30326

National Library of Canada | Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE | *THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE*

NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* Ruth Whidden Yates

TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* A. J. M. Smith: A Chronological Description of his Poetry, and Criticism

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* Simon Fraser University

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/ *GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* M.A.

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* 1976

NAME OF SUPERVISOR/*NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE* Dr. Sandra Djwa

DATED/*DATÉ* April 30, 1976 SIGNED/*SIGNÉ*

PERMANENT ADDRESS/*RÉSIDENCE FIXÉ* 811 Spruce Ave
Coquitlam B.C.

A. J. M. SMITH:
A CHRONOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
OF HIS POETRY AND CRITICISM

by

Ruth Whidden Yates

B.A., Brigham Young University, 1971

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

April 1976

APPROVAL

Name: Ruth Whidden Yates

Degree: Master of Arts (English)

Title of Thesis: A. J. M. Smith: A Chronological Description of his Poetry and Criticism

Examining Committee:

Chairman: M. Steig

Sandra Djwa
Senior Supervisor

George Bowering

David Stouck

Colin Partridge
External Examiner

University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia

Date Approved: April 30, 1976

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis or dissertation (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:

A J M SMITH: A CHRONOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF HIS POETRY AND CRITICISM

Author:

(signature)

RUTH W. YATES

(name)

APRIL 30, 1976

(date)

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the work of Arthur James Marshall Smith, Canadian poet and critic, who was born in Montreal in 1902. A. J. M. Smith was a prominent member of a group of Montreal poets who distinguished themselves by their modernism in a culture still rigidly rooted in traditional Victorianism. Smith's dedication to the improvement of literary standards in both poetry and criticism has been a significant factor in the development of a distinctive Canadian literary culture. The thesis refers directly and specifically to Smith's poetry and makes frequent reference to his critical essays as they help to inform the poems and establish a personal poetic credo. All of the published poems that are now out of print and not readily accessible are provided in Appendix B of this thesis. Chronological bibliographies of all the poetry and prose publications are also included in Appendix A and Appendix C.

There has been relatively little critical attention devoted to Smith's work. No extensive analysis has been made of either the poetry or the prose and no attempt has been made to give either chronological perspective. This thesis provides a descriptive analysis of most of the important poems and reviews the critical essays in the order in which they were published. It traces the thematic development and relates the patterns which occur with Smith's critical position and his personal circumstances. The thesis elucidates his aesthetic and draws conclusions as to the scope and quality of his achievement as a poet and critic.

Each chapter of the thesis is concerned with a particular stage of Smith's career and delineates the style and tone that characterizes the written work of that period. The concluding chapter shows where Smith stands in relation to other well-known poets of the twentieth century. A diagram based on Smith's chronological development helps to illustrate Smith's position and accomplishment. He is best described as an artificer whose major emphasis has been on the development of artistic perfection. An analysis of the proportionate use of various critical terms in his prose supports the contention that Smith is primarily concerned with craftsmanship both in his own poetry and in the work of the young poets he influences in his teaching and criticism. His poetry is intellectual and cosmopolitan and deals with universal rather than regional themes. The poetry is neither objective nor personal and reveals little of Smith's inner self. Nevertheless when all of the poems are studied as a whole they disclose a keen and concerned sensibility of a man whose perception of the world and his role in it has inspired and guided his work, and enabled him to make a significant contribution to Canadian letters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance and encouragement of Dr. Sandra Djwa in the preparation of this thesis. The interest of A. J. M. Smith who kindly granted interviews and responded to letters is also greatly appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

Although A. J. M. Smith is recognized as one of the founders of the modern movement in Canadian poetry, his own poems have been called "masterly," and his critical works are regarded as significant, he remains something of an enigma in Canadian literature. There has been relatively little critical comment on his work, and what criticism there is has been diverse. The reasons for a lack of criticism are understandable. The poetry is erudite and Smith has been evasive about placing it in chronological order, thus making it very difficult to trace its development. Then too, very little biographical information is available since Smith has determined that the creative writings must stand on their own merit. Until very recently the critical prose was scattered among a great number of journals, and obscure magazines and newspapers, and was not readily available for intensive and inclusive examination.

As a young student, Smith helped to initiate the modernist movement in Canadian poetry. He encouraged fellow staff members of The McGill Fortnightly Review (1925-27) to discard the rigid, stylistic conventions that typified the poetry of the Victorians in favour of free verse, symbolism and imagism. Objecting to the emphasis on Canadianism put forward by the Canadian Author's Association, Smith urged that Canadian poetry take its place in the wider world. Recognizing that Canadian poets could hardly develop artistic excellence without a standard of criticism, he insisted on a more stringent criticism that would correspond with the new poetic trends being established abroad. The breadth of his

contribution to Canadian literature has been well delineated by Earle Birney.

> He was the first of our critics whose opinions were based both on a close, sympathetic reading of the corpus of Canadian writing from its beginnings, and on a sophisticated awareness of contemporary critical ideas in the larger society of Europe and the United States. As a consequence he has been both historian and shaper of our literature, perceptive in discovering new talents, courageous in reassessing established ones. His anthologies, and the incisive editorializings contained in them, have not only cut away much of the deadfall cluttering our literary woods; they have let us see what trees still stood with sap in them.[1]

In contrast, Germaine Warkentin recognizes Smith as the "architect of the contemporary," but claims that modern writers have abandoned the structure he designed. In her review of Smith's Selected Critical Essays, she rejects some of the basic principles of his critical stance and declares that his isolation from his Canadian audience is a consequence of his isolation from self.[2]

What critical response his poetry has called forth is extremely diverse. A. J. M. Smith has been called a "poet of the century"[3] by the English poet and man of letters, Roy Fuller. His poems have been praised by his contemporary, A. M. Klein.

> An appreciation of Smith's craftsmanship--his hammered gold on gold enamelling--is not to be taken, however, as underestimating the content and essence of his verse. It is true that Smith's poems are never editorial; he is sybilline, not megaphonic; but the purposefulness of his writing cannot be gainsaid. He has hewed to the aesthetic line with a consistency and a devotion which is reminiscent only of Rilke; he has taken for his themes the grand verities and not the minuscule ephemera; and he has written of them in a manner which is never dated, only with difficulty placed, and always inalienably personal.[4]

However, Padraig O'Broin, editor of Canadian Bookman, and writing from a pro-nationalist point of view, raises the question of Smith's residence in the United States. "Smith, lacking absorption into, identification with place, is not in full truth a Canadian poet."[5] But O'Broin gives him the credit of an "apostle" of Canadian literature by virtue of his criticism and anthologies. Lionel Kearns, whose own poetry emphasizes process and experiment, rejects Smith's poetry on the grounds that it is overly-academic; the poetry "seems to typify what can happen to an art form when it is dominated by an historically oriented academic discipline."[6]

The points made by each of these critics demand further clarification and qualification. There has been no inclusive study made of the writings of A. J. M. Smith, and without it, declarations of praise or criticism lack foundation and hence validity. Smith has been reticent about revealing details of his life and has insisted that the reader of his work should not attach undue significance to chronological progress. This self-effacement does not negate the fact that any body of literature produced by one man will bear witness to his guiding sensibility. By virtue of the inevitable passage of time and the accretion of experience and knowledge, his writings will chronicle changes and development in ideas and attitudes. Because of this the poetry and criticism must be given chronological perspective and examined as a whole.

This thesis traces the chronological development of both the poetry and prose of A. J. M. Smith. It describes and analyses the poetry and reviews the critical writings in so far as they inform the poetry. Pertinent biographical information is included. Each chapter defines and describes a different stage of Smith's career. The first chapter is concerned with

the poetry and critical articles written while he was a student at McGill University. The second chapter deals with the period between 1926 and 1936. The third chapter describes the poetry and prose written between 1936 and 1943. After the publication of his first book of poetry, News of the Phoenix, in 1943, a new trend toward light verse becomes evident and this stage is dealt with in Chapter IV. Chapter V is primarily concerned with the two latest publications of Smith's poetry, Collected Poems (1962), and Poems: New and Collected (1967). The final chapter draws conclusions about the nature of Smith's aesthetic and the quality of his accomplishment based on the patterns of progress that have been developed in the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER I

A. J. M. SMITH AND THE McGILL MOVEMENT

Arthur James Marshall Smith was born in 1902 in the upper-middle class section of Montreal known as Westmount. He attended McGill University between the years 1920 and 1926, and obtained both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English literature. Leon Edel remembers Smith during this period and writes,

> Smith, when I first met him, was a slim youth of medium height, with fine dark-brown hair which he combed back; usually a few strands fell over his forehead and his gold-rimmed spectacles, so that he looked like the young Yeats. He carried himself with an excess of politeness that was in his English breeding. . .but he was a tempest of poetry and revolt against establishment hypocrisies. . . Arthur started to study science; after a while he moved into the English Department where we would sit at the back of a classroom and pretend to listen to Cyrus Macmillan expound Shakespeare. . . while Smith wrote poems and gave me T. S. Eliot to read. I remember the shock of recognition when I first read "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Here was my language: this was "modern,". . .Smith first taught me the meaning of literature, how words could be made expressive and shaped into a poem. He made me feel the modern idiom, the use of words as this year's language shorn of old accretions of meaning.7

As an undergraduate, Smith edited the weekly Literary Supplement to the McGill Daily. Its pages contained short stories, poetry, and articles of review and criticism. Smith was a major contributor, and eleven of his first poems appeared in the Supplement. Although three of these become the source of later poems, the rest have never been reprinted. While none of the poems is strikingly impressive, as youthful experiments in the writing of verse they indicate the wide range of Smith's interest and demonstrate a fine sense of rhythm and style. The Supplement provided Smith with an incentive to write poetry and

an opportunity to present it to a critical audience.

In 1924 Smith and several fellow students started The McGill Fortnightly Review. This publication dealt more intensively with the material of its predecessor and oriented itself toward what was "new" in poetry and literary criticism. One of Smith's colleagues in this venture, F. R. Scott, recalls this important period:

> I first met Smith when he and I were undergraduates at McGill. He came to McGill from the Westmount High School, and was soon editing a weekly literary page in the McGill Daily. When this was stopped he founded and edited with a group of us the McGill Fortnightly Review. In the two years, 1925-1927, which it was published, Smith wrote a number of poems which, though mostly buried now in these inaccessible pages, were all remarkable for their fresh imagery, their wit, the metaphysical content, and for a quality which I can only describe as gaiety. . . While still at McGill, Smith had poems accepted by the Dial, then in the last days of its glory as an expounder of new aesthetic values, and which only a few years previously had first printed Eliot's "Waste Land". Such an honour was a stimulus to our whole group, . . . 8

The writers gathered together by Smith became known as the "Montreal Poets," and they started the modern movement in Canadian poetry. They based their ideas on the work of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot, key figures in the Symbolist and Imagist movements that had begun in Europe several years before. Smith was instrumental in bringing to the attention of his peers the early poems of T. S. Eliot, and he convincingly refuted less astute critics who had dismissed Eliot on the basis of his intellectuality and obscurity. Smith recognized that Victorian poetic structures were incompatible with the verse forms of the modern poets and he promoted the Imagists' plea for precision, clarity and objectivity in the writing of poetry. Smith criticized Canadian poets for their habit of dealing solely with Canadian subjects

and he encouraged them to be aware of the new poetic trends being established in Europe and America, and to write on more universal themes.

In the second edition of the first volume of The McGill Fortnightly Review an article entitled, "Symbolism in Poetry" appeared, which outlined Smith's view of symbolism. It "is the language of Mysticism, which, ever tending toward a more tenuous subtlety, seeks to give an outward form of expression to emotions, intuitions, half-thoughts and gleams which are as shadowy and elusive as a rare perfume or a chord of music." Accommodating the ideas of both Thomas Carlyle and the transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Smith describes symbols as the means for an intensely personal communication between the body and the soul and between the soul and God. Referring to the Renaissance poet, George Herbert, Smith develops an analogy between symbolism and prayer. Smith then applies his theories to the world of art:

> . . . 'The essential characteristic of symbolist art,' says Jean Moreas, 'consists in never going so far as the conception of the idea in itself.' The reader or hearer must bring with him some gift of interpretation, sometimes of divination and is allowed by the poet, 'the delicious joy of believing he creates.'[9]

Smith also refers to Verlaine's Art Poétique and admires in Verlaine's poetry the subtle use of poetic techniques by "the placing of unemphatic words in the rhyme position and the use of assonance and half rhymes. . . in the harmonious variation of vowel sounds within the line, and the frequent use of an internal rhyme." The article concludes with extensive quotations from the writings of W. B. Yeats, whom Smith considers to be the exemplar and master of symbolist poetry and criticism. Smith was an avid student of literary history and his investigations enhanced

his capacity to employ a great variety of poetic techniques and theories in his own poetry.

During this period Smith was in the process of writing his Masters Thesis on the poetry of W. B. Yeats. Smith sensed that Yeats' cultural predicament was somewhat similar to his own. Both the Irish and Canadians existed on the outskirts of the British literary tradition, and yet both were dominated by British conventions and influences. They had lived with the rigid and narrow tenets of Victorianism, while submerging their own national, cultural interests. With the phasing out of Victorian ideas and attitudes, there was a loss of faith and spirit for which the new poets had to compensate. Yeats created a new mythology to revitalize both social and creative life. Smith's remedy was more practical. By educating Canadian poets in the methods and concepts of the Symbolists, he hoped to encourage the production of a distinctive, national literature that would compare favourably with those of Europe and the United States.

The McGill Fortnightly Review was just a year old when Smith contributed an article on T. S. Eliot called, "Hamlet in Modern Dress." The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men" had just been published and so Eliot had not yet begun the spiritual rejuvenation which was to mark all of his later works. Smith, very accurately, analyses Eliot's sense of frustration and desolation as he searches for a purpose in an asocial and amoral world. The defensive tone that introduces the article indicates that the majority of Smith's student peers were followers of the critics skeptical of the innovative and intellectual school of which Eliot was a leader. Smith felt it necessary to justify as well as explain the

position of the poet, and it becomes clear that Smith had made a very thorough study of the poems written by Eliot and had understood and assimilated the processes by which they were created. He notes that "Memory and subconscious association play their part in the introduction of intellectually related motifs," and that ". . . it is in [Eliot's] own mind that the waste land really exists." Eliot "is always the explorer of his inner self and is overcome by an immense and bitter disillusionment, a conviction of the helplessness and futility of all effort, because he can find there nothing that will provide an antidote for the poison of civilization." The comparison of Eliot and Hamlet is accurate at this stage of Eliot's career, for both were searching for a place to belong in a spiritually barren land. Smith is impressed with the technical virtuosity of Eliot's expression and declares that a signal of his artistic superiority is his ability "to unite beauty and ugliness to form a new and more strangely beautiful quality."[10]

In another article printed in The McGill Fortnightly Review, entitled, "Contemporary Poetry," Smith elaborates upon the cataclysmic effects of a dramatically changing world on the various art forms and particularly on poetry. He reiterates that poetry must change so that it, at least, coincides with the economic and social changes taking place in the world. Poetry must not only "overthrow an effete and decadent diction," it must be removed "from the tea party," and be put into "the open air." It must deal "with subjects of living interest." Smith supports a popular trend to return to the Seventeenth Century Metaphysical poets for inspiration. He demonstrates his familiarity with the theories proposed by Freud and Jung and recognizes the necessity of the poet being

able to delve into the recesses of his own mind and translate its functions into credible art. He catalogues some of the moderns who have accomplished these things in their poetry mentioning Edith Sitwell and Wallace Stevens in particular. His article briefly discusses the problem of the relative importance of form and meaning, and concludes that in poetry, "These two things should be merged into one--a single and complete artistic whole--Form, the Body and Content, the Soul. . .the One but the visible manifestation of the other."[11]

Smith's early poetry was most often a reflection of the discoveries he had made while studying the work of other artists. Their ideas and practices appear in his own poems, disguised only by his ability to incorporate them into phrases, moods and tones uniquely his own. With a fine technical agility, Smith combines the important aspects of Imagist and Symbolist poetry. The poems that may be classified as symbolist are made more precise and objective by the application of imagistic forms of expression, while the poetry in the imagistic vein is given depth and variety by the symbolic values imposed upon it. Smith does not hesitate to admit his dependence on other poets for inspiration and example, but he is not limited by it. He is in agreement with Eliot when in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he states:

> . . .we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of (a poet's) work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.[12]

"Poem," first published in Poets of the Future, 1924-25, and reprinted in The McGill Fortnightly Review, December 19, 1925, is the initial version of a much to be revised poem now called "Universe

into Stone." A brief and simple first version serves only as an introduction of a theme Smith considered worthy of explication. Both versions echo the tone and style of Emily Dickinson. The first stanza in the original poem reads,

> Let us invert the world, and laugh,
> And stare with downcast eyes
> Below the world to where the stars
> Are littered on the skies.[13]

The revised version apostrophizes the world and uses a personal pronoun.

> Turn over World! O monstrous World!
> I stare with down-dropt eyes.[14]

The second version is generally more dramatic and uses more poetic devices. In it the metaphor of the stone is extended and amplified. A more mature poet in the second version associates himself with the creator of the world. He is "The voice, the victim, and the god," and himself assumes the task to "shape this world of stone/Into the likeness of a heart/Of flesh and blood and bone." The speaker's proposal to change the world suggests his dissatisfaction with the human condition and the roles to which men have been assigned. It is the responsibility of the poet, "the tongue of that vast bell/Inverted over me--" to draw attention to the deficiencies of mankind and to call for support in altering conditions for the better. The final version does not make it clear how the poet intends to accomplish this, but his determination to try is similar to Smith's will to bring awareness to men blinded by "pride and chastity and scorn."

A rather self-conscious poet wrote the first version of "The Sorcerer." It was first printed in the November 21, 1925 edition of The McGill Fortnightly Review under the title, "Not of the Dust." The final version was published in the Queen's Quarterly in 1954. The

differences between the two allow for an interesting comparison between the work of a youthful and a mature poet.

> Let us imagine ourselves goldfish:
> We would swim in a crystal bowl;
> The cold water would go swish
> Over our naked bodies; we would have no soul
>
> In the morning the syrupy sunshine
> Would sparkle on our tails and fins;
> We would have to stop talking of "Mine"
> And "Thine"; we would have no sins.
>
> Come then, let us dream of goldfish
> Let us put away intellect and lust,
> Be but a red gleam in a crystal dish,
> But kin of the cold sea, not of the dust.

The diction and punctuation in this version produce a jerky rhythm that does nothing to reinforce the tone or theme of the poem. The addition of a stanza at the beginning of the second version serves to heighten the gothic qualities and helps to identify the speaker more clearly. The first stanza in "The Sorcerer" introduces the sea which, is an important element in the second poem.

> There is a sorcerer in Lachine
> Who for a small fee will put a spell
> On my beloved, who has sea green
> Eyes, and on my doting self as well (p. 69)

The introduction of locality gives this version a sense of immediacy, and the reference to the priest as a sorcerer sets the fanciful tone for the rest of the poem. The change to a future tense of the verb increases the active quality and removes the sense of unbelievability which is the major weakness of the first. The final half of the second stanza in the first version is vague and forced, while the revision makes the relationship between the speaker and his lover more concrete and human.

> I shall have her then all for mine
> And Father Lebeau will hear no more of her sins.

A more jocular tone is given the final stanza by the changes.

> Come along, good sir, change us into goldfish.
> I would put away intellect and lust,
> Be but a red gleam in a crystal dish,
> But kin of the trembling ocean, not of the dust.

A "trembling ocean" has more appeal than the "cold sea" and carries the connotation of fertility more effectively. The desire of the speaker to change the nature of his environment, to immerse himself in the "trembling ocean," is analogous of his yearning to be free of the restraints and life-reducing characteristics of an earth-bound existence.

"What Strange Enchantment" is an early poem that underwent no change in subsequent printings, an indication that the poet was pleased with its original form. Smith's stringent requirements for technical precision and refinement of thought are evident in this finely balanced poem. The poem is a single interrogative statement which revolves both technically and conceptually around the number three. There are three enchantments of love which entrap the lover and each is defined in three lines.

> What strange enchantment
> Out of Faery
> Or the land of flowers
> Have you woven over me three times
> That the shy glances of your eyes
> Are the meshes of a net
> For my limbs,
> And the dark sheen of your hair
> Candle-light
> For my moth thoughts,
> And your white breasts
> Twin moons
> To draw my tides? (p. 60)

The images are metaphysical and reminiscent of John Donne's love poems, although they are not as extensively developed. The poem has imagistic

and lyrical qualities, demonstrating Smith's ability to utilize the new poetic theories while retaining the substance and depth of lyrical and metaphysical verse.

Smith experimented with a great variety of forms during this exploratory stage of his writing career. "The Lonely Land" was first printed in the January 1926 edition of The McGill Fortnightly Review. When it appeared in the Dial in June 1929 it had been significantly revised and met most of the qualifications of an imagist poem. The images are clearly accurate and sharply penetrating, and are supplemented by sounds and colours that vibrate with life. The scene being described is characteristic of the rugged, northern shore of Lake Superior. The first version was dedicated to the Group of Seven, several members of which had painted pictures of this shoreline. It has been said that Smith's poem transforms one of those paintings into words. The lake and the forest stand in juxtaposition as a storm approaches.

> Cedar and jagged fir
> uplift sharp barbs
> against the gray
> and cloud-piled sky;
> and in the bay
> blown spume and windrift
> and thin, bitter spray
> snap at the whirling sky;
> and the pine trees
> lean one way. (p. 50)

The wind and water have little regard for the trees and animals in their grasp.

> A wild duck calls
> to her mate,
> and the ragged
> and passionate
> tones stagger and fall,
> and recover,

and stagger and fall,
on these stones--
are lost
in the lapping of water
on smooth, flat stones.

The poet is at first shocked by the force of the conflict between elemental and animate nature, but he sees, in the midst of the storm, that they have learned to co-exist.

This is a beauty
of dissonance,
this resonance
of stony strand,
this smoky cry
curled over a black pine
like a broken
and wind-battered branch
when the wind
bends the tops of the pines
and curdles the sky
from the north.

He recognizes and respects the dissonance as he confirms its resonance. The poet captures the tone of natural co-ordination in the **final stanza.**

This is the beauty
of strength
broken by strength
and still strong.

Smith also developed his own brand of "pure poetry." Since Canadians no longer had to be concerned with conquering and subduing the earth, they were free to turn their attention to more universal concerns. The artist in such a position should concern himself with "the fundamental emotions of the human heart, and with the adventures of the soul in its search for an eternal nourishment."[15] Smith's definition of pure poetry is developed after his first attempts to write it. It is "a poetry that is almost timeless and changeless, and that deals with the everlasting verities, human love, human loneliness, the sustaining strength of the

earth, man's response to the voices, fancied or real, of nature." (p. 72) Several poems found in the pages of The McGill Fortnightly Review fit this description. They equate various aspects of nature with intense human emotion without attempting to translate the experience into didactic or moralistic thought.

"Something Apart" describes a very personal experience in which the poet discovers in a natural setting a parallel for his emotional anguish.

> I went into the cool
> Woods where the yellow sun falls
> Into a steel-grey pool,
> And heard at irregular intervals
> The bitter, complaining note
> That staggers and falls
> From the cat-bird's ragged throat.
>
> All day by the pool side
> Stretched on the lush grass
> I heard what that solitary cried,
> Watching his shadow pass and repass,
> Dip and wheel and return,
> Over the pool and the grass,
> Over the grass and the fern.
>
> The wind and the water stood still,
> And stiller than these--
> As though the whole world were crystal--
> Stood the attentive trees:
> Only the raucous bird was something apart,
> As alien from all these
> As the sorrow in my heart.(p. 40)

The Romantic poets sought for a refuge in nature. The protagonist in Smith's poem finds that his anxieties are confirmed and reinforced by nature. For him the sun is merely yellow and the pool, steel-grey. Rather than a nightingale he hears the "bitter, complaining note" of the cat-bird. The poet discovers, however, that immersion in a natural habitat can eventually lead to the discovery of a consoling facet in

nature; and that is its stillness and the vision and comprehension that emerge from silence. This poem underwent some revision before it was published in the final edition of Smith's collected poems. The majority of the changes occur in the second stanza and the new version makes the relationship between the cat-bird and the poet more emphatic and establishes more quickly their separateness from the rest of their surroundings. The revision eliminates the weakness in the last four lines of the second stanza resulting from the overuse of rhyme and repetition. Smith calls the second version, "The Two Birds," thus further emphasizing the poet's identification with the "alien bird."

In the March and April editions of The McGill Fortnightly Review there is a series of poems which attempt to deal with Christian dogma as the poet investigates the possibility that he may find some of the answers to his questions in popular religion. "Testament" is a vivid description of a stranger wandering in a strange land.

> It is along the seamed and gnarled
> And long-dead river-beds
> I take my way--I, molten,
> Moulded, hardened into stone,
> Rifted with ripples, seamed with sand,
> Myself more sun-baked, sallow-seamed,
> With sand and little fine grey dust
> In eyes and mouth and matted hair,
> Than any god of the desert
> Brooding with unwinking eyes
> The cactus and the prickly pear.

This is another view of Eliot's waste land, and Smith's protagonist has characteristics in common with Tiresias. The poem adopts more of Eliot's images as the poet continues his quest.

> Was it an old poet spoke of wells
> And green and grass and juicy trees?
> April has the sound of silver bells
> Or a certain misremembered voice
> Calling to me out of a child's heaven...

The protagonist in "Testament" finds himself in a predicament similar to that of the magi in Eliot's "Journey of the Magi." Though they recognize the new God, they too are unwilling to give up old ideas, customs and friends.

> I'm for the desert and the desolation.
> I have kissed my hands to distant trees
> And to the girls with pitchers
> Waiting at the well,
> And I am set upon a pilgrimage
> Seeking a more difficult beauty
> Unheartened by even the most faint mirage.

Christianity does not offer a secure haven for the wanderer. He is impelled to continue his quest for new solutions to old problems. There is nothing to indicate that the journey will ever prove fruitful but the protagonist sacrifices himself to his eternal quest.

> I am not I, but a generation
> Communicant with trickling sand
> And grey and yellow desert stone--
> The blood and body of our unknown god.

"Testament" is derivative of Yeats as well as Eliot. The tone of the poem is reminiscent of "Sailing to Byzantium," and the fates of the two protagonists are somewhat similar. Smith's lack of originality when dealing with religious themes may be due to the fact that important religious questions remain unresolved in his own mind.

Ambiguity is the primary quality of a short religious poem entitled "Beside One Dead." Two contradictory interpretations are possible. On a literal level, the poem is a simple description of the circumstances of Christ's resurrection. But if the symbology is extended, the poem becomes a modern redefinition of Christ's mission. The title suggests that Christ is, in fact, dead and that he will remain so despite his

promise to the contrary.

> This is the sheath, the sword drawn;
> These are the lips, the Word spoken;
> This is Calvary toward dawn;
> And this is the third day token--
> The opened tomb and the Lord gone:
> Something Whole that was broken. (p. 149)

The death is a fact; the instruments of the death still exist. The missing body symbolizes an irreversible loss. The two words given prominence by their capitalized "W" suggest that the Word or promise has been broken just as the body has been broken and that there will be no resurrection.

The unreality of a life after death is spoken of again in another poem entitled "The Shrouding." It is an emphatic statement of man's need to stand on his own, but it also accepts man's vulnerability. The message of the poem concurs with the rituals associated with death, because they are final.

> Unravel this curdled cloud,
> Wash out the stain of the sun,
> Let the winding of your shroud
> Be delicately begun.
>
> . . . .
>
> Fold your thin hands like this,
> Over your breast, so;
> Protract no farewell kiss,
> Nor an elastic woe. (p. 150)

The stanzas are the first and last of the first version of the poem written in the spring of 1927. In the last revision, Smith changed the last line and added another stanza. The new stanza suggests that the poet may have come to a personal conviction of the nature of death as an extinction.

Protract no farewell kiss,
No ceremonial woe,

But stand up in your shroud
Above the crumbling bone,
Drawn up like one more cloud
Into the radiant sun.

As a cloud is dissipated by the heat of the sun, so man is dissolved in death.

Of the many and diverse themes with which Smith deals in his early poetry, the poems about love are the most technically and aesthetically successful. The tenderness and passion of human love are associated with the elements of nature and the images created thereby are sincere and sensitive. "A Poem," later called "For Healing" is such a poem.

Take in your long arms
The torso of a wave:
Stroke its lithe loveliness
Let it tenderly lave
Arms, breast and shoulders,
Sinews and thighs
From the yellow of love
Her immoderate eyes,
The ache of her fingers,
The whips of her hair,
And the bruise where her mouth
Moved here and there.

The wave introduced in the second line reverbrates throughout the rest of the poem in the motions made by the woman's body. Its final crash upon the shoreline leaves identical impressions on the body of the man. There is just enough internal and end rhyme to reproduce the effect of the undulating wave, and its association with the woman's body is accomplished by the punctuation and structure of the lines. Smith changed the first four lines in his revision to read:

Spread your long arms
To the salt stinging wave
Let its breathless enveloping
Cleanliness lave (p. 38)

The first two lines now provide a better introduction with their softer, more sensuous sounds. The repetition of the sibilant sounds in combination with the heavy/ē/sounds create the sensation of breathlessness in the reader, allowing him to more fully participate in the experience being described in the poem.

Another love poem written during this period is called "Field of Long Grass." The speaker imagines himself a field of long grass through which a woman is walking. He attributes to the grass his own desire to touch and embrace her.

> When she walks in the field of long grass
> The delicate little hands of the grass
> Lean forward a little to touch her. (p. 66)

Alliteration and assonance in the second stanza simulate the fluctuation in the light as the grass and the woman's dress wave back and forth in the wind. As the woman moves beyond the field of grass and is lost to the speaker's view, she enters into the poet's imagination where he consummates his love.

> Then she begins to walk in my heart.
> Then she walks in me, swaying in my veins.
>
> My wrists are a field of long grass
> A little wind is kissing.

As he begins to develop a style more particularly his own, Smith diverges somewhat from the theories of the new poets who were writing "free verse." Smith's poetry begins to demonstrate a growing concern with balance and control. Definite metrical and rhythmical patterns become an important part of his verse. While he does not confine himself to strict rhyme schemes, very few poems are completely without some form of rhyme pattern. Two of Smith's finest and most distinctive poems

exhibit the control he has gained over his medium. Both poems were published in reputable literary magazines. "The Two Sides of a Drum" was first printed in the Dial in December, 1926 and "Shadows There Are" was published in The Nation in June, 1927. The first poem is imagistic in form and reminiscent of some of Ezra Pound's Chinese translations. The technique of positioning himself at a great distance and in an exotic landscape, allows the poet to evoke a sense of timelessness and spacelessness. Deep in meditation the visionary is located exactly at the "still point" of Eliot's "turning world" where he can silently contemplate the opposites of eternity and time. He gives expression to his vision, for "Eternity and time/Are the two sides of a drum," which must be sounded as a herald to those who are incapable of comprehending for themselves these universals. (p. 137) This recognition of the responsibility of the artist to discover and proclaim truth motivates the writing of "Shadows There Are." Shadows in the physical world represent man's effort to understand the spiritual world, and they are capable of inducing fear in the most composed of men. The three sections of the poem each contribute to a different phase of the poet's attitude toward himself as he functions in the world, trying to ascertain the nature of its shadows. First is revealed an educated recognition of the inconceivable; second a realization of the personal threat of the unknown, and finally, frustrated desperation at the mortal's incapacity to deal with the realities creating the shadows. (p. 13)

The years spent at McGill University constitute the exploratory and experimental stage of A.J.M. Smith's writing career. The critical articles indicate that he was reading widely and interpreting the works

of others with discernment. He was cognizant of what was worthwhile in the work of the moderns and demonstrated his capacity to incorporate their best recommendations into his own creative writing. The poetry of this early stage is not notable for its ingenuity or profundity, but it is the result of the careful application of technique to concept. As with any developing talent it is anticipated that practice will lead to the achievement of truly original and meaningful art.

CHAPTER II

A "PURE" POET

Arthur Smith spent the next two years in post-graduate study at the University of Edinburgh. Under the supervision of the renowned Elizabethan scholar, H. J. C. Grierson, Smith prepared a doctoral thesis on the religious poets of the seventeenth century. While his thesis concentrated on the work of George Herbert, Richard Crashaw and the religious poetry of John Donne and Henry Vaughan, his interest extended to the lighter verse of Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell. Smith's poetry had already begun to express an interest in religion, but his study of the Metaphysicals gave his thoughts a new direction. His frame of reference became intellectual rather than personal and his concern focused on the contradictions in theological issues. Just as the Metaphysical poets were revolting against the conventionalism of Elizabethan love poetry, Smith began to reject the Romantic conception that a poem must be a direct reflection of the personality of the poet. A poem must have merit within itself and be able to exist apart from its creator. Smith's natural inclination toward pure poetry was reinforced by his work with Renaissance poetry.

A poem, entitled "To Henry Vaughan," was written while Smith was at Edinburgh. The poem is an undisguised imitation of Henry Vaughan's poetry and responds to the particular problems raised in Vaughan's poem, "The Retreat." In "The Retreat," Vaughan revels in joyous thoughts of a pre-earth existence in which he dwelt in the presence of God. There is no pleasure in his current life, and he longs to be free of the bonds of mortality, for every step towards maturity takes him further from the

imagined innocence and purity of his former life. In the final stanza Vaughan states his desire to return to a state of "angel infancy."

> Oh, how I long to travel back,
> And tread again that ancient track!
> That I might once more reach that plain
> When first I left my glorious train;
> From whence the enlightened spirit sees
> That shady city of palm trees.
> But, ah! my soul with too much stay
> Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
> Some men a forward motion love;
> But I by backward steps would move,
> And when this dust falls to the urn,
> In that state I came, return.

The modern poet, in "To Henry Vaughan," cannot comprehend this wish to hasten death. He addresses Vaughan to remind him of the many natural beauties of the earth, "Such bright stalks/Of grasses! such pure Green! such blue/Clear skies! such light! such silver dew!--" Surely heaven cannot offer more than this. The poet is skeptical and slightly mocking until he finally realizes that while he has been concerned with physical things, Vaughan has been concerned with spiritual things. It is not total comprehension, but it is the acceptance of another man's beliefs. The poem represents its author's ability to give sincere expression to thoughts other than his own. The last stanza of "To Henry Vaughan" acknowledges Vaughan's beliefs and admires him for them.

> Yet art thou Homesick! to be gone
> From all this brave Distraction
> Wouldst seal thine ear, nail down thine eye;
> To be one perfect Member, die;
> And anxious to exchange in death
> Thy foul, for thy Lord's precious, breath,
> Thou art content to beg a pall,
> Glad to be Nothing, to be All.

The formal diction, punctuation, and metrical pattern are similar to Vaughan's and echo his sounds and rhythms. Smith also recreates

a similar harmony between structure and theme.

During the spring and summer of 1928, Smith had four poems published in either The Canadian Forum or the Dial, which were immediately concerned with the subject of death. They are products of his recent study of metaphysical poetry and are the beginning of an overwhelming fascination with the idea of death both in universal and personal terms. In "Nightfall," later subtitled "Fin de siècle," the poet approaches death as it relates to the passage of time, and while the poem speaks only of the passing of one day into night, it is also referring to life and death on a larger scale. The poet finds himself in a "winding garden" and in a "maze," and as he wanders he is acutely conscious of the passage of time. The "crystal" and "fragile sky" seems to represent his imaginative and creative capacities and their productivity is measured by the clouds that pass fragmenting its surface. Just as nature's creations droop, fade and finally fall, the lights of his imagination fade and fall. All that remain are the stars; small pinpoints of light which the poet equates with the "words of poems, crisp and sharp and small." So it is poetry that illuminates life just as the stars transform the darkness of the night sky. (p. 65)

Smith's death images develop toward a recognition of death as a state of "nothingness." In the poem "Journey," published in the Dial, May, 1928, is found the first step in the development of that image. A state of nothingness is made up of complete solitude and ignorance of what lies ahead.

One and by one,
Under a drooping sun
His footsteps fall.

With heavy tread
And unbowed head
He goes alone,

The end unknown,
On either hand a wall.

Death walks behind
With pace designed,
An overtaking tread.

He asks of heart
To bear a braver part
When death draws nigh.

And for reply,
Heart moveth not. And all is said. (p. 138)

It is the inevitableness of death that delivers the strong sense of abandonment in this poem. With the removal of hope and faith there is no other option open to man but acceptance of absolute negation.

In "Prothalamium," published in the same magazine two months later, the same theme is given further attention. The poet describes the physical deterioration of the body in its grave. The coffin gives way to natural forces as do all material things. A prothalamium is a marriage hymn and this poem too, celebrates a kind of marriage feast. It recognizes the reuniting of the dust of the body with its original source. By calling this natural element his sister, the speaker is suggesting that this relationship is an incestuous one that can never be positively productive. Death is inevitable; it is also "voluptuous." The final stanza equates death and sexuality.

No matter: each must read the truth himself,
Or, reading it, reads nothing to the point.
Now these are me, whose thought is mine, and hers,
Who are alone here in this narrow room--

> Tree fumbling pane, bell tolling,
> Ceiling dripping and the plaster falling,
> And Death, the voluptuous, calling. (p. 136)

Looking forward to his return to Canada and employment, Smith turned his attention to Canadian literature and particularly the state of literary criticism in Canada. In the April, 1928 issue of The Canadian Forum, he published an article entitled "Wanted--Canadian Criticism." In this essay he decries the "hasty adulation mingled with unintelligent condemnation" that has characterized the general critical response to Canadian artists. Smith sees the Canadian confusing the realms of commerce and art and suggests that in the effort to guarantee saleability of artistic effort on grounds other than quality, the value of the art produced is greatly undermined. The Canadian is satisfied with marketing his products in the interests of duty and morality. The artistis made to serve the interests of the Canadian manufacturer by glorifying things Canadian and the consumer is encouraged to purchase for the good of the Canadian economy.

> Without a body of critical opinion to hearten and direct them, Canadian writers are like a leaderless army. They find themselves in an atmosphere of materialism that is only too ready to seduce them from their allegiance to art and with an audience that only wishes to be flattered. It looks as though they will have to give up the attempt to create until they have formulated a critical system and secured its universal acceptance. (p. 168)

In order to accomplish this end the writer must be free to choose his own subject matter. He should not be compelled to deal with things distinctly and solely Canadian.

> Canadian poetry. . .is altogether too self-conscious of its environment, of its position in space, and scarcely conscious at all of its position in time. (p. 169)

The article voices a plea for realism, intellectualism, and consciousness.

In 1929 Smith returned home from Scotland to fulfill a contract he had signed with the Montreal School Board to teach English at Baron Byng High School. He had been offered a job at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, but turned it down because of his prior commitment to the Montreal School Board. After a year of teaching high school for eight and nine hours a day with little or no time to concentrate on his own poetry and his still unfinished Ph.D. thesis, Smith started to look for a university appointment. There was no work available in Canada and so he applied to the teachers' agency in Chicago and obtained a job in Munsing, Indiana as a replacement instructor. He later took a position as an instructor at Michigan State University and taught there for two years as a replacement. In the midst of the depression, Smith found himself without a job again, and was unemployed for almost two years. He eventually returned to Michigan State University where he spent the rest of his academic career. Smith admits now that he regrets not having accepted the post at Queen's for it would have enabled him to stay in Canada. This very significant alteration in his personal plans and aspirations had a profound effect on his position both in terms of his Canadian identity and his attitude toward life.

A series of descriptive, landscape poems were published shortly after his return to Canada in 1929. Although they make no reference to a particular place, the poems are the expressions of a man who has had intimate experiences with the world of nature and is able to reproduce those experiences with precise and sensitive images. While Romantic poets idealized nature in their poetry and the Imagists strove to reduce it to its most basic elements, Smith practices a compromise

technique by which he attempts to reproduce the very act of nature. In "The Creek" the reader is made to see precisely what the poet has seen. The words chosen call all the senses into play and the very act of pronouncing them contributes to their effectiveness in describing the scene.

> Stones
> still wet with cold black earth,
> roots, whips of roots
> and wisps of straw,
> green soaked crushed leaves
> mudsoiled where hoof has touched them,
> twisted grass
> and hairs of herbs
> that lip the ledge of the stream's edge: (p. 44)

The act of observing usually takes place in two stages. First the eye sees and signals the formation of mental images. Then the mind translates and interprets the image in accordance with its own experiences. The second stanza of "The Creek" documents the thought processes taking place in the mind of the poet.

> then foamfroth, waterweed,
> and windblown bits of straw
> that rise, subside float wide,
> come round again, subside,
> a little changed
> and stranger, nearer
> nothing:
>
> these (p. 44)

Since Smith had come to regard poetry as a craft whose forms could be refined and perfected through practice and conscious control, the writing of the landscape poems trained him in the efficient and precise use of poetic device and diction. He refuses to align himself with any single school of poetic thought, but combines and manipulates various theories to produce his own unique brand of poetry. Few of the poems

before 1930 can be judged according to a prescribed standard and must be analysed according to their respective achievement of their author's intent.

Until this point in time, Smith's poetry had expressed little, if any concern with current, social events. He preferred to deal with universal and conceptual problems rather than immediate and practical ones. But there is no question that he watched with interest the effects of the First World War. It had become obvious that the economic boom of the Twenties was a temporary one that had, in fact, helped to insure the breakdown of social and moral responsibility. The Christian ethic was suffering both from neglect and abuse and there seemed to be no viable system of moral values taking its place. The depression did have the advantage of forcing people to reassess their personal stands and to realign their thinking. This historical period is well documented in Smith's poetry. A more distinctive and personal trend is evident in the new poems and they mark a coming to terms with the subjects and ideas that have been haunting him, and they offer a kind of solution to the predicament in which he has found himself as he has tried to function as a poet in what he considers an alien environment.

"Son-and-Heir" bears the date of 1930, and reacts to the overindulgence and complacency of young people coming to a negative and objectionable maturity. The speaker heaps scorn on the concepts of innocence and penitence as they are perceived by those who have fostered and taught incorrect moral principles in the guise of Christianity. The falsity and sham that are perpetrated on the children contribute to the societal drought which is becoming universal. The tone of the poem is paradoxi-

cally bitter as the joyfully anticipated child grows to reinforce the inadequacies of his parents and becomes in time the generator of further chaos. Smith's technique of incorporating divergent images plays an important role in delivering the message of the poem. Hints of Christian dogma are ironically framed in modern media and movie theatre slang, as in "Angels sing/Like press agents the praises of their lamb." Politics too pollutes the original Christian ideal of the sacredness of birth. The birth of a son is a political achievement as well as an astute investment for the parents who intend that the child will live to promulgate their own warped beliefs. The child is set against a prehistoric backdrop where men live as animals and where brawn and cunning determine one's progress. Pride, greed and calumny are the primary qualities the child will inherit. He will be trained to look and act in accordance with his parents' rules of behaviour and will serve their bloated but vacuous egos. The child develops as a reflection of his corrupted environment and is incapable of even the most perfunctory service. He is destined to the doom of,

> . . .the empty years, the hand to mouth,
> The moving cog, the unattended loom,
> The breastless street, and lolling summer's drouth,
>
> Or zero's shears at paperwindow pane. .
> And so forth and so forth and so forth. (p. 114)

"A Portrait, and A Prophecy," first published ten years later, might well be a sequel to this poem for it further portrays the parents and the conception of the child born in "Son-and-Heir." The final stanza in particular makes the relationship between the two poems implicit.

> Cassandra-like, I prophesy the lad
> So sired will grow from no-so-good to bad:
> Untruthful, nasty, secretive, and sad,
> He'll drive his ill-adjusted mother mad,
> And end by growing up just like his dad. (p. 96)

The beginning of this poem describes the parents who are rebelling against the inhibitions and restrictions imposed upon them by their parents. The father has become a "delicate-fingered thief/Of values. . ., a dealer in stolen belief." He has nothing to replace the standards he rejects. He falls "in love with Penitence," a virtue now more closely associated with pretension than true contrition. "He'll bring that slut to bed of the most fulsome of his sins,/The precocious blue-eyed bastard, Innocence." Innocence, when not honourably sired can only mature to become the individual described in the final stanza of the poem quoted above. Except for this final stanza, the poem is composed of four tercets. The metre is varied and the longer lines tend to increase the impact of the accusatory tone that is prevalent in the poem. The sing-song quality of the short lines in the last stanza dramatizes the point that the circumstances described are too familiar in modern society.

Although Smith lived and worked in the United States he kept a close relationship with his friends and associates in Montreal. By 1936 the Montreal Poets had established themselves enough to publish an anthology of their poetry. New Provinces contained selections from the work of Smith, F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, A. M. Klein, Robert Finch

and E. J. Pratt. In his preface to the book, F. R. Scott comments on the changes that the modern movement had made in poetic form and content, and notes that by the end of the 1920s the modernists were "frustrated for want of direction." "Poetry was reflecting the aimlessness of its social environment." Scott states that the concern of contemporary versifiers with current economic and social conditions has given poetry a new vitality.[16] The selections of the various poets represented in the anthology demonstrate this growing awareness of their social situation. Eleven poems by A. J. M. Smith were included in the publication. Four of them ("The Lonely Land," "Prothalamium," "The Creek," and "Two Sides of A Drum") have already been referred to above. Of the the rest, only two had never been printed before ("A Soldier's Ghost" and "To a Young Poet"). Since its first appearance in The McGill Fortnightly Review, "Epitaph" has invariably concluded any collection of his works. The remaining four ("Like an Old Proud King in a Parable," "In the Wilderness," "News of the Phoenix," and "Offices of the First and Second Hour") are among the best and most representative of Smith's entire poetic output. He has begun to recognize and experience the difficulties of being a poet in an environment where men are primarily concerned with economic and social gain and care little for the imaginative arts. The poet must become an isolated being who is compelled to observe, guage and predict the directions of that society. Without an appreciative or even aware audience, the poet must create one for himself and often must resort to his own ego for necessary feedback.

"Like an Old Proud King in a Parable" very poignantly relates the problem of the artist as he tries to live with the frightening insights

that are his. The king in the parable is bitter because of the crassness and insincerity of the people who surround him. He is strong enough to break away from the confines of his court and make, "A meadow in the northern stone," and breathe a "palace of inviolable air." His companion and lover in this escapade for freedom is only his own sense of pride and wholeness. The speaker envies the king in his break for freedom, for he too is entrapped by the exigencies of his daily routine and longs to be free. He believes that his own individuality will sustain him and alone he will finally be able to,

> . . .sing to the barren rock
> Your difficult lonely music, heart,
> Like an old proud king in a parable. (p. 12)

The "difficult, lonely music" of the poet haunts this poem, making it impossible to separate his creation from his own precarious predicament.

While Smith can legitimately empathize with the "Old Proud King," he can cast a cold and piercing eye on those who might be classified as the old king's "fawning courtiers." "In the Wilderness" describes the mindless man who refuses to meet the challenges of life. This individual chooses always to walk in the light of an innocuous summer day. He is blind to the light of the stars (the poetic imagination) and deaf to the song of birds (words of poems). He is immune from pain and loneliness because he is incapable of feeling. The poet condemns and mocks this narrow-minded ignorance.

> He walks between the green leaf and the red
> Like one who follows a beloved dead,
>
> And with a young, pedantic eye
> Observes how still the dead do lie.
>
> His gaze is stopped in the hard earth,
> And cannot penetrate to heaven's mirth. (p. 16)

This focus on the harshness and futility of existence compels the poet to examine more closely the nature of life and if possible to devise a system which will support him in his own personal search for meaning.

In "News of the Phoenix," a poem which more than any other describes the particular position of the poet, Smith symbolizes life in the world as a phoenix. But this modern version of the bird is different. The classical phoenix habitually dwells in lonely desert places but has the unique ability to renew itself eternally.

> They say the Phoenix is dying, some say dead.
> Dead without issue is what one message said,
> But that has been suppressed, officially denied.
>
> I think myself the man who sent it lied.
> In any case, I'm told, he has been shot,
> As a precautionary measure, whether he did or not. (p. 116)

The poem is in lyric form and manages, through inference, to hark back to Greek choric poetry. The reader is reminded of the Graecian method of delivering important news in dramatic choral expression. The tone, however, is distinctly modern for it is one of skepticism and pessimism, particularly as it introduces the personal element. The poet refuses to accept the news of the immortal Phoenix's death and tries to escape from the fact by suggesting the death of the news-bearer. Unconfirmed news draws one into the shadowy, ill-perceived world where speculation and rumour run rampant. But even that condition is preferable to a confirmation that the Phoenix, the symbol of immortality, is, in fact, quite dead. The bird's death would signal the end of any hope for any form of human immortality, including his artistic creations. An artist survives and produces in the belief and hope that there will be an audience to appreciate his creations. Thus he and they are made immortal.

Man threatened by oblivion is the subject of the poem, "The Offices of the First and the Second Hour." The poem mentions many physical features of the human body and then relates how each of them succumbs to nothingness. Even darkness, which represents an avenue of escape or at least forgetfulness, is beyond the speaker's reach. The law of contraries suggests that since there is no darkness, there can be no light. The "office of the first hour" kindles memories of the past, but the past can no longer provide a viable framework or foundation for life. The "office of the second hour" is the present and represents the stage at which man suffers the loss of conscious control over his own existence. All that is left to him is,

> Quietly to attend the unfolding light's stark
> Patience, inhuman and faithful like a weed or a flower,
> Empty of darkness and light. (p. 144)

The tone of this poem is established by the chanting qualities in the verse which is reminiscent of the verse drama, Murder in the Cathedral, by T. S. Eliot. The chorus responds to the cue of the priest, automatically and without spontaneity. The message in the choral response is antithetical to the traditional ones sung in the masses of some Christian churches, and the principle question remains unanswered.

"A Soldier's Ghost" is a dramatic response to the barbarity of war. The poet is at a loss to commemorate adequately the sacrifices made by young men called to serve and die as soldiers. All of the devices employed to boost their morale and pride seem vain and ridiculous in the face of their immanent and inevitable destruction. The "chevron" denoting their rank on their uniforms will eventually mock the corpse it surrounds.

Can a memberless ghost
Tell?
These lost
Are so many brother bones.

The hieroglyph
Of ash
Concedes an anagram
Of love. (p. 121)

The poet asks the reader to compare one man's life with the nothingness of death and determine for himself if the sacrifice is a worthwhile one. The speaker is convinced that love is not sufficient motive for self-sacrifice.

The last poem by Smith in New Provinces is completely different from those already mentioned. It is representative of the sort of poem favoured by the New Critics which uses classical myths to relate modern messages. "To a Young Poet" refers to the story of Iphegenia, a young Greek girl who was abducted from her home to become a sacrifice to Artemis, the goddess of the woodland. A miraculous event prevents the sacrifice from taking place and Artemis makes Iphegenia a priestess in her temple. Iphegenia was particularly noted for the grace and delicacy with which she performed the tasks required of her by her mistress.

Than I would have you find
In the stern, autumnal face
Of Artemis, whose kind
Cruelty makes duty grace,

Whose votary alone
Seals the affrighted air
With the worth of a hard thing done
Perfectly, as though without care. (p. 21)

Clearly, Smith's sympathy is with the hard, tight syntax and precise meanings of the new critics. The effort required in the creation of works of art

is often oppressive and always difficult. But in spite of this, the artist, like Iphegenia, must perform his duty with grace and delicacy, "Perfectly, as though without care."

Smith had been asked to prepare the preface for New Provinces, but his final draft was objected to by E. J. Pratt, and a new preface, written by Scott, introduced the book. An examination of the "Rejected Preface to New Provinces" which was finally published in 1966 shows why he chose to include the poems he did. Speaking of the writers contributing to the Anthology, Smith says:

> In attempting to get rid of the facile word, the stereotyped phrase and the mechanical rhythm, and in seeking, as the poet of today must, to combine colloquialism and rhetoric, we were of course only following in the path of the more significant poets in England and the United States. And it led, for a time to the creation of what, for the sake of brevity, I will call "pure poetry." (p. 171)

He goes on to define "pure poetry."

> Such poetry is objective, impersonal, and in a sense timeless and absolute. It stands by itself, unconcerned with anything save its own existence.

This sounds a bit pompous, but it does serve to emphasize the main point that Smith tries to make in the essay. That is, that the poetry in the anthology stands out among the rest of the poetry being written in Canada because it is not steeped in old-fashioned forms and ideas. The reasons for the initial rejection of the preface are fairly obvious. It tends to become a bitter tirade against what has been characteristic of Canadian poetry in the past rather than a thoughtful consideration of the new and enlightened movement that the poets anthologized do, in fact, represent. Although he eventually recognizes the important qualities of the contributors, the admission lacks the positive force that it might otherwise have had.

New Provinces reached a very limited audience. Copies of the book were given to poets already acquainted with the contributors but it received no critical attention at the time of its publication. The anthology is now recognized as the most important publication of the modernist movement in Canada. It was becoming indelibly impressed on Smith, at least, that the task of the poet is a "lonely and difficult" one and that he must be satisfied with a small but select audience of appreciative readers.

CHAPTER III

A "COSMOPOLITAN" POET

The frustrating effort to find suitable employment, the disillusionment of having to settle outside of Canada, and the economic hardships of the Depression years all combined to make life difficult for A. J. M. Smith. But the struggle to identify himself and his role as a poet increased his awareness and his concern and thereby improved the quality of his poetry. The years between 1936 and 1943 are Smith's most productive in terms of his producing vital and relevant poetry. The poems are generally longer, less concerned with technical effect, and they deal more intensively with social and moral problems. Smith was haunted by the threat of war and feared the consequences of the seemingly universal loss of respect for human life. His poems attack and condemn the hypocrisy and selfishness of leaders in government, church and business. Although he recognizes that his audience is limited, Smith regards poetry as a vehicle for social change and hopes that by exposing human folly there will result an imporvement in the human condition. The critical articles written during this period attack the incompetence of Canadian literary critics, and Smith assumes the task of preparing what he considers to be the first adequate anthology of Canadian poetry.

The poem "Noctambule," which first appeared in 1936, is a fantastical description of wartime atrocities. The poet verbally paints an illusive landscape that is both ludicrous and horrifying. He views the scene from many perspectives. Illuminated only by the jaundiced light of the moon, the shapes of derelict weaponry are ominously lifeless.

The reader is then forced to think of the deceptions exercised on Othello who was victimized not wholly by lies, but also by his own naiveté. So the nameless men marching in armies are prey to their belief that their cause is just and that the sacrifice of their lives is worthwhile. Nothing is real in this artificial and nightmarish world. What was mistakingly believed to be a moon turns out to be a dirty and ragged white flag which symbolizes complete surrender and defeat. A paradoxical aphorism, "Perhaps to utilize substitutes is what/The age has to teach us," emphasizes the sense of dehumanizing futility. The soldiers are no longer in control of their own lives.

> wherefore let the loud
> Unmeaning warcry of treacherous daytime
> Issue like whispers of love in the moonlight,
> --Poxy old cheat! (p. 92)

Certainly there are no sureties left, for the "warcry of treacherous daytime" is as deceitful as the "whispers of love in the moonlight." The fable of the mouse and the lion suffers its characters to reverse their roles, just as the roles of good and evil have been reversed on the battlefield. The world has divorced itself from compassion and comprehension.

The wars of this century have been wars of attrition and the tendency to talk of the loss of countless thousands of men promoted the loss of a sense of individual worth. Dead soldiers were "unknown soldiers." They became anonymous and somehow easier to dismiss from one's conscience. In "The Common Man" the poet lists many of the conditions that contribute to the failure to recognize the individual, and identifies that as the chief malady of the modern generation.

> He was the only man in the world
> Not registered. He was a node, a furled
> Forgotten flag, a still point still unwhirled. (p. 126)

While social conditions in general did little to promote his individuality, the war condemned him to anonymity. Because the statistics in his file lacked any distinction, the common man was selected to become a spy.

> His function was to stand outside.
> At first he thought this helped him when he tried
> To tell who told the truth, who plainly lied.
>
> . . . .
>
> His job was to listen in on the queues,
> To decode the official releases, and fuse
> The cheers on parade with the jeers in the mews.

The difficulty is that the enemy is also anonymous and its true identity has been concealed, causing all men to wonder if, in fact, they too are not to be considered enemies. The common man serves in the vain hope that eventually he too will be able "To speak and be himself and have a name." His destiny is that he will be forgotten when his usefulness has come to an end.

> He fell, of course, An abstract man
> Who ended much as he began--
> An exile in a universal plan. (p. 128)

The "universal plan" seems aimed at the destruction of mankind.

Death and the various methods that men have discovered to perpetrate it have become central in the poems by Smith. His concern, however, is not solely the needless exterminations of wartime, for he is becoming more conscious of his own death and this begins to have a measurable effect on the quality of his life. In "Ode: The Eumenides" the poet considers the possibility of escaping from the depravities of the world. He contemplates a return to the innocence of childhood. Not only his own childhood

is implied in the poem, but also the childhood of the world when both nature and mankind were free of the stains of experience.

> If we could go again
> To the innocent wood
> Where the crisp floor
> Muffles the tread,
> And the classic shade
> Of cedar and pine
> Soothes the depraved head
> In the children's glen, (p. 118)

His purpose in returning is not primarily to nostalgically revive the past, but it is to escape the tormenting spirits of all those who have died in vain and futile causes. The religions that taught piety and fear no longer provide secure havens and the protagonist is persecuted by feelings of guilt as if he personally shared the responsibility of the deaths.

> How shall we ask for
> What we need whose need
> Is less, not more?

Man's efforts to cultivate and civilize are in vain since the "dragon seed" is untamed and uncontrollable. In spite of all effort,

> There is none,
> However innocent
> In heart or head
> That shall escape
> The stench of the dead
> Emptied and butchered hope
> In lives and deaths made
> Meaningless froth.

The poet examines the consequences of such a life and death in Christian terms in "The Bridegroom." The poem is one of Smith's longest and most difficult in terms of its symbolic references. It is essentially a modern vision and is similar to the one that inspired T. S. Eliot to write "Ash Wednesday" and The Four Quartets. While "The Bridegroom" uses major Eliotic images it does come to a different conclusion. The overriding

image is that of Christ, his coming to earth, his life and atoning death and ascension to heaven. But this theme is entwined with a modern figure trying to deal with contemporary problems. Christ traditionally has been called the bridegroom who is to take the Church as his bride. His pre-earth existence is referred to commonly and by the poet as a state of sleep or innocence. The poet calls upon metaphysical images to describe the idyllic and pure state from which he rises to take upon himself the burden of mortality. An important symbol in the poetry of Eliot is the stair which separates the waste land from the rose garden. Smith's bridegroom descends this stair and as in Eliot's poem, the descent makes the protagonist acutely conscious of time.

> He closed the door, addressed him to the stair,
> Descended slowly past th'ancestral clock
> And bore it with him, beating in his breast--
> Memorial sound
> that choirs him cloudily
> To spongy earth
> kinder than stone,
> But canopied with dust. (p. 129)

Recognition of one's position in time as well as in space has been an important message present in much of Smith's critical work. The movement of the poem at this point is suggestive of the dream convention in 13th century French poetry and in the work of Chaucer and Danté. Danté may be the model in this instance, for the protagonist does descend into an "inferno."

> . . .a pitted place, whereof ruth mists
> Assail him, and the booming frogs--
> And in the acrid marshes, flaming wells.
> He came, thence, down
> into a land of smoke.

The devil reigns supreme in this place. The poem echoes Danté's descriptions of the various levels of hell. The horrors in Smith's poem

are modern ones, such as, "Rusty block," "the machine," "huge gears," and "flues." The bitterest image is that of the effects these evils have on the men, for some fell "into the fire of sheer fatigue and fried." The simple statement set off on its own, "Fears might not quench that flame," indicates the ultimate despair felt by the observer poet, and his despair is the equivalent of the death of the bridegroom. Christ, however, is able to untie the bonds of death and frees men from their mortality. This provides a very open-ended answer and perhaps poses more problems than it solves. Not only must Christ reascend the stair but he must take man with him. The ascension has been made difficult, if not impossible, by the burden of knowledge accumulated during their earthly experience. A state of innocence will no longer be a secure or comfortable state even if they do reach heaven. So the nature of that heaven must, of necessity, be redesigned. The only offering Christ can give to the men he has rescued is his love, but the poet closes with the warning that this love, "will stop/Far short of hope."

In 1939 Smith applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship to support the preparation of an anthology of Canadian poetry. His work prompted the publication of an article entitled, "Canadian Poetry--A Minority Report." An extensive quote from the introduction of the essay serves to clarify the position he had adopted with regard to Canadian literature.

> Now I am not one of those people. . .who love every literature but their own and who hear the muses singing in the isles of Greece but never stop to listen for them on the old Ontario strand; nor am I one of those lovers of the new who have no patience with whatsoever our fathers have found of good repute. I certainly do not wish to blow frost on the idea that Canada has produced a considerable body of respectable and interesting poetry. The belief, however, which most of the standard anthologists and pontifical critics assume, suggest, and

> sometimes even state, namely, that our "great poets" have given us a national poetic literature comparable in power and fidelity to that of England or the United States--this belief is so fantastic that no one outside Canada can be made to believe anybody really holds it. (p. 175)

Smith goes on to consider in detail the kind of literary criticism that has been prevalent in Canada. He attacks the lack of perception and discrimination of most Canadian critics and pinpoints the poetic anthologies as demonstrating a notoriously poor taste:

> The one test that the anthologists never fail to make is the test for "Canadianism." If a poem does not exhibit some obvious and often superficial manifestation of being Canadian, it must treat the grand, serious themes with solemnity and unction. But if it is unmistakably Canadian, it may be as trivial as it likes. (p. 176)

The article is not, however, solely an attack on the efforts that have been made but also tries to indicate ways by which the situation might be amended. He states that a poet must first gain recognition outside Canada if he expects to receive an adequate critical evaluation of his work.

> The most pernicious influence upon Canadian poetry is, and for a long time has been, the optimistic spirit engendered by our adoption of special standards. We have stealthily acquired an enervating habit of making allowances, which in turn has cajoled us into accepting the mediocre as the first rate--<u>for us</u>. And it has meant in the long run (and, of course, with some exceptions) the condemnation of our poetry to a lonely exile within our borders. (p. 182)

He counsels young poets to send their verse to magazines outside of Canada. If their poetry is good, it will compare favourably with what is being accepted elsewhere. Smith's concluding statements are meant to encourage young writers.

> Set higher standards for yourself than the organized mediocrity of the authors' associations dares to impose. Be traditional, catholic, and alive. Study the great masters

> of clarity and intensity. . . Study the poets of today whose language is living and whose line is sure. . . Read the French and German poets whose sensibility is most intensely that of the modern world. . . Read, if you can, the Roman satirists.
>
> And remember, lastly, that poetry does not permit the rejection of every aspect of the personality except intuition and sensibility. It must be written by the whole man. It is an intelligent activity, and it ought to compel the respect of the generality of intelligent men. It it is good, it is a good in itself. (p. 185)

These extensive quotations are useful since they attest to the development and maturation that Smith had reached up to this point in his life. While anxious to cement his relationship with Canadian artists, he was also genuinely concerned with the health of Canadian literature, and his criticism is never without the constructive advice that has made him an important voice in the training of new poets in this country.

Smith's first anthology, The Book of Canadian Poetry, was published in 1943. In the introduction, he describes a concept which he is to develop more fully in later criticism.

> Canadian poetry, in the most general terms, is the record of life in Canada as it takes on significance when all the resources of sensibility, intelligence and spirit are employed in experiencing it or in understanding it. Some of our poets have concentrated on what is individual and unique in Canadian life, and others upon what it has in common with life everywhere. The one group has attempted to describe and interpret whatever is essentially and distinctively Canadian and thus come to terms with what is only now ceasing to be a colonial environment. The other, from the very beginning, has made an heroic effort to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal civilizing culture of ideas. [17]

He considers the poetry in line with events of historical significance and suggests that it was not until the 1850s and 60s that the national

ideal began to take shape in reality or to find expression in genuine poetry. But he believes that the work of an anthologist requires:

> . . .a catholic hospitality toward every period of Canadian literature--and every type of poetry--traditional and experimental, ambitious and homely--

and that does not mean that he must adopt,

> . . .any ambiguous standard of elegance. The true standard, after all, is one of degree, not kind.[18]

In his selection of poems, Smith places primary emphasis on the poem's "purity and excellence" and on its "vitality and sincerity." Loyalty and duty do not bind him to admit representative verse when it is not good poetry. He ignores periods prior to 1850 and pays scant attention to versifiers whose work had been praised primarily for its Canadian content. On the other hand, he recognizes such figures as Charles Heavysege and Isabella Valancy Crawford where other anthologists and critics (with the exception of Ralph Gustafson ~~in his~~ Anthology of Canadian Poetry (English)) had virtually ignored them. He minimizes poets who had been receiving excessively wide acclaim such as Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and Charles G. D. Roberts. Smith analyzes the colonial conditions that helped to engender the majority of the verse and notes the gradual changes that became evident as Canadians stopped looking behind and beyond themselves and turned to the Canadian physical, social and cultural landscape for their inspiration. But it is in the modern revival which began in Canada during the 1920s when poets began to be more precise in diction and imagery that Smith considers the poetry as meeting his own high qualifications. It is in this area that his critical standard is of greatest value for though a member of that generation of artists, he is one of its most astute critics.

In the same year (1943) that he published The Book of Canadian Poetry, Smith's first collection of poems appeared. Many of the poems in News of the Phoenix had been written very early in his career but this is the first time Smith exercises a critical evaluation of his own poetry. The selection represents the best of his serious work, a sampling of his imagist poetry, a number of his verses in the classical mode and a few satires and parodies. The poems are not placed in chronological order nor do they appear to be organized for particular effect. They may be categorized in broad thematic groups as they are concerned with current social problems, including the devastations of war, religious questions, and with the subject of death. Their structural patterns may be divided into three period groups, classical, metaphysical and modern.

A classical theme and style occur frequently in the poetry written before the publication of News of the Phoenix. Two of those poems will be reviewed here as they are representative of an important phase of Smith's developing sensibility. "Choros" is an impressionistic interpretation of the escape from the island of Aulis by Iphegenia after she had been taken captive by Artemis. It specifies not the activities, but the emotions experienced, as Iphegenia feels the threat of a sacrificial death; the concern and love she has for Orestes who is to become the means whereby she is rescued; and finally the relief and sense of freedom she feels as they make their escape from Aulis. While the actions are not explicitly described, the short and rigid phrasing is very descriptive of the states of mind through which Iphegenia passes when circumstances would not allow her to colour or embellish them. The alternations between self-willed and fated action are perfectly poised in the poem.

"Moveless, unmoved caught in the dead face," the actors have only a limited control over their own actions, and the intervention of the gods is only occasionally in the favour of the human participants.

"The Faithful Heart" tries to bridge the gap between classical and modern religion The poet mourns the passing of the gods of ancient Greece and Rome and finds it difficult to accept the new God who lacks the romance and charm of his predecessors. The speaker refuses to abandon all hope that the ancient gods will be restored to their former place, for he believes that they inspired the creation of beautiful and majestic art forms while the rigid doctrines of the Christian God inhibit creativity.

> O Heart, I said, be silent, the world itself grows cold,
> The brave songs all are sung, the Satyrs all are old,
> And old the Principalities where once in May we went
> All garlanded with flowers who now keep narrow Lent.
> I said our sweet lord Pan, by Judas Time betrayed,
> Sleeps in the dusty tomb with Strength and Beauty laid.
>
> My true-religious heart upbraided my unfaith--
> She will not feel the frost, she'll not acknowledge death.
> She says, poor fond enthusiast, the goatfoot god is slain
> But like a god, whom we shall see rise from the tomb again.
> She quavers we shall know him as lusty as of yore
> And bear the vine-tipped thyrsus into the woods once more.
> (p. 32)

Several of the poems in News of the Phoenix are concerned with important moral and ethical problems. They offer a personal observation and attempt to propose solutions. They demonstrate Smith's natural ability to find within a static object or image symbols that are both penetrating and enlightening. There is no sense that the poet is impeded by the conventional structures associated with metaphysical poetry, but rather has explored their boundaries and become adept at developing their possibilities. These poems are a reflection of his academic background, and his personal interest in the traditional philosophies that have been

postulated on the eternal subjects of beauty and truth and their relationship to human life and art. Smith recognizes the viability of many divergent points of view and credits them from a sensitively informed and liberal perspective.

"The Fountain," like much Marvelesque poetry, attempts to transcend the mundane. The principal conceit is a fountain which represents the artist. The controlled outpourings of the imagination are equivalent to the "flowery spray" of a natural fountain. The poet compares the fountain to an "enchanted tree of May." The fountain lacks the fragrance of the tree but has the advantage of immortality.

> Through Autumn's sodden disarray
> These blossoms fall, but not away;
> They build a tower of silver light
> Where Spring holds court in Winter's night; (p. 63)

Time, in most instances is a destroyer, but the fountains's feathery frost paradoxically and through a process akin to metamorphosis, is immortalized. While all nature evolves and changes, this aspect, in its delicate precision and perfection remains the same. So too does the poem, the sculpture and the painting. Their virtuosity remains intact and thus, "Time is fooled, although he storm." Like the fountain they become "cold, immortal ghost s of day," and a reminder, in the midst of change and decay, of the stability of truth and beauty. The two, eight line stanzas are in octosyllabic couplets which exhibit both alliteration and consonance. The metaphysical characteristics of this poem are manifested particularly in the use of the fountain as a conceit and in the paradoxical assertion that spring can exist in the midst of winter.

"To the Christian Doctors" is a sonnet which restates the Renaissance argument in support of humanism. The Christian doctors or medieval

theologians were determined to suppress the natural side of man and exalt his spiritual being. The poet recognizes that to separate these two aspects of man's identity, "'Twould filch his character away and bind/ Him spiritless." Since the soul and the body connot function distinct from one another, it is an unnatural and evil doctrine that promotes the ascendancy of one over the other. Man was designed by "Holiness" to,

> . . .swell the vein with a secular flood
> In pure ferocious joy, efficient and good,
> Like a tiger's spring or the leap of the wind. (p. 23)

The poet despises the effects of repressive Christianity and voices a plea for a return to natural values.

> Let the wind, then, or a beast of the wood,
> Whose savage fire is self-consuming, blind,
> Match his quick flame: though in its human mode
> Like theirs in force, it is unlike in kind,
> Whose end it is to burn sensation's lode,
> With animal intensity, to Mind.

An early version of "A Hyacinth for Edith" appeared in The McGill Fortnightly Review. A revised and extended version is included in News of of the Phoenix. It is evidence of the very great influence of modern poets such as Edith Sitwell and T. S. Eliot. The poem has an Eliotic theme couched in the kind of whimsical verbal acrobatics that characterized the poetry of Edith Sitwell. Smith describes the facets of nature that revive themselves in the harsh light of the spring sun. The poem is a series of contradictory images and the protagonist is incapable of distinguishing between the activities that are restorative and those that are destructive. The personal prounoun, I, reminds the reader that this too, is a poem about poetry and the poet's search for satisfying expression. The terms, "A candy-sweet sleek wooden hyacinth," used to describe the strongly scented spring flower, would more aptly be applied

to a manufactured lollipop. Thus there is an extreme irony developed as the poet romanticizes the effects upon his poetic imagination if he should find such a flower.

> The bird of ecstasy shall sing again,
> The bearded sun shall spring again--
>
> A new ripe fruit upon the sky's high tree,
> A flowery island in the sky's wide sea-- (p. 14)

At this point a break occurs in the poem as the poet is brought to earth to recognize the cold, painful realities of "this tinsel paradise/Of trams and cinemas and manufactured ice." It is the aberrations of modern life that drive the sensitive and searching poet to try

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

The satire attempts to disguise a very sincere wish for a return to that childhood purity where the imaginative faculty is allowed to run free.

"Far West" is generally acknowledged to be one of Smith's finest poems. The subject matter is distinctly contemporary and the treatment is at once witty and critical of modern society. The protagonist is a young and very naive girl watching an early cowboy film. The scene is typical of any movie theatre, complete with a warm, dark environment and the mechanical consumption of popcorn and candy. The girl is entranced by what is taking place on the screen. "The tremendous cowboys in goat-skin pants" become her seducers and her imagination transforms them into members of her own community. The cinematic hero, however, is not adversely affected by the disruptions caused by noisy streetcars and clanging machinery, nor is he subject to the imperfections of her own acquaintances. The sexual imagery of the final stanza brings the girl's

vicarious experience to an appropriate climax.

> In the holy name bang! bang! the flowers came
> With the marvellous touch of fingers
> Gentler than the fuzzy goats
> Moving up and down up and down as if in ecstasy
> As the cowboys rode their skintight stallions
> Over the barbarous hills of California.

This is a disparaging attack agains the modern hero and is Smith's rather facetious look at an anti-hero who may provide a cheap thrill but can offer no lasting satisfaction.

The publication of News of the Phoenix marked the end of A. J. M. Smith's most productive poetry writing period. His examination of himself and his role in society and his investigation of social, theological and philosophical problems all added to the depth and complexity of his poetry. His growing interest in Canadian poetry made him more conscious of the responsibility of an artist to measure, analyse and predict the directions of social development. Because universal problems had parallels in his own personal life, his treatment of them demonstrates a legitimate and genuine concern. Personality is never an overwhelming factor in the poetry, however, for Smith retained that degree of objectivity and catholicity which he considered essential for a truly "cosmopolitan" poet.

CHAPTER IV

IN SEARCH OF A 'WORLDLY MUSE'

After the publication of News of the Phoenix, Smith entered into a third stage of his writing career. The tone and content of his poems began a dramatic change. His critical attention turned toward satire and light verse and his poetry began to reflect this new interest. There is great diversity in the poems of this period, since they range from occasional, popular poetry, through humorous and witty light verse forms to Juvenalian satirical poems. A cynical attitude may well be expected of an intelligent observer of a global conflict whose participants were bent on destroying each other at the risk of destroying themselves. The "cold war" did nothing to assure Smith that the world had righted itself or that men were any more interested in self-preservation. Smith's own position had become secure. He had accepted and become adjusted to his exile from Canada. He had an assured professorship at Michigan State University and he could concentrate on his occupation of teaching English literature. This orientation could not help but influence his poetry. His poems do become more controlled and emphasize Smith's commitment to formal structures. His cynical view of the world's situation encouraged him to apply his natural wit and wry sense of humour to his creative writing.

Smith's second collection of poems, entitled A Sort of Ecstasy was published in 1954. The title is derived from Santayana:

> Every animal has his festive and ceremonious moments, when he poses or plumes himself or thinks; sometimes he even sings and flies aloft in a sort of ecstasy.

This quotation prefaces this and all succeeding editions of his collected poems. It describes very aptly the new spirit that motivates Smith's creativity. A perfect poem celebrates life. The celebration is of necessity occasional and momentary, and the ecstasy is conditional, since human life in the modern world does not frequently give cause for celebration. The book contains only 36 poems, fourteen of which appeared in News of the Phoenix. Of the rest twelve make their first appearance in this volume and the remainder are reprinted in revised or original form from The McGill Forthnightly Review. The poems are grouped into four, untitled sections. The first group deals with serious social problems and is primarily concerned with war and death. "The Bridegroom" concludes this section thus aligning theological questions and social problems. The second section is composed of experimental and highly stylized imagist and symbolist poems. Besides descriptive landscape poems there are two sonnets, "The Archer" and "Bird and Flower." This section concludes with "Ode: On the Death of William Butler Yeats." The third section contains a translation of a French Canadian folksong, entitled "Brigadier;" two pastiches, "Chinoiserie," and also "A Hyacinth for Edith," and several short pieces on classical themes. His most individual poems are grouped in section four. The new ones, "Political Intelligence" and "Quietly to be Quickly" are illustrative of the new trends developing in his writing.

Several poems in which Smith considers the plight of the soldier in wartime have already been referred to. One of the new poems in A Sort of Ecstasy is directed toward the ordinary citizen who never sees active duty. Everyone is subject to the effects of war, if not the physical consequences, then the psychological and emotional ones. "The Dead"

written after the end of the Second World War, describes those consequences. Newspapers and radio broadcasts keep the distant observer abreast of battle strategy and the human toll of those battles. The non-participant is haunted by the faces of the dead and they come to inhabit his dreams.

> Father
> Finds the comfortable funnies
> Not so funny and not comfortable;
> Rather
> Against his will he takes the dead
> Into his usual organ of deep thought,
>
> The pit
> Of his stomach; there he becomes
> Aware of the dead; there he feels sad.
> At night
> The stories of bombings and legends
> Of ack-ack trouble his bowels
>
> The dead
> Walk in his sleep. He cries out, ah!
> There is a kind of fighting in his guts.
> His bed
> Creaks with the ceaseless tread
> Of the shiftless dead. (p. 122)

These vicarious experiences are very painful, but there is no relief offered to the spectator since he must continue to be subjected to the guilt-inducing thoughts of what is happening across the sea.

> They come
> With no accusing look; their eyes
> Are drained of any light but pity's;
> His doom
> Is this, there is not any spark
> Of fellowship in these dead eyes.

The dead soldiers may be compared to the actors in a play and their audience is composed of the non-participating citizenry. The actors surrender their entire beings to the action and are able to achieve a kind of self-satisfaction. Their commitment ends with the closing of the

final curtain. The audience, on the other hand, has no means by which to expurgate the emotions aroused in them. They must continue to live with the scenes portrayed. The poet may be suggesting that it is easier to deal with one's own death when it is unavoidable than to face and accept the responsibility for the deaths of countless others. The six stanzas of the poem are structured like the scenes of a three act play. Each is introduced by a sharp two syllable line which is linked to a climactic internal line by consonance or in the case of the first and fourth stanzas by full rhyme. The heavy sound of the words, dead, red, bed and tread lend a note of dissonance which effectively reproduces the footfall of soldiers doomed to death. The climax of the drama occurs in the fith stanza. "His doom/Is this, there is not any spark/Of fellowship in these dead eyes." And the sixth stanza is anti-climactic as it restates the moral of the tragedy.

> He lives,
> Indeed, but might as well be dead
> As these anonymous statistics,
> Whose loves
> Were just as kind as his, whose lives
> Were precious, being irreplaceable.

Smith repeats the idea that we are not removed from the cataclysm just because oceans separate us from the centre of it. In the first stanza of his poem entitled "Business as Usual 1946," he describes with stacatto notes the events taking place across the sea. The second stanza may be called an extended oxymoron for the poet melds two contradictory scenes.

> Across the craggy indigo
> Come rumours of the flashing spears,
> And in the clank of rancid noon
> There is a tone, and such a tone. (p. 124)

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

The observers and non-participants have created a "delightful" and "fluted" forest; it in turn, separates us, "burgers of the sunny central plain" from the "flashing Spears" and the "clank of rancid noon." We are likened to the ostrich with his head in the sand, for to think that we have escaped the danger by blinding outselves to it is a fatal form of self-deception. The concluding lines of the poem cause our protective barriers to disintegrate by forcing us to recognize their inadequacy.

> Fable a still refuge from the spears
> That clank--but gently clank--but clank again!

The sounds of clanking spears introduce a follow-up poem which is entitled, "Fear as Normal 1954" and its subject is the cold war. The explosion of an atomic bomb for "testing purposes" in the Pacific Ocean fills the poet with dread.

> But gently clank? The clank has grown
> A flashing crack--the crack of doom. (p. 125)

This manifestation of strength is bound to have universal implications. The parody of Gerard Manly Hopkins', "God's Grandeur," suggests rather pointedly that no spiritual mediation will intervene to prevent men from destroying themselves. While the subject of these two poems is one of crucial concern, the poems lose impact by overstating the case in a somewhat melodramatic manner. They lack the subtlety and barbed witticisms that make "Noctambule" and "The Dead" so effective. That Smith was able to write fashionable poetry when the occasion demanded is evident but that he fell prey to the traps inherent in writing popular poetry is also exhibited.

Undisguised satire makes the poem, "Political Intelligence," a devastating comment on the efforts of political leaders to avoid dealing with the critical business of war. The poem begins by describing a formal dinner party for politically distinguished guests including the Prime Minister. Fear that the war might become a topic of conversation and thus ruin the air of festivity causes a ludicrously self-conscious behaviour among the dinner guests. An awkward situation is further complicated by an unexplained interjection:

> Two soldier's crutches
> crossed up a little bit of fluff
> from a lint bandage
> in the firing chamber of a 12 inch gun. (p. 107)

The unwelcome intruders are greeted with a moment's embarrassed silence but,

> People agreed not to notice.
> The band played a little bit louder.
> It was all very British.

Blind complacency triumphs again. The poem is a jarring mixture of opposing situations; the comedy of the first increases the desperation of the second.

"Quietly to be Quickly or Other or Ether" is a poem dealing with the problems of identifying the self in a world that has gone awry. It is subtitled "A Song or a Dance." The ambivalence of the title precipitates the contradictions in the poem. The constant repetition of words and phrases simulate the step patterns in a dance or the rhythmic humming of a single chord in a song. There is no real progression in the movement of either and the poet makes no headway in his dilemma.

To be
to be quietly
to be quietly to be
to be quick
Not this but that

To be
to be either
to be either
or other
Is this a bother?
Take ether (p. 106)

What seems like meaningless cant actually serves to emphasize a painfully dichotomous predicament. It is no longer possible to firmly establish one's identity since one's position in life is in a state of constant flux. Therefore, the only viable alternative is to be adaptable and conciliatory by submerging one's own will.

Some see
Some see
this is not that
This is what
some see
Some see this
Some see what
not all see

Quietly to be quick
not this but that
other or ether
Do you see?

The capitalized words must provide the punctuation for the poem and if the reader is not willing to extend the effort to find the pattern, as one would have to read the notes in a song or learn the steps in a dance, the poem will remain for him a meaningless cant. His remedy is suggested at the end of the second stanza. Smith is deliberately challenging and provoking his reader to think or to accept the consequences of not thinking.

In an article written for a book published in 1955 and edited by George Whalley, Smith amplifies his views about the business of writing poetry and of the role he sees the poet playing in society. He begins by quoting Professor Roy Daniells who wrote:

> The one staggering generalization that may safely be made of Canadian poetry, past, present, and far into the future, is that its excellence has sprung from the vision, the self-nurtured impulse, the self-taught craftsmanship of a handful of individuals in the face of an immense public indifference, deadly though unspoken and none the less menacing because it is polite. (p. 186)

Smith goes on to restate several viewpoints on this subject held by various Canadian poets and critics. Their unanimous opinion is that the Canadian poet is an exile and a rejected man. Smith responds to the question as to why this is so. It is not, he says, "that the poet has isolated himself from either the world of men and affairs or the world of nature; but that. . .he has identified himself too closely and in too critical a spirit with those worlds." (p. 188) It is the obligation of the poet to look beneath and beyond experience and emotion and to come to an understanding of things and his feelings about things. He must achieve this with accuracy and clarity, and purify his thoughts and language of the superficial. The task is a lonely and difficult one. It requires the rejection of the banal and mundane or in other words the attitudes of the vast majority of people. It does not make one popular nor will it make one wealthy. Poets, of necessity, must write for other poets. While this audience is a limited one, it forces the poet to strive for perfection.

> A poem is a work of art-a thing made; and the first responsibility of the poet is to see that it is well made--made as well as he can make it. This responsibility is primarily to himself. And it is for this reason that self-discipline, self-control, and the humility that comes from submission to the laws of craftsmanship are so essential. (p. 191)

After the publication of A Sort of Ecstasy, Smith devoted substantial effort to the study and writing of what he terms 'light verse.' His interest led to the publication of an anthology entitled, The Worldly Muse. The entries are drawn from anonymous medieval balladeers through to popular poets of modern time. Its seventeen sections are not arranged chronologically but each deals with a different aspect of the human condition as it has been treated down through history. An enlightening introduction describes Smith's beliefs about the importance of light verse as both an art form and as a medium of social commentary. The first paragraph is particularly instructive and worth quoting in its entirety since the book is no longer readily available.

> This is an anthology of light verse, but it differs from collections usually described as light in that it is not merely a compilation of amusing, witty, or ingenious verses. Instead, it is a book of poetry, and though the poems are presided over by the muse of Comedy they offer a genuine "criticism of life," which though never solemn or pretentious is never trivial either. Indeed, most of the poems included here are more serious and often more beautiful than it is generally thought light verse can be. I must therefore try to define, or at least describe, the particular qualities which contribute to their paradoxical combination of lightness of tone and seriousness of effect. Mr. T. S. Eliot named one of these as a "tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace;" others, the poems collected here would seem to indicate, are an incisive directness, an absence of squeamishness, and a tolerant understanding both of man's needs and of his limitations. The themes are serious--but the treatment is light. This is not always witty poetry, but it is always poetry with its wits about it. It is a secular poetry, and when successful it demonstrates that what comes home to men's business and bosoms is quite as much the concern of poetry as are the ecstasies of the exalted imagination or the transports of the god-intoxicated spirit. The worldly muse casts her glance on the common interests of mankind and throws whatever light she possesses, not on the dark interiors of the soul, but on the everyday experiences of the human animal as he commonly feels himself to be.[19]

In 1957, five years after The Worldly Muse was published, Smith and F. R. Scott co-edited The Blasted Pine. The book was subtitled, "An Anthology of Satire, Invective and Disrespectful Verse Chiefly by Canadian Writers." The poems are directed mainly at the Canadian social and political setting and are categorized according to their historical, patriotic and economic content as well as by their concern with the vicissitudes of nature in the Canadian landscape. The introduction, written jointly by Smith and Scott, describes the poems as being

> . . .sharply critical, in one way or another, of some aspect of Canadian life that has more often been accepted uncritically. They have been chosen because they sound a sour note. Their tone is harsh, sometimes unrefined, sometimes, perhaps, distorted, but always unsentimental --the noise that common sense makes, or the whisper of intelligence.[20]

This is the strongest statement we have from Smith about the responsibility of the artist and the individualist to strike out against the "established system of convention and privilege." In order to emphasize his own commitment against conformity and as a demonstration of his ability to write satirical verse, Smith includes a long invective poem in iambic pentameter couplets which attacks all the middle of the road habits that make one man a duplicate of another. "Ode to Good Form" salutes the innocuous and mundane. In its use of clichés, fashionable phrases, and in its listing of the "acceptable" things to do, places to go and emotions to feel, it minimizes them and makes ridiculous the people who are determined to pattern their lives after the "representative man."

> Reason, thy overlord, and Tolerance, thy friend,
> On him, with yours, their kindest glances bend,
> Till, Heaven-instructed, he has learned to live
> By knowing when to stand and when to give.[21]

That Smith does not take himself too seriously either is illustrated in a poem called, "Souvenirs du temps perdu." It is dedicated to Leon Edel and recalls a new year's eve the two spent together in Paris.

> The champignon salad has repeated
> to the verge of tedium.
> We sit in the Dôme
> to the ditto of le même
> as French as a french fried potato
> in a greasy cornucopia
> of the Montreal Daily Star. (p. 101)

Even in foreign and elegant circumstances, there is no escape from the realities of life. A mushroom salad will cause gastric distress. The third and fourth lines are a slighting reference to Eliot's shadow of the rock. If one is not truly French, there is no way he can fake it. Smith parodies Eliot's parody of modern life in the latter half of the poem:

> God I will rise and take a train
> and get me to April once again
> for April is the cruellest nymph
> scattering garters and spent stays
> on an unmade bed in a one-room head.
> Oh to be in April now that
> yes sir she's my baby. . .

Eliot's April represented fertility and a new birth; April, in Smith's poem, is just another whore. The stupor in which the speaker finds himself is not so much a result of his having had too much to drink as it is a consequence of the vacuity of spirit that his surroundings inspire and the subsequent lack of purpose and direction. Smith is satirizing the meaningless social and sexual encounters that many people indulge in to ward off boredom and self-extinction.

Several of the poems which appear in later collections of his poetry reflect the interest that sparked the preparation of Smith's two anthologies of light verse, and were likely written during this time period. "Ballade un peu banale," previously published under the title, "Pastorale" has been significantly revised. Smith has called the poem a "treatise on agricultural economics." [22] After a hilarious description in formal middle English diction of the romantic pursuit of a "gentil cow" by "good Master Bull," Smith adds two delightfully incongruous stanzas.

> I like to think sweet Jesus Christ,
> For His dear Mother's sake,
> By some miraculous device,
> Her to Himself did take;
>
> That her preserv'd Virginity
> Flutes holy flats and sharps
> In that divine vicinity
> Where Eliot's hippo harps. (p. 80)

Smith has made the statement that "only a believer can blaspheme." Smith considers himself an athiest so these lines must be read in light of their satirical implications. The doctrine surrounding the virgin birth is incredible to an unbeliever so the poet applies some theories of his own, if not to make the event more credible, at least to make it explicable. Smith cannot resist another jibe at Eliot, whom he believes to be an inferior poet after his conversion to Anglicanism. He refers to Eliot's post-conversion poetry in line with his comic verse and suggests that his penitence has met with its just reward in the "divine vicinity" where great stake is placed on "preserv'd Virginity."

"Song Made in Lieu of Many Ornaments" is another poem written early in Smith's career and is now brought forward for revision. The opening line is derived from a song from the renaissance play, Gammer Gurton's Needle. The original song celebrates the pleasure of food and ale. Smith celebrates a sexual feast made more pleasurable by its being prohibited in the "Bower of Beauregard."

> Your body and my blood,
> Consanguine, make the feast:
> Pious, and oh so good
> The Apostle-blest twined man-beast
>
> In the chapel under the winding stair
> The priest of Beauregard
> Cries: 'Back and side, go bare, go bare;
> Lovers, go on, go hard.' (p. 86)

The irreverent use of Christian symbols is appropriate to the gay abandon of the activities being described. Once again it is a non-believer's response to a doctrine he cannot understand or accept.

> Stripped of the love of creatures
> (Save ours for us)
> We love like sectarian preachers,
> With an intense, exclusive fuss.

Enforced celibacy will colour the imagination and tempt one to sexual feats made more joyful by being illegitimate.

During a recent reading of his poetry, Smith called the following two poems, "literary criticism." The first, "The Devil Take Her--and Them," was written on the occasion of his reviewing a book edited by Irving Layton in 1962. Love Where the Nights are Long was designed not only to inspire imaginative sexual adventure but also to challenge the reader to a more active pursuit of it. The poem by Smith lampoons the orgiastic qualities of Layton's book, but behind its playfulness there is an implied criticism of the book's lack of artistic restraint.

What had she done to bring this tantrum on?
The same as she'd done for a couple of weeks.
Ever since reading Love Where the Nights are Long
She had kept on turning her other cheeks
And sighing for all the lyrical feats
Of poets in Montreal between the sheets. (p. 99)

The second of the two poems is entitled, "Stanzas Written on First Looking into Johnston's Auk,"and it is directed at George Johnston's The Cruising Auk, published in 1959. The humour is distinctly Rabelasian with the emphasis on the picturesque description of bodily functions. Madcap hilarity is the predominant tone of the poem and laughter rings in every line with the repetition of cacaphonous sounds.

Capers and jiggles and sings like hell
(And Mrs. Beleek belike as well).
. . .
My cousin Balls (And my Auntie Crap!)
  Are a little bit cracked but loads of fun,
And I myself am a whimsical chap,
  A Betjeman manqué, if not a Donne,
Who dwells in a suburban sort of a hell
With Mrs Beleek belike as well. (p. 98)

The poem is completely uninhibited, but at the same time it is an expression of distaste for the kind of writing that he is mimicking. Smith feels that to always submit to such a theme is a form of exhibitionism and it should not be the sole form for the serious artist.

The new poems included in A Sort of Ecstasy and many of the poems written after its publication provide an interesting and entertaining diversion from the more serious poems of the preceding period, but they do not achieve an equivalent degree of artistic accomplishment. While there are some very good satirical poems among them, there are others which are merely witty and clever. The topical poetry lacks depth since the events about which it is concerned does not seem to have the same

degree of personal impact that made the earlier poems more profound. The poems of "literary criticism" are full of "in" jokes that cannot be fully appreciated by the average reader. Smith seems to have limited himself in order to reach an audience that he has come to perceive as being limited.

The range of Smith's literary investigation and experimentation is evidently large, and he justifies his approach in an important article written in 1961 and entitled, "Eclectic Detachment: Aspects of Identity in Canadian Poetry." Smith states that the Canadian poet is in an advantageous position as a result of his "separateness and semi-isolation." That is,

> . . .his ability to draw from British, French and American sources in both language and literary conventions while maintaining a detachment that permits him to select what will best work in his own special circumstances. "This gives to contemporary Canadian poetry. . .a distinctive quality--its eclectic detachment. . .(which) can be. . . a defect of timidity and mediocrity; but it can also be , . .a virtue of intelligence and discrimination. (p. 21)

So the artist must immerse himself in both the European and North American cultural tradition and yet not be a part of it--to be able to accept, select and reject those aspects of the culture that he determines useful to himself. Smith confirms that the detachment is not necessarily from one's self but, in fact, is an "affirmation of personality." The article proceeds to outline the various critical attitudes which helped to distinguish the existence of what he describes as two distinct trends in Canadian poetry, the native and the cosmopolitan. The native poetry concerns itself with local conditions and exhibits technical crudity. It is impersonal and objective. The second trend is a distinctively personal and subjective treatment of universal themes

whose location in time is more important than their location in space. This cosmopolitan poetry emphasizes technical precision more often than does its native counterpart. The most important aspect of eclectic detachment, according to Smith, is the position in which it places the poet, allowing him the right and ability to choose freely from other cultures only those characteristics and qualities which will enhance his own artistic composition. He recognizes a "peculiar and inevitable openness of the Canadian culture," a quality necessary for the process of eclectic detachment to achieve its full artistic potential.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERING 'POETIC EMOTION'

The change in the direction of Smith's poetry, commented on in the preceding chapter, was reflective of the interaction of several opposing factors in his personal life. It was noted that cynicism was a prominent characteristic of the poetry of the period. A cynical attitude is developed frequently as a means of defending and preserving the self from the damaging effects of external encroachment. Smith's cynicism may have relieved him from having to deal directly with the problems of self-identification that arose out of several conflicts of interest. Smith was a Canadian citizen and considered himself a Canadian poet and a critic of Canadian Literature, but he lived in the United States. Smith made his living as a teacher, but considered his primary occupation to be that of a writer. He maintained that poetry should be objective and he was determined to separate and isolate his creative and personal lives. Smith was unwilling to admit to any differences between the poetry of his youth and his mature years. The effort to reconcile these disparate factors placed great strain on his creative faculties and affected his ideas and theories about poetry. The importance of technique in the production of verse took precedence over the emotive and imaginative values inherent in this form of artistic expression. Smith became more dependent on external sources for his inspiration and he justified this by re-emphasizing his theories on cosmopolitanism and eclecticism. The only poem to which Smith is willing to concede autobiographical implications is entitled, "My Lost Youth," and it may be

read as a confirmation of the opinions expressed above.

> I remember it was April that year, and afternoon.
> There was a modish odour of hyacinths, and you
> Beside me in the drawing room, and twilight falling
> A trifle impressively, and a bit out of tune.
>
> You spoke of poetry in a voice of poetry,
> And your voice wavered a little, like the smoke of your
> Benson & Hedges
> And grew soft as you spoke of love (as you always did!),
> Though the lines of your smile, I observed, were a little
> sententious.
>
> I thought of my birthplace in Westmount and what that
> involved
> —An ear quick to recoil from the faintest 'false note'.
> I spoke therefore hurriedly of the distressing commonness
> of American letters,
> Not daring to look at your living and beautiful throat.
>
> 'She seems to be one who enthuses,' I noted, excusing
> myself,
> Who strove that year to be only a minor personage out of
> James
> Or a sensitive indecisive guy from Eliot's elegant shelf.
> 'What happens,' I pondered fleeing, 'to one whom Reality
> claims. . .?'
>
> * * *
>
> I teach English in the Middle West; my voice is quite good;
> My manners are charming; and the mothers of some of my
> female students
> Are never tired of praising my two slim volumes of verse.
> (p. 102)

Smith's identification with "J. Alfred Prufrock" is not entirely facetious. Eliot's character and Smith's poetic personality came to birth at approximately the same time. They both had to come to terms with similar social and cultural problems. A natural reserve is common to both Smith and the fictional Prufrock; a result of their good breeding. Prufrock's ambivalence and inability to commit himself to a definite course of action have parallels in Smith's life. The tone of "My Lost Youth" is one of excessive self-consciousness. Every fact of the speaker's existence has had its effect on his actions. "I thought of my birthplace

in Westmount and what that involved." It involved an intense awareness of those activities which are socially acceptable and those which are not. It involved the predilection to avoid self-exposure and to avoid answering questions like, "What happens to one whom Reality claims?" The poet provides a superficial one that evades the real issue, but serves to dismiss the nagging thought. Like Prufrock, Smith is deprecatory in his self-effacement, but the problem has been raised and it must receive a more satisfactory resolution tha the one offered in the final stanza of "My Lost Youth."

A significant number of the poems written during the rest of his career indicate that Smith had been thinking a great deal about the effects of reality on the psyché. It was only through a painful process of examining and analysing personal fears and motives that Smith began to gain an understanding of the workings of his sub-conscious mind. It enabled him to produce poetry from the spirit and heart that speaks to the spirit and heart of mankind.

Collected Poems appeared in 1962. It contains 100 poems and would more accurately be called a selection of the poems, since it does not include all of Smith's poetry. Smith refuses to make available poems which he feels are incomplete or imperfect and so the poems he selects for inclusion are, in themselves, evidence of a critical self-evaluation. All stages of his writing career are represented in the collection. Many of the poems have been revised, while others remain as they were originally printed. The book contains only nineteen poems that had never been published before. Poems: New and Collected was published in 1967. It is the last collection of his poetry and it contains all but one of the

poems from the earlier collection and twenty-two new ones. The poems in both books are organized in sections according to theme and mode. A significant number of the new poems in each book ha- been placed in the final section of each. The poems in the last sections of both books are exclusively concerned with the subject of death and deal with it on both a universal and personal level. It is in the poems about death that the reader of Smith's poetry may gain an understanding of the processes by which he identifies and re-assesses the self.

The first poem is not original to Smith but is an appropriate introduction to the series of poems concerned with death. "When I was a Thrush" is a translation from the Hungarian poet Zoltan Zelk.

> When I was a thrush, a sparrow-hawk chased me.
> I eluded him all summer: now I sit on a wintry tree.
> White storms came on slow wings; they encircled me,
> Listening to my silence on my wintry tree.
> And that is all. The dream stops there Don't you see
> I'm waiting to awaken. I
> Am waiting to die! (p. 137)

The speaker is considering the alternative ways of meeting death. A violent and premature death is a horrifying prospect until one is faced with the agonizingly slow and painful wait that comes with death by old age. The wait becomes a form of death from which the poet hopes to awaken by dying. This is not Smith's point of view, but it is included near the beginning of this section of poems to bring into perspective the variety of attitudes that are held by people considering the inevitable fact of their own deaths.

The folk hero, Casey Jones, becomes a medium for expressing Smith's very ambivalent feelings about death. Casey Jones' final climactic ride as the engineer of a doomed train is compared with the

short and perilous duration of a life ruled by fate. In the poem "What the Emanation of Casey Jones Said to the Medium," the details that flash through a man's mind while he is on death's threshold are listed.

> Turn inward on the brain
> The flashlight of an I,
> While the express train
> Time, unflagged, roars by. (p. 108)

Approaching death does prompt one to examine the self but it is done in terms of the past, not of the uncertain and unknowable future. Smith has commented that, "We are saved from the terror of contemplating and understanding death by the nature of our minds which refuses to delve into its mysteries."[20] But it was Casey Jones' refusal to believe that he too could die that led to his destruction.

> . . .the make-up of the mind
>
> Embellishes and protects,
> Draws beards between fabulous tits,
> Endorses the stranger's checks,
> Judges and always acquits.
>
> Turn inward to the brain:
> The signal stars are green,
> Unheard the ghost train
> Time, and Death can not be seen.

In a poem called, "What is that Music High in the Air," Smith strives to unite the idea of death with the rhythms of the poem. The musical qualities of the words and lines produce a sense of haunting ethereality which in itself describes the nature of death.

> A voice from the heroic dead,
> Unfaltering and clear,
> Rings from the overhead
> And zips into the ear;

But what it was it said
Or what it meant to say,
This clarion of the sacred dead,
I cannot tell today;

And tomorrow will be late,
For the ear shall turn to clay
And the scrannel pipe will grate,
Shiver, and die away.

A sigh of the inconsequential dead,
A murmur in a drain,
Lapping a severed head,
Unlaurelled, unlamented, vain. (p. 152)

The short three and four foot iambic lines are made up of clear and precise syllables. The rhyme scheme abab/acac/dcdc/aeae puts a heavy emphasis on the first heavy, masculine rhyme, and its constant repetition provides the most important form of punctuation for the poem. There is a funereal chanting quality in the first two lines of every stanza. The last two lines in each stanza reproduce a choral response with words made vocal by both their meaning and their sound. Rings, zips, clarion, scrannel, grate, shiver, lapping and unlamented; all have onomatopoeic qualities which allow the reader to sense the message of the music. This poem is another expression of the fact that the living cannot possibly understand death even though it has been described in a multitude of ways.

"Metamorphosis" describes the degenerative processes of the body which culminate in death. The speaker hates the inevitability of the process and supposes that the energy with which the body consumes itself is a consequence of its anxiety to die and become another form of life. In this case it provides the organic base in which a flower may take root and grow.

This flesh repudiates the bone
With such dissolving force,
In such a tumult to be gone,
Such longing for divorce,
As leaves the livid mind no choice
But to conclude at last
That all this energy and poise
Were but designed to cast
A richer flower from the earth
Surrounding its decay,
And like a child whose fretful mirth
Can find no constant play,
Bring one more transient form to birth
And fling the old away. (p. 153)

The tripping rhythm cannot disguise the undercurrent of bitter irony which is the main thrust of the poem. The speaker fears death and can envision nothing beyond it but the physical evidence of the grave.

Another poem, entitled "My Death," is a more personal statement on the subject.

. . .My death is a thing
Physical, solid, sensuous, a seed
Lodged like Original Sin
In the essence of being, a need
Also, a felt want within. (p. 154)

The seeds of death are implanted in the body at the same time it is imbued with life and, therefore, it is a part of that body and its existence creates within the body a yearning for death which all other senses strive to deny.

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

The seeds of death thrive as they build up a resistance to the forces of life that attempt to repudiate them. It is this conflict that contri-

butes to the life-enhancing and enforcing characteristics that make individuals strive for a higher quality of existence. The poet is finally converted and overwhelmed by the seed of death within him and so he comes to believe and accept the fact that death is the object of his existence.

> I am the food of its hunger.
> It enlivens my darkness,
> Progressively illuminating
> What I know for the first time, yes,
> Is what I've been always wanting. (p. 154)

It is the growing awareness of death that makes life so precious, and it is the final acceptance of death that is life's reward.

Smith describes some of the feelings that prompted the writing of the poem entitled, "On Knowing Nothing," in an article entitled "The Poetic Process."

> . . . This poem was produced out of a troubled and uncomfortable fascination with unconsciousness or non-being, a brief or prolonged form of death that is experienced under anaesthetics or at the climactic moment of love, and which <u>might</u>, but does not, bring a reconciliation with the idea of death.
>
> These feelings had been lacerating my mind for a long time, but the chance-born catalytic incitement had not come. One evening I was sitting quietly, alone in the house, reading Camus' <u>The Plague</u>. The book is filled with images of death and descriptions of dying, but when I came upon a sentence that tells of a mortally stricken woman lifting herself from the bed with one last cry--the single word Never!—I was seized with a sudden and unexpected thrill. I dropped the book, grasped a pad of paper and a pencil, and began to write, almost without stopping, these lines: (p. 228)

> Others have seen men die
> Or heard a woman scream
> One last word Never!
> How do I know the horror
> That breaks the dream,
> Hateful, yet clung to
> As the image hugs the mirror
> With such a silver shiver
> As chills and almost kills?

It is only in the last moment before death that one can hope to comprehend it. It is this moment of insight that makes the woman cry out in terror, for all her illusions are finally destroyed and the body is flung into the pit of nothingness.

> I know: but how or why
> Out of this savory fatness I
> Should suck the sharp surmise
> That strangles dying eyes
> I do not know. What have I done
> To bring the Angel round my head
> That I can smell his pinion
> (Bond or wing?)
> Whom I must hate and love. (p. 156)

The poet is tormented by the prospect that he too must experience death and he wonders why this threat must colour and corrode his life until that moment comes. Some unknown being or object insists on reminding him of his own death until it becomes implanted in his own consciousness from which there is no escape.

> The surgeon's jab, a woman's thigh
> Give blank surcease
> For short or long.
> I cannot let the hollow
> Interval alone,
> But pick it like a scab
> To probe the wound within--
> As deep as nothing, as the grave.

Human efforts to prolong life or to experience the similitude of death through sexual intercourse are only temporary escapes. Some quality inherent in the nature of man impels him to try to satisfy his curiosity about this thing, this "nothing."

This theme is treated again in the poem, "Watching the Old Man Die."

> Watching the old man die
> I savored my own death,
> Like a cowardly egotist
> Whose every thought and breath
> Must turn and twist
> Selfward, inescapably (p. 157)

The poem is in a very direct, narrative form. In its concentration on the point, it intensifies the conviction that death is a hollow passage to nothingness and increases the agony of the knowledge that one day everybody must face that journey. Fear and pain can be nurtured and relished more easily than they can be dismissed.

> This I was forced to learn
> Watching the old man die. . .
>
> Till death was my own concern.
>
> The body cannot lie.
> I savored my own death
> And wept for myself not him.
> I was forced to admit the truth
> It was not his death I found grim
> But knowing that I must die. (p. 157)

In this instance self-concern is somewhat less than a fault since it reveals an extremely sensitive recognition of personal vulnerability.

The article quoted above also reveals the process by which Smith wrote the next poem to be discussed here. It provides information about Smith's feelings as he composed the sonnet entitled "The Archer."

> The general idea of death or nothingness as a vague but yet disturbing and, if concentrated on, frightening concept has been hanging over my sensibility for longer than I can remember. In the state of discomfort and frustration caused, I suppose by an imaginative realization of the inescapable and unpleasant fact of death and the seeming impossibility of controlling it in any way—even to the extent of finding a name . . for it, there came. . .an image or a picture of an arrow winging its flight through an empty sky—to what end? into what heart or target? The image gave no clue. Into darkness? into nothingness? Or was the flight infinite? Something in the picture, I cannot tell what—perhaps a slight downward inclination of the arrow's tip—made that impossible. My arrow was to be no symbol of immortality—of that at least I was certain. (p. 223)

Smith goes on to describe in detail the step-by-step process of writing "The Archer." Its form, diction, images and theme took shape as a

result of poetic inspiration and the exercise of technique.

> Bend back thy bow, O Archer, till the string
> Is level with thine ear, thy body taut,
> Its nature art, thyself thy statue wrought
> Of marble blood, thy weapon the poised wing
> Of coiled and aquiline Fate. Then, loosening, fling
> The hissing arrow like a burning thought
> Into the empty sky that smokes as the hot
> Shaft plunges to the bullseye's quenching ring
>
> So for a moment, motionless, serene,
> Fixed between time and time, I aim and wait;
> Nothing remains for breath now but to waive
> His prior claim and let the barb fly clean
> Into the heart of what I know and hate—
> That central black, the ringed and targeted grave. (p. 158)

Smith's analysis of his poem demonstrates very clearly the harmonious working relationship that has been established between the poetic muse and the craftsman. This condition has not always been the case with Smith for his concentration on technique has often overshadowed his imagination. The death poems achieve a fine sense of balance between artistry and emotion. They appeal on both a personal and universal level. They communicate a strong feeling without letting that feeling control the poem. They are the creations of a mature and sensitive poet whose examination of himself has led to the discovery of universal truths.

The poetic theories that govern Smith's writings at this point in time are derived in large part from the French Symboliste Paul Valéry. In his article, "The Poetic Process," Smith quotes extensively from a lecture Valéry delivered in 1927 entitled "Remarks on Poetry." An essential quote defines the difference between ordinary human emotion and poetic emotion. Valéry describes the feelings aroused by a beautiful scene, important events, and "critical moments of the

affective life." The emotions aroused are of varying intensity, and Valéry suggests that some are "ordinary emotions" and others are "poetic emotions." It is essential for the artist to distinguish between the two.

> . . .One always finds tenderness, sadness, fury, fear or hope intermingled with the essential poetic emotion; and the particular interests and affections of an individual never fail to combine with that sense of a universe which is characteristic of poetry.
>
> The poetic state or emotion seems to me to consist in a dawning perception, a tendency toward perceiving a world, or complete system of relations, in which beings, things, events and acts, although they may resemble, each to each, those which fill and form the tangible world--the immediate world from which they are borrowed--stand, however, in an indefinable, but wonderfully accurate relationship to the modes and laws of our general sensibility. So, the value of these well-known objects and beings is in some way altered. They respond to each other and combine quite otherwise than in ordinary conditions. They become. . . musicalized. . . (p. 221)

Having identified true poetic emotion Valéry indicates how it can be developed into poetry. The process cannot be willed; its primary determinant is chance. Smith applies Valéry's theories to the process by which he creates poetry.

> Valéry calls it chance. I prefer to call it luck, and to affirm that when it comes, it comes to the deserving. After it comes, then consciousness begins, and judgment and technical manipulation are brought into play. This happens, it seems to me, when will and desire have reached such a pitch of excitement that they spill over into images or rhythms, which perforce can only find expression in words. (p. 222)

Smith concludes his essay by juxtaposing the famous definitions of poetry proposed by Wordsworth, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, etc." and by Eliot (with the image of a catalyst in a chemical reaction). He then defines what poetry is for himself.

> . . .poetry is not an expression but a distillation of experience; passion is transmuted; and suffering (if a physiological or medical term may be permitted) is digested. (p. 230)

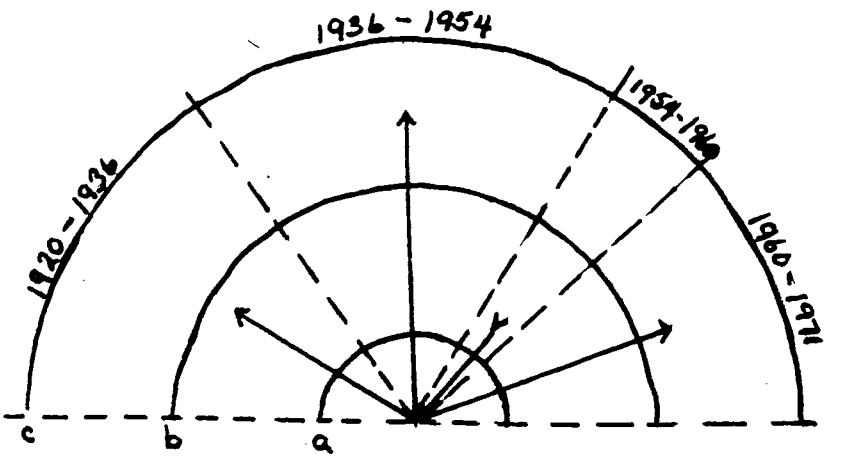
Nowhere in Smith's poetry are these particular characteristics more evident than they are in the death poems. They represent both the culmination and distillation of experience. Unlike most of his earlier poems they allow for the transmutation of passion. The agony and suffering caused by the realization of impending death are refined and translated into "poetic emotion."

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

A. J. M. Smith recently published a collection of his critical writings under the title, Towards a View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays 1928-1971. It contains all of the important critical essays including the introductions to his anthologies of Canadian poetry, reviews of Canadian poets of the past and present, general criticism and finally a personal epilogue. This last section is comprised of two essays in which he assesses his own poetry and the process by which he creates it. This book and the author's latest edition of poetry, Poems: New and Collected can be fruitfully studied in conjunction with one another, and especially so if the poems and essays are given chronological perspective. In the "Author's Note" found at the beginning of Towards a View of Canadian Letters, Smith asks the reader, "to pay special attention to the date of composition of each article. If he does, he will find, I think, what he may choose to consider either a remarkable consistency or a remarkable lack of development." Smith has made the same kind of claim for his poetry, stating, "I do not believe in progress in the ordinary sense of the word. The more recent poems in this collection (Poems: New and Collected) are neither "better" nor "worse" than the earlier, and what differences there are depend on the genre or the occasion, not on the time of writing." (p. 213) These statements must be considered in light of Smith's achievements as a poet and critic.

Consistency does not necessarily indicate a lack of development nor does a single standard of quality indicate a lack of progress. Smith's development as an artist has not been sequential and his progress has not been chronological. Rather the development has taken place within four distinct chronological stages and each stage has been marked by varying degrees of sequential progress. This may be illustrated by the following diagram, which is not meant to be quantitative or definitive but is designed to mark the chronological stages of his development as a poet and trace the degree and direction of his progress as an artist.



The three arcs represent degrees of poetic achievement. (a) is the level of a technician (an artist who has great technical skill or knowledge but who is limited by a strict adherance to form and structure). (b) is the level of an artificer (an ingenious and skillful craftsman who is able to create a beautiful and meaningful work of art by shaping emotion and thought to conventional form.) (c) represents the level of a master poet (one who expresses in original form truly unique human experience.) The broken lines indicate time periods of distinct stages of development. The arrows placed at the median point of each stage

mark the degree of Smith's sequential progress within the arcs or levels of achievement. Each stage is defined by a change in personal circumstances, by differing attitudes toward life, and by a different approach to the creation of poetry. Because of the diversity in direction of this movement, Smith's progress toward perfection in any one area has been hampered. All of his poems are notable for their technical accomplishment. In every stage of his development there has been an almost overriding concern with form and structure. Smith is not adverse to being called an artificer and it is on this level that the majority of his work rests.

The first and formative stage took place while he was a student at McGill University and continued through the years spent in Edinburgh. It ended with the publication of the anthology New Provinces. Smith was always very much aware of the new literary movements taking place in Europe and the United States and was instrumental in introducing the new poets to his fellow students. His own poems were imitative and his early critical writing was didactic and reflective of his investigation of the Symbolists and Imagists. His study of W. B. Yeats and the Seventeenth Century religious poets gave him more confidence and a larger foundation upon which to base his own growing talent. This experimental and exploratory stage was essential to the development of a genuine artist.

The poems of the second stage trace the path of the poet as a protagonist in search of a meaning and purpose for his existence and a justification for his role as a poet. His quest leads to an investigation of Christian theology, classical mythology and modern

psychology. The prose of this period focuses on the Canadian literary scene and begins to identify Smith's position in it. The prospects for a young Ph.D. to find work in a Canadian University during the early years of the Depression were bleak and Smith was obliged to settle for a variety of minor posts in the States. The mental and emotional adjustments required by this circumstance had a profound effect on the kinds of problems dealt with in the poetry. The poems are the most philosophically challenging ones of his career and were written in response to his personal predicament. The best poems written during this stage move far beyond technical adeptness and demonstrate a potential for achievement on the level of a master poet.

Smith's personal affairs became more settled toward the end of the second stage when he accepted a permanent position at the University of Michigan. His expatriation from Canada resulted in an increased concern with Canadian poetry and criticism. The tone of his work changed at this point and a new stage in his writing began to emerge. Satire, invective and parody became his medium, reflecting perhaps the cynicism required to reconcile himself to his circumstances and to world conditions in general. As in the other stages, the poetry is generally very fine technically, but its new concern is to expose human shortcomings rather than to try to understand and provide alternatives for them. Smith's position as a university professor may have had a tendency to make him even more conscious of accepted poetic principles and forms. His own poetry became more deliberate and emphasized structure over content. The stage is one of regression rather than progression, since he is limited by the style as well as by technical device that has become too controlled.

The eve of Smith's retirement from the university environment saw the evolution of a more contemplative and self-conscious stage. The most immediate indications of this are the death poems and the more personal tributes to fellow-poets. Many of his new poems and his critical articles continue to reveal the wry cynicism that has become a permanent cast of character but these poems are less consciously crafted, indicating the self-confidence that comes with the mastery of technique. These poems move toward the ultimate goal of poetry--the expression of unique human experience.

There is additional evidence to support the thesis proposed here and illustrated by the diagram, and it is found in Smith's own critical writing. Because there are so many instances in which the critical prose informs the poetry, it is a valuable exercise to apply both the terms Smith uses and the artistic ideals he espouses to his poetry. This provides a means of evaluating the poetry in terms of its fulfilling the poets's own expectations and also its value with relation to generally accepted critical principles. Besides the terms and ideas that Smith uses extensively and authoritatively, there are those which he uses only occasionally and then very tentatively. The poetry reflects a corresponding tentativeness in those areas.

The terms most commonly found in Smith's critical prose are: intellectual, pure, academic, cosmopolitan, eclectic, concentrated, concise and crafted. Early in his career, Smith defended T. S. Eliot's insistence that poetry must be intellectual and suggested that the modern tendency toward obscurity made the reading of poetry a challenging art for intelligent men. (p. 188) He admires the poets who "Made an

effort to escape the limitations of provincialism or colonialism by entering into the universal civilizing culture of ideas." (p. 4) Because he feels that the chief audience of a poet is other poets, the writing of poetry is a "lonely and difficult" occupation. Smith's poems, "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable," "Plot Against Proteus," "In the Wilderness," and "News of the Phoenix" may all be admitted to Eliot's classification of intellectual poems. To fully understand them requires a knowledge of classic mythology, Jungian archetypes, Christian doctrine and modern philosophy. Speaking about the necessity of writing this kind of poetry, Smith asks, "What good is this quiet intellectual poetry in the age that we live in, this violent wicked age of crises. Well, such poetry nourishes the human soul and encourages. . .whatever in man is strength to resist tyranny, cruelty and indifference either in the state or in himself." (p. 207) The universal predicament, with which a responsible artist must deal, requires that he be intellectual.

Smith derives his ideas about pure poetry from Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry. A quotation from Valéry provides a very accurate description of the process by which pure poetry is written and explains the affinity Smith has with the symbolists.

> The poet awakes within a man at an unexpected event, an outward or an inward incident: a tree, a face, a "subject," an emotion, a word. Sometimes it is the will to expression that starts the game, a need to translate what one feels; another time, on the contrary, it is an element of form, the outline of an expression which seeks its origin, seeks a meaning withing the space of my mind. . . Note this possible duality in ways of getting started: either something wants to express itself, or some means of expression wants to be used. (p. 219)

A self-disciplined poet who appreciates the limits imposed by conventional

forms would find pure poetry a comfortable medium for expression. Smith has said that pure poetry is "poetry that is almost timeless and changeless, and. . .deals with the everlasting verities, human love, human loneliness, the sustaining strength of the earth, man's response to the voices, fancied or real, of nature." (p. 72) In order to achieve his purpose a poet must be "true to the reality of nature and of human nature--above all in his language and in his imagery. He must cultivate in himself accuracy and clarity." (p. 188) Most of the poems in the second section of Poems: New and Collected have these qualities. They are descriptive landscape poems but each melds the scene being described with a human emotion and both are amplified in the process. These poems are primarily imagistic but Smith is able to work the same effect into his lyrical poetry. "The Mermaid," "The Fountain," "Eden's Isle," and "A Little Night Piece" are all examples of his pure poetry.

Smith calls himself an academic poet, although he would have the term "cleansed of its opprobrious implications, its suggestions of pedantry, mere bookishness, pure formalism, and timid conventionality." (p. 217) He states that this characteristic was fostered by his role as a university professor which compelled him to "expound, explicate, and reconcile different and apparently incompatible theories of poetry." (p. 218) The process helped to make him more aware of what he was trying to accomplish in his own writing. Smith's familiarity with both traditional and contemporary poetic conventions made him adept at using a great variety of styles and structures. Greek and Roman mythology provided the source for many of his shorter poems, while the Renaissance poets greatly influenced the writing of several lyrical pieces including, "With Sweetest

Heresy," "The Faithful Heart," and "To Henry Vaughan." The great satirists of the Eighteenth Century inspired many of his later poems. There are a few poems in the Romantic vein but in most instances they demonstrate Smith's contempt for that mode as in "A Dream of Narcissus." The contribution of the moderns is everywhere evident although the sonnet form and conventional patterns of structure are given preference over free verse.

The terms cosmopolitan and eclectic are particular favourites of Smith's. His work demonstrates his ability to assimilate a great variety of ideas and attitudes and give them objective expression in translations, pastiches, parodies and imitations. He is discriminating in his choice of masters and is able to learn and adapt many of their best practices. W. H. Auden's, "The Unknown Citizen" was the stimulus for Smith's poem, "The Common Man." Edith Sitwell is both imitated and parodied in "A Hyacinth for Edith." The poems and prose are replete with references to T. S. Eliot. "The Bridegroom," "Souvenirs du temps perdu" and "My Lost Youth," may serve as examples.

As has been shown, Smith's work demonstrates that the most important terms in his vocabulary are those pertaining to the craft of writing poetry. Conscious calculation, concentration, precision, and technical manipulation are words commonly found in the essays and they are appropriate to a description of Smith's poetry. He points to his poem entitled, "One Sort of Poet," as a description of precisely the kind of artist that he rejects.

> Though he lift his voice in a great O
> And his arms in a great Y
> He shall not know
> What his heart will cry

Till the fountain rise
In his columned throat
And lunge at the skies
Like a butting goat
And fall again from the tumid sky
In a rain of sound
Or a piercing sigh
On a fruitful ground.
Whatever spring
From the struck heart's womb
He can only sing
Let it come! Let it come! (p. 54)

The writing of poetry is not primarily a cathartic experience for Smith, nor is it an impulsive one; as a consequence most of his poems reveal little of his inner self. Smith is aware of this. "My poems are not autobiographical, subjective, or personal in the obvious and perhaps superficial sense. None of them is reverie, confession or direct self-expression." (p. 213) But reverie, confession and self-expression have provided the stimulus for some of the very best poetry ever written and has been an essential element in the poems of the best poets writing in this century. If a very intelligent, informed and gifted poet does not write this kind of poetry, the question, why not, must be answered. A partial response is found in the essay, "A Self-Review." "When I write a poem I try to know what I am doing--at least with respect to craft. Luck is needed too, of course, and luck is unpredictable. All I know about it is that it has to be earned. Everything beneath the surface of technique remains obscure." (p.212) The article sets out to explain the role of the subconscious in the creation of a poem, but the conclusions he comes to are somewhat less than satisfying. Smith verbalizes an internal debate in which he attempts to identify the various aspects of his psyché. "The 'I' of the

poem, the protagonist of its tragedy or the clown of its pantomime, is not me. As Rimbaud said. . .I is another." (p. 213) Jean-Paul Sartre has called this kind of admission an attempt to escape the responsibility of self. "Thus we flee from anguish by attempting to apprehend ourselves from without as an Other or as a thing." Smith refuses to acknowledge a personal anguish as the subconscious motivation or source for his poems. He excuses himself by saying that he is not a philosopher or moralist and thus cannot get to "the heart of the general problems of the role of personality, conscious and unconscious, in artistic creation." (p. 213) Nevertheless, this is not to say that Smith has not held philosophical and moral views throughout the various stages of his career, but that he has not applied them to himself and his work. He does not propose any solutions to the problem he has raised and at the first opportunity escapes into a clearly more congenial discussion of technique. The last essay in Towards a View of Canadian Letters, "The Poetic Process" becomes a little more explicit on this subject. At the same time, however, he describes those who have made a serious study of the unconscious as "extreme romantics" who "plunge into the depths of personality and seek to isolate a unique essence, fished out of the unconscious and discovered not as thought or emotion, not as picture or music, but as poetry and nothing but poetry." (p. 220) This hyperbolic description minimizes the importance of this kind of understanding and attempts to justify his own lack of interest in gaining that knowledge. This is not an expected outgrowth of an older critic who earlier professed an appreciation of the theories of Freud and Jung.

It was pointed out in Chapter V that the death poems developed out of Smith's examination of his inner self and reflect the discoveries he made. Even then Smith was not entirely conscious of the process by which they were written. He concludes his comments on his poem "The Archer" in "The Poetic Process" with the statement:

> It was only after this poem was finished and I was coming back to it. . as a stranger reading something written by somebody else, that I noticed how significant was its Freudian imager -so that the poem may very well be a betrayal of the guilty knowledge hidden in the unconscious self of the identity of love and death. . ." (p. 227)

It is only after the fact that Smith is able to recognize the contribution of the inner self in the creation of a poem. He goes so far as to state: "Perhaps after all our careful planning, it is the unconscious that triumphs after all." (p. 227) No amplification is given this and the reader is forced to call into question earlier assertions that his poems are not "autobiographical, subjective or personal." Because Smith does not treat the subject further and because the poetry does not illuminate the situation, it is necessary to conclude that Smith's "tentativeness" in this area has tended to limit his progress toward a higher level of poetic achievement.

Fancy, intuition and imagination are terms that receive only cursory attention in Smith's writings and then it is usually to disparage those artists who are dependent on these elusive promptings for their inspiration. "Poetry does not permit the rejection of every aspect of the personality except intuition and sensibility." (p. 185) Smith goes further to say: "I think of the act of a poet as the antithesis of a naive or primitive surrender to chance or impulse." (p.217)

And of himself, he says that the "controlling mind, the critical shaping faculty of the rational consciousness sends the tremulous instinctive and sensuous fancy packing." (p. 214) Those poems which illustrate, at least in some measure, Smith's instinctive fancy are not among his better ones. "A Pastoral," "The Trance," and "The Circle" are tentative and often superficial. The persistent obedience to strict form does not allow for the sense of freedom and whimsy that would have provided a more conducive background for the fanciful subject at hand.

There have been only three poems published since the appearance of Poems: New and Collected. One of them was printed in the magazine, Poetry and is entitled, "Lines Written on the Occasion of President Nixon's Address to the Nation, May 8, 1972." It is an extension of an earlier poem entitled "The Face." More interesting are the two poems which appeared in the Canadian Forum in May, 1970. Both are important, for in them Smith, the mature poet, talks about being a poet. "Angels exist, and sonnets are not dead" expresses an appreciation for "My Guardian Angel" or his own poetic muse who visits him "unwilled and undeserved." The poet gives more credit to his muse in this poem than he has ever done in his critical writing.

> . . .I've known
> I've had one all along,--felt certain she
> Was watching me--was watching over me;
> Guiding each forward step, and if a stone
> Stood in my path she smiled and it was gone (Appendix B p. 131)

The sonnet goes on to describe an experience of the imagination which becomes the source and inspiration of the poem. It is as close as Smith ever comes to equating an internal, spiritual experience with the creation of a poem. It has always seemed that Smith controlled his muse, but

here, for the first time, the reader is allowed to see that Smith can let the muse take control of him.

> She knew when to come and yet she came unwilled
> And undeserved, and coming, called my name.

The second of the two poems is "To Frank Scott, Esq." (on the occasion of his seventieth birthday). In this tribute to a dear friend and fellow-poet, Smith lists the attributes that make F. R. Scott a true poet.

> To be a poet, Frank, you've shown
> 's a harder thing. It is to be a stone,
> an eye, a heart, a lung, a microphone,
>
> a voice, but not a voice alone, a hand,
> a hand to grasp a hand, a leg to stand
> on, nerves to feel, and in supreme command,
>
> the shaping mind that shapes the poem
> as it shapes the man, four-square, and needle-eyed,
> and Frank. (Appendix B p. 132)

The particular metaphorical symbols that Smith uses in the poem are derived from F. R. Scott's poetry. A poem by Scott entitled, "Stone" describes a number of things in terms of their likeness to a stone. They are all complete within themselves and like seeds carry their potential within them. So a poet's creative abilities are nurtured from within, and produce in accordance with the quality of the inner self. A single stanza from a poem called "Vision" describes Scott's perception of the relationship between the eye and the heart.

> Tireless eye, so taut and long,
> Touching flowers and flames with ease,
> All your wires vibrate with song
> When it is the heart that sees.[24]

The eye can encompass all things, but it is the heart that interprets the images into meaningful thought and emotion. A lung, microphone and

a voice are all personal references to Scott's ability to project himself into his poetry. Above all else, Smith admires Scott's "shaping mind;" his ability to control the visions captured by the eye and the emotions of the heart and shape them into poems that communicate to men. These are essential qualities to a true poet, qualities which Smith himself possesses in good measure. That they are sometimes overpowered by his natural reserve and hesitancy to expose the inner man is perhaps a shortcoming, but by no means a fatal flaw.

The position of A. J. M. Smith as a poet and a critic will continue to require intelligent study. This chronological description of his writings places his entire work in perspective and provides a framework for the development of more comprehensive and contextual studies of his poetry. The literary legacy that Smith has left to the world of art and to Canadian poets in particular is undeniably of great importance. Whether or not modern Canadian poets agree with Smith's aesthetic, they have been influenced by his efforts to modernize, universalize and revitalize Canadian poetry. Smith was able to sustain and reinforce his poetic theories by the creation of intelligent and sensitive verse. He applied his fine talents to the evaluation of Canadian poets and the particular problems posed by their unique environment. He developed a critical standard to assist poets and critics alike in their appreciation of the art that has been, is, and will be produced in Canada.

APPENDIX A

Poems by A. J. M. Smith

A Chronological List by Date of Publication

Abbreviations:

McGill Fortnightly Review	- MFR	
News of the Phoenix	- NoP	(1943)
A Sort of Ecstasy	- SoE	(1954)
Collected Poems	- CP	(1962)
Poems: New and Collected	- P:N&C	(1967)

1. "Prayer," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily , 1924-25

2. "Vagabond," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

3. "Irony," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

4. "Hellenica," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25. Revised for NoP and included in all editions of collected works.

5. "The Wanderer," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

6. "Light O' Love," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

7. "Nocturne," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

8. "Interior," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

9. "Vain Comfort," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

10. "The Ascetic Who Found Another Way," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily

11. "Chinoiserie," Literary Supplement, McGill Daily, 1924-25.

12. "Pagan," Canadian Forum, Sept. 1924 p. 370; "Were I the Great God Pan," P:N&C.

13. "Not of the Dust," MFR, Nov. 1925; "The Sorcerer," Queen's Quarterly, XLI,229, 1954; SoE; CP; P:N&C; Macleans Magazine 75:33-020, 1962.

14. "Smile," Canadian Forum, Feb. 1925 p. 149.

15. "What Strange Enchantment," MFR, Nov. 1925; P:N&C

16. "The Woman in the Samovar," MFR, Dec. 1925; "They Say," CP; P:N&C.

17. "The Cry of a Wandering Gull," MFR, Dec. 1925

18. "Poem," MFR, Dec. 1925

19. "Felicity," MFR, Dec. 1925

20. "Universe Into Stone," MFR, Dec. 1925; The Adelphi, Jan. 1932; The Best Poems of 1934; SoE; P:N&C.

21. "Ascensions," MFR, Jan. 1926.

22. "Epitaph," MFR, Jan. 1926; Canadian Forum, Aug. 1928; New Provinces, 1936; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

23. "The Lonely Land," MFR, Jan. 1926; Canadian Forum, Jul, 1927; Dial, Jun, 1929; New Provinces, 1936; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

24. "Here Lies an Honest Man," MFR, Jan. 1926.

25. "Punchinello in a Purple Hat," MFR, Jan. 1926; "Varia," MFR, Mar. 1927; Canadian Forum, Sept. 1927; "Three Phases of Punch," P:N&C.

26. "Summer Warning" MFR, Feb. 1926.

27. "Chiaroscuro," MFR, Feb. 1926.

28. "Silver Birch," MFR, Feb. 1926.

29. "Save in Frenzy," MFR, Feb. 1926.

30. "Legend," MFR, Mar. 1926.

31. "Proud Parable," MFR, Mar. 1926.

32. "Nocturne," MFR, Mar. 1926.

33. "Pastorale," MFR, Mar. 1926; "Ballade un peu banale," New Verse, June, 1934; CP; P:N&C.

34. "The Bird," MFR, Mar. 1926; Canadian Forum, Jun. 1927; CP; P:N&C.

35. "A Poem," MFR, Mar. 1926; "For Healing," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1940; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

36. "Leda," MFR, Nov. 1926.

37. "The Moment and the Lamp," MFR, Nov. 1926.

38. "Tailpiece," MFR, Nov. 1926.

39. "For Ever & Ever Amen," MFR, Dec. 1926.

40. "Something Apart," MFR, Dec. 1926; "The Two Birds," CP; P:N&C.

41. "College Spirit," MFR, Dec. 1926.

42. "Flame and Fountain," MFR, Dec. 1926.

43. "The Two Sides of a Drum," Dial, Dec. 1926; New Provinces; NoP; CP; P:N&C

44. "Panic," MFR, Feb. 1927.

45. "Homage to E.S.," MFR, Feb. 1927; Adelphi, 1932; "A Hyancinth for Edith," NoP; SoE; P:N&C.

46. "Poem," MFR, Feb. 1927.

47. "Twilight," MFR, Feb. 1927

48. "Testament," MFR, Mar. 1927; Canadian Forum, Aug. 1930.

49. "Sermon," MFR, Mar. 1927.

50. "To Evening," MFR, Mar. 1927.

51. "Field of Long Grass," MFR, Apr. 1927; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

52. "Undertaker's Anthology, Two Epitaphs," MFR, Apr. 1927.

53. "Beside One Dead," MFR, Apr. 1927; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

54. "Shadows There Are," The Nation, Jun. 1927; New Provinces; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

55. "The Shrouding," MFR, Apr. 1927; Dial, Nov. 1928; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

56. "Nightfall," Canadian Forum, Feb. 1928; The Commonweal (N.Y.) Jul. 1930; Sub-titled "Fin de siecle," CP; P:N&C.

57. "Journey," Dial, May, 1928; P:N&C

58. "Prothalamium," Dial, Jul, 1928; New Provinces; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

59. "Cavalcade," Canadian Forum, Aug. 1928 (p. 745).

60. "The Creek," Dial, Nov. 1928; New Provinces, NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

61. "Good Friday," Canadian Mercury, Mar. 1929; Poetry (Chicago) May, 1935; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

62. "The Circle," Canadian Mercury, May, 1929: SoE; CP; P:N&C.

63. "Sea Cliff," Canadian Forum, Jun. 1930; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

64. "Swift Current," New Verse, Jun. 1930; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

65. "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable," The Hound & Horn (N.Y.), Mar. 1932; New Provinces; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

66. "In the Wilderness," The Hound & Horn, Mar. 1932; New Provinces; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

67. "Plot Against Proteus," The Hound & Horn, Mar. 1932; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

68. "The Fountain," Adelphi (London) 1932; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

69. "The Offices of the First & Second Hour, New Verse, Dec. 1933; New Provinces, NoP; CP; P:N&C.

70. "News of the Phoenix," New Verse, Dec. 1933: New Provinces, NoP; CP; P:N&C.

71. "Resurrection of Arp," New Verse, Apr. 1934; SoE; The Blasted Pine, P:N&C.

72. "Son-and-Heir," New Verse, Jun. 1935; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

73. "The Face," New Verse, Sep. 1936; Canadian Forum, Sep. 1936.

74. "A Soldier's Ghost," New Provinces, 1936; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

75. "To a Young Poet," New Provinces, 1936; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

76. "Chorus," New Verse, Sept. 1936; NoP; CP: "Choros," P:N&C.

77. "Noctambule," New Verse, Dec. 1936; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

78. "The Archer," Canadian Forum, Jan. 1937; NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

79. "Poor Innocent," New Verse, Jan. 1938; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

80. "Bridegroom," Canadian Forum, Jan. 1939: SoE; CP; P:N&C.

81. "A Portrait & A Prophecy," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1940; Poetry, July 1943; NoP; SoE; The Blasted Pine; CP; P:N&C.

82. "The Common Man," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1940; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

83. "On Reading an Anthology of Popular Poems," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1940; Poetry, Jul. 1943; NoP; The Blasted Pine; CP; P:N&C.

84. "The Cry," Poetry, Apr. 1941; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

85. "The Mermaid," Poetry, Apr. 1941; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

86. "Surrealism in the Service of Christ," Poetry, Apr. 1941.

87. "The Eumenides," Canadian Poetry, Aug. 1941; Vice Versa (N.Y.) Jan. 1942; Canadian Forum, Oct. 1943; NoP; SoE; CP; "Ode: The Eumenides," P:N&C.

88. "Calvary," Poetry, Apr. 1943; CP; P:N&C.

89. "I Shall Remember," Canadian Forum, Oct. 1943; NoP; CP; P:N&C.

90. "To the Christian Doctors," Poetry, Jul. 1943. NoP; CP; P:N&C.

91. "The Faithful Heart," NoP; CP; P:N&C.

92. "Far West," NoP; CP; P:N&C.

93. "A Pastoral," NoP; CP; P:N&C.

94. "Hellenica," NoP; CP; P:N&C.

95. "Ode on the Death of W. B. Yeats, NoP; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

96. "With Sweetest Heresy," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1944, Maryland Quarterly, Jun. 1944; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

97. "On Seeing Pictures of the War Dead," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1944.

98. "Spiritual Pigeon Catapults the Air Around You," Canadian Forum, Dec. 1944; "Bird and Flower," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

99. "Souvenirs du temp perdu," Here & Now, May 1948; SoE; The Blasted Pine; CP; P:N&C.

100. "Tree," Here & Now, May 1948; SoE; CP; P:N&C.

101. "Narcissus," Contemporary Verse, Fall 1951; SoE; CP; "A Dream of Narcissus," P:N&C.

102. "To the Moon," Canadian Poetry, Fall, 1951, "Damn'd Haggard Moon," P:N&C.

103. "Business as Usual 1946," SoE; Fiddlehead, Fall, 1961; CP; P:N&C.

104. "Chinoiserie," SoE, CP; P:N&C.

105. "The Dead," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

106. "Fear as Normal 1954," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

107. "No Treasure," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

108. "Political Intelligence, SoE; The Blasted Pine; CP; P:N&C.

109. "Quietly to be Quickly or Other or Ether," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

110. "To Anthea," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

111. "To Hold in a Poem," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

112. "Brigadier," SoE; CP; P:N&C.

113. "Ode to Good Form," The Blasted Pine, 1956.

114. "The McGill Daily," The Blasted Pine.

115. "On Reading Certain Poems by Irving Layton and Louis Dudek," The Blasted Pine.

116. "What is that Music High in the Air," Tamarack Review, Winter 1957. CP; P:N&C.

117. "Eden's Isle - A Poem," Queens Quarterly, Winter 1957.

118. "This Flesh Repudiates the Bone," Tamarack Review, Winter 1957; "Metamorphosis," P:N&C.

119. "My Death," Queens Quarterly, Summer 1958; CP; P:N&C.

120. "Ode on the Death of Pratt," Tamarack Review, Winter 1958; "In Memoriam: E.J.P.," P:N&C.

121. "Song Made in Lieu of Many Ornaments," Tamarack Review, Winter 1959; CP; P:N&C.

122. "Speaking About Death," Tamarack Review, Winter 1959; CP; P:N&C.

123. "To Jay Macpherson on her Book of Poems," Tamarack Review, Winter 1959; P:N&C.

124. "To Henry Vaughan," Tamarack Review, Winter 1959; CP; P:N&C.

125. "The Wisdom of Old Jelly Roll," CP; P:N&C.

126. "When I was a Thrush," CP; P:N&C.

127. "Wild Raspberry," CP: P:N&C.

128. "Astrea Redux," CP; P:N&C.

129. "At Twenty-six," CP; P:N&C.

130. "Canticle of St. John," CP; P:N&C.

131. "The Convilvulus," CP: P:N&C.

132. "The Crows," CP; P:N&C.

133. "May Song," CP; P:N&C.

134. "A Narrow Squeak," CP; P:N&C.

135. "On Knowing Nothing," CP; P:N&C.

136. "One Sort of Poet," CP; P:N&C.

137. "Pastel," CP; P:N&C.

138. "The Stallions," CP; P:N&C.

139. "Stanzas Written on First Looking Into Johnston's Auk," CP; P:N&C.

140. "The Swan and The Dove," CP; P:N&C.

141. "Thomas Moore and Sweet Annie," CP; P:N&C.

142. "The Trance," CP; P:N&C.

143. "Le Vierge, Le Vivace et Le Bel aujourd'hui," CP; P:N&C.

144. "What the Emanation of Casey Jones Said to the Medium," CP; P:N&C.

145. "Devil Take Her--And Them," Delta, Fall 1963; Tamarack Review, Winter, 1963; P:N&C.

146. "An Iliad for His Summer Sweetheart," Tamarack Review, Fall 1963. P:N&C.

147. "The Hippopatamus," Tamarack Review, Fall 1963; P:N&C.

148. "Death and The Lady," Canadian Poetry, Nov. 1963.

149. "No Knife Needed," Canadian Poetry, Nov. 1963; P:N&C.

150. "In the Churchyard at South Durham, Quebec," Canadian Literature, Winter, 1963; P:N&C.

151. "Walking in a Field, Looking Down and Seeing a White Violet," Canadian Literature, Winter 1963. P:N&C.

152. "Watching the Old Man Die," Canadian Forum, Jan. 1964. P:N&C.

153. "Souvenirs du temps bien perdu," Tamarack Review, Fall 1966; P:N&C.

154. "On the Appointment of Ralph Gustaphson, Esq. as Poet in Residence at Bishop's University," Tamarack Review, Fall 1966; P:N&C.

155. "A Little Night Piece," Tamarack Review, Fall 1966; P:N&C.

156. "Wedding Night," Tamarack Review, Fall 1966.

157. "The Taste of Space," Saturday Night, Nov. 1966; P:N&C.

158. "Birches at Drummond Point," P:N&C.

159. "The Adolescence of Leda," P:N&C.

160. "The Ship of Gold," P:N&C.

161. "The Country Lovers," P:N&C.

162. "A Dirge for Gordon Dundas," P:N&C.

163. "The Hunter," P:N&C.

164. "My Lost Youth," P:N&C.

165. "Perdrix," P:N&C.

166. "The Tin Woodman's Annual Sonnet to Ozma of Oz at the Approach of Spring," P:N&C.

167. "Angels exist and sonnets are not dead," Canadian Forum, May 1970.

169. "To Frank Scott, Esq." Canadian Forum, May 1970.

170. "Lines Written on the Occasion of President Nixon's Address to the Nation," Poetry, Sept. 1972.

APPENDIX B

Poems Not Included in Poems: New & Collected

Prayer

I would take words
as strong as a jack pine;
as white as our snow;
as clear and as cold
as our ice;
as our birds
in our sinshine,
bold:
sweet as the winds that blow
in the spring to entice
our young lovers again
to the sun and the rain:
and I would make a song,-
one song only,
O God,
only one!-
to catch and keep, for ever
the subtle, sweet, strong;
beautiful, lonely,
earth-shed
spirit of this land of river
and mountain and prairie and sun.

Vagabond

A gaunt rough man with ragged dusty hair
Unkempt above a sallow wind-burned face
In which was something farmers could not place-
A look about the eyes, perhaps, a care
For certain things he could not share
With them nor with another tramp, a trace
Of strange, half-hidden, unexpected grace-
They called him "lazy vagabond Pierre."

He used to walk the roads and railway ties
And did odd jobs at plough or harvesting,
And when the first snow fell he went away-
Up north to trapper's camps, the farmers say.
The called him good-for-nother, but their eyes
I thought, were eager for him in the spring.

Irony

One wanted water,
But the pump was rust:
He begged for bread,
And they gave him dust;
He looked for Love,
And found Lust.

Another asked for water,
But was offered wine;
He begged a bit of bread,
And they took him to dine:
In the eyes of a Harlot
He saw Love shine.

Hellenica

I

White throated swallows
Are swerving over the waters
Of Mitylene,
But we shall see no more
The faint curve
Of Iope's sweet mouth.

II

Lithe Anthen twine roses
Over the lovelocks of her hair.
Brambles and dry thorns
Litter that garden now.

III

In a silent place
Overlooking blue waters
Ianthe sleeps among the grasses.
They have carved these words on marble:
"When beauty freezes into stone
Its immortality begins."

IV

Chloe has gone down the dark path
Into the land of shadows,
And the perplexed ghosts
Of the long dead
Are half-forgetful of Lethe,
Half-remembering the white flower
Of the wild narcissus
Blowing in Spring.

The Wanderer

He has said farewell to easeful quiet now,
Peace and content and sleep are his no more,
Like exile longing for his native shore
Glimpsed far away beyond his vessel's prow
So does he yearn for one pale gleaming brow
And haven of deep breasts; but, oh, before
That port is made, how desolate and frore
And many are the waves his barque must plough!

Great year long rollers of uneasy time
Must surge and thunder on a distant strand
For long and long before his heart's desire
Shall wave him safe ashore and watch him land
Among sweet fields of grasses and wild thyme,
And run to him with limbs and lips of fire.

Light O' Love

I saw a poplar lure the moon
Like a light o' love:
She bowed and swayed and murmured
To him above.
And when again I passed that way
Several hours after,
She held the white moon in her arms
And laughed triumphant laughter.

Nocturne

The stars are gold pin-heads
Holding the purple curtain of the sky.
God was quite proud of His purple curtain
Shading the white light from the world at night-
But look!
Careless Jehane has touched it
With her cigarette,
Burning a hole in the lovely curtain,
Letting the white moon through,
Flooding the world with moon light,
Marring the purple perfection-
My, won't God be cross!

Interior

Firelight and candlelight
Gleaming in polished mahogany
Are moonlight and starlight
Across a water-lily pond.
The fat wife of a prominent banker
Drops a lump of sugar into China tea
With the inappropriate splash
Of a bull-frog plopping from a lily pad;
Wrinkling the white moonlight
And the yellow starlight
On the lacquered pond.

Vain Comfort

All dear, sweet things grow gray;
Time steals the fire from eyes,
And cracks clear laughter's bell,
Making of truths and lies,
Changing felicities
To memories.

Ah, then, and shall I dream
Beside a glowing fire
Of old, far faded things
Without desire,
Content with the cold ash
Of beauty's pyre,

Murmuring that memories
Are in themselves sweet things,
Lying that loveliness
Looked on too long but brings
Satiety? False, false
Cold comfort rings.

Chinoiserie

I

A princess whose arms were white as new-peeled almonds,
and whose almond eyes were rayed with lashes
henna-dipt
Looked from a casement in her honorable ancestor's tower
of porcelain by the Yellow Sea
And stretched her arms to reach the moon.
She had two lovers, and she said to them:
"To which of you shall bring the moon to me
shall be granted the exquisite felicity
of sending my women away and undoing
the innermost folds of my dragon-pattern gown
himself."

II

One climbed a mountain in Mongolia, and stood on
tiptoe on the highest crag, and stretched his
arms to reach the moon.
The other on a moony night jumped from his junk, and
sought the bottom of the Yellow Sea to pluck the
moon from thence.

III

The princess, looking from a casement in her honorable
ancestor's ancient tower of porcelain,
Turns her eyes through tears in lonely longing to
the moon.
Sometimes it is gashed and broken like the face of
one fallen from a great height onto sharp rocks.
Sometimes it is white and cold and bloated like a
drowned man's face:
And if the princess sends her women away she has no more
exquisite felicity than of undoing the innermost
folds of her dragon-pattern gown
herself.

Translated from the Chinese of the 4th
century, A.D. by Vincent Starr and
R.S. M'Ing.

The Ascetic Who Found Another Way

I lit a little candle
Before a little shrine;
I ate a little white bread,
And drank a little wine,
And stretched after vespers
Across a spikey pine:
I was sound asleep by nine.

Better to me than brandy
Was the bloody wine;
Sweeter than a lighthouse
My candle did shine,
And I thought that it was fitter
On bitter bread to dine
Than to sup at high table
On the red meat of kine.

But my body grew so weak
And my spirit so strong
That body couldn't follow
After very long
The dictates of the spirit,
And erred and did wrong.

So I snuffed the little candle,
And closed the little shrine;
I fed the birds the white bread,
And tossed off the wine:
I took a new line.

And now I drink brandy,
And juniper and gin,
And my jolly red nose
Makes even Parson grin,
And to eat a good beef steak
I hold as no sin-
Even on Friday
If the priest isn't in.

My spirit like my body
Grows mellow and gay;
They're both such boon companions
That every night I pray,
"Mary, keep them long together."
Then I drink the dark away
Till the morning comes gray.

Not of the Dust

Let us imagine ourselves goldfish;
We would swim in a crystal bowl;
The cold water would go swish
Over our naked bodies; we would have no soul.
In the morning the syrupy sunshine
Would sparkle on our tails and fins;
We would have no stop talking of "Mine"
And "Thine;" we would have no sins.

Come, then, let us dream of goldfish
As we put away intellect and lust,
Be but a red gleam in a crystal dish
But kin of the cold sea not of the dust.

The Woman in the Samovar

The woman in the samovar
spreads webs of felt desire
more maculate than jaguar,
and offers them for hire

on stalls of oranges and figs,
bananas, cocoanuts and Roquefort cheese,
and other necessary things, as wigs,
wax candles, brassieres and bees.

She pleads in vain, and stubs her toe,
muttering curses to a parakeet:
the nebula whose name is Joe
excuses awkwardness of feet;

perching precipitously on the roof
he strums Stravinsky on a table-spoon,
returns to don a waterproof,
recedes against a background of the moon.

while Hero and Leander meet
beside the leafy Hellespont
at corner of each dusty street,
before each Christian font,

and feel the bawdy music surge
in green and crescent wave,
and spread warm arms to breast the urge
to coalescent grave.

The Cry of A Wandering Gull

The cry of a wandering gull,
And the far cry in the lonely air
Of the crows in the cool
Of the evening, share
With the boom of the tide
On the hollow shore
All the sorrowful words I cried
And thought to cry no more.

Poem

Let us invert the world, and laugh,
And stare with downcast eyes
Below the world to where the stars
Are littered on the skies,

And drop a pebble at our feet
And watch it falling up
Gathering size as it recedes
Till all the vasty cup
Of idiot infinity
Is single solid stone
To chisel into kinder things
Than blood and brain and bone.

Felicity

No more exquisite felicity
There is than this-
To find an eccentricity
In a familiar kiss.

The Lonely Land

Cedar and jagged fir uplift
Accusing barbs against the grey
And cloud-piled sky;
And in the bay
Blown spume and windrift
And thin, bitter spray
Snap at the whirling sky;
And the pine trees lean one way.

Hark to the wild ducks' cry
And the lapping of water on stones
Pushing some monstrous plaint against the sky
While a tree creaks and groans
When the wind sweeps high.

The Lonely Land Cont'd.

It is good to come to this land
Of desolate splendour and grey grief,
And on a loud, stony strand
Find for a tired heart relief
In a wild duck's bitter cry,
In grey rock, black pine, shrill wind
And cloud-piled sky.

Here Lies an Honest Man

Chisel this monumental calumny
Clammily cold and eagerly erect!
This was no saint. But plain gentility
Owed some respect,

And honest tombstone-makers might have spared
To spoil clean granite with a public lie,
Content to undisturb the silence shared
By those who die.

But red-eyed relatives gave glosing gold
For chewing chisellers to eulogize,
And he who surely would have bid them hold-
Meekly assenting lies.

Punchinello in a Purple Hat

Punchinello in a purple hat
scattered a handful of grey dust,
singing the while a song of this and that.
They asked him why. He said because I must.

Punchinello in a purple hat
stood upon his mother's breast, and sang.
He sang of stars and flowers, this and that,
and for a little while the welkin rang
and clappered like a long dingdong
that churned the Milky Way to cheese
(whereof I carve a moon) His song
treated of ecstasy, of things like these:

Punchinello in a Purple Hat Cont'd.

Cupid and my Campaspe, kisses, cards;
pledged cocktails of a woman's eyes;
tears, idle tears; tall trees and dusty shards;
love, laughter, beauty, apples, angels, flies;
mermaiden winding their golden tails
about the heart, combing the sea to waves;
nightingales and girls, and nightingales
and brooding boys; coral and cool caves.

Whilom he sang, the dust awoke:
there was a stirring in the inner bone;
and somewhare flame - because he saw the smoke;
and somewhere fellowship - he stood alone.

Summer Warning

When one fat bee can fill an afternoon
With the last letter of the alphabet
There is some little danger to be met
In gardens or in clover or in June.

Pray not too long before a garden god
Nor mark the shadow pausing on the dial,
Trap no stray sunbeam in a crystal vial
Nor rest enraptured of the easy sod

For languidly June loiters in the lane:
Some sultry summer she will wax so slow
That viscous time will pause, will cease to flow,
And the rebellious afternoon to wane,

And you'll be prisoned in an attitude -
Poised to a flower bell or on an urn
Draped tragically-awaiting the return
Of cooler dynamism and a moving blood.

Chiaroscuro

This one was somewhat chary of a smile
And something underconfident it seems:
For he who very seriously dreams
Of death imagines in a little while
That the grinning jaws and the rasping file
Are what even the dearest face's gleam
Will presently become, or at least seem:
This one was somewhat chary of a smile.

And acidly at last upon the lips
That met and answered his most fleeting kiss
He tasted the inevitable mould.
He thumbed his skeleton at breast and hips,
And naturally distrusted after this
A smile as something cynical and cold.

Silver Birch

Delicate bender over pools,
your body is a white and
as slender as a girl's.
Stooping a little, you stand
by a wide water, or droop
forward letting your long hair
drip slowly into the water.
It is you who share
with some women the power of bending
beautifully to strange beauty, of
leaning lightly in hiding hair
over a wide water or an infinite love.

Save in Frenzy

If you study a loveliness
Like a lesson in grammar,
Or inspect the first kiss
When the heart is tamer,
Or analyse and parse
A poet's verse,
You'll find that the Whole is
More than the sum of its parts,
And that the Holy of Holies
Of devout sweethearts
Is inaccessible save
In frenzy you move.

Proud Parable

I will sit with my love
in the somnolent window seat,
and watch for long enough
the slender rain. And how it
stings the polished street
to an intolerant white flash
of loveliness will parable
how beauty in the flesh
from a high elsewhere fell,
blossoming its bright splash
to a proud momentary parable.

Nocturne

Piling the comforters about the bed
this snowy lady prances to her rest:
if music be the food of love, if love be dead,
play of dark dirges only the quietest-

pluck the faint willow, ruffle the pool,
drop the crisp yellow down to death,
muting the fretwork of the cool
fountains and her shadowy breath.

Down these white curves her body moves
circuitously coupling night-
black velvet on the budding groves
that harbour a quaint feigning of delight.

The dark evelops her phorescent limbs,
Night mixes with her Day:
she is a twilight woven all of whims,
most accurately murmurous of grey.

Pastorale

The bellow of the lusty bull
Astounds the timid cow
That standeth in the meadow cool
Where cuccu singeth nu,
And holdeth her in mystic trance
Beneath the timeless trees
While ebon-bellied shad-flies dance
About her milk-white knees,
And sets her dreaming of the Groom
That doth attend his bride,
Until she lows for him to come
And fawn upon her side.

A Poem

Take in your long arms
The torso of a wave:
Stroke its lithe loveliness,
Let it tenderly lave
Arms, breast and shoulders,
Sinews and thighs
From the yellow of love,
Her immoderate eyes,
The ache of her fingers,
The whips of her hair,
And the bruise where her mouth
Moved here and there.

Leda

As Leda lay dreaming
By the still, sad stream
In the gold of the gleaming
Last sunbeam,
A whiteness grew
Out of the crisp air;
A white bird flew
To her bosom bare.

The white wings of a swan
Hovered over her dream
That became a dream of dawn:
An inward gleam
Of beauty shone,
Piercing her white body
As the colour of dawn
Pierces the sky.

And suddenly tall Troy
Pushed troubled towers
Into a flaming sky:
And there was blood upon the flowers
Where wandered one
Whose swan-like loveliness
Made old men young
And filled the young with bitterness.

The Moment and the Lamp

There is a beacon on a mountain top
That in a certain instant flings a flame
Across a public sky that might have been
But roof and walls of divers human hearts
Had not it been the lining of a brain.

You ask what signal in the changing star?
The meaning of the palpitating flame?
Ah, were there wizards in the gaping throng
Or dapper alchemists about the place
There might be comprehension in the sky.

But as it is, it is enough to know
That in the flicker of a candle flame
We could, were any skilled enough to read,
And having read, were bold enough to speak,
Fathom the dido of the universal flux,
Matching the moment and the momentary lamp.

Tailpiece

Poor little wistful Poem,
Tagging in after the others,
What are you all about?
Have you a meaning and moral?
Have you a purpose?
No?
God help you!
What-what would the English Department
Say of such a song?

For Ever and Ever, Amen

Lonely aloft in a turret
Hewn of the bodiless night
Sits one who out of chaos
Has carved a cube of light.

Bent double over his book
What does he ponder there
As quiet and lonely as a planet
Hung in the silent air?

For Ever and Ever, Amen Cont'd.

Looking out he sees only dark,
There is no one to look in;
When a gust twists the flame of his candle
Shadows swim with no fin.

From the gulf below his window
Comes no betraying noise,
There is no frog in the marsh,
Nor the sound of a human voice;

There is no step on the stairway,
There is no hand on the door,
The Is is the same as the Will Be
And both the same as before

Something Apart

I went into the cool
Woods where the yellow sun falls
Into a steel-grey pool,
And heard at irregular intervals
The bitter, complaining note
That staggers and falls
From the cat-bird's ragged throat.

All day by the pool side
Stretched on the lush grass
I heard what that solitary cried,
Watching his shadow pass and repass,
Dip and wheel and return,
Over the pool and the grass,
Over the grass and the fern.

The wind and the water stood still,
And stiller than these -
As though the whole world were crystal -
Stood the attentive trees:
Only the raucous bird was something apart,
As alien from all these
As the sorrow in my heart.

Flame and Fountain

Seeking a symbol, I return again
To flame and fountain shewing heart and brain:
Sensitive, lonely, and in every wind
Veering and wavering, neither harsh nor kind,
But bright or feeble, tall or no,
As the winds vary and the seasons go.

A red torch burning in the utter black:
What but the heart atoning for the lack
Of many things it must lament -
Kindness and understanding, wonderment?
And what at last more bitterly burnt out
To leave such wreckage in the fired redoubt?

And ah, how cold, how pitiful and pale
The fountain rises and assumes her veil!
Ghostly in the ghostly afternoon she stands
And lifts unwearied, ineffectual hands,
As if to pluck an answer from the air
To the eternal Why that all must share.

The heart of man the intelligence:
This pondering on the why and how and whence,
And ever springing like a fountain's plume
Whitely and icily against the gloom;
And that as hot, as wavering, as fire,
Kindled for comfort, burning to desire.

Homage to E.S.

Now that the ashen rain of gummy April
Clacks like a weedy and stained mill

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

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

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

I will saw a wooden hyacinth
In the woods' callous plinth,

And set it seriously in a made jade vase
Appropriately upon the mantelpiece.

Homage to E.S. Cont'd.

And there its creaking naked glaze,
And there the varnish of its blaze

Shall hold all time as in a glass
And snare our youth that tries to pass.

'Til we are held a child again
Under the hot icicles of rain.

. . . .

Or failing this, I'll not go out of doors,
But find my childhood in these poems that are yours.

Poem

When I was arrested for drunkenness
They wanted to know my profession.
I answered them, saying:
"I am an Interior Decorator."
They thought I was lying:
They did not know
That I decorate my thoughts
With scarlet scarves
Wound on the loom of dreams,
And paper my mind with purple.

Twilight

This poem stole by me in the afternoon:
This poem and that afternoon is you:
Twilight gray and rather mournful, song a little
out of tune,
And all the things one should, but did not do.

You spoke of music in a voice of music,
And your voice wandered on like the smoke of
your cigarette
As you mixed in your talk the name of Helen
And the name of Deirdre and the names of some
living yet.

It is easy enough to recall the body of your death,
To comprehend with the mind what you meant;
Not easy to forget the quick catch in your breath,
How an army with banners suddenly came and went

Twilight Cont'd.

Before the cloud had descended on your face again,
And you asked if I'd have another cup of tea,
And smiled and chatted as if there had been no pain:
"What's Hecuba to him?" you thought, and stared at me.

Sermon

Striplings all of you,
Listen to me:
I would not have you do,
But be.

Project no tomorrow,
Treasure the now -
The sum of all experience
Sans why, sans how.

Whittle the universe
Down to an I;
Act, not rehearse;
Affirm, not deny.

Take with your two hands
What you desire
Before the cold sands
Quench your brave fire.

And sully your loving
Beyond hope of laving,
Till what you are having
Is worth but the leaving.

To Evening

Thou modest maiden, blessing the quiet light
That gathers in they forehead with repose
And gradual coming in of peace, until the vale
And all the neighbour copses and the late bright
Hill and the tall poplar trees in stately rows
Climmer awhile, and fading, fail,
Turn thou also on me, a too tired child,
The dark lustre of thy lovely eyes,
Shew me thy countenance-how it is mild,
Thy breast-how comforting, thy mien-how wise;
And spill about my head thy dim, forgetful hair
That the last light fading out of the yellow west
Her peace and gentle loveliness may share
With one whose all desire is only rest.

Field of Long Grass

She walks in the field of long grass
in the evening

and the delicate little lover-hands
lean forward a little to touch her
with the gesture of shyest caress

Light is like the waving of the long grass
Light is the faint to and fro
of her dress
Light rests for a while in her bosom

When it is all gone
from her bosom's hollow and
out of the field of long grass
she walks in the dark
by the edge of the fallow land

Then she begins to walk in my heart
then she walks in me
swaying in my veins

My wrists
are a field of long grass
a little wind is kissing

Undertaker's Anthology

I

Under this grassy mound
Lies one of those who went
Upon the solid ground
Timidly and diffident,
Her thoughts upon the air
And the enfolding skies,
Who in the thoughtless dust
Now dreamless lies.

II

Say not of this lady
Sleeping here
That she was beautiful, beloved
And dear;
Tell no one she was witty,
Graceful, fine;
Tell no one, - this I beg you -
She was mine;

Undertaker's Anthology Cont'd.

Only say she had a lover,
Add that she is dead;
Then go away and leave her -
Everything is said.

Epitaph

Stranger, this stone standing here
Signifies no more than this:
That one who erstwhile loved his Dear
Now takes a colder kiss,
Yet sleeps as well, though in an alien bed
On no sweet bosom doth he rest his head.

The Shrouding

Unravel this curdled cloud,
Wash out the stain of the sun,
Let the winding of your shroud
Be delicately begun.

Bind up the muddy Thames,
Hearken the arrogant worm,
Sew the seams and the hems
With fine thread and firm.

When the moon is a sickle of ice
Reaping a sheaf of stars,
Put pennies on your eyes,
Lie you down long and sparse.

Fold your thin hands like this,
Over your breast, so;
Protract no farewell kiss,
Nor an elastic woe.

Cavalcade

If only we had a song
We could get through this shadowy valley
And over the sandy plain.
Then we could pasture our beasts
In the meadows under the mountains,
Forgetting the weeds and the dust,
Forgetting the leagues and the stones -
We could win to the sea in the end:
Had we a song to sing -

Cavalcade Cont'd.

Something a horse could prance to;
Something a heart could beat to,
A ballad, cannone, a chorus,
Something the feet could step to.

My father had such a song. He sang it lustily.
It sounds hollow enough nowadays.
It sounds hollow enough to me;
And my mother's voice singing on Sunday
Trails away in the dust.
There was a young cavalier
Who rode with us to the wars:
He knew a good song, he knew a brave song.
But they stopped his mouth with the mud in Flanders.
Ah well! The locusts are singing.
The vultures are wheeling overhead
And they too are singing a kind of song.
A kind of grace before meat.
And the wind sings too.
We had better get on.

The Face

The man with the acid face
Under the hammer of glass
Imperils the pure place.
The emotion of the mass,
Inverted, seems to ask
The jack, queen, king and ace
To do the task.

Wait for a sure thing,
Card into sleeve blown,
Arm out of sling,
Friends post at phone;
Then when trumps are declared
And partner's strength known
Overpower the guard.

But keep the face mum
Till the right minute come.
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?

The Face Cont'd.

Replace the slave state face
With a face of bread:
Each shall choose his place,
Be Dead, or Red.
The cards are no way stacked
And he may live by grace
Who wills to act.

Surrealism In The Service Of Christ

Twisted Cross stands alone erect
With a smile on his well-turned corners
Inserting avuncular punctuation
In an immaculate maidenhead
Responding in the hollow church.

Subdiaconal Fissure
Doffs a couple of maces and a tennis net,
Descending from the cabbage
To the terror made of fonts.

Collars are worn reversed across the privates
Or screwed to the navel with scallops of crepe:
You ought to see Judas in samite!

Anyway, the stoned the roll away,
And what do you think?
Only two storm troopers had the right time:
    Three merry widows in three
    Quarter time
    For you and
    Time for me and
    Three heil Marys on St. Stephanasplatz

Rubber Stocking came in with a lilt
And a penetrating skewer
And the headsman in black.
The controlled press agreed that she died rather well.

The Angelic Doctor, on the contrary,
Shows, that having no form,
And, consequently, no life,
Neither had she, therefore, any death,
Either good, bad, or indifferent.

Surrealism In The Service Of Christ Cont'd.

Likewise also Twisted Cross, Immaculate Maidenhead,
Subdiaconal Fissure, Judas in Samite, Storm Troopers
A and B, Agnes, Mabel, Becky, Three-Quarter Time,
Penetrating Skewer, and the Hangman in Black
in Limbo ~~only~~
Unlive and undie: God is not mocked.

To The Moon

How shall I forget how under this
Immeasurable thin dome of azure
You drove, one cold blue morning,
Out of me, O high and wandering moon,
My angry mood!

And now you walk the midnight lost
In ragged cloud,
Like a wild virgin, long since dead,
Across a Gothic corridor,
And fix me with your glare.

You bring what once you took away,
My angry mood,
That burns, like you, caustic and cold,
And draws my blood.

Oh when shall the sun, like a good fairy,
Drive you into your grave again,
And turn your black palace
Into a shining meadow?

Ode To Good Form

Hail gentle Goddess of Civilities,
Who smiles upon The Worldly and The Wise!
Happy the Protestant, whose pious wit
Finds out thy Discipline, and cries Submit!
Reason, thy overlord, and Tolerance, they friend,
On him, with yours, their kindest glances bend,
Till, Heaven-instructed, he has learned to live
By knowing when to stand, and when to give.
He acts with the same Elegance and Ease
His varied part at Circuses or Teas:
Is grave in Church and hearty when he sups,
Pious at Pray'rs and merry in his cups.
He worships Woman in his ardent Youth,
Honour in Manhood, and in Old Age Truth.
Trimming his Wants to what may be obtained,
He asks no Honey when the Moon has waned,
Nor pines for Oysters in the month of June,
Nor dives for Pearl in them with fork or spoon,
Happy indeed, to take what he can get
Without the loss of Honour, or of Sweat.
Catholic, his taste, he's Anglican in this:
He only hates two things - Extremities:
With equal Moderation he deplores
Unused Virgins and ill-used Whores,
And with an even mind seeks out the Shade
To take a Nap, a Cocktail, or a Maid.
If Kings are murdered, or a hackneyed Tune,
Or Woman grows Inconstant, or the Moon,
If Governments, or only Sparrows, fall,
If Agents, Policements or the Vicar call,
Patriots bellow, or big Preachers bawl -
He keeps his Countenance, polite, serene,
Safe in the Centre of his Golden Mean,
And chooses not-to-elevate his Voice
Like some who irritated by the noise
Of Pompous Fools cry out upon it so
That the damned Clatter does not cease, but grow.
Not so thy Faithful: in that stricter School
He's learned The Attitude to Knave and Fool,
And two being Company, he leaves the Pair,
Happy enough to be found wanting there.

The McGill Daily

"Why is The McGill Daily?"
Asked the pessimist sourly.
"Thank God," said the optimist gaily,
"That it isn't hourly!"

A Portrait, And A Prophecy

Indeed, he has sinned! and of his many sins the chief
That mortal sin, Himself. A delicate-fingered thief
Of values this, a dealer in stolen belief,

And a smiling falsifier of the intricate debt
Of love to the tiger. Why! this is the one who set
A premium on the monstrous sins of age and let

The petty faults of youth go hang, who watered his blood
And coached his infected heart to stammer I will be good
Like a young Victoria of wax and wood -

And now, by God! he has fallen in love with Penitence!
He'll bring that slut to bed of the most fulsome of his sins,
The precocious blue-eyed bastard, Innocence.

* * *

Cassandra-like, I prophesy the lad
So sired will grow from not-so-good to bad:
Untruthful, nasty, secretive, and sad,
He'll drive his ill-adjusted mother mad,
And end by growing up just like his dad.

Wedding Night

Now all they have not done they do.
What's that" I do not know. Do you?

Angels exist, and sonnets are not dead

My Guardian Angel? Yes, indeed. I've known
I've had one all along, - felt certain she
Was watching me - was watching over me;
Guiding each forward step, and if a stone
Stood in my path she smiled and it was gone.
Angels, as dear Belinda learned, are He
Or She as Fate requires or God's Necessity:
But mine is unambiguous - and my own.

Angels exist, and sonnets are not dead Cont'd.

Last night I slept in Paradisal flame
That coursed along my veins in such delight
As I a Salamander were, and filled
My mouth with fragrance, my black bed with light.
She knew when to come and yet she came unwilled
And undeserved, and coming, called my name.

To Frank Scott, Esq.

Poet and Man of Law - O brave anomaly! -
dove wise and serpent-tongued for Song or Plea -
a parti-coloured animal, committed, parti-pris
but not a party man, a Man, and free.

Padlock unlocker and voice with a key,
unbanner of books, and by a natural necessity
against duplicity and privileged Duplessity.

But what endears you most to me,
old friend,'s your love and practice of sweet poesy.

I ask, then, what it means to be a poet:
- to grasp the Muse's saxophone and blow it?
- to have a quivering soul, and show it?
- to prance in purple like an Emperor's clown?
or tickle the gallant salons of the town?
or lift the Holy Grail, and toss it down?

Not today, I think. Wrong answers drop,
facile as angels' tears, and plop
so dully unctuous you cry "For God's sake, STOP!"

To be a poet, Frank, you've shown
's a harder thing. It is to be a stone,
an eye, a heart, a lung, a microphone,

A voice, but not a voice alone, a hand,
a hand to grasp a hand, a leg to stand
on, nerves to feel, and in supreme command,

the shaping mind that shapes the poem
as it shapes the man, four-square, and needle-eyed,
and Frank.

Lines Written On The Occasion Of
President Nixon's Address To The Nation,
May 8, 1972

'The man with the acid face
Under the hammer of glass
Imperils the pure place.'
Thirty-six years ago
The muse of political verse,
By the time's distempers crazed,
Brought these prophetic lines
Into a poet's mind -
Apposite then
And now, godammit, again.

The man in the box of glass
Speaks to a million rooms
With a sharp, determined face
And an obstinate, truculent voice.
He speaks of enlarging the war
To hasten the coming of peace;
Of care for the 'boys' he leaves
To suffer for him and for us;
And, wickedest folly, of honor,
Not knowing it long ago lost.
The irresponsible bombs
Dropped by anonymous hands
Into invisible clouds
Splash into fire and blood
On military targets alone,
Including alas! - O crocodile tears! -
Mother and baby, ox and old man
Not white or American though,
Yet inescapable parts
Of the Chiefs of Staff's overall plan.

The man with the acid mind
Speaks from the box of glass.
We listen in darkening rooms.
But not only America listens;
The Tartar and Muscovite hear.
We have made of the symbol of love
The defoliate rose.
Must we foresee our New York,
As Gray foresaw London,
'Purg'd by the sword/ And beautifyed by fire'?

APPENDIX C

Critical Prose and Books Edited by A. J. M. Smith

A Chronological List by Date of Publication

1. "Symbolism in Poetry," The McGill Fortnightly Review, Dec. 1925.
2. "Hamlet in Modern Dress," The McGill Fortnightly Review, Nov. 1926.
3. "Contemporary Poetry," The McGill Fortnightly Review, Dec. 1926.
4. "Wanted—Canadian Criticism," The Canadian Forum, April, 1928; Towards a View of Canadian Letters, 1973.
5. "Some Relations Between Henry Vaughan and Thomas Vaughan," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters Vol. XVIII, 1932.
6. "Observations on Marianne Moore," The Rocking Horse (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1935).
7. New Provinces, Poems of Several Authors (edited by F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith)(Toronto, Macmillan, 1936)
8. "Canadian Poetry—A Minority Report," University of Toronto Quarterly, Jan. 1939; Towards a View, 1973.
9. "A Poet Young and Old—W. B. Yeats," University of Toronto Quarterly, April 1939.
10. "Our Poets: A Sketch of Canadian Poetry in the Nineteenth Century," University of Toronto Quarterly, Oct. 1942.
11. "Canadian Anthologies, New and Old," University of Toronto Quarterly, July 1942.
12. News of the Phoenix and Other Poems, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943)
13. The Book of Canadian Poetry, Introduction and notes by A. J. M. Smith, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943). Revised and enlarged edition (Toronto: Gage, 1948); Third Edition, revised and enlarged (Toronto: Gage, 1957)
14. "Colonialism and Nationalism in Canadian Poetry Before Confederation," University of Toronto Quarterly, 1944; Towards a View, 1973.
15. "Nationalism and Canadian Poetry," Northern Review I:33-42 (Winter 1945/46).

16. "The Fredericton Poets," University of New Brunswick, Founders' Day Address, 1946.

17. Seven Centuries of Verse: English and American, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947). Second Edition, revised and enlarged, 1957. Third Edition, revised and enlarged, 1967.

18. "Canadian Literature of Today and Tomorrow," Proceedings of Second Conference of Canadian Library Association, June 1947 in Vancouver).

19. "New Canadian Poetry," The Canadian Forum 26:250-2, Fall 1947.

20. "The Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott," Dalhousie Review 28: 12-21 April 1948; Our Living Tradition 2nd and 3rd Series, 1959 in association with Carleton University; Towards a View, 1973.

21. The Worldly Muse, An Anthology of Serious Light Verse (New York: Abelard Press, 1951).

22. A Sort of Ecstasy, Poems New and Selected (Toronto, Ryerson, 1954)

23. Exploring Poetry with M. L. Rosenthal (New York: The MacMillan Co. , 1955) Revised 1973.

24. "The Recent Poetry of Irving Layton—A Major Voice," Queen's Quarterly, 1956.

25. "Poet," from Writing in Canada edited by George Whalley (The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1956); Towards a View, 1973.

26. The Blasted Pine: An Anthology of Satire, Invective, and Disrespectful Verse, edited by A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott (Toronto, Macmillan, 1957).

27. "American Pressures and Canadian Individuality," (East Lansing, Centennial Review, I (Fall 1957)

28. "Poet (E. J. Pratt)," Tamarack Review No. 6:66-7 (Winter, 1958).

29. "Duncan Campbell Scott, a Reconsideration," Canadian Literature No. 1: 13-25 (Summer 1959).

30. The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse (in English and French), edited with an Introduction by A. J. M. Smith (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1960).

31. Masks of Fiction: Canadian Critics on Canadian Prose, edited with an Introduction by A. J. M. Smith (Toronto: McClelland, 1961).

32. Graham Greene's Theological Thrillers," Queens Quarterly, LXVIII, 15-33, Spring 1961.

33. "Critical Improvisations on Margaret Avison's Winter Sun," Tamarack Review, No. 18 (1961); Towards a View, 1973.

34 "Eclectic Detachment: Aspects of Identity in Canadian Poetry," Canadian Literature No 9, (1961).

35. Collected Poems (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1962)

36. Masks of Poetry: Canadian Critics on Canadian Verse, edited with an Introduction by A. J. M. Smith (Toronto, McClelland, 1962).

37. "A Self-Review," Canadian Literature No. 15:20-26, (Winter 1963).

38. "The Poetic Process: of the Making of Poems," The Centennial Review of Arts and Science, 1964 (Michigan State University); Towards a View, 1973.

39. "A Rejected Preface to New Provinces, 1936," Canadian Literature No. 24 (1965); Towards a View, 1973.

40. "A Survey of English Canadian Letters—A Review," University of Toronto Quarterly (1965); Towards a View, 1973.

41. "The Poet and the Nuclear Crisis," English Poetry in Quebec, edited by John Glasco (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1965).

42. "Canadian Poetry in English," Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, edited by Alex Preminger (Princeton University Press, 1965).

43. "Clerihew," Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,

44. "Light Verse," Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.

45. "Occasional Verse," Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.

46. The Book of Canadian Prose, Vol. I, edited with an Introduction by A. J. M. Smith (Toronto, Gage, 1965).

47. Essays for College Writing, edited by A. J. M. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

48. 100 Poems: Chaucer to Dylan Thomas, edited by A. J. M. Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

49. "Pope, The Rape of the Lock," Master Poems of the English Language, edited by Oscar Williams (New York: Trident Press, 1966)

50. "A. E. Housman, from A Shropshire Lad," Master Poems of the English Language, edited by Oscar Williams (New York: Trident Press, 1966).

51. "A Unified Personality: Birney's Poems," Canadian Literature No. 30, 1966; Towards a View, 1973.

52. "F. R. Scott and Some of His Poems," Canadian Literature No. 31, 1967; Towards a View, 1973.

53. "A Reading of Anne Wilkinson," The Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1967); Towards a View, 1973.

54. "The Canadian Poet I/To Confederation," Canadian Literature No. 37, 1968; Towards a View, 1973.

55. "The Canadian Poet II/After Confederation," Canadian Literature No. 38, 1968; Towards a View, 1973.

56. "The Poetry of P. K. Page," Canadian Literature No. 50, 1971; Towards a View, 1973.

LIST OF REFERENCES

[1]Earle Birney, "A. J. M. S.," Canadian Literature No. 15:4-6 (Winter 1963) pp. 5.

[2]Germaine Warkentin, "Criticism and the Whole Man," Canadian Literature No. 64 (Spring 1975) pp. 83-91.

[3]Roy Fuller, "A Poet of the Century," Canadian Literature No. 15: 7-10 (Winter 1963).

[4]A. M. Klein, "Poetry of A. J. M. Smith," Canadian Forum No. 23: 257-258 (February 1944) p. 257.

[5]Padraig O'Broin, "After Strange Gods (A. J. M. Smith and the Concept of Nationalism)," Canadian Author and Bookman 39:6-8 (Summer 1964) p. 7.

[6]Lionel Kearns, "Review of A. J. M. Smith's Poems: New & Collected," in The McGill Movement, ed. Peter Stevens (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), p. 125.

[7]Leon Edel, "When McGill Modernized Canadian Literature," in The McGill You Knew, forthcoming from Longman Canada Limited.

[8]F. R. Scott, "A. J. M. Smith," in Leading Canadian Poets, ed. W. P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948) p.

[9]A. J. M. Smith, "Symbolism in Poetry," The McGill Fortnightly Review Vol. I No. 2 (Dec. 1925) p. 11.

[10]A. J. M. Smith, "Hamlet in Modern Dress," The McGill Fortnightly Review Vol. II No. 1 (Nov. 1926) p. 3

[11]A. J. M. Smith, "Contemporary Poetry," The McGill Fortnightly Review Vol. II No. 4 (Dec. 1926) p. 32.

[12]T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," The Sacred Wood, (London: Methuen & Co., 1920) p. 43.

[13]A. J. M. Smith, "Poem," The McGill Fortnightly Review Vol. I No. 3 (Dec. 1925). All future reference to poems not included in Poems: New & Collected will give the poem in its entirety or refer to Appendix B. For publication information refer to Appendix A.

[14]A. J. M. Smith, "Universe Into Stone," Poems: New & Collected (Toronto: Oxford University Press,1967) p. 76. All future references to poems included in Poems: New & Collected will refer to the appropriate page number. For complete publication information see Appendix B.

[15]A. J. M. Smith, "The Fredericton Poets," in Towards a View of Canadian Letters, Selected Critical Essays 1928-1971 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973) p. 72. All future references to Smith's critical essays will be followed by an indication of the appropriate page number in the above mentioned book. For complete publication information refer to Appendix C.

[16]F. R. Scott, "Preface," New Provinces (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1936)

[17]A. J. M. Smith, "Introduction," The Book of Canadian Poetry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943) p. 1.

[18]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[19]A. J. M. Smith, The Worldly Muse: An Anthology of Serious Light Verse (New York: Abelard Press, 1951) p. xix.

[20]F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith, "Introduction," The Blasted Pine (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1957) p. xv

[21]A. J. M. Smith, "Ode to Good Form," The Blasted Pine p. 56. See Appendix B p. 134.

[22]A. J. M. Smith, Public poetry reading, Simon Fraser University, November 5, 1975.

[23]Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956) p. 43.

[24]F. R. Scott, "Vision," Selected Poems (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 170.