

The New Canadian ANTHOLOGY



*Poetry
and
Short
Fiction
in
English*

Edited by Robert Lecker and
Jack David

THE
NEW
CANADIAN
ANTHOLOGY:

POETRY
AND SHORT FICTION
IN ENGLISH

Edited by
ROBERT LECKER & JACK DAVID

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• PREFACE •

The New Canadian Anthology collects some of the finest English-Canadian poetry and short fiction written since the late 1800s. Although its thrust is intentionally modern, the importance of maintaining a sense of historical perspective has not been forgotten.

We have attempted to provide a chronological and developmental perspective by dating each work. The date that appears in brackets at the end of each selection is the *date of first publication in any form*. For previously unpublished material, we give the estimated date of composition. In all cases, we have sought to reproduce the most authoritative text *currently* available; this text frequently differs from that of the first publication. A list of the texts we have employed appears in the permissions acknowledgements. Except in the case of excerpted material, line numbers are provided for all poems of more than forty lines.

In making our selections we were often assisted by the many scholars and critics whose contributions to this volume make it unique: this is the first single-volume anthology of English-Canadian poetry and short fiction that contains bio-critical essays written by experts on the various authors whose works appear here. These contributors have also provided the helpful lists of works by and on each author which appear at the end of each bio-critical entry. In this sense, *The New Canadian Anthology* is a genuinely collaborative effort, and we wish to thank all of the contributors. Their input helped us make a better anthology; whatever flaws remain are strictly ours.

A number of people made special contributions to the editing and preparation of this volume. Our many thanks are due to Jamie Gaetz, W. J. Keith, Nanette Norris, and Francesca Worrall. As well, our debt to Peter Milroy is profound; this book is in many ways the product of his faith, intelligence, and vision.

ROBERT LECKER
JACK DAVID

· INTRODUCTION ·

by George Woodcock

An anthology that sets out to represent a literary tradition is rather like an exhibition in one gallery of a great museum, in which the curators have set out to assemble a representative collection from the best works they have available. There, carefully selected, well lit and labelled, the exhibits stand, and the way they are arranged reflects a pattern which in the curator's mind represents the essence of the culture that is presented. But, as the experienced museum-goer knows, the other galleries and even the cellars and attics of the museum are packed with works not on display, works often as good, which have been left out perhaps because one can have too much of any class of good things, or perhaps because the objects are too large to fit easily into the show, or perhaps because they belong to formative periods about which critical judgments are still uncertain.

Wise viewers take the whole show in—the excellence of the objects shown and the conclusions to which the curator is gently trying to edge them by arrangement and emphasis. But if the exhibition has been a good one, they go away happy but not quite content, for the selection of objects in that bright room will have aroused their curiosity about what lies unseen in the other galleries, in the cellars and attics, and they will not be satisfied until they have seen them.

It is the same with anthologies. No one ever learns a literature completely from an anthology, since each is deliberately a sampling, with its limitations of size, of period, of choice. But whatever its approach, the good anthology will not merely provide its readers with a few hours of stimulating reading and a collection of quotable passages to be used in impressing others. It will also stir their curiosity and lead them to find for themselves the other necessary works and writers in the tradition, so that the anthology will indeed be an introduction, an opening of awareness to a new field of experience.

This kind of introduction is, I suggest, what Robert Lecker and Jack David have provided in *The New Canadian Anthology: Poetry and Short Fiction in English*.

Collections like *The New Canadian Anthology*, which present a broad spectrum of Canadian poetry and fiction for the general reader, do not have many predecessors. There have been numerous anthologies of verse, of which the best known are those by A. J. M. Smith, Margaret Atwood, and Ralph Gustafson, together with the two-volume *Canadian Poetry*, which Lecker and David themselves prepared more recently, and these collections have been influential in establishing the critical, accepted

canon of Canadian poetry. There have been quite a number of good anthologies of short stories, notably those compiled by Robert Weaver and by David Helwig. But of broader collections that bring in the whole field of creative writing, poetry and prose, there have been comparatively few. One was *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature* (1973), by Weaver and William Toye, and even that was prepared with one eye on the academic market. Another was Mordecai Richler's *Canadian Writing Today* (1970), published with a view to introducing Canadian writers to an international and particularly to a British readership.

It is interesting to compare Richler's collection with the present one, prepared more than a decade and a half later, for it shows considerable changes not only in Canadian writing itself but also in our attitudes toward it. Richler seemed at first an odd figure to pick for such a task. He was living in England, and had been an expatriate from Canada for over ten years, while he was well known for his deprecatory remarks about Canadian writers and writing. But in fact both his physical distance from Canada and his modest expectation of what Canadian writers could produce were editorial advantages, and he put together in the end the kind of workmanlike and provisional collection, introducing quite a number of new and not yet very well tried talents, which was appropriate at the time. What Richler found was that when he looked at his country's writing at the end of the 1960s, many years after his departure for Europe, there was more to admire than he had expected, and the general tentativeness yet hopefulness of his effort was summarized in a paragraph toward the end of his introduction:

This anthology, then, is of writers embarking on settlement. It is not meant to be historical or definitive. It entertains no over-large claims unless it be considered such to say (and this is a real measure of recent Canadian literary achievement) that I believe it to be sufficiently fresh and talented to engage the interest not only of dutiful buyers of Canadiana but of a broader, more exacting, audience, appreciative of good new writing whatever its origins.

The time has come, in the late 1980s, when there is a sufficiently large and varied body of Canadian writing for us to regard it as a literature that *has* reached its maturity and that we can have no doubt merits the interest of the "broader, more exacting" audience to which Richler refers. We have moved from diffidence toward certainty, and the editors of *The New Canadian Anthology* have shown their sense of this fact in the decisiveness of their choices, which explains both the deliberate limitations and the particular advantages of this volume. They have realized that as a literature changes and matures a new kind of anthology is needed, and they have acted accordingly.

The limitations are of proportion and of period as well as—inevitably—of choice. There are obviously some works of literature, notably novels, and the long poems of writers like E. J. Pratt, that cannot be

anthologized except in fragments. The editors have, I think, been wisely cautious about using extracts from such longer works since, charming or impressive though a fragment of such a poem or novel may be, it will almost always seem diminished by comparison with a short complete work. I believe I am right in saying that among hundreds of items the excerpt from Pratt's *Brébeuf and His Brethren* is the only actual fragment chosen for this anthology, and it works because Pratt tends to be an episodic poet.

This limitation on extracting from larger works has of course meant that a number of leading contemporary Canadian authors are excluded because they are by nature writers of books, dealing at their best with large integrated structures, and none of their smaller works seemed adequate to represent them faithfully. Excellent novelists such as Hugh MacLennan, Robertson Davies, and Timothy Findley are among them, and anyone who enjoys this anthology is urged to supplement it by seeking out their books, if he does not know them already.

The limitations of period are perhaps more debatable. The poetry extends just over a century, for it was in the 1880s that Isabella Valancy Crawford, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Archibald Lampman, the earliest poets represented here, published their first volumes, with Bliss Carman and Duncan Campbell Scott following in the 1890s. The prose covers an even more restricted period; the earliest of it dates from after World War I. The editors have not attempted to be representative of the whole scope of Canadian writing, for many early writers included by earlier anthologists like A. J. M. Smith and Margaret Atwood in the interests of historical completeness have been deliberately ignored.

This has meant sacrificing a good deal of interesting but not necessarily first-rate work, for there have been writers active in Canada almost since the time of the earliest settlement. The first in English was Robert Hayman, whose *Quodlibets, Lately Come Over from New Britaniola, Old Newfoundland*, was published in London in 1628, two and a half centuries before the first poem in the present volume was written. And throughout the nineteenth century, especially after the influx of immigrants from Britain after the Napoleonic Wars, men and women were hard at work producing the poems, novels, and memoirs which we now regard as representing the colonial period in our literature. Some of these writers, like James de Mille and Rosanna Leprohon and Susanna Moodie, became accomplished professional writers of a kind, while others, like the poets Alexander McLachlan and Charles Heavyside, revealed strains of undisciplined and often bizarre originality.

But all these writers in their own way remained transient, still committed to the literary language and attitudes of a distant mother culture and inclined to that fear of the still so proximate wilderness which Northrop Frye has described as "the garrison mentality." Furthermore, until the appearance late in the nineteenth century of Isabella Valancy Craw-

ford and the Confederation poets (such as Roberts), and of Sara Jeanette Duncan and Stephen Leacock as prose-fiction writers a little later, not much writing was being done in Canada that would bear comparison either with contemporary British writing or with the kind of later Canadian writing from which this anthology has been selected. What value we should place on the early Canadian writers has always been a matter of debate, with their advocates tending to defend them because they existed at all in so hostile a land, and their critics tending to dismiss them because of their lack of evident quality. Much of the argument over past anthologies of Canadian writing has centred on the “dear bad poets,” as James Reaney once called them:

*Who wrote
Early in Canada
And never were of note.*

Not very long ago, indeed, the appreciation of writing in Canada was largely in the hands of the literary historians, because at that time it seemed as though we had so little to offer that we could not afford to be rigorously selective. When the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada* appeared, as recently as 1965, Northrop Frye remarked in his Conclusion that if evaluation had been the guiding principle of the book it would have ended as “a huge debunking project, leaving Canadian literature a poor naked *alouette* plucked of every feather of decency and dignity.” He added:

And Canada has produced no author who is a classic in the sense of possessing a vision greater in kind than that of his best readers. (Canadians themselves might argue about one or two, but in the perspective of the world at large the statement is true.) There is no Canadian writer of whom we can say what we can say of the world's major writers, that their readers can grow up inside their work without ever being aware of a circumference.

Now, a mere twenty years later, we have accumulated a body of writing that has grown immensely in variety and in strength, and we have cause to be proud of it. Our pride, moreover, is reinforced by assurances from outside. Not long ago I read a review in which Anthony Burgess discussed Robertson Davies's novel, *What's Bred in the Bone*, which he described as “high art.” Burgess concluded:

If Canada is not proud of producing Robertson Davies it is the provincial backwater that its southern neighbour thinks it is. But I have too much respect for that great country to suppose that it cannot reconcile ice hockey with literary greatness.

The form the present anthology takes is a sign that we have indeed found our pride, that we are no longer afraid to judge our literature by standards of excellence rather than provenance; the creativity of our

writers and the growing independence of our critics has relieved us of the need for the literary-historical crutch, the crutch of an approach that enabled us uneasily to avoid the responsibility of critical judgement. The editors are justified in their recognition that, in an anthology that does not claim to be historical, writers like Charles Heavyside and Susanna Moodie have no place beside far better writers like Earle Birney and Mavis Gallant. Which does not mean that we reject the “dear bad” ones; they have their own virtues, which are largely those of social history, and they will keep their places in the museum if not in the select gallery. It does mean that we are celebrating the coming of age of literature in Canada by presenting our best writers in all the variety that is one of the true signs of growth in any artistic tradition.

Apart from the fact that it is evaluative in the sense of seeking to pick the best works by the best Canadian writers, *The New Canadian Anthology* also continues the essentially critical function initiated by A. J. M. Smith's *Book of Canadian Poetry* in 1943 by presenting not only biographical notes but also concise critiques of each of the poets and prose writers included. In this sense it adds a further dimension to our view of Canadian writing; since these introductory pieces are prepared by various critics and scholars, the poems and short stories are supplemented by nearly fifty miniature individual essays which show the range and fertility of approach that in recent years have emerged among Canadian critics.

Vitality of criticism is one sign of the maturity of a literary tradition. The others, I suggest, are individuality and variegation, the constant moving away from models. Emerging literatures tend to be self-conscious in their search for identity, but once the tradition is established it forms a space within which individual writers can develop according to their own talents and inclinations. What this anthology shows best is the way in which Canadian literature has reached this situation.

Among the earlier writers included in these pages we become aware of the kinds of urge that mark the emergence of a national literary culture. Poets like Crawford and Roberts, Lampman and D. C. Scott, represent the first transitional stage, when Canadians realized that they must write from Canadian experience, but in general did so while continuing to use the forms and the diction of another tradition—that of English late romanticism. Even here the sense of a need to find forms more appropriate for the poetic charting of a new land appeared fitfully in the later poems of Duncan Campbell Scott and Charles G. D. Roberts, with their tendency towards a freer verse and towards a more imagistic kind of perception. E. J. Pratt provided a more self-conscious extension of the same process, taking themes that reflect the emergence of Canadian national sentiment, but often going back as far as the English seventeenth century and Butler's *Hudibras* to find the verse forms in which he could give these themes expression.

But it soon became obvious that there was a disparity between content and form. Canadian geography and Canadian history shaped experience

and perceptions of it in ways that could not find expression in a poetic language developed in the English mid-nineteenth century, a language that in an increasingly industrialized age even English poets were finding inadequate. And so, over the next generation, the Canadian poets whose work was vital enough to survive were those who set out on a deliberate crusade of modernism in poetry, which was partly encouraged by similar currents elsewhere in the English-speaking world, but also expressed a mounting sense of cultural nationalism. So we have the various groupings of poets who centred on the avant-garde magazines of the times: the *McGill Fortnightly Review* group of the 1920s, who produced the anthology *New Provinces* in 1936, and among whom A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, and later A. M. Klein were most important; and in the 1940s the partisans of the two rival Montreal magazines, *Preview*, with which P. K. Page and again Scott and Klein were associated, and *First Statement*, edited by John Sutherland, in which Irving Layton and Louis Dudek were closely involved.

Since there was no native model for a kind of poetry that might fit the Canadian experience, these writers tended paradoxically to become international in order to express their sense of nationality. They followed the work of poets elsewhere who were mounting their own rebellions against established conventions, hoping to find the formal clues that they could apply to their own situation.

The imagists—Ezra Pound and especially H. D.—strongly influenced W. W. E. Ross, who can perhaps be regarded as the first true Canadian modernist, and to a lesser extent both Smith and Scott. The latter two were also influenced by the English poets of the thirties generation (Smith actually published in English avant-garde magazines of the time like *New Verse*); Dorothy Livesay, in her autobiographical miscellany, *Right Hand Left Hand*, has told how reading Auden and Spender helped her to reconcile her fervent Marxism with her desire to write a genuine lyric poetry. The inclination to follow English examples was continued in the *Preview* group, one of whose leading figures was an English expatriate poet, Patrick Anderson.

But the *First Statement* group oriented themselves toward American mentors, theoretically because they saw themselves not merely as Canadian but also as linked to an American rebellion against old-world values, and practically because they found American speech more like their own than English. Through them the influence of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams entered most deeply into Canadian poetry and contributed to its rapid colloquialization. Inevitably, considering the fact of geographical proximity, developments in American poetry have continued to have their impact in Canada, as happened again in the early 1960s when, particularly on the West Coast, a number of younger poets fell under the influence of Charles Olson and other Black Mountain poets and their theories of poetic sound and its relation to breath rhythms.

But such influences have usually been quickly absorbed, and the poets subjected to them, such as George Bowering in the 1960s, have emerged as very individual voices.

Indeed, I think one of the striking characteristics of the whole period when Canadian poetry was emerging into modernism is the way in which—while poets were acting together to liberate their literature from the domination of the past, and in doing so were accepting influences from outside—there was little inclination for Canadians to write in such a derivative way that they could have fitted easily into the English 1930s or the American beat generation. This showed a completely different attitude from that of the colonial period, when poets like Oliver Goldsmith the younger and Charles Sangster and their contemporaries wrote like poets transported from England—even, in the case of Charles Heavysege and his grandiose verse dramas, from an England lost in the past. The urge to create a native and independent literature encouraged a personal individuality among its adherents, so that although we have been talking about groups in the 1920s and 1940s, these were largely associations for convenience, created for the immediate purpose of enabling poets to publish work for which there was as yet no commercial market. One has only to glance at the writings of this transitional period to realize how much, even when they were closely associated, the poets differed from each other. Placing the cool agnostic rationalism of an F. R. Scott beside the intense Jewish mysticism of an A. M. Klein not only reveals vastly differing attitudes toward life and the universe but also different uses of language and imagery; another pattern of striking contrasts can be found by comparing the ways in which Irving Layton and Raymond Souster, who collaborated in *Northern Review*, the successor to *Preview* and *First Statement*, developed into very different poets, the one bardically self-assertive and the other patiently constructing a unique urban vision out of modest perceptions recorded in the manner of latter-day imagism.

The individuality which even at this early period of the 1930s and 1940s already characterized the more vital Canadian poets then emerging led to the extraordinary variegation that appeared already in the 1950s with poets inclined towards the mythic and the metaphysical like James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, and to a lesser degree Eli Mandel, and has become the most striking feature of the 1970s and 1980s in Canadian writing, both poetry and prose. Liberated within an assured tradition, writers in recent years have tended to follow their own idiosyncratic courses without being dominated by the imperatives of either nationalism or conventional avant-gardism, and it would be hard to find much in common between the youngest poets in this collection—Margaret Atwood, Daphne Marlatt, Michael Ondaatje, bp Nichol, Mary di Michele, and Roo Borson—except the fact that they are all Canadian. Writers from the 1930s and 1940s, like Dorothy Livesay and Earle Birney and

P. K. Page, who got their second winds of inspiration during the 1960s, re-emerged at a higher stage of poetic self-realization, as one can see in the case of Birney by comparing “The Bear on the Delhi Road” with “Vancouver Lights”; or in the case of Dorothy Livesay by comparing “Ice Age” with “Day and Night.” In each case the earlier poem is covertly didactic, making an obliquely political point; the later poem is the lyrically intense recording of a gratuitous perception about existence.

Studying the poets from E. J. Pratt onwards, one becomes aware—among the echoes of foreign influences—of the emergence of a distinctive tone one can only call Canadian: a gruff, ironic tone of self-recognition and self-deprecation (projected in the image of the poet as clown appearing so often in writers like Birney, Purdy, and Layton) that finds its expression in an easily colloquial language or in the kind of laconic pattern of short lines that was first developed in Canada by W. W. E. Ross, whose brief 1939 poem, “Loon” (not included in this collection), I take the liberty of quoting because in its close sense of the land, in its tendency to identify with wild creatures, in its modesty, directness, and clarity of diction, and yet in its contained simplicity, it epitomizes so much that is characteristic of the best in recent Canadian poetry:

*Black and white
the loon glides at approach of night
on the lake. The moon
nearly full will soon*

*fill the lake with eerie glow
and the rocks around will soon
echo over the water below
the wild calling of the loon.*

Up to now I have concentrated on poetry, and this is not only because there are more poets than prose writers in this anthology. It is also because poetry has been the cutting edge of new developments in Canadian literature for the past century, a national fiction following on the heels of a national poetry, and poets themselves often becoming the most strikingly experimental of novelists. No less than three poets included in this anthology—Robert Kroetsch, Leonard Cohen, and Margaret Atwood—are among the more important Canadian fiction writers, while others, like Earle Birney, P. K. Page, and George Bowering, have written interesting individual novels.

The accidents of publication—it was often easier for a book of substantial length to appear in Boston or New York than in Toronto or Montreal—had created in the nineteenth century a tendency for Canadian fiction writers to look southward over the border, and even when Canada began to produce novelists and storytellers of some stature and individuality, like Sara Jeannette Duncan and Stephen Leacock, they seemed to fit as much into a continental as into a Canadian pattern.

Duncan's great masters were William Dean Howells and Henry James, and Leacock was in many respects an heir to the American humourist tradition represented by Mark Twain; yet they wrote best, as Duncan did in *The Imperialist* and Leacock in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, when they wrote drawing deeply on their Canadian experience. This inclination was carried on into the 1920s, especially by Morley Callaghan, who in his earlier days tended to seek and find an audience in the United States and who learnt much about the writing of fiction from his association with Ernest Hemingway—which did not prevent him from writing some of the best novels of Canadian urban life.

Indeed, it is among the fiction writers—more than among the poets—that the pattern of departure and return, the tradition of the Canadian expatriate writer, has been most evident. Mavis Gallant, for example, has spent virtually all her writing life in Paris and has contributed most of her stories, before publication in volume form, to the *New Yorker*. Mordecai Richler wrote most of his novels in England, where Margaret Laurence also lived for a long period, having already spent years in Africa. But this did not make these writers less Canadian; they did not become successful transplants into the new environment, like Canadian actors in Hollywood. Rather, they added their new experiences to their old ones, which they had acquired during those first twenty years of life that, as Richler once remarked, provide a novelist with the ideas and impressions on which he or she works for the whole of his or her career. As their frequent homecomings in fiction demonstrate, it is impossible to think of Richler or Gallant without the Montreal childhoods they have so vividly re-created. Margaret Laurence's African experiences, once she had translated them into literature in books like *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), turned out to be merely the prelude to a deep immersion in her prairie background. This in turn led her to write that remarkable sequence of books, from *The Stone Angel* (1964) to *The Diviners* (1974), which may well constitute the greatest Canadian achievement in fiction to date. It certainly represents the peak of the urge—which the Canadian novelists in the years after World War II shared with the poets—to give the Canadian land and its inhabitants a shaping myth that would do justice to its splendid geography and also to its history as a unique community of peoples. Now the pattern of expatriation—which was so characteristic of the transitional 1950s, when writers were trying to establish their identities in a shifting world—is less evident; indeed, a reverse pattern is perceptible, for some of the best story writers in this anthology, like Leon Rooke and Audrey Thomas (American in origin) and John Metcalf (English in origin), began work in other settings before they brought their talents to enrich Canadian literature.

More than the poems, the stories in this volume act as pointers to larger works that cannot be represented here, for all but a few of their creators have written novels as well. To get the full flavour of Canadian

fiction, the reader who admires Sinclair Ross's "The Painted Door" or Morley Callaghan's "Now that April's Here" or Ethel Wilson's "From Flores" should carry on to read Ross's *As For Me and My House*—one of the finest prairie novels—or *They Shall Inherit the Earth* and the other splendid moral fables in the form of novels that Callaghan produced during the 1930s—or Wilson's sensitive novels set in British Columbia, like *Hetty Dorval* and *Swamp Angel*, which so intriguingly combine an Edwardian sensibility with a modern intelligence.

But it would be wrong to regard the stories as merely introductions to their writers' larger works, or in any way as specimens of a minor genre. Only in size is the short story less than the novel: in the hands of a fine writer it can produce a vision of life as intense—though necessarily not so complex—as that of a novel, and Canadian writers have long been attracted to this briefer form. Generally speaking, the story is one of the less profitable literary genres, and one of the less popular among publishers and editors of periodicals, and there were times—particularly during the 1950s and 1960s—when it was hard even to get stories published. But for reasons that critics have not satisfactorily explained, Canadian writers continued to produce them. For a long time their principal patron was the CBC, where, from the 1940s, Robert Weaver (later also the editor of the *Tamarack Review*) broadcast stories, paid their writers, and even arranged for their publication in anthologies. Some of the best story writers—such as Alice Munro and Hugh Hood—developed under his encouragement, and so the story continued as a living form until, from the late 1960s onward, publishers began to take risks with short fiction again and new and vital story-tellers appeared. Some of the best are represented here, and among them are excellent writers who have made the story their special genre and have not yet chosen to go beyond it, like Keath Fraser.

Poetry and short fiction, of course, are not all the constituents of a literary tradition. Behind the story looms the novel, and we have already noted how impossible it is to convey any sense of the intricate architecture of such a form through a chapter picked for inclusion in a miscellany. Behind poetry stands drama, which was once its natural blank-verse extension, but which in more recent centuries has become a meeting ground where the prose and poetry of customary dialogue meet. But there is an inevitable colloquial diffusiveness about contemporary drama that makes it difficult to bring into a volume with more compact forms like the poem and the short story.

There are also the other, non-fictional and non-poetic forms of writing that sometimes verge on imaginative literature, like history—whose need to make comprehensible patterns often edges it over into myth—and like biography and autobiography, which are often infused with the imaginative intensity of fiction, as the biographer seeks to enter the mind of his subject or the autobiographer seeks to find a pattern in his own past. Again, these are forms too peripheral to find a place in such a

collection as this, though one can conceive an ideal Canadian anthology, of several volumes and three thousand pages, where every kind of writing representative of our culture would have its place. One day, perhaps, we shall see it.

Over the last century, what was once a scattering of writers working largely in isolation across a vast country, has gradually been transformed into a literary community. It is this literary community, come of age, that *The New Canadian Anthology: Poetry and Short Fiction in English* presents. The days when “Canadian literature” was a phrase used either with diffidence or with mockery have come to an end. English-Canadian writers and writing can stand with pride, as these offerings show, beside those of any other English-writing community.