties a natural, indigenous modernism became the norm in Canada. Specifically, Canadian poets became more realistic in their attitude to life and firmly rooted in the here and now (although they remained basically romantic); and their poetry, correspondingly, became less subjective and more concrete. Poets dropped 'poetic' diction, and superficial 'modern' techniques, and borrowed attitudes and tones. They used the language and rhythms of everyday speech in their poems--but everyday speech intensified and compressed--and they created experiences in their poems that the reader could respond to directly instead of just telling the reader about something. Dorothy Livesay's early forties poetry demonstrates this shift in sensibility.

Livesay's handling of her material is surer, more fluid and natural in Contemporary Verse 5 than in her three poem sequence in the second number of the magazine. The earlier poems (probably written in the late thirties) are not satisfying wholes; the reader is told about the experience, and there is frequently a forced striving for effect as these lines from "When the House Snaps Out Its Lights" show:

From the parched day a fugitive  
 I bow, drink deep the well of silence formed  
 Banish the blaze where doubt and indecision  
 Hold and halt; reach out for flowing waves  
 Of wall; open a shadow door--- and lo!

I leap, I run, swiftly to meet myself.  
 (2,8)

Diction, phrasing, and imagery are hackneyed. It is hard to really believe

in the fugitive's desperate withdrawal; it seems a pose--and imposed from the outside through the awkward rush and stop movement of the lines, and the overemphatic punctuation, especially "--- and lo!" In the later poems, Livesay fuses soft sensuous sounds and lulling rhythms and integrates fresh evocative imagery into the matrix of the poem:

Night's soft armor welds me into thought  
 Pliant and all engaging: warm dark,  
 No scintillations to distract  
 Nor any restless ray, moon-shot.  
 I am still of all but breathing ---  
 No throbbing eye, no pulse; and a hushed heart.  
 (5,7)

The language is still a little lush, lacking the toughness, precision and energy of such later lyrics as "Page One" (20,3) and "Bartok and the Geranium" (39,3). But it is more casual and natural, and rhythmically closer to everyday speech than the language of "When the House Snaps Out Its Lights." The earlier poems are didactic and strident and see the disorder in society as something external to the individual--arising out of an inequitable economic or political system, not out of anything within man. Implicit in these poems then, is the message that the world can be improved by finding a better system; or there is the adolescent alternative of escape into an inner world of unreality (which is what the poet does in the poem "When the House Snaps Out Its Lights"). In the later sequence, the poet has matured away from simplistic solutions and from adolescent escape. She is squarely in and of the world and knows that it is people, not systems that must change. She looks to nature for comfort and (perhaps) salvation:

Be earthward bound; and here  
 In the strata of flown flowers  
 And skeleton of leaf, set self down  
 Hurry ear to ground.

(5,8)

But the poems are not optimistic, Livesay fears "We are late sleepers, drugged in dark / Aliens all, to morning" (5,7).

In his review of Day and Night in the April 1944 issue of Contemporary Verse, L. A. MacKay divides Livesay's work into two phases--the late formative and the early mature--with the war being the turning point. In the late formative period, MacKay finds in Livesay's work "a contortion of phrase which seems to be the result of an intellectual struggle to express completely something that is not completely and directly apprehended." Her mature work is "poetry of one understood and mentally assimilated world, rather than two disconnected worlds, one rejected and one hoped for" (10,15). MacKay's division can be explored further. Livesay's early "contortion of phrase" may have its roots in her "struggle to express completely something that is not completely and directly apprehended;" but more likely it results from her struggle to objectify her experience into a poem that can be directly apprehended by the reader--a skill which she and many of her contemporaries had not mastered before the war.

Younger poets who began writing poetry during the early forties were not troubled by the nineteenth-century-modern conflict as the twenties and thirties poets were; they were troubled by the lack of an indigenous modern literature to grow upon. The role models available to them were American or British and their early poetry is, resultingly, not only derivative (which is to be expected) but derivative in an un-Canadian way. P. K. Page's early poetry shows her working to assimilate foreign influences into a Canadian consciousness and voice, as the preceding Chapter showed. Page is typical of the many Canadian poets who had to learn to be Canadian in their poetry. Her

influences in "Ecce Homo" and in "The Crow" are apparent and embarrassingly naked, and her idiom is not Canadian. "Blackout" in the second Contemporary Verse is a little better. It is strongly influenced by Auden, but the vocabulary is less intellectual and a conversational tone is more nearly approximated. The attempt at a muted cadence, however, is lost to the exigencies of rhyme and meter:

Christmas was such as this  
 Once --- Christmas as dark.  
 Night blotted a stable  
 as night now blots a park.  
 (2,16)

A year later in December 1942 Page has moved away from imitation in her breezy, ironic, narrative poem "The Traveller" (6,7). The poem does not have the characteristic Page imprint yet and it is troubled by awkward phrasing and un-Canadian diction ("factory-made goods," "dreadful town," "lodgings"); but it is not patently derivative. By the end of the war Page has evolved a poetic voice that is uniquely, distinctively her own, and that arises naturally out of Canadian experiences; as her poem "Morning, Noon and Night" shows:

Dropped from some great height they flop at noon,  
 liquid and lazy with the heat, upon  
 the bright green grass beneath the trees, between  
 the grey of public stone;  
 and hardly know their wish  
 and hardly guess  
 themselves as more than surface indolence.  
 (19,3)

Dudek was at home with the Canadian idiom even in his earliest poems, but he had difficulty moulding the language into effective poetry without losing naturalness. In "Night Scene" in the March 1943 issue of Contemporary Verse, the tone and phrasing is too prosaic:

Somewhere I hear the notes of a piano  
 And into my head drift the words of a poem  
 Which a while ago I was reading.  
 (7,11)

"Morning," from the same issue strives too obviously after the opposite effect and lapses into affectation:

Sun-dance on a banister,  
Pea-shooter sun on roof,  
Pop-corns exploding at street corners  
Sun-sliding, sun, dazzle-proof ...  
(7,11)

Two years later Dudek wrote his energetic poem "Midsummer, Adirondacks," but it is Dylan Thomas--not Dudek:

There in the hills we kissed.  
In the streams, pebble-naked -  
your body bread-brown, then shining,  
shining with drops, bewildered with water -  
(7,11)

By 1947 when nine of his poems appeared in the winter issue of Contemporary Verse, Dudek's language is both natural and effective; for example, the everyday words and subtle rhythms of "A Rain Washes Us:"

Swift small umbrellas of rain splash on the pavement.  
break breezes of spray that  
fall backward against a wall  
in flares of water.  
(23,5)

Some Contemporary Verse poets never did succeed in working through to a modern idiom, and because of this remained transition poets even though they explored modern themes. Anne Marriot's tendency to load her language with poetic phrases, abstractions, and emotional tones is as evident in her last poem in the magazine-- "Squamish, May 1951:"

So split here, tears for mother sea, of her own essence  
thickening my eyes at pain of natal cord  
not wholly severed, drawing taut ---  
(36,20)

as it was in her first ten years earlier--"Prayer of the Disillusioned:"



Give us a cause...  
 Given it, let us follow,  
 Run, though the sand slide under foot, slip us back,  
 Hamper us.

(1,13)

While avoiding this kind of vague poetic speech, Floris McLaren still was never completely at home in the modern idiom. Her characteristic use of a slow and heavy line prevented her from capturing the colloquial nuances of contemporary speech, and she frequently used words and phrases that dated from an earlier time--"muscular limbs", "bureau," "wavering pocket-torch." When she avoided such obvious faults and honed her language down, her poetry was clear and moving; often capturing experiences with sensitivity and compassion as in "Figure in Shadow:"

It was good to lie in the Cove  
 Face down in the sun, the warm stones under our thighs.  
 Good to close our eyes  
 And smell the salt on the rocks  
 While the tide ran in with little splashing sounds  
 Over the shingle...

(14,9)

Earle Birney particularly liked this poem and commented on it to Alan Crawley: "I think 'Figure in Shadow' the best thing of hers I have read; she has matured greatly in the last few years; this poem made the issue worthwhile for me" (AC, 25 Nov. 1945).

In 1943, in the first edition of the Book of Canadian Poetry, A. J. M. Smith divided modern poetry into two categories--"Modern Native" and "Modern Cosmopolitan." Smith was right to divide the poetry, but his reasons (or at least his labels) were wrong. The division he made is actually between transition poetry and modern poetry (Ross, Livesay, and Birney are misclassified in this sense). The poets

listed under the "Native Tradition" have not yet acquired a modern sensibility--their work still shows the struggle between the romantic tradition and the attitudes and techniques of modernism--while those grouped under the "Cosmopolitan Tradition" have achieved a modern voice. What irritated John Sutherland was the derivativeness of this Cosmopolitan modernism. It was modern, yes; but it had been imported wholesale from England and the United States and it hadn't yet been naturalized. During the years of the War modernism went through this naturalizing process and a truly indigenous modern poetry evolved that was Canadian "in the only way that is worth anything, implicitly and inevitably" (these are Smith's words from the 1948 edition of the Book of Canadian Poetry).<sup>2</sup> This was the real accomplishment of the early forties poets; and in his continuing work of sifting through the manuscripts that came across his desk, criticizing and sending poems back for revision, selecting and publishing the largest body of poetry during the forties and reviewing most of the books of poetry published during the forties Alan Crawley was intimately a part of this accomplishment. Crawley's ideas about poetry and the standards he set for Contemporary Verse were significant shaping forces on early forties poetry.

Alan Crawley was not a theorizer about poetry. He responded intuitively and personally to a poem and he had the 'taste' to know if a poem was good or bad regardless of its terms of reference. Crawley liked a poem that said something and 'said' well. He liked good bones in a poem and meat enough to chew on. He responded to energy and rhythm, and sound. He was chary and parsimonious in adding to the small store of poems that met his exacting standards of excellence, and

he was quick and frank in his criticism of mediocrity and insincerity.

"Every book of poetry on my shelves must pay space rent in at least two poems to read again and again," Crawley wrote in a review of David and Other Poems (6,15).

Sound in poetry was (and still is) of crucial importance to Alan Crawley--understandable in view of his blindness. He approached poetry in a very auditory way, listening to each new poem several times over. Now he uses a tape recorder, but in the forties someone--usually his wife Jean--read him the poem several times over until he had it memorized, or typed it in braille for him to 'say' to himself until he had fully apprehended its sound and rhythmic pattern. With this as a basis he moved into a full appreciation of the poem; incorporating the thought, imagery, verse form into the sound pattern. His approach was first sensuous, then intellectual. A letter to Earle Birney in early February 1943, illustrates Crawley's concern with sound in a poem:

On the following Tuesday night I heard the Story Teller read your David and liked his reading of it...but inconsequent as it may seem, again as before when I had heard it read by Jean to me, the lines that struck and annoyed me are those..."on my ripped boots of his blood"...such a cavil but when I am so dependent on my ear for all the poetry I get a harsh unpleasant line does irritate.

(UT, nd)<sup>3</sup>

Reviewing Now is Time in 1946, Crawley again discussed the sound in Birney's poems. "There is a new power in Mr. Birney's writing. The late poems show this in the smoothness of line from which grit of hard unusual words have been cast out and in the strong noun unpropped by adjective" (17,18).

"Reading the poems obviously written within the last twenty years

I am struck by their vitality and strength," Crawley wrote referring to the poetry in Gustafson's Anthology of Canadian Poetry (5,16). Of Patrick Anderson's A Tent for April he commented that "The impression that has pleased and persisted most strongly with me is that of extreme vitality and energy, springing and fed from Mr. Anderson's feeling for movement, so skillfully and sensitively translated into words" (13,16). Energy, intensity, and vitality were essential components of a poem for Crawley, and all the better if coupled with vivid fresh imagery. He liked P. K. Page's imagery, and Dudek's, and Reaney's. "What is perhaps the most distinctive element" in Page's poetry in As Ten As Twenty (which Crawley judged to be "a remarkable first book") "is her wealth of imagery drawn from wide and varied sources, sharp and startling with the force of the personality they reveal" (19,18). Of Dudek Crawley wrote, "Over and over again we find this poet taking the raw materials of poetry and from them building a logical and often magical sequence of connected images, sensations, and suggestions in organized association and musical arrangement;" and of Reaney, "His poetry is sometimes derivative but it is never conventional and always is charged with his individual rather macabre imagination and is lovely in the unusual brilliant clusters of sounds and images" (23,21-22).

Forties poetry was primarily lyric and didactic and Alan Crawley liked this kind of poetry. He liked to feel the poet was writing out of his own intensely felt experiences and had something significant to say. A poem was not for moralizing or for grinding axes, but it was for communication. "No poetry can be written unless the writer has absorbed something from the world about him and from the effects

of this is able to say his reactions and feelings caused by this absorption and reflection in some different and lovely way" (FMCL, 1 Feb. 1937), Crawley wrote to Floris McLaren in 1937 advising her on the selection of poems for Frozen Fire. He reiterated this belief ten years later, singling out a quotation from the writings of A. C. Bradley that is "so good a caption for this magazine or to be a framed motto on its official wall that I shall repeat it:"

If a poem is to be anything like great it must, in one sense, be concerned with the present. Whatever its subject may be, it must express something living in the mind from which it comes and the minds to which it goes. Wherever its body is, its soul must be here and now.

(23,18)

Crawley (like many of his contemporaries) seemed immune to the strong didactic quality of the poetry of the first half of the forties that dates it (and spoils it) so immediately for the reader in the seventies. In 1942 Crawley reviewed David and Other Poems and noted:

Mr. Birney has no social problem to pose and no ethical code to expound. He is not absorbed in exploring wide and deep ideas. His writing is free of didacticism....

(6,14)

In 1945 he described Patrick Anderson's poems in A Tent for April:

The poems are unangered and unresentful, and glory be to heaven, they have no whine of persecution nor whimper of self-pity, and there is remarkable absence of propaganda, prediction and prescription for these or future times..

(13,16)

Later on, with the distancing of time and with new trends in poetry, Crawley became more sensitive to didacticism. In ten years "Earle Birney has changed his technique very little apart from progressive refining and developing, and a regrettable almost complete elimination of expression of passion or of deep emotion," Crawley commented,

reviewing Trial of a City and Other Verse. "The axe is still taken to grinding although it is now more cunningly concealed" (39, 24-25).

But 'lyric' and 'didactic' are classifications of the broadest and most general kind--they are attitudes really, more than classifications--and easily contain the variety and dissimilarity that make up Contemporary Verse (and early forties) poetry. There was no specific genre, theme, or technique that Alan Crawley specifically preferred and favoured in Contemporary Verse. There were, however, two kinds of poetry uncongenial to Crawley--imagist and narrative poetry--although examples of both genres can be found in the magazine. The absence of 'message' and of personal involvement in imagist poems could be the reason why Crawley did not particularly like them, although the strong visual component in imagist poems and their rhythmical plainness might also be factors. "I never cared for W. W. E. Ross's poems," Crawley remarked in a recent interview, "they did not say much to me." Crawley disagreed with "the Smith-Livesay-Kennedy tributes and estimations" of Raymond Knister's strongly imagistic work in his review of Knister's Collected Poems. "Take out of the section Men and Animals the dreary genealogical cataloguing of Rows of Stalls, and the unsuccessful Poisons, add to the poems left After Exile--and you have the poetry by which Raymond Knister may be remembered" (31,22).

"I do not, as you know like narrative verse, unless of very exceptional power and beauty," Crawley reminded Floris McLaren after he had advised her to drop "Gene's Bride" from her Frozen Fire collection (FMCL, 1 Feb. 1937). When Crawley admitted this bias to Earle Birney five years later--"The poem [David] is a fine bit and in

spite of my dislike of narrative poetry you have done a good thing in it and I am glad it has got so much praise from reviewers and readers" (UT, nd)--Birney rapped his editorial knuckles sharply:

Am amazed that you should admit to a 'dislike' of narrative poetry. If that is really so, you are ruled out from enjoying most of the great poetic literature--Homer, the Aeneid, Chaucer, Dante, most of Milton, Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and a good deal of Wordsworth. The form has admittedly been unfashionable of late, but what have we to do with fashions? Leave them to the IODE and CAA. The most promising poetry editor in Canada should be above prejudices which relate to a whole form. It is like a great horticulturist saying that he won't grow peaches because he doesn't like their fuzz, or that he is only interested in apples under 5 ounces...

(AC, 20 Feb. 1943)

In spite of these biases (little imagist or narrative poetry was being written), Alan Crawley was the most eclectic poetry editor in Canada during the forties. By the end of 1946 when Contemporary Verse was at its mid point, Crawley had published almost three hundred poems by seventy poets--the largest, most impressive, and most representative collection of early forties work in Canada. In the same period First Statement (and later Northern Review) published about one hundred and fifty poems, the work of some thirty five poets; and Preview substantially fewer, perhaps one hundred poems, almost exclusively the work of the Preview group.<sup>4</sup> Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, and Raymond Souster were the major contributors to First Statement after 1943; with Miriam Waddington, Kay Smith, Audrey Aikman, and some members of the Preview group also having work published in the magazine.

By far the bulk of Contemporary Verse pages is given over to poetry; but beginning with the fifth issue in September 1942, Crawley

included a little review section that discussed all of the important books of poetry that were published during the life of the magazine. Next to the annual "Letters in Canada" in the University of Toronto Quarterly, the Contemporary Verse reviews constitute the most comprehensive assessment of forties poetry to come out of the period. Crawley did most of the reviewing, Dorothy Livesay did some, and occasionally L. A. MacKay and Floris McLaren help out. Crawley's reviews are brief, impressionistic, and refreshingly free from literary and academic jargon. Lister Sinclair referred to them as "tiny critical notes...worth their weight in gold" on Critically Speaking in 1950. Crawley's aim in reviewing was to highlight the main characteristics and provide a general assessment of the poetry, and to entice the reader into his own exploration of the book. He was impatient with the close textual analysis pioneered by the 'new criticism' (John Sutherland loved it), and he did not use a book review as a springboard to express his own ideas and theories about poetry and poets. "I have seen NR and the review of Counterpoint, much of which I like and agree with," Crawley wrote to Anne Wilkinson, "but why all this bother and pretence of great foresight, insight, and the unimportant trimmings which are considered necessary for every book review?" (UT, 8 Nov. 1951). From the mid-forties on, Crawley was a regular reviewer on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation program Critically Speaking. In his broadcasts he combined his brief criticisms with a reading of a selection of the poet's work. Crawley did a program on A. M. Klein in 1947 and Klein wrote to thank him, saying "It was most gratifying for me to know that the poems which you were reading were being heard across Canada:"



I think too that you are to be congratulated upon the very impressive delivery which you gave to these verses, and I particularly was touched by the poems that you chose. Concluding your reading with "Jerusalem Next Year, Next Year Jerusalem" was to my mind a particularly effective gesture.

(AC, 16 May 1947)

Livesay's reviews are not impartial like Crawley's. She liked causes and she liked a fight. In the June 1943 issue of Contemporary Verse she lumps four chapbooks together--M. Eugenie Perry, Hearing a Far Call; Mary Elizabeth Colman, For This Freedom Too; Evelyn Eaton, Birds Before Dawn; and Anne Marriott, Salt Marsh--and dismissed them in one paragraph:

Ten years ago we spat at sentimental lyricism,  
bedecked with nature's more obvious outer garments;  
and we cried out for ideas, and a genuine interpretation  
of the Canadian people in poetry. The result, if judged  
by these four booklets, is disastrous.

(8,13)

These were exciting and productive but not easy years for Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse. The magazine had its ups and downs. There was seldom enough good poetry that met Crawley's rating standards to fill sixteen pages quarterly (occasionally in these years Contemporary Verse was eighteen or twenty pages). Crawley wrote to poets for manuscripts, reminded, encouraged, and cajoled; and then often had to send submissions back for revisions. Subscriptions and finances never reached a comfortable state; and wartime restrictions on paper and printing were a troublesome bother, causing frustrating and embarrassing delays in publication. "The quarterly has had more than its share of trouble this summer, running into snags in paper shortage and Government priorities and restrictions and so there has been a terrific delay in getting out the June issue," Crawley wrote to

A. J. M. Smith in October 1943. (UT, 22 Oct. 1943). Sometimes it seemed impossible to Crawley that even the combined efforts of himself, Floris McLaren, and the publishing committee could keep the magazine going. He worried about it to Earle Birney who wrote back:

I do hope Contemporary Verse can continue... It deserves to, more than any other publication of its kind in Canada right now. I'm afraid I don't like the Montreal people in general; they seem to be such little poseurs, full of bastard surrealism--nothing original except a few images--nothing they want to say--and, if they had anything to say, too damned highbrow to condescend to say it.

(AC, 20 Feb. 1943)

"Once again CONTEMPORARY VERSE is long overdue," Crawley wrote to the readers in the July 1944 issue. "The causes for delay are so common to most magazines that excuses would be tiresome and explanations are, I hope, unnecessary" (11,2). There was another long delay after this issue (the October number had to be committed) and Crawley apologized in January. "The staff hope to overcome publishing difficulties and return to the scheduled four issues in 1945" (12,2). Subscribers were frequently reminded to pay up for "every reader and every dollar is precious," and letters were sent out to drum up subscriptions similar to this one of April 1945:

CONTEMPORARY VERSE fills a particular niche in Canadian poetry. The editor is ready to continue with the work of selecting and preparing, the committee is willing to aid him in every way possible; but the urgent necessity is to have on hand the modest finances requisite for production.

(AC)

The eastern little magazines were not faring any better... Preview had dropped much of its esotericism by late 1943 and was inviting contributions both of manuscripts and money. "PREVIEW welcomes outside contributors" the October 1943 issue stated, and the following number

announced 'The Preview Fund.' "We need money. Not a great deal. But some. We need your nickles for our gold, upon your quarters and dollars our irridiscence depends." Quite a change from the third number of June 1942 which reminded its readers that "PREVIEW is a private 'Literary Letter', distributed to about a hundred subscribers or potential subscribers, and that it is in no sense a 'magazine' on sale to the general public."<sup>5</sup> Of course, First Statement had started the 'First Statement Fund' early in 1943 to expand and print the magazine; and had reduced the frequency of publication from every two weeks, to monthly, then bi-monthly. Crawley discussed the two magazines in the summer of 1945 with Earle Birney:

Preview went through a shaking up in the last few months with Patrick Anderson forsaking it to take over En Masse mainly political and Pat Page now in Victoria. I gather that Page did most of the stenographic work in the past and was one of the chief stays in management. There was a rumour that Preview was to combine with First Statement but with the last issue of the former shows a new lease of life with Klein and Neufville Shaw editing. First Statement is now coming out every two months and is doing some good work.  
(UT, 12 June 1945)

In the winter of 1945 Preview and First Statement merged into Northern Review with John Sutherland as editor. It was less of a merger, really, than a closing down of Preview and the end of a distinct phase in the development of Canadian poetry. The work of Preview was finished. It had been a place where a small group of writers tried out new work of a particular style and political orientation. With the end of the war, other publishing outlets, new poetic interests and the dispersal of the group; the need for the special coterie support of Preview disappeared. A. M. Klein kept the magazine going for a time but was likely grateful for a graceful exit into

Northern Review. The new name for the magazine saved face for the Preview poets who otherwise might have felt a little diffident at joining the First Statement 'enemy camp.' With the withdrawal of the Preview writers after Sutherland's highly critical review of Robert Finch's Poems (in the sixth number) Northern Review seemed, more than ever, First Statement newly named. Raymond Souster has suggested that the animosity between Preview and First Statement was the basis of the creativity of this period:

While the two magazines still continued, (in the late 1944) hostilities were over. And soon it was open to question just how much of an integral part of this literary movement had nourished itself on what was essentially a meaningless feud, because the last issue of 'Preview' appeared not long after, and I could almost read then the first signs of disintegration.<sup>6</sup>

Sutherland's opening editorial in Northern Review seems a little tired, an echo from those exciting early forties years more than a statement for the present: "We shall try to fulfill the classic function of the 'little magazine'--to afford a means of expression for the serious writer who, without a reputation and without the advantages of commercial publicity, is nevertheless determined to make no concessions to the slick, the theatrical, and the popular."<sup>7</sup>

Northern Review appeared irregularly, was well printed, broadly oriented to the arts, and carried some interesting critical discussion (especially those of Sutherland).<sup>8</sup> The poetry was of mixed quality and disappointingly small in volume--about twenty pages of poetry per year. Alan Crawley wrote to Earle Birney that he was disappointed in the first issue of the magazine. "The good features of First Statement and Preview are not too apparent and nothing in it was startling or

very remarkable" (UT, Spr. 1946). For a time it seemed as if a new Toronto magazine Reading might act as a competitive impetus for Northern Review (John Sutherland was always at his best when there were opposing forces), but Reading ceased publication in 1946 after a few issues. Raymond Souster closed down Direction too in 1946 after ten sporadic issues. Souster's magazine had been more of a wartime newsletter than a little magazine and had run from November 1943 to February 1946. It did seem in this immediate post-War period that the little magazine movement was losing impetus.

With the October 1946 number, Contemporary Verse completed "five years of hazardous progress" (19,16). It had outlived and (in the matter of attracting and publishing good poetry) outperformed both of the eastern little magazines Preview and First Statement, in spite of the 'isolation' of the west and Crawley's 'handicap.' But five years of 'hazardous progress' maintaining the high standard that was the trademark of Contemporary Verse takes a toll; and in 1946 Crawley considered merging with Canadian Poetry Magazine when Earle Birney took over as editor in the fall. There would be advantages. With the financial backing of the Canadian Author's Association, Contemporary Verse could be expanded and printed (Crawley's one great regret regarding Contemporary Verse was that he never managed to get the magazine printed--in this he envied First Statement and Northern Review). Crawley would be relieved of some of the editorial responsibilities and he and Birney were compatible and would likely make a good team. On the other hand, Contemporary Verse was well established as a quality modern poetry magazine and Crawley as an astute and honest critic. The traditionalism and mediocrity of the Canadian Author's

Association might destroy this hard won reputation and with it the usefulness of the magazine. Crawley tried the idea of a merger out on a number of Contemporary Verse poets and P. K. Page's adamant letter is typical of their responses. Page firmly supported Birney: "If Birney does take this on I will back him because I feel if the C.A.A. has enough wits to appoint him editor they deserve whatsoever help we can give;" but felt Birney should take over Canadian Poetry Magazine on his own and not jeopardize Contemporary Verse. "Also," Page concluded, "I personally like to feel CV is there--small and compact, reflecting you" (AC, nd). F. R. Scott agreed:

How are you making out with Birney and his schemes?  
 No idea of dropping CV I trust. You have your own  
 supporters and your own place among the poetry  
 magazines and it would be a pity to cease publishing  
 now."

(AC, 16 Feb. 1947)

Crawley decided against the merger and Earle Birney took over Canadian Poetry Magazine on his own. Now with the Montreal coterie magazines defunct and three liberal magazines active (and spread across Canada in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal), eclecticism was the dominant mood in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Earle Birney commanding the Canadian Authors' Association garrison was an astonishing happening for modern poetry in Canada. Just as astonishing was Alan Crawley's cross-Canada poetry 'saying' tour in the late fall of 1946. It was an enormous boost for Crawley and for modern poetry. In ten weeks Crawley spoke to more than fifty large and enthusiastic audiences from Vancouver to Montreal. Not since Bliss Carman's triumphal reading tours of the 1920's had Canadian audiences had a chance to hear live presentations of contemporary poetry.

Crawley had an excellent voice for saying poetry--clear and capable of a great range of nuances and moods--and an excellent repertoire of contemporary work alive and ready in his memory. The pace of the tour was hectic. Crawley wrote to Birney that he had "demanded a day and a night for ourselves" in each of Ottawa and Montreal following "the three weeks of one night stands, five days a week in 'Ontario' (UT, nd). He used basically the same format for these 'sayings' that he had worked out the preceding spring for a series of poetry talks for local and university audiences in Vancouver. He challenged his hearers with the statement: "I have to understand the poems to say them and if they make sense to me they will to you" (19,19); then proceeded with his sayings interspersed with down-to-earth comment on the poems and sometimes a bit of biographical information about the poet if it seemed relevant to the poem. He described an early talk to Earle Birney:

Started to talk at eight twenty and said the last telling words at ten to ten so they had a belly full. It really went well and I was for a wonder a bit pleased...there was great attention and I felt the audience of some eighty or so was thoroughly interested and taking it all in. Dorothy [Livesay] and Pat Page said it went well and even my critical Jean was pleased. (UT, nd)

Birney was excited and positive about Crawley's talks. "The big and positive audiences you got, in spite of hellish weather, proves that people will listen to poetry if only the poets will write in a way that can be listened to and will get out on a stage or in front of a mike and yell a little, and give support to people like yourself, who read it in public as it should be read" (AC, 4 April 1946). It is impossible to assess the impact Crawley's saying tour had on

the general public--Crawley had jokingly written to Birney "Tell me if there is any jump in your sales, or god help me, any falling off" (UT, nd)--but it was a great help to Crawley and Contemporary Verse. The tour gave Crawley a chance to meet and talk to most of the poets and people connected with writing and publishing across Canada. Crawley knew many of these people through their letters, but it was not the same as meeting and talking to them face-to-face. He came back to Vancouver stimulated by the exchange of news and ideas, even more enthusiastic about poetry, and bolstered by the promise of manuscripts from a number of poets. He approached the editing of Contemporary Verse with renewed vigour in 1947.

Stimulated by the vitality of this period and still chafing at A. J. M. Smith's classification of modern Canadian poetry into the "native" or the "cosmopolitan" stream in the Book of Canadian Poetry, John Sutherland prepared his own anthology--Other Canadians: An Anthology of the New Poetry in Canada 1940-1946--with its argumentative, irritating, perspicacious introduction, and unimaginative selection of poems. A. M. Klein was indignant at Sutherland's anthology and complained about it to Crawley:

I do not think much of Sutherland's book. That the volume contains some good poems is, of course, not his fault. They were written by others. But the literary standards, the lack of logic and the sheer malice which characterizes the introduction, makes one rage where it does not make one laugh.

(AC, 5 Sept. 1947)

Crawley was more tolerant of Other Canadians in his review of it in the Summer 1947 issue of Contemporary Verse. He recognized the inadequacies of the selection of verse (including the fact that all eighteen poets represented lived east of Manitoba), but felt the



Introduction was important and stated why:

These important things are: his clever analysis of 'national' and 'colonial' influences on Canadian poetry; his estimation of the condition of our poetry, past, present, and future; the timely and deserved appraisal of the poetry of Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster and the repeated evidence of Mr. Sutherland's sensitive feeling and enthusiasm for contemporary poetry.

(21,18)

Sutherland was grateful for Crawley's reasoned assessment and wrote

"I liked the review of Other Canadians, which seemed to me very fair as well as penetrating. It was by all odds the most intelligent comment of any reviewer on the quality of the introduction" (AC, 4 April 1948). Sutherland had expected Other Canadians to be a corrective to the Book of Canadian Poetry and perhaps to the course of modern poetry in Canada; instead it was a postscript to a period. Canadian poetry was moving into a new phase.

# FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>2nd ed. (Toronto, 1948), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Birney wrote back that "the line you find harsh was more or less, intended to be so, i.e. the inversion, throwing the emphasis on 'blood', is deliberate. I wanted the words to cause a small shock, at the moment. I can see that the inversion may be too ugly, however" (AC, 20 Feb. 1943).

<sup>4</sup>Patrick Anderson, P. K. Page, F. R. Scott, Bruch Ruddick, Neufville Shaw, and later A. M. Klein.

<sup>5</sup>No. 16 (October 1943), p. 10; No. 17 (December 1943), p. 1; No. 3 (June 1943), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>"Poetry Canada, 1940-1945," Impression, 1; No. 4 (Spring 1952), p. 69.

<sup>7</sup>1, No. 1 (December-January 1945-46), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>There were three issues of Northern Review in 1946, four in 1947, two in 1948.

<sup>9</sup>Fiddlehead from New Brunswick was still strongly oriented to keeping the Carman-Roberts tradition alive.

## CHAPTER IV

NEW DEPARTURES: CONTEMPORARY VERSE 1947-1952

How suddenly it all changed! The First Statement Press had no sooner published Other Canadians, An Anthology of the New Poetry in Canada, 1940-1946, which I furnished with a bristling, defiant introduction, than the whole purpose and driving spirit of the 'new movement' were in a state of decay. We had barely rushed to the side of this challenger of tradition, holding up his right--or rather his left--hand in the stance of victory, when the challenger laid his head upon the block and willingly submitted to having it removed.<sup>1</sup>

The war was over and life settled into a comfortable mediocrity. There was disillusionment; what had seemed like major victories shrunk into small gains in face of the cold war. The rebuilding of Europe was slow, undramatic and far-away. Canadians returned gratefully to middle-class values of materialism, social prestige, and security--intensity and commitment have never been dominant values in Canada. It left the poets who rode the crest of the war beached and silent. Earle Birney wrote to Alan Crawley early in 1946:

I really mean it about future verse-writing. The new mag., 'Reading', has two of mine in its first issue but they are ones you already saw; I have written no more. If ever I get out of the CBC and back into the life of the semi-leisured classes, I will try prose; but to produce anything else in this Philistine paradise is a waste of spirit and expense of shame.  
(AC, 20 Feb.)

The eastern writers felt discouraged too. From Frank Scott:

Your visit [while Crawley was on tour] was the last time we had so many of the local writers together. Even our Northern Review meetings these days are getting scrappy--and so perhaps is N.R.

The core seems to have gone. Perhaps Patrick  
Anderson was it, and he lives out of town.

(AC, 16 Feb. 1947)

But in the west coast office of Contemporary Verse there was new enthusiasm and vitality in the spring of 1947. There was fresh and promising work from new poets and sharp finished poetry from the seasoned writers in the magazine. The contacts Crawley made during his saying tour in 1946 resulted in a rich assortment of manuscripts in 1947. The spring issue carried James Reaney's excellent "School Globe" and Livesay's very good "Page One". It was Reaney's second appearance in Contemporary Verse and he was an exciting find. The next few issues brought more of Reaney, a first meeting with Anne Wilkinson, a rare glimpse of Malcolm Lowry, and sound work from P. K. Page (including "Puppets" and "The Permanent Tourists") and A. M. Klein ("O God! O Montreal" and "Monsieur Gaston"). Scott, Smith, Souster, Dudek, Birney, Roy Daniells and L. A. MacKay contributed too. There was no slump here. Floris McLaren had a new bolder cover designed for the magazine; and Crawley increased the number of pages--first to twenty, then twenty four, and occasionally an issue was made up with twenty eight pages. The publishing houses (notably Ryerson, Macmillan, and McClelland & Stewart) regularly bought advertising which covered the cost of printing the covers; and the circulation of Contemporary Verse increased to a comfortable three hundred.

The flavour of Contemporary Verse is different after the war. The "common attitude" that Smith talked about in the Book of Canadian Poetry "which unites all the very different individual poets into a single recognizable school" is gone, and so is the bulk of didactic social realism poetry.<sup>2</sup> The war, of course, is gone too. There is

more variety and gaiety, and more love poems. There is fantasy, symbol, and myth; and poems about moths; words, hats, eating lunch in Rockcliff park, a school teacher in November, and Bartok and a geranium. It is not that the poems are not serious--most of them are--but there is a saner, broader, less simplistic response to life in these later poems. The intricacies of life are not avoided and neither are the joys. The reader of post-war forties poetry is less likely to be instructed and more likely to be stimulated and entertained than the earlier reader. Seventy-seven poets published three hundred and ten poems in Contemporary Verse during the years 1947 through 1952. The transition poets have left the magazine except for an occasional appearance. Floris McLaren's honest poem "Mountaineer," in the summer 1948 issue makes a moving epitaph for those poets who seemed permanently caught between the romantic and modern tradition:

He reaches each lookout just as the others leave  
 Accepts the view with no discoverer's eye  
 Conscientiously reading the locked sky,  
 The rivers looped in Sanskrit;  
 But is moved to solitary tenderness  
 By hair-stemmed twinflower,  
 The minutely separate lacquer cups of moss.  
(25,6)

The poets of the social realism school (Desmond Pacey's term) became more individualistic and personal, but few of them did outstanding work in the post war years. Their poetry is competent and interesting and provides stability for the more brilliant but sometimes ephemeral offerings of the new poets in Contemporary Verse--the mythopoeic writers who quite suddenly appeared and quickly gained prominence... Anne Wilkinson, James Reaney, and P. K. Page have the most poems in Contemporary Verse during this period; followed closely by

Louis Dudek, Jay Macpherson, and Raymond Souster; and distantly by Colleen Thibaudeau, Miriam Waddington, F. R. Scott, and Kay Smith. Dorothy Livesay and Earle Birney command substantial space with fewer but with long poems--"Call My People Home" and selections from "Damnation of Vancouver."

Alan Crawley's ability to attract and recognize new talent was amazing, especially in this second half of the forties, when poetry moved in new directions and poets became more individualistic. James Reaney had his first poetry published in Contemporary Verse, and so did Jay Macpherson and Daryl Hine. Others--Anne Wilkinson, Margaret Avison, Phyllis Webb, J. K. Heath (a promising poet, killed in the Korean War), Elizabeth Brewster, and Marya Fiamengo--were recognized early in their poetic careers and published and encouraged by Crawley. "I envy you your knack of catching all the promising younger poets before the rest of us know they exist" (AC), John Sutherland wrote to Crawley in June 1949. Sutherland had just read the Spring issue of Contemporary Verse which featured six of Jay Macpherson's poems. It was her first work and she was seventeen.

James Reaney burst upon the Canadian poetry scene in 1946 like a rocket--brilliant, dazzling, and erratic. Reaney took the entire literary tradition and the Canadian experience as his canvas; and if his poems are sometimes derivative and contrived, they are never dull. John Sutherland saw Reaney as a corrective for Canadian poetry. "What we can do to combat the indifference with which C.V. and Northern Review still meet, I do not know, unless James Reaney sets us the example", Sutherland said in a letter to Crawley early in 1948:

I have been delighted to see him trundling along at the heels of Canadian poetry, coloured like a zebra escaped from a circus, and uttering that amazing horse-laugh of his. There is something really appropriate about that laughter, as if he had taken in the whole cavalcade ahead of him at one glance, and that is why his horse-laugh is really horse-sense. I find that reading Reaney is a good way of warning off Northern Review.

(AC, nd)

Evocations of childhood experiences, neither contrived nor sentimental, dominate Reaney's early poems, as in "Childhood Musette." When his mother is away at the "Institute Meeting" and his father has ridden "over to Travistock" the farm becomes fantastical, a haunted and deserted place for the child "sitting among the feather-ticks and old trunks" in the room where he was born. Then he weaves fairy-tale dreams around a "dim engraving" and hears

The sound of the blue plums  
Falling straight through the gold air

Like dead stars in the Bering Sea.

(23,12)

As with the poetry of P. K. Page, the safe recognizable reality seems veneer thin in some of Reaney's poems; a pastiche pasted over things terrible and macabre. In the cardboard and paper world of "The Katzenjammer Kids"

The thin sun is yellow and flat.  
It wears a collar of black spikes and spines  
To tell the innocent heart that it shines  
Warming the face of the fat idiot  
Who calved the dwarf imps with porcupine locks.

(23,13)

Reaney nonchalantly combines the exotic, the literary, and the everyday with a savoir faire uncommon in Canadian poetry. His poetry (unlike most of the early forties and much of the post-war poetry) is un-selfconscious, and even when nostalgic or macabre contains an

eagerness and zest for life. He happily clusters the incompatible--  
 "intestinal paths" and a "vicious fox" with a face "like a bicycle  
 seat" in the lush "The Rape of the Somnambulist:"

Into a thicket where tumble  
 And noctambulate  
 Luna-moths whose eyes resemble  
 Tears in a sunset  
 In a thicket of Jack-in-the-pulpit,  
 Each green preacher a hypocrite,  
 She softly descends...

(23,10)

But Reaney can speak plainly too, as he does in "Miss Newport's  
 Letters:"

Miss Newport is moving,  
 In her garden she burns  
 All her correspondence...

(18,11)

James Reaney was a twenty year old student at the University of  
 Toronto when he submitted his poems to Contemporary Verse. "They're  
 rather unfinished and awful, but I am so anxious that you should see  
 my work" (AC, 27 Sept. 1946). Reaney asked for a chance to meet  
 Crawley when he was in Toronto on his saying tour to further discuss  
 his poetry. Later after The Red Heart had been published, Reaney  
 thanked Crawley "for all the encouragement and assistance I've got  
 from you and C.V."; and commented "I can still remember how ecstatic  
 I was when you first accepted a poem of mine; and the ecstasy still  
 has not died out" (AC, 10 Dec. 1949).

Another new poet, Anne Wilkinson, made her debut in Contemporary  
 Verse at the same time as Reaney. Considerably older than Reaney--  
 Anne Wilkinson was thirty-six in 1946--she had only recently begun  
 writing poetry seriously, and had had little published. In a way  
 Wilkinson and Reaney were opposites in poetic development at this time.



Reaney had considerable technical virtuosity and he approached the craft of poetry with verve and imagination. His sensibility was still essentially unformed, but there is youth and innocence and sensitivity and intelligence in his poems. On the other hand, Anne Wilkinson brought a mature sensibility to even her earliest poems; but she lacked craftsmanship. She had not yet found the way to translate her particular vision of life into satisfying poetry. Much of the poetry that Wilkinson submitted to Contemporary Verse was sent back for revision or for complete rewriting. The Crawley-Wilkinson correspondence during the years 1946-1951 shows the kind of careful supportive criticism that Crawley gave to writers during his years of editing Contemporary Verse that was so important to their development.

Alan Crawley met Anne Wilkinson in Toronto when he was on tour. Wilkinson came to hear him and later they had a chance to talk. She was writing poetry (a few had been published in Reading), but was uncertain of their quality and hesitated to submit them to editors. Crawley offered to read them and late in December 1946 a whole book of Wilkinson manuscripts arrived. Crawley was ecstatic:

Last night for the first time I opened the book of your poems and you can have no idea of the delight and exhilaration I had in reading the MSS. It is such a rare thing for me to find such freshness and vitality and originality of expression and I do thank you very deeply for letting me have the reading. There are so many of the poems I would like to have for C.V. that I would be a glutton, the list mounts as I go over them a second time.  
(UT)

Crawley chose two poems for Contemporary Verse 18, eight for the next number (these issues appeared much later than their stated dates of

July and October 1946), and six for number 22 including "Theme and Variations," "Momism," and "Pastoral." A. J. M. Smith was particularly impressed with Contemporary Verse 22 and wrote: "The new CV has just come in--a swell number made so by Klein and Wilkinson" (AC, 7 Jan. 1948).

"Pastoral," which Wilkinson left out of Counterpoint to Sleep but added to The Hangman Ties the Holly, evolved after extensive reworking. Crawley was "very struck" with "Pastoral" at first reading, but felt that the poem at that point was really three separate poems. He suggested separating them and dropping part three which was "too loose and does not quite come off:"

I have felt in the few of your longer poems I have seen that you are apt to lose the thread of the thought and do not keep strictly to this all through the poem. This of course is a very common tendency and particularly among the younger writers. When it is overcome and the main idea is the sole theme the poem becomes forceful and memorable and it is much easier for the writer to control form.

(AC, 5 Sept. 1947)

Wilkinson agreed with Crawley "on every point re Pastoral." "Your letter was the greatest stimulant imaginable. I am starved for criticism. I never see anyone who reads my poetry and you can have no idea of the value your letter has for me," she wrote. "When I put the three under one title I had my doubts at the time--it was more because I wrote them simultaneously than for any logical reason that I felt they were one poem:"

It was the last thing I had written when I sent it off and my usual practice is to consider nothing finished until I have buried it for three months, dug it up and revised it. As long as I am writing something I'm in love with it and the judgement only comes after the burial when the corpse is brought back to daylight and seen with the indifferent eyes of an ex lover.

(AC, 15 Oct. 1947)

"Pastoral" is typical in many ways of Anne Wilkinson's work. It is a sensuous poem, inviting the reader to "Let the world go limp, put it to rest," and while it sleeps plunge intimately into nature. "Drench the flesh in foetal memory:"

Wake it with your eyes  
 Paint it bright with pigment from your lens  
 Splash on the red,  
 Be prodigal with tears; green for a leaf,  
 For wheat be blinded by the dazzle on your lids  
 (22,10)

The Wilkinson visual light/green imagery is there and seeing is central to the poem. But seeing is supplemented, complemented by the other senses--"Touched a drenched leaf," "nurse the noise of solitude," "smell the salt drugged steaming of the sea." The poem culminates in a reaffirmation of godly man:

Ape, your image, man,  
 Hold his mirror, strain to reflect his God.  
 (22,10)

"I am writing a longish poem called 'After reading Kafka's The Trail' but I am afraid to show it to anyone," Wilkinson wrote to Crawley November 30, 1947 (AC). Crawley replied: "please believe that I would like to see any MSS if you think there is a chance I might be able to help you with it in any way, even if you do not want to let me have it for C.V." (UT, nd). The manuscript arrived with Wilkinson's letter of December 9, 1947:

I think it is bad (the poem not the book!), perhaps excruciatingly bad but until someone tells me so, bluntly, I'll go on trying to make something of it instead of turning to new work. I not only esteem your criticism but act on it and if you say 'forget Kafka', I'll at least forget this particular effort without too much sorrow.

(AC)

Crawley liked the poem "the deeper I go into it." "There is a great deal of thought packed into its good images and lines but it could be better...it seems to me incomplete and needs some further fashioning on the wheel." He worked through the poem concentrating mainly on fuzzy syntax and on individual lines that needed clarifying or strengthening. "Do not lay this away," he encouraged, "It is too good to be left" (UT, 7 Feb. 1948). Wilkinson's letter of March 10, 1948 brought word that she was working on the poem again--"Everything you told me about it has helped enormously" (AC)--and the revised poem was in Crawley's hands by May. Still it did not suit him and he returned it with suggestions for further revision; it was "greatly improved and strengthened," but not yet finished (UT, nd). When it came back, reworked and with a new title "After Reading Kafka," Crawley was satisfied and published the poem in the summer 1948 issue of Contemporary Verse.

Crawley was a generous editor. He always put a writer's personal development ahead of his own need to gather up enough copy to make an issue of Contemporary Verse. He advised Anne Wilkinson to submit a group of her poems to Poetry (Chicago)--including the Kafka poem that he had worked so hard on--to get her work better known; "Not that I think poetry is always all-hell in its grandeur but it has come to represent some desired achievement" (UT, 29 Oct. 1948). She was at a loss to know which poems to select and how to group them most effectively, so Crawley did it for her and submitted the manuscripts as well. Poetry sent them back, but Here and Now and Canadian Forum accepted some.

Anne Wilkinson's ability to know when a poem was finished and if

it was good was slow in developing. The quality of her manuscripts was as mixed and her letters almost as uncertain in 1950's as they had been five years earlier. The group of three poems in the Summer 1950 issue of Contemporary Verse--"Summer Acres," "Winter Sketch," and "Folk Tale: With a Warning to Lovers"--were part of a large batch of poems Wilkinson submitted to Crawley in the Spring. Crawley thought these three showed "a great deal of progress in your work, in construction, development, imagery, and in adherence to your thought and scheme." "Winter Sketch" and "Summer Acres" "are the best and most complete work you have done," Crawley wrote; and "Folk Tale" did amuse me and gave me a good deal of pleasure." The others were mediocre. "None of them moved me emotionally or to thought, speculation or remembering;" they were bits and pieces, "more cerebral than vigorous and affecting" (UT, nd). A year later Crawley returned a batch of poems that lacked tension, point, and vitality. He advised Wilkinson to "attack and use more variety in poetic form, taking a hurl at traditional patterns and mastering their rigidity." You have the talent and ability, Crawley scolded, "it now requires that application and discipline and hard work without which the napkin can never be completely withdrawn" (UT, nd). He felt that Wilkinson's heavy schedule of reading--she had written recently that she was writing little but reading voraciously and "studying Greek and full of excitement about it" (AC, 12 Nov. 1950)--was taking her away from her native poetic roots. Your recent poems "are in many parts genuine Anne Wilkinson," Crawley wrote; but "they are less important to Canadian writing than are those poems which have essential "Canadian ingredients:"

You know that I am not a bigotted booster for national or regional writing yet I do feel that it is helpful if writers who have a wide knowledge and close and deep intimacy with Canadian life and surroundings make use of this as much as possible for the good of their writing and of our creative life.

(UT, nd)

In August 1952, Wilkinson submitted her long poem "Letter to My Children" to Contemporary Verse which Crawley accepted with alacrity, relieved that her slump was over:

I like the long poem, it is real AW work in every way and much better than the others you sent me some months ago. Of course I want it but I think you should first send it to Poetry Chicago. It might be what they would take yet if they do not some comments from them might be helpful and you must keep on trying....If they don't take it, and golly I hope they do for you should be in that magazine, do not dare to let John have it but send it back to me for the next CV at the end of the year.

(UT, 16 Aug. 1952)

The range and variety of Wilkinson's poems is impressive; yet, as A. J. M. Smith noted in his 1968 "Reading of Anne Wilkinson," her work as a whole has unity. She uses a great deal of light and eye imagery, and her poems are infused with greenness. Green is important to Wilkinson. It represents growing things and freshness and coolness; and the pulsating drive of life. Smith talked of the "green, light-riddled poetry of Anne Wilkinson." "Light is everywhere here a symbol of truth, reality, and, above all, life. Green signifies Nature, sensation, happiness, grace, and again life."<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson's poems are sensuously personal--not personal in the sense of exploring herself, but in the sense of using herself as an instrument to experience and to understand life. She is a filter, sensitive and refined, distilling and concentrating perceptions, ideas and happenings

into poetry. Like Dorothy Livesay in her personal lyrics (including her recent The Unquiet Bed); Wilkinson is intensely, sensuously aware of and part of nature. "She never knew the tragedy of not living in a sensual world," Smith wrote, "It is a sensuousness of the eye that most vividly brings her world to life, but the aether through which this light vibrates is a tremor of the mind and the vision of her green world is made fruitful by love."<sup>4</sup> Like Reaney, Wilkinson is completely un-self-conscious in her poetry; her work raises Canadian poetry a level in directness and sophistication.

Alan Crawley had been corresponding with Jay Macpherson for almost two years before her first appearance in Contemporary Verse. Every letter is laced with encouragement, aimed at bolstering this very young poet's self-esteem and commitment to writing (Macpherson was fifteen when the correspondence began):

I am certain I shall have considerable exhilaration in keeping up with your work.

(JM, 21 May 1947)

You have packed, most expertly and finely a great deal into a few lines in each poem. That is poetic skill.

(JM, 8 Feb. 1949)

When work which shows such promise and talent as yours comes unexpectedly, there is exhilaration and compensation that is unbelievable unless it is experienced.

(JM, 16 March 1949)

Crawley told Anne Wilkinson that "Jay Macpherson is rather an amazing and a bit frightening young woman:"

She is not yet eighteen and at college in Ottawa and for some time has been sending me MSS. strictly marked not to be published and including some poems written in English, French and German and translations that is translations of poems written originally in either of those back and forth into and from one of the others....

I believe that if she is able to hold her balance and  
to find something that she really wants to say and  
can say it she will do something worthwhile.

(UT, nd)

By the spring of 1949, Jay Macpherson felt ready to appear before a larger audience. Six of her poems are in the twenty-seventh issue of Contemporary Verse and they show Macpherson at this early stage--even before her association with Northrop Frye--already a symbolic, mythopoeic poet; and already exploring the themes that have become central to her work. "Ordinary People in the Last Days" introduces the unicorn symbol which figured prominently in The Boatman collection:

The unicorn yielded to my sweetheart.  
She was giggling with some girls  
When the unicorn walked carefully up to her  
And laid his head in her lap.

(27,7)

Several of the poems use water/sea imagery and symbolism, including "Seasons" with its sinuous intertwining of 's' and 'e' sounds and half rhymes. It is a more directly personal poem than most of Macpherson's:

No. You are left with only this release:  
To drop in dreams to underwater seasons,  
Deadlocked face upward under dapple-green  
Until the dear tide cast you up again.

(27,10)

"Seascape," with its beautiful modulation of sound and rhythm, introduces the religious theme central to Macpherson's work--the struggle for grace--a theme picked up and explored in the 'poor child' image and myth of "Objective Correlative: Poor Child." The 'poor child' image informs several later poems in Contemporary Verse ("The Comforter," "The Comforted," and "Ill Wind"); and Macpherson uses it as the controlling idea in the first section of The Boatman. "The



Ill Wind" closes:

'Is there room for one only under your cloak,  
Mother, may I creep inside and see?  
Did you not know my wicked will  
When you summoned me?'

(38,17)

Jay Macpherson's entry into Canadian poetry created quite a stir.

Alan Crawley felt her six poems in Contemporary Verse 27 was a significant happening in Canadian literature. He soon had other opinions to back him up. Dorothy Livesay wrote:

CV spring number was a grand surprise.. What a fine haul you made with the poems by Jay Macpherson. I was greatly excited with them. Who is he?

(JM, 27 May 1949)

Anne Wilkinson hurried off a note:

C.V. arrived this morning. On a rapid first reading I find the poems by Jay Macpherson remarkably exciting - particularly the first - but more about C.V. after a careful reading.

(AC, 25 May 1949)

Ira Dilworth (then head of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation International Service) sent a letter:

My copy of Contemporary Verse has just come....  
The poems of Jay Macpherson are most interesting.  
If Contemporary Verse published nothing else than these I should be quite satisfied with my subscription.

(JM, 27 May 1949)

"I have not had before so many references to any contributors work in so short a time since publication and I feel very pleased and proud and rather possessive," Crawley confided to Macpherson (JM, 27 May 1949). He later wrote that "No. 27 will be a collectors piece, already we have few of it left for complete files" (JM, 14 July 1949).

In her allusiveness and use of (often literary) myth and symbol; Macpherson is similar to Reaney. Desmond Pacey remarked on their

similarities in his "Literature of the Fifties" addition to Creative Writing in Canada. He assigned them to his 'mythopoeic school' (Wilkinson is there too) and noted Macpherson's resemblance to Reaney "in wit, allusiveness and intricacy of technique;" but finds Macpherson a more elegant and reserved poet."<sup>5</sup> Macpherson worried about the allusive quality of her poems--allusiveness had never been a dominant characteristic of Canadian poetry; would readers understand and accept it?--but Crawley reassured her:

Referring to one of your questions about allusions in your poetry which might escape the reader...I do not find your poems obscure, rather stimulating and evocative. You use,...few private or obscure images and so though your writing is not direct, it is not intentionally obscure.

(JM, 16 March 1949)

Allusive, symbolic, mythological; the multileveled richness of Anne Wilkinson's, Jay Macpherson's and James Reaney's poetry signalled a new departure for Contemporary Verse and for Canadian poetry in the years 1947 to 1952. But there was good, solid work from the established poets too.

P. K. Page's poetry stands out in brilliance and finish from the rest of her early forties contemporaries. Alan Crawley had thought Page's 1946 Collection As Ten As Twenty was chiefly important as a demonstration "that Miss Page has the equipment of a poet and the ability to use this;" but "It is not so evident that she has yet found the theme or absorbing interest which will enable her to make fullest use of that endowment" (19,17). P. K. Page was never comfortable with the strong political orientation of the other Preview writers; and this particular Preview influence was not a happy one for her. Post war, essentially on her own with her poetry; Page quickly perfected the

precise, intense, introspective poetry that has become her trademark--  
 "The Permanent Tourists," "Photographs of a Salt Mine," "Puppets,"  
 "Portraits of Marina." Anne Wilkinson's poems celebrated sensuousness  
 and warmth; in Page's the constraint and isolation is so severe that  
 people are forever immobilized in photographs and portraits, not real  
 people but puppets and permanent tourists in life. Page built her  
 poems with brilliant images of light, mirrors, lenses, sharp hard  
 things, and dazzling (and sometimes terrifying) snow; and with  
 statements of great precision, too brittle to be musical--as in  
 "Portrait of Marina:"

She walked forever antlered with migraines,  
 her pain forever putting forth new shoots  
 until her strange unlovely head became  
 a kind of candelabra-- delicate --  
 where all her tears were perilously hung  
 and caught the light as waves that catch the sun.

(35,12)

Page continued to be fascinated by the inconsistency of surface  
 everydayness or beauty, and underlying pain and suffering. The lives  
 of the miners in "Photographs of a Salt Mine" look "innocent" and  
 "like a child's" against the snow-like salt where they could "make  
 angels in its drifts:"

Lie down and leave imprinted where they lay  
 a feathered creature, holier than they.

(35,10)

But another photograph shows them in a pit, "figures the size of pins  
 ....strangely lit" who "might be dancing, but you know they're not:"

Like Dante's vision of the nether hell  
 men struggle with the bright cold fires of salt  
 locked in the black inferno of the rock.

(35,11)

Technically Page's poems in the post war Contemporary Verse (most of  
 them were collected in The Metal and the Flower) show a marked increase

in skill over her earlier poems. She has mastered tone and subtlety, her diction is more exact and more vivid, and her ability to create a controlling image then modulate it into new shapes and nuances is superb. In "Photographs of a Salt Mine" the poem moves in a series of photographs from salt-snow whiteness and purity to the black inferno of guilt. Curiously, Page was uncertain of the quality of these very accomplished poems:

I am very self-conscious about all the stuff I've written in the last year [1950-1951] and quite honestly cannot tell whether it should all be burned or not. Perhaps it should and my feelings will not be hurt if you say so. But I would like some idea of the stuff.  
(AC, nd)

Crawley was satisfied that they were good Page poems; but Irving Layton did not agree. Renewing his subscription to Contemporary Verse ("as an act of faith and optimism") he commented on number 35:

Page's poems are sloppy and disappointing in the extreme. Now that there seems to be no concern with technique, only the feverishness remains. In the entire issue there is not a line or a phrase that is recallable; everything is blurred, misty, full of damp crawling things.

(FMcL, nd)

The poetry of Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster continued in essentially the same lyric vein post-war, as in the war years in Contemporary Verse. They each had a large group of poems in the twenty-third issue which seem all the more personal and lyric in company with James Reaney's mythopoeic group. They write of love and lovers (mostly), and of rain, and winter, and the moon. Dudek's explanatory letter to Crawley is as pertinent to Souster's selection as to his own:

Your selection pleases me because it is in the direction which I like at present. It is the kind of lyric which



Dorothy Livesay and Earle Birney experimented with new verse forms in the late forties and early fifties--Livesay with more success than Birney. Dorothy Livesay's documentary poem "Call My People Home" is aligned to her thirties poems "Day and Night" and "The Outrider;" but is longer, more ambitious, and has an added dramatic dimension being written for broadcast. It is more lyric than the earlier documentary poems, subtler and more controlled. The poem is openly emotional without being sentimental:

As we set sail at midnight, now a thousand boats  
Chained to the naval escort, steadily south  
Into familiar waters where the forests cooled their feet  
At rocks end, mountains swam in mist ---  
As we set sail for home, the young ones, born here, swore  
Not softly, into the hissing night. The old men wept.  
(28,7)

Earle Birney's verse drama "Damnation of Vancouver" is a more ambitious undertaking, and more literary and scholarly. But Birney fails to universalize the experience of the poem (in spite of the everyman - morality aspects) and it drags along, an uneasy alliance of a slangy contemporary city life, native lore, and medieval English history. In "Damnation of Vancouver," Birney attempts to do in large what he did so brilliantly on a small scale in "Anglosaxon Street." Livesay's other poetry in Contemporary Verse shows a sure increase in lyric power and intensity--"Ancestral Theme," "Page One," "Bartok and the Geranium"--while Birney's shows a definite decline. "I am in many minds about E.B. and his late work which seems to me often marred and sullied by a strange new quirk though he does have a fine architectural sense and some good lines," Crawley worried to A. J. M. Smith (UT, 10 January 1948).

The poetry of the second phase of the forties movement is more competent but less urgent than early forties poetry. Late forties poetry (including the first year or two of the fifties) is cooler and more personal; the anger, indignation and political panaceas of the earlier poetry is gone, and so (largely) is the gaucheness. The emphasis on specifics and the here-and-now of the "aggressively realistic poetry of early modernism"<sup>6</sup> has given way to more universal concerns--the search for enduring patterns of myth, religion, the cycles of nature--to give coherence and meaning to life. But the search was a comfortable one. Poets, like most other Canadians, were enjoying the general prosperity of the country; innocent still of the problems that affluence would bring. In this mood L. A. MacKay wrote to Crawley:

I wish I could offer effective support in some more literate fashion than a cheque, but the vein seems to have pinched off. Perhaps poetry is necessarily the by-product of maladjustment, in some way or another, and I am just too content to write, too much at ease in Zion.

(AC, 2 Aug. 1951)

Dudek saw this move away from aggressive realism as a sell-out. He argued the point with Crawley as he commented on Raymond Souster's retrospective article for Impression on the early forties movement:

I agree with him that our little boon was a late echo of the Auden-Spender line. And after? We need to realize just how much of a sense of hopeless crisis there now is...and how much of a retreat into the internal world, safe corners, logorhoea, romanticism (none of these acceptable to us) has taken place in the face of this hopelessness. And refuse to lie down and die.

(AC, 23 Feb. 1952)

For Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse, 1946 and 1947 were peak years. The magazine had already won its reputation as the best poetry

magazine in Canada and Crawley as the most discriminative editor; now there was exciting new work from young writers, a comfortable margin of subscribers, and Crawley's public lectures, informal talks, and radio broadcasts on poetry. It was satisfying but exhausting; and in the late fall Crawley confessed to Anne Wilkinson that "This year after the forty or so talks on the Canadian Club tour and some additional lectures on poetry here early in the year I have gone 'stale' on poetry and could not work up any enthusiasm over a fresh project and this state of mind is discouraging and unhealthy" (UT, nd). During the summer of 1947, the slump that F. R. Scott had talked about in his February letter had spread west. The summer "has been desperately barren of new work" and "the standard has been so low, in what I have had sent me", Crawley continued in the same letter, that Contemporary Verse has had to sit idly waiting. "This dry condition has affected all the publications using poetry here in Canada and so far the fall has not done much to remedy."

The 'dry condition' worsened in 1948. Crawley was hard pressed to scrape enough material together to warrant publishing Contemporary Verse--and it shows in the magazine. Issue twenty-four is particularly uncharacteristic with its mixed-bag of single poems instead of the usual satisfying groups of poems. "It must be quite a battle to keep CV going," F. R. Scott wrote, "but I hope you will never be too discouraged:"

This apathy you speak of is all over this country, thick and heavy like a sheet of glue. What makes it? No pep anywhere, hence little art. Or is it no art, hence little pep? Anyway you are doing a fine job in maintaining a plot of ground on which the spirit may walk freely, and breathe the upper air.

(AC, 23 Oct. 1948)



A. J. M. Scott's revised Book of Canadian Poetry brought a little stir of activity to 1948. Smith wrote to Crawley in early January asking for "comments and advice" on his proposed changes; and Crawley, in general, concurred with them. But Crawley thought that Kay Smith should not be included--"she has done some good things but too few and so many of them are messy and the promise she gave seems failing and she does not write, after all it is a poets business to be a poet"--and that Anne Wilkinson and James Reaney should. Reaney, Crawley wrote, "is doing a lot of work and is a worker and his stuff is completely different from that of any other contemporary" (UT, 10 Jan. 1948). Posterity has proved Crawley's judgement right. Smith corrected his error of dividing the modern writers in the revised edition and thus ended the native-cosmopolitan controversy. He grouped the moderns together and commented:

The five years that have elapsed since the publication of the first edition of this book have been unusually rich in the production of modern Canadian verse by a talented group of writers, who seem to have escaped from the limitations of provincialism into a cosmopolitanism that does not reject native sources of strength but draws nourishment from them....<sup>7</sup>

In 1949 the Massey Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences sparked a little interest in literature and Crawley presented a brief to it, hoping for more substantial returns than 'interest'. Crawley felt that the best way to encourage writers was to provide adequate publication outlets and to pay them for their work. It was a sore point with Crawley that throughout the twelve years of Contemporary Verse he was never able to pay contributors --not even the token amount that Sutherland managed with First Statement and Northern Review--nor enlarge and print the magazine.

Poets gave their full support to Crawley and Contemporary Verse; but, as with most Royal Commissions, there were no immediate benefits. What writers said about Contemporary Verse shows how important the magazine was to them and to Canadian poetry during the forties. Jay Macpherson wrote that "I know very well that I...should never have ventured into print last spring if it had not been for your continual encouragement" (AC, Sept. 1949). "Take Contemporary Verse out of the Canadian literary scene and you have nothing left west of Longitude 85'" (AC, 1 Sept. 1949), said James Reaney. Anne Wilkinson wrote simply "I for one am continuing to write poetry because there is a Contemporary Verse.... The United States has a hundred good outlets for the poet; Canada has one. Contemporary Verse holds together Canadian poetry" (AC, Sept. 1949). Roy Daniells thought that Contemporary Verse "has consistently attracted the best of the established poets and at the same time given space to promising unknown writers--no mean feat. Its standards of admission have been high, and what is equally important, they have been consistent. The ups and downs of other periodicals are in striking contrast" (AC, 5 Sept. 1949). And from Earle Birney:

In my opinion Alan Crawley's Contemporary Verse has given the most valuable service to poetry of any Canadian publication in the last decade. It is the only Canadian verse magazine which has consistently maintained high editorial standards. It has introduced a number of important younger Canadian writers to the public and encouraged them to continue writing. What space it has been able to give to criticism has been intelligently used. The whole tone of the magazine has been literary, responsible, and stimulating.

(AC, Sept. 1949)

In 1950 Alan Crawley tried to interest Canadian poets in an anthology of new (unpublished) work. "I have roughly thought of a book

somewhat the form of Unit of 5 which would give each writer 78 - 81 lines, a single poem of 24 lines to a page. This is of course an elastic estimate and allotment" (UT, nd), he explained to Earle Birney. Poets were interested in the idea of an anthology, but few had the new work to submit. Some, like P. K. Page, were reluctant to tie that amount of work in publisher's copyrights.

In view of the fact that on the whole Canadian writers are not overly prolific such a stipulation (all new work) might leave you with a much poorer selection than you think. Also I think, speaking for myself, the idea of having 84 lines tied up for so long a time -- for book publication is slow -- is rather depressing.

(AC, 28 Nov)

In spite of her objections, Page was willing to support the project with "the best I have to offer.... Certainly CV should have some kind of a between hard covers aspect to it--for it has maintained a consistently high standard now for an astonishingly long time" (AC, 28 Nov.). But Crawley had to abandon the idea. He wrote to Birney that "there was a lot of encouraging approval of the plan and of my trying it, but far too many of the writers I must have wrote that they had no unpublished work and so that is that" (UT, nd). It was 1941 all over again; an editor asking poets for work and poets coming up empty handed. In 1952 Crawley tried once more to edit an anthology--this time of significant and representative work from Contemporary Verse--but publishing difficulties scotched the plan. Crawley was disappointed. There was definitely a need for an up-to-day modern anthology of Canadian poetry and the work was there in Contemporary Verse, just waiting to be collected. Instead of Crawley's anthology, Canadian readers had to make do with Dudek and Layton's

Canadian Poems 1850-1952 and Earle Birney's Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry, neither of them showing the kind of editorial astuteness that was Alan Crawley's trademark in Contemporary Verse.

In 1949 and 1950 Contemporary Verse brightened up again. The pattern of groups of poems is back; and newcomers George Woodcock, Wilfred Watson, Norman Newton, and J. K. Heath make an interesting contrast to the regular contributors. Some of the older poets reappear (for some it is a first appearance)--F. R. Scott, Roy Daniells, A. M. Klein, Alfred G. Bailey--seeming very substantial beside the unknowns who disappear after one or two contributions. Several issues stand out--number 28 for Dorothy Livesay's "Call My People Home" and Crawley's "Notes on A. M. Klein;" number 29 for John Sutherland's little known analysis of Northrop Frye's "Canada and its Poetry;" number 32 for Dudek's article "A Visit to Ezra Pound" and for good poetry by Wilkinson, Klein, Scott, and Bailey.

In the fall of 1951 Contemporary Verse completed ten years of publication. Alan Crawley reassembled the original contributors (supplemented by E. J. Pratt, F. R. Scott, L. A. MacKay, Anne Wilkinson and J. K. Heath) for the anniversary issue. It's a nostalgic issue. The members of the founding committee--Doris Ferne and Anne Marriott--and business manager Floris McLaren had been absent from the magazine (except for one or two poems) since the war years; and Leo Kennedy and L. A. MacKay had left Canada and had given up writing. Their offerings here are acts of friendship more than of creativity. The presence of Canada's three senior poets adds weight and solemnity. Pratt's contribution "Cycles" (a religious poem prophesying redemption through Christianity) is unexpected--it

is Pratt's only appearance in Contemporary Verse. Smith seldom published during this period and his poem "Narcissus" shows why. Scott's excellent "Last Rites" takes the honours for the issue. Birney's and Page's poems are not of their best work. Crawley wrote a foreword--"C.V. 1941-1951"--which he intended to be a retrospective glance at a decade of publishing and editing but which turned out to be an expression of his own doubt and uncertainty about the future of the magazine:

During this summer and up to a few weeks ago I have been wavering and distrustful of my decisions; even though the hundreds of manuscripts which have been sent to me for approval for publication and the many letters which have come to Floris McLaren and to me convince me that CV has given needed help and encouragement to many young writers, that there is still a need for this work to go on, and that much of what we hoped would and could be done by CV has been accomplished.

(36,4)

His concluding statement that Contemporary Verse will continue--"the place occupied by Contemporary Verse has not yet above it a sign TO LET"--is not entirely convincing. "There is a job for CV in presenting the best of Canadian poetry written in the 1950's as it has presented that of the last ten years," Crawley wrote, "If such poetry is written, then so long as it is possible, Floris McLaren and I will get out CV in very irregular order and with as great interest and pride in what we are doing as we have done for 36 times" (36,4).

Crawley's uncertainty reflected a general lack of direction in Canadian poetry in the early fifties, as Robert Weaver noted in his Critic review of Contemporary Verse and its decade of publishing: "When Mr. Crawley feels uncertain of himself and of the function of his magazine at the present time, it seems to me that he is simply

reflecting the uncertainties of Canadian poetry during a period of change."<sup>8</sup> Certainly, magazine publication had been erratic during the late forties and things seemed to be worse in the early fifties. There simply was not the creative impetus to keep magazines going. Earle Birney, resigned from Canadian Poetry Magazine in June 1948, discouraged at the lack of good poetry available and disgusted at the narrowness and mediocrity of the Canadian Authors' Association; and Here and Now, the most impressive magazine in format that Canadians had seen, came and went in only four issues. Several other little magazines made brief appearances--PM (from Vancouver), Impression (from Winnipeg), Protocol (from Newfoundland)--but did not last long enough to make an impression. In spite of John Sutherland's herculean efforts, Northern Review was never on firm ground, poetically or financially. Sutherland got out two issues in 1948, four in 1949, six (which is what he was aiming for) in 1950 and in 1951, but only three in 1952. His growing conservatism alienated Dudek, Layton, and Souster who had been his main support since the Preview poets left the magazine in 1947. Crawley commented on the precarious position of Northern Review and on Sutherland's changed editorial policy in his June 27, 1950 letter to Anne Wilkinson:

I hear from many quarters that John Sutherland is predicting a wind up of Northern Review if he cannot get together a sum sufficient to carry on for another year. I am sorry to hear this as he has done a good work though the magazine since last summer has, it seems to me, got into a less interesting and less important manner and J.S. appears to be stressing patriotism and regionalism a bit too far. I can never get wildly excited at an urging to praise Canadian products of any kind just because they come from Canada. In spite of this I admit John and his amazing energy and doggedness. *admire*

(UT)

The discouragement that Crawley expressed in his foreword to the anniversary issue of Contemporary Verse roused an immediate response in Canadian poets. If Contemporary Verse closed down, the ailing Northern Review would be the only periodical left to support poetry writing. The Montreal poets were so alarmed they sent a telegram to Crawley:<sup>9</sup>

Montreal poets meeting tonight are convinced survival  
Contemporary Verse essential to Canadian literature  
stop Your ten years prove value of little magazine  
encouraging new and established writers to publishing  
best work stop You must present the fifties as you  
have presented the forties.

(AC, 15 Oct. 1951)

And soon after came an enthusiastic, rallying letter from Dudek:

Impossible to think of the literary scene and Contemporary  
Verse not there. I would not believe it. That telegram  
from F.R. Scott's house came with or went with a true  
concern for CV and a desire to make you realize how  
important we think it is. A few hundred readers? Say  
it were ten. Ten may be the node of life in the mids  
of an organism, one of the small life cells. Enough!  
Literature is that important.

(AC, 13 Nov. 1951)

Literature is the "one outpost holding out" in "this disease of modern life," Dudek said, and "one has no right to give up." "Who knows if we won't have better poetry in the fifties than (even) the forties.

Let's all be around for the birth pangs" (AC, 13 Nov. 1951). L. A.

MacKay said simply that "the disappearance of CV would leave a horrid gap in Canadian letters. I have no confidence that a new team would take over; the country would probably be left to the glories of CPM, except for the very mixed fare of the CF, seldom very tasty, and the scant commons of NR" (AC, 2 Aug. 1951).

The praise encouraged Crawley: but a magazine cannot run on praise. He hoped poets would support their well-wishes with manuscripts, and

some did but not enough. Crawley got number 37 out (late) by doubling up winter and spring into one issue. The Summer 1952 issue of Contemporary Verse (also late) would have been pretty thin without Birney's eight pages of selections from "Damnation of Vancouver." In

July Crawley wrote to Jay Macpherson who was then in England:

All writing in Canada this year dreadfully dull and depressing, lifeless and grinding out old stuff or new work no value....CV in a pretty deplorable state at the moment, a better bank showing than ever before and with not enough MSS to make another issue. No one is writing PK, Reaney, Thibeaudeau, Avison doing no poetry or prose or hack work. I am very disheartened and think seriously that CV has no further work to do, certainly not for the present. If a need comes again there will be someone and some magazine to fill it.

(JM, 5 July 1952)

The fall number of Contemporary Verse was delayed, then delayed again into the winter of 1953 as Crawley waited for good material to come in. Abruptly, in February 1953, Crawley gathered up the material he had, assembled it with the notice that the magazine was closing, and sent out number 39--the final issue of Contemporary Verse. The decision to close down the magazine was neither "sudden" nor "capricious," Crawley wrote; it was made "after much consideration and is weighted with regret at the termination of eleven years of an absorbing job." "We have a strong belief that the work of a little magazine under the same editor's direction declines in time from its peak of usefulness. In this conviction we close our files and write the abrupt and final statement that this is the last issue of CV" (39,1). Dorothy Livesay, close to Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse from the beginning (fittingly her fine lyric "Bartok and the Geranium" was the lead poem in the final issue of the magazine), agreed with--but



rued--Crawley's belief that he was no longer doing a good job (or as good a job) as editor. Her letter of February 16, 1953 reacting to the close of Contemporary Verse is angry, honest, and supportive. "I had sort of thought, having been so definitely a midwife, I might have been called in at the death," she began:

I am sad, but not to cry. Where there is no enthusiasm, poetry perishes. And I have felt strongly, this past year, that you have lost the fiery interest you once had. For this we are all probably to blame--we writers, that is. We move on and where we move does not perhaps interest you. I mean; you have to think of the publication and how it stands up; we think only of our own development; we have to have faith in ourselves and our direction. And your frequently expressed sense of disappointment--because work is not the same as it was--does incline one to question: why should it be? How could it be?

No: if you were to carry on you would have to depend not on the older generation who started the works, but on young men like Daryl; and if there were enough of them around I would urge you to continue... But I suppose there aren't!

"In any case," she closed, "nothing has been lost: all the effort was to the good and terribly worthwhile; and the start you gave so many will always be bearing fruit--even if from trees that will not nourish you! Others will be nourished" (AC).

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>John Sutherland, "The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry," Northern Review, 4, No. 2 (December-January 1950-51), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>2nd ed. (Toronto, 1948), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ed., Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson (Toronto, 1968), pp. xx, xiv.

<sup>4</sup>Smith, p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup>Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto, 1961), p. 238.

<sup>6</sup>Dudek and Gnarowski, Making of Modern Poetry, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup>"Preface," (Toronto, 1948), p. vii.

<sup>8</sup>"Books," 2, No. 2 (February 1952), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>It was signed by A.M. Klein, Louis Dudek, F.R. Scott, John Sutherland, Audrey Aikmann, Phyllis Webb, and Neufville Shaw.

## CHAPTER V

ALAN CRAWLEY, CONTEMPORARY VERSE, AND  
THE RENAISSANCE OF THE FORTIES

The passing of Contemporary Verse did leave a "horrid gap" as L. A. Mackay had prophesied, and as writers and readers immediately realized. "Nothing can quite take its place," F. R. Scott wrote; but "of one thing you can be sure: through it you have become part of the literary history of Canada, and you have the gratitude of a whole generation of poets." "I have some unpublished poems to send out somewhere," Scott went on, "now where shall I turn?" (AC, 8 March 1953). Jay Macpherson wrote demanding that Crawley "continue to make your influence felt...you can't leave the field to the doggerel-obscurity-mongers" (AC, 20 March 1953). Dudek's letter is full of regret. "I gather from your letter that nothing can be done to save CV. It is a great pity, since you've got such a fine record behind you, and there is the need of a mag. on the West coast. However, however... I guess somebody else will get busy eventually" (AC, 10 March 1953). The Canadian publishers all wrote to Crawley. They realized, perhaps better than anyone else, how important a bridge between poetry writing and book publication a magazine such as Contemporary Verse was-- setting standards, offering criticism, trying the work out on the public. J.G. McClelland wrote:

It was a shock and a disappointment to learn that Contemporary Verse is no longer to be published. It has served a fine purpose in the last ten years and

I can think of no one who has made a greater contribution to Canadian letters than you have done through the publication of this magazine..... It is a matter of sincere regret to me that we have not done a good deal more to actively support the publication through the years.

(AC, 26 March 1953)

Lorne Pierce from Ryerson, was more personal:

I shall miss CV more than I can say. It was consistently good as a magazine, and kept the banner of integrity blowing bravely in the breeze. But most of all it spoke of you, a very gracious and a very gallant gentleman. I am thankful for all you have done for Canadian letters, and for your kindness to me.

(AC, 14 April 1953)

Like so many others who wrote to Crawley at this time, Dudek felt that he should have helped Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse more:

I think I've never done enough for CV. Lack of brains on my part (I'm always oppressed with a sense of my lack of intellect as compared with other so-called intellectuals) has kept me in all sorts of muggy ruts, especially in poetry, and the good things I write have been too scarce, too hard to pick out from the trash (especially before revision), maybe have gone to the wrong magazines.... Bad emotions interfere with my intellection and memory; that's where I envy the others. In any case, CV has meant a lot to me, gave me a start almost from the beginning, and the correspondence in the New York years helped get a few things off my chest and keep confidence going.

(AC, 10 March 1953)

Manuscripts from poets would have helped Crawley, but it was not only the lack of material that prompted him to close Contemporary Verse in the winter of 1953. For the preceding year or two, Crawley had been "wavering and distrustful" of his decisions about poetry, as he wrote in the Anniversary number (36,4). He felt that the creativity that produced the 'renaissance' of the forties was fizzling out. Poets were writing less and the standard of what was written had dropped. Writers in 1951 and 1952 in Canada seemed to be caught in a creative

vacuum between the spent forties movement and the still undiscerned thrust of the fifties. A new impetus and new directions were needed. Margaret Avison described the effect of this vacuum on her poetry writing in a letter to Crawley June 14, 1952. She talks of distractions, discouragement and "no focus point:"

I feel rotten about the frittering I seem to do earning a living, reading maybe too much and too rapidly, writing first drafts of poems now and then, when little pools of quiet occur, and then never going back to polish as they require. And never putting the loose pages of them in order or keeping track of what should be salvaged, what would come out after enough working over, what should be thrown away and forgotten. It is a state of confusion and unseemliness that grows worse with time....

(AC)

Crawley sensed that Canadian poetry was moving off in a new direction and he felt out of step with it. If he could not be sensitive to and supportive of new moods in poetry, if he could not accept the new poetry on its own terms of reference and began instead to arbitrate what poetry should be rather than respond to what it was; then he was no longer useful as an editor. These were his feelings when he wrote to Anne Wilkinson November 4, 1952:

I feel very strongly that a little magazine has its place and its work but that both are ended when the cycle of its immediate usefulness appears to have run its course and this feeling is one that has come to all who have started and carried on and ended one of those magazines. The work done in Canada and published in the last two or three years has not been up to the standard of that done in the late forties, and I am not relying only on what has come to me in MSS but on that and what I have seen in other magazines. Also I feel that perhaps I have stayed behind in criticism and appreciation of what the young writers are now trying to do and so am not able to give as much help and useful criticism as I was able to give twelve years ago.

(UT)

Probably it was Souster's new little magazine Contact that caused Alan Crawley to question himself as editor of the magazine that prided itself on recognizing and publishing the best contemporary verse available. By 1951 Souster was disgruntled enough with Northern Review and Contemporary Verse to start a new magazine--one that would be international in flavour and open to what Souster felt were vital influences from the United States. He was aided (not altogether wholeheartedly at first) by Dudek who wrote to Crawley November 13, 1951:

Souster will crank out Contact soon a new mimeo magazine. No matter how many copies will come out, it will be a welcome noise they'll make. Souster has the kind of irascibility that one expects from an honest mind in these times. The Apollonian will come to him late, if ever.

(AC)

Crawley felt bad that Souster had not told him of his plans--he wrote to Wilkinson "I had a letter from Souster less than three weeks ago in which he did not mention the plan and I feel a bit hurt that after many years of letters between us and what I thought was some sort of friendship that he had not told me of what he was up to"--but wished him well:

I really feel that it is a good sign that there is some feeling among the younger writers that they want their own publications, just as there was in the early forties, that these, no matter how long they last, are enlivening and a good thing and do something to awaken interest in reading and stimulate writers.

(UT, nd)

The first issue of Contact appeared in January 1952, introducing Canadians to the work of Cid Corman, Charles Olsen, and Robert Creeley. It was the beginning of a new period for Canadian poetry.

Canadian poets, on the whole, were pretty critical of Souster's

new magazine. Jay Macpherson, for example, condemned it on aesthetic grounds in her November 18 letter to Crawley. She commented on the translations of Gottfried Benn ("apparently quite unauthorized") which "are bad: he really is a decent poet, though one would hardly have guessed it," then went on:

Mother feels it's a pity the feeling aroused in Mr. Layton by 'the Girls of his Graduating Class' couldn't be brought to the attention of the Quebec Home and School Ass'n. And as for Mr. Dudek, who appears to think that every minute during which young ladies are not sleeping with young gentlemen is wasted, even at high noon--no comment. However, compared to some of their authors, the restraint of these two seems commendable. --My objection isn't that the stuff isn't decent, it's that it's not poetry: anything's decent if handled with sufficient love, intelligence, sensitivity, and discipline.

(AC, 1952)

Anne Wilkinson wrote to Crawley that "I am not sorry that I withdrew" from Contact (AC, 20 March 1952). John Sutherland frankly disliked the magazine from the start. Souster "is lacking in any sense of critical values, as he is in a sense of editorial responsibility, and I think if the magazine had much currency--which, fortunately, it won't--it would be a real setback to all our efforts to develop a more intelligent attitude in Canada towards the writing of poetry" (AC, 12 March 1952). Dudek sounded a bit defensive about Contact in his February 23, 1952 letter to Crawley:

I think Souster's CONTACT should do some good as it gets going and makes its critical point clear. So far people...students etc...have asked 'What's the idea? What it is supposed to be trying to do?' It's the kind of noise that's very necessary in the very correct drawing room atmosphere of Canadian poetry at the moment.

(AC)

Crawley was undecided about Contact. He did not really like the magazine,

but it had a certain energy that made it seem worth reading. In March 1952, Crawley wrote to Wilkinson that "I have seen the two numbers of Contact and am not very excited over them, the introduction by Dudek has not so far been fulfilled by what has been printed.... Whether Souster can improve and discipline his critical ability remains to be seen, he is still gripped by the enthusiasms and crusades of adolescence" (UT). In June he discussed the magazine with Wilkinson again. "What to think of Contact fuddles me and I hold off. Messers Dudek, Souster and Layton may set some broth boiling in their combined efforts promised by Contact Press." It could be that Contact might act as a catalyst to start new activity in poetry--"most of what I get lately does little to start me crowing but there may be new life ready to spring up somewhere" (UT, 4 June 1952).

Alan Crawley was a forties man. He grew up (poetically) on modern poetry from England and the United States and was on hand, an enthusiastic welcomer and supporter, when modernism settled in Canada in the forties and took over Canadian poetry. Crawley was one of the main sponsors of this new poetry through his magazine Contemporary Verse, and no one worked harder than he to help get it naturalized in Canada. But just as he was sensitive to the beginning of forties poetry in 1941, Crawley recognized its ending in the early years of the fifties and chose to close down his magazine with the close of this distinctive period in Canadian poetry. He believed, as he wrote in the final number of Contemporary Verse, "that the work of a little magazine under the same editor's direction declines in time from its peak of usefulness" (39,1). In the fifties, there was need for new directions, new vigour, and new editors. "I do not read a great deal



of contemporary poetry," Crawley said in 1969, "I find that...I don't get as much satisfaction or pleasure out of it as I do out of reading the poems that I knew or by writers that I have known some years ago."<sup>1</sup> The emerging and influential Black Mountain movement was uncongenial to Crawley in 1952, yet neither could he support retrenchment and traditionalism as John Sutherland was doing. It took courage and a firm hand to close Contemporary Verse; twelve years earlier it had taken the same kind of courage and firmness to begin it.

By any aesthetic standard romantic-nature poetry was dead at the beginning of the forties when Alan Crawley started Contemporary Verse; it had been dead, in fact, for at least two decades. Yet this anachronistic nineteenth century poetry--which was seldom better than mediocre in Canada even in its heyday--had a hundred times more followers in 1940 than the superior modern poetry. Modernism started bravely in the twenties but lost impetus and direction in the thirties and had to wait for the forties to become established in Canada--a good twenty years behind England and the United States. Modern poetry in Canada was derivative until well into the forties, but it was still much better poetry than the (also derivative) romantic-nature genre and far more relevant to twentieth century life. Why were Canadians so reluctant to accept it? The nature of Canadian culture, the literary tradition in Canada, and confusion about the real nature of modernism, all were causal factors.

Canadian culture before the second World War was pioneering, agrarian, and puritan. The end of the homestead era and beginning shift to the cities (which roughly coincided in Canada) had happened too recently to permit a new set of values to evolve more applicable to

collective life in the cities. Canadians were pragmatic, materialistic, and anti-intellectual. They valued hard work, responsibility, self-control (especially in sexual matters), and puritan morals. They were flat, angular, reserved people who judged a man by what he could do (and it had to be something utilitarian) and his ability to pay cash. Poetry did not 'do' anything and consequently it had little prestige. It was relegated to the limbo of 'Culture'--far enough away from the mainstream of Canadian life to avoid any contact with reality--where it was vaguely thought 'to be a good thing,' a suitable afternoon pastime for idle ladies who had nothing better to do; but not acceptable for able-bodied men.

This kind of a culture fosters gentility in literature, and Canadian literature had been markedly genteel since the days of John Gibson's Literary Garland (1838-1851). It is unfortunate that Canadian poetry had its real beginning when full-blown genteel sentimentality was the order of the day. The poets born in the sixties in Canada infused this last gasp of English nineteenth-century romanticism (A. J. M. Smith heads this section in his Book of Canadian Poetry "Varieties of Romantic Sensibility") with new vigour in the 1890's using youthful enthusiasm, Canadian landscape, and a smattering of Indian lore and names. Only Lampman made any real attempt to move into poetry more realistically in tune with the times ("City of the End of Things"), but his early death (1899) ended this promising development. The pity is that Carman and Roberts were so successful and lived so long. Their success was not so much based on merit as on nationalism and novelty; like Mark Twain's dog, the wonder was not that these Canadians sang well, but that they sang at all. After Carman's

triumphant reading tours of the 1920's--to womens' groups, normal schools and a few universities--his style of poetry was firmly entrenched as epitome of Canadian art (although Carman had not lived in Canada for more than twenty years), and was ardently emulated until well into the forties. Fiddlehead, for example, was established in 1945 in New Brunswick to keep the Carman-Roberts literary tradition alive. And even later, in 1954, Ryerson brought out an up-dated version of Bliss Carman and Lorne Pierce's 1935 Our Canadian Literature (the new edition is called Canadian Poetry in English) which carried V. B. Rhodenizer's reactionary Introduction:

Had all of Canada's potential poets who have begun to publish since the First World War adopted the same sane attitude [i.e. as Pratt] toward what is unchangeable in poetic tradition, it would have been much better for Canadian poetry. And such would probably have been the case had Canadian poetry been left to continue its natural course of development without the introduction of new or revived poetic techniques from abroad.<sup>2</sup>

Carman was the only Canadian poet who had achieved recognition outside of Canada and Canadians were reluctant to turn their backs on that kind of success (even in 1940), especially when they did not really understand the nature of the alternative--modernism.

The militancy and anger of the traditional-modern controversy in the thirties and forties is surprising. Canadians are usually not so emotional or so involved. Dudek and Gnarowski include three sensible, reasoned discussions on the nature and merits of modernism in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada--they were written in 1914, 1919, and 1920. By the thirties the controversy had reached endemic proportions, and the disinterested, 'men-of-good-will' tone of Arthur Stringer, John Murray Gibbon, and F. O. Call is gone. "There are no examples of wildly

'modern' free verse to be found lurching through these pages;" and no trace of "bizzare and grotesque affectations and practice of the ultra-modern 'isms', a present-day mask and mockery worn by psuedo-poetry," Nathaniel Benson proclaimed in his inappropriately named 1930 anthology Modern Canadian Poetry.<sup>3</sup> A. J. M. Smith countered that "The Canadian poet is a half-baked, hypersensitive, poorly adjusted, and frequently neurotic individual that no one in his senses would trust to drive a car or light a furnace:"

He is the victim of his feelings and fancies,  
or of what he fancies his feelings ought to be, and  
his emotional aberrations are out of all proportion  
to the experience that brings them into being. He  
has a soft heart and a soft soul; and a soft head.<sup>4</sup>

Modern poetry was condemned as deliberately obscure and/or too prosaic, pessimistic, and lacking spirituality and enlightenment. The crux of the matter was the function of poetry and of the poet. A. J. M. Smith (who almost single-handedly fought the battle of modernism after Leo Kennedy left Canada) said that "The poet is not a dreamer, but a man of sense:"

...the artist who is concerned with the most intense of experiences must be concerned with the world situation  
.... For the moment at least he has something more important to do than to record his private emotions.  
He must try to perfect a technique that will combine power with simplicity and sympathy with intelligence so that he may play his part in developing...a more practical social system.<sup>5</sup>

Clara Bernhardt, a traditionalist, is representative of the opposing view. A poet, she said in 1939, "is a man who sees beyond the present," who "should be vitally awake to the contemporary scene, yet able to take the longer view and transcend its tragedy. By a bitter yet steadily ascending path, he learns to mould the ideal from the real....

The clarity of his vision should be so pronounced that he can... become 'a maker of spiritual forces, a leader of men's imaginations.'"<sup>6</sup> Readers and writers took sides in the controversy, but often did not really know what the fight was all about. Alan Creighton thought he was in tune with modernism in the anthology he co-edited with Hilda M. Ridley in 1938. He talked about the "feeble imitativeness" and evasion of Canadian poetry which had resulted in Canada appearing "a scene of nature rather than of humanity;" and implied that the poetry in New Canadian Anthology was squarely in and of the real world: "In political and economic life there is a sharper sense of unrest, with an ever-present threat of war. Such changes in the environment have their effect upon the poet, shaping his mood and form of expression even though he does not consciously indicate it."<sup>7</sup> The poetry in the collection is traditional, romantic and incredibly mundane; less modern even than Benson's unashamedly romantic selection of 1930. Pratt is the only 'modern' poet of the ninety-nine represented, yet Creighton wrote that "Something of this change is apparent in most of the following poems, apparent either in theme or in treatment."<sup>8</sup>

Alan Crawley was in tune with modernism in 1941 when he agreed to edit Contemporary Verse and he knew there was not much modern poetry being written in Canada. He was an avid reader of English thirties poetry and sensed that this was the 'new direction' that modernism needed to really take hold in Canada. Dorothy Livesay agreed--she had been trying to incorporate the ideas and techniques of Auden-Spender-MacNeice into her own poetry since the mid-thirties--and there were indications now and then in the poetry in Canadian Forum that other poets

were experimenting with these new approaches too. The problem with this tentative new poetry was that it was derivative; and because it was realistic, socially relevant poetry, this derivativeness made it seem un-Canadian. The job for writers and editors in the early forties was to develop a truly indigenous modern poetry in Canada, and Crawley and Contemporary Verse figured significantly in this development.

"First Statement in the Forties had naturalized the modern styles to Canada," Dudek wrote in 1958 in "Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry."<sup>9</sup> Dudek was right about modern styles being naturalized to Canada in the forties, but First Statement did not manage the transformation quite by itself. Militant manifestoes, and calls to arms, and polemic criticism which First Statement (and Preview) provided raise blood pressures and interest and get people moving; but in the long run change comes about through the slow and steady process of growth and maturation. The first requirement is a place to grow and Contemporary Verse provided that. It was the first of the forties little magazines (and that itself was an accomplishment), it lasted the longest, and it consistently maintained the highest standards. Preview promoted the ideas and techniques of Auden (especially), Spender, and Dylan Thomas; and this was important because it encouraged Canadian poets (although not many of them were eligible to appear in the magazine) to move toward a realistic socially relevant poetry. First Statement made its contribution to the development of poetry by pointing out that the 'new poetry' of Preview was derivative--it was interesting, it was technically competent, it had potential; but it was essentially imitative. First Statement writers tried to write more naturally out of their own Canadian experience and be 'modern' in the manner of Auden and company

as well. In the small literary community of war time Montreal this mini-feud started poets thinking and experimenting and writing. It was all to the good, but without the unbiased, eclectic, quality orientation of Contemporary Verse as a back-up the new poetry might have fizzled out with the feud in 1945 or become entrenched and narrow in two militant camps.

"It was the function...of Little Mags like Contemporary Verse, Preview, First Statement and Direction to subvert the prevailing literary values of a lingering genteel Romanticism and to establish Modern poetry in Canada," Wynne Francis wrote in her article on little magazines in Canada.<sup>10</sup> The policy making and proselytizing of Preview and First Statement were essential to the establishment of modernism in Canada; just as essential were the high standards and eclecticism of Contemporary Verse which encouraged a poet to do his best (it was a test of merit to be published in the magazine) and to realize his own individuality. Dudek criticized Contemporary Verse in 1958 for not being a "fighting magazine with policy;"<sup>11</sup> but in a recent letter he has changed his mind and sees the value of the magazine's eclecticism as a necessary balance to the cliques and partisanship which dominated early forties poetry. "Alan Crawley stood in a sense above the battle, outside the partisanship of Preview and First Statement, and outside political partisanship. His magazine was a cool place and we were all able to appear in it together" (JMcC, 7 July 1970).

By 1946, as John Sutherland ruefully noted in "The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry," "the whole purpose and driving spirit of the 'new movement' were in a state of decay."<sup>12</sup> In the period and process of the war, Canada achieved nationhood and Canadian poets evolved an indigenous

social realism poetry only to discover--after the flush of victory had subsided--that both were obsolete. Technological advances had turned the world into a global village where nationalism was a threat; and by the time the Canadian contingent had arrived at Auden's party of involved activists (some wearing Dylan Thomas buttons) everyone had gone home. Raymond Souster talked about this in his Impression article "Poetry Canada, 1940-45:"

...the Canadian movement of the Forties was a delayed-action adoption of the Spender-Auden-Day Lewis 'social' poetry, which from an almost meteoric beginning in 1933, revolutionized English poetry until 1939, when the war wrote finis to what was already beginning to wobble very noticeably. In this Canada was merely acknowledging the cultural time-lag that still exists between us, the United States, and Europe. So it can easily be seen that this 'renaissance' of ours was doomed from the very first to a dim actuarial future, and did well to survive as long as it managed to do.<sup>13</sup>

Sutherland saw the collapse of the 'new movement' as a defeat, but it really was a victory. The early forties movement naturalized modernism to Canada, now poetry was ready to move on to new interests and concerns. Preview closed down because it was so entirely part of the first phase of forties modernism; its work was done. First Statement continued under its new name Northern Review, but the enthusiasm and vitality of the early years were not much in evidence. Sutherland never did get as involved in the second phase of the forties movement as he was in the first--perhaps because poets became more individualistic and there were fewer large battles to fight. But Crawley was interested in good poetry regardless of its perspective, and so the move away from social realist poetry in the mid-forties did not disturb him. He was excited and enthusiastic about the new mythopoeic writers (whom he almost single handedly presented to the Canadian public) and supported the older writers



as they began to explore more individualistic and personal concerns after the war. Contemporary Verse is easily the liveliest, and consistently published the best poetry, of any of the Canadian magazines in the second phase of the forties (1947-1951).

If Alan Crawley is known at all it is through Contemporary Verse and, perhaps, through his radio discussions and public poetry 'sayings'. His extensive work as critic, advisor and confidant of many of the major poets of the forties is seldom discussed. Crawley likely prefers it that way because he is a quiet and unassuming man, his satisfaction came from doing the work not from seeing his accomplishments chronicled in literary history. But this extra editorial work that Crawley did had a significant impact (it is impossible to assess how much) on individual poets and on the development of poetry during the forties. "No one knowing you through the magazine alone could ever guess at the giant behind the scenes job you do," P. K. Page said in a letter to Crawley in 1951. "I feel sorry that you have to suffer for your virtues--but this faculty you have which is that of the good psychiatrist! is to make your 'patient' feel he can show you anything he has written. It is more important to the writer than CV is even, and that, heaven knows is important enough" (AC, nd).

Crawley had a rare ability to see the way a poet was going and help him move in that direction without imposing his own views and preferences on him. Crawley's interest and letters bridged the isolation many poets felt who were writing alone (and most poets in Canada in the forties were, except for the Preview group). He was the best possible audience--sensitive, enthusiastic, honest, and he had very high standards. Without Crawley's guidance and encouragement, it is unlikely that Anne

Wilkinson would have progressed far beyond occasional magazine publication. "I've had this material ready to send you for some time but have been so preoccupied with domestic affairs that I had almost forgotten that I used to try and write verse," Wilkinson wrote in May 1949.

I'm enclosing a new version of Morning Song with the old one so that you can compare them. I wrote the revised verses immediately on receiving your stimulating words of criticism. I'd write more if I lived in the atmosphere of interest and criticism that you create, so miraculously, in your letters.

(AC)

P. K. Page, Floris McLaren, Earle Birney, Anne Marriott, Dorothy Livesay, James Reaney, Jay Macpherson--all of these poets counted on Crawley's creative criticism and support. So did Souster--"Thanks for the criticism you have given me, straight from the shoulder. Some of it has been a little hard to take, but I believe it has done me good" (AC, 31 March 1950)--and Dudek, who said in a recent letter (unfortunately the early Dudek-Crawley correspondence was lost):

Contemporary Verse meant a great deal to me in my New York years (I lived there from 1944 to 1950, unless Mike Gnarowski corrects the dates).... I wrote to Alan, as I remember, as to a kind of father-confessor; you must remember that in those days magazines were fewer--I myself was a beginning writer--and we were grateful for any editor's attention and a chance of publication.

Dudek is unusual in that he did feel that Crawley tried to shape his poetry in a way that impeded his development as a poet. "I think I sent him some bad poetry and maybe he published some of it," he reminisced in the same letter. "As I recall, he wanted me to write lovely innocent lyrics of the sort I wrote at the very beginning. But I felt I was going toward something more real and more complex, and that it was a mistake to try to recall a writer to his past" (JMcC, 7 July 1970). A very young Daryl Hine phoned Crawley one day and asked to

come and talk about poetry--"He was just about 15 and he had a sheaf of manuscript in his hand; we went down to my room and he read to me for about two hours, most remarkable writing for a boy of that age,"<sup>14</sup> Later on Hine submitted some work to Contemporary Verse; Crawley suggested some changes and Hine replied--respectful but hurt and possessive:

I was interested to hear that you wished to discuss the Dedicated Poem further, with me. I am curious about what particular points in the poem you feel need revision. I hope that faults which detract from what I feel to be the basically sound construction of that particular poem may be remedied.

(AC, 11 March 1952)

Five years later, with his first collection of poems ready for the press, Daryl Hine sent Crawley a warmly grateful letter:

I don't believe that I ever told you how much your encouragement meant to me five years ago, when I first visited you in West Vancouver. I had been writing then for about two or three years, but I doubt that I should have persevered through the vicissitudes of adolescence had you not been so kind and so perceptive. Certainly I left you that day resolved at any rate to continue my attempts for another few years to prove whether or not I was, in reality, a poet.

(AC, 20 Dec. 1956)

It is the kind of letter that makes an enormous amount of work worthwhile. Crawley received many like it.

The Montreal Group "looms very large" in any consideration of the development of modern poetry in Canada. They have had a very good press, as Dudek has pointed out: "W.E. Collin wrote a volume of criticism about Scott, Klein and Smith before any one of them had published a single book; and E.K. Brown followed with a second critical study very soon after. Desmond Pacey's Ten Canadian Poets is the third book-length of these poets, Scott and Smith, who have each of them hardly produced enough to fill one thin book of original poetry in a lifetime

of fame."<sup>15</sup> A. J. M. Smith's indefatigable efforts, both as critic and anthologist, from the twenties right up to the present have heightened what was already a disproportionate amount of fame for this early generation of modern poets. The work the Montreal Group did in bringing modernism to Canada was important--they were the explorers (there were others--Arthur Stringer, Murray Gibbon, F. O. Call, Raymond Knister, W. W. E. Ross) who brought the new ideas to Canada. Most of them stayed as pioneer homesteaders (Kennedy didn't and Smith operated from afar) and tried to make the new poetry grow in Canada. But the Canadian terrain was dry and resistant in the thirties and the kind of poetic plants that the Montreal Group imported did not do well.

In the forties modernism truly became established in Canada. The creative impetus came at first from outside of Canada--mainly from the social realist poetry of Auden--but by the mid-forties there was an indigenous modern poetry in Canada that provided its own creative stimulus. Montreal and the little magazines Preview and First Statement were an important part of this naturalizing process. So was Contemporary Verse. The Montreal magazines were fighting and partisan and died when the fight to establish modernism was over. Contemporary Verse was quality and liberal and supported forties poetry into its second more accomplished phase. In the last issue of his magazine, Crawley wrote: "The story of CV through its more than a decade of publication is already written in the 39 issues since Sept. 1941. Once again, reading these issues, I am proud of the overall excellence of the poetry published there which has made, for CV and for the writers, an assured and high place in the history of Canadian writing" (39,27). It is a fitting epitaph for the magazine that was so large a part of and presents so graphically the 'renaissance' of the forties.

## FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>Robertson, ed., "Alan Crawley", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer 1969), p. 94.

<sup>2</sup>Rpt. in Making Modern Poetry in Canada, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>(Ottawa, 1930), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>"A Rejected Preface", Canadian Literature, No. 24 (Spring 1965), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, "A Rejected Preface," p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>"The Poet's Function", Canadian Poetry Magazine, 4, No. 3 (December 1939), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>"Foreword," (Toronto, 1938), pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup>"Foreword," p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Culture 19 (Winter 1958) p. 409.

<sup>10</sup>"Literary Underground: Little Magazines in Canada," Canadian Literature, No. 34 (August 1967), p. 68.

<sup>11</sup>"Role of Little Magazines in Canada", Canadian Forum (July 1958), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup>Northern Review (December-January 1950-51), rpt. in Making of Modern Poetry, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup>1, No. 4 (Spring 1952), p. 68.

<sup>14</sup>Robertson, "Crawley," Canadian Literature, No. 41, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup>Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry," Culture, No. 19 (Winter 1958), p. 408.

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Titles of poems and articles are capitalized in a standard manner without quotation marks. If no title is given to a poem, the first line (or portion thereof) is quoted with the first word capitalized and without quotation marks. Titles of books and periodicals are capitalized in a standard manner and underlined. Author entries and subject headings are given in full upper case.

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Queen's Quarterly

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## LETTERS

Alan Crawley (holder): letters written by Margaret Avison, A.G. Bailey, Earle Birney, Roy Daniells, Louis Dudek, John Gray, Daryl Hine, A.E. Johnson, George Johnston, A.M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, Malcolm Lowry, J.G. McClelland, L.A. Mackay, Jay Macpherson, P.K. Page, Lorne Pierce, E.J. Pratt, James Reaney, W.W.E. Ross, Duncan C. Scott, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, Raymond Souster, John Sutherland, Wilfred Watson, Phyllis Webb, Anne Wilkinson to Alan Crawley.

Joan McCullagh (holder): letters written by Louis Dudek, Daryl Hine, Irving Layton, L.A. Mackay, Jay Macpherson, James Reaney, Mary E. Ross, F.R. Scott, A.J.M. Smith, Raymond Souster, Lionel Stevenson, A.G. Wilkinson to Joan McCullagh.

Floris McLaren (holder): letters written by Alan Crawley, Irving Layton, Lionel Stevenson, Robert Weaver to Floris McLaren.

Jay Macpherson (holder): letters written by Alan Crawley to Jay Macpherson.

University of Toronto (holder): letters written by Alan Crawley to Earle Birney, A.J.M. Smith, Anne Wilkinson.

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