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PREFACE
Rummagings, 20: A.G. Bailey among the Modernists

My relationship with Alfred Bailey began in the late 1970s when he kindly agreed to serve on the Editorial Board of *Canadian Poetry.* I was never fortunate enough to meet him, but from that time until before his death in April 1997 we corresponded sporadically, and I benefitted greatly from his comments on my work and his learned and wise observations on such subjects as poetic form, the Fredericton members of the Confederation group,[1] and the literary culture of New Brunswick and Canada. It was Bailey who pointed me in the direction of Arnold Toynbee's remarks on "The Stimulus of Migration Overseas" in *A Study of History*" (1934-61) that provided the basis for my essay entitled "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom': The Atlantic Crossing as a Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada," which appeared in *Re(Dis)covering Our Foremothers* (1989), Lorraine McMullen's edition of the proceedings of a conference in the University of Ottawa's Reappraisals: Canadian Writers series, so clearly I owe him a lasting debt of gratitude. I still deeply regret that in *The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry, 1690-1990* (1992) I did not discuss Bailey's "The Muskrat and the Whale" (1973), an ecologically resonant poem in his *Thanks for a Drowned Island* (1973) whose muskrat M. Travis Lane sees as a "lithe animal unobliged to make Great Pronouncements" and as typifying not just Bailey's lyric voice, but a "certain kind" of Canadian poetry: "frisk[y]," "moderate," "medium-conscious," and characterized "by gaiety and seriousness together" ("A Sense of the Medium" 8).[2]

Several years before he died, Bailey sent me a copy of his "Literary Memories," on the understanding that the manuscript was not for publication in *Canadian Poetry* but for interest as a source of information and insights about his evolution as a poet and thinker and about his involvement in the literary and intellectual currents of his day. The 85 pages of "Literary Memories" are divided into two parts, the first focused on his life prior to 1935 and the second ending in the 1970s. 1935 was a watershed year for Bailey because it marked his return with two graduate degrees from The University of Toronto to settle permanently in New

Brunswick, first in Saint John and then, three years later, in Fredericton, where he had an extremely distinguished career as a scholar and administrator at The University of New Brunswick until his retirement in 1969. My focus here is not on Bailey's New Brunswick years or on his poetry per se but on the period from 1927 to 1935 when he was a graduate student in Toronto and, in 1934-35, a postdoctoral fellow at the London School of Economics – a period in which he encountered and responded to Modern poetry in ways that have much to tell us about the impact of Modernism in Canada.

When he moved from Fredericton to Toronto in 1927 Bailey was "intending to enroll in the graduate school in English, but changed to history for no very logical reason" (1:17B). Despite this change of course, during his first year at the university Bailey enrolled in E.J. Pratt's graduate seminar on Modern poetry where he encountered a poem that he had read some years before but was new to Pratt, *The Walker* (1914) by the political activist and workers' poet Arturo Giovannitti. "Perhaps acquaintance with *The Walker* had helped me to grow up, to some extent," he recalls; "[i]n any case, hearing it again, read by Professor Pratt, helped to bring me closer to a new way of looking at things" (1: 20). After two years in which "[n]othing occurred . . . to change . . . [his] outlook and style of writing very much," Bailey graduated with an M.A. in 1929 (1:19) and began work as a reporter for the *Toronto Mail and Empire*. It was while working as a reporter and then pursuing his Ph.D. at The University of Toronto that he came into contact with "contemporary thought" through conversations with Donald Calvert, a friend in British Columbia who felt, as he did, that his undergraduate education had failed to give him a sense of "what was going on in the world," and referred him to "the six most seminal works of the age": Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, T.E. Hulme's *Speculations*, and Irving Babbitt's "works on the New Humanism" (presumably the essays gathered in *Literature and the American College* [1908]) (1: 19). Bailey's exposure to "contemporary thought" was augmented by a growing "acquaintance with modern poetry" through Theodore Goodridge Roberts, who introduced him to Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), and the poems of his aunt Margaret Emerson Bailey, whose works include *Robin Hood's Barn: The Confessions of a Garden Adventurer* [1922], *Rain before Seven* [1939], and *Good-Bye Proud World* [1945]).

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Outside the realms of academia and literature Bailey's sense of "what was going on in the world" was greatly increased by his experiences as a reporter as the Great Depression took hold:

> I saw hundreds of people living and subsisting on the city dump; I saw a little girl, wearing a communist badge, at a labour demonstration howling with pain as a burley policeman twisted her arm . . . I covered rape trials, and the trial of a canned heat[3] drinker who had killed an old man; I was thrown down a flight of stairs by a man in a homicidal rage; I was threatened by race-track touts overheard making plans to fix the races at a well-known race track. (1: 21)

"These experiences, and many more, gradually impressed upon me that the world in which I lived was not a perfumed garden," he observes with characteristic understatement; "I was ready for the 'hog butcher of the world' and what E.K. Brown called the "ash can school of poetry" (1: 21-22).[4] (Bailey knew Brown primarily as the faculty mentor of the Nameless Society, a group of students at The University of Toronto that included such left-wing figures as Dorothy Livesay, Stanley Ryerson, the Sinophile Henry Noyes, and Thomas James Keenan, the reporter for the *Toronto Star* who introduced Bailey to the group.)

Bailey's "read[iness]" made him an ideal candidate for a eureka moment every bit as intense as Archibald Lampman's on reading Charles G.D. Roberts's *Orion, and Other Poems* fifty years earlier. By 1931 Bailey was a "regular reader" of the *Canadian Forum* but "knew absolutely nothing as yet . . . about Hopkins, Pound, and Eliot" (1: 23). Then "[o]ne evening [Roy] Daniells [who was a graduate student in English at The University of Toronto from 1930 to 1936] called on me and my fiancée Jean Craig Hamilton at her place" and read "The Hollow Men," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and *The Waste Land*, with cathartic (and emetic) results:

> I experienced the greatest excitement such as I had never experienced before and have never since experienced. All sorts of inchoate and previously ill-defined feelings and experiences suddenly came into focus. One felt transfigured, and one c[ould] only think that the old symbols and intonations and meanings had become completely dead, that a great spiritual void had been created by a sense of the bankruptcy of 19th century beliefs and standards, that the economic system under which we lived was in

> a state of disintegration, that the great urban wilderness of the modern world marked the sterility and death of our society. Eliot supplied the catharsis. He had pronounced an epitaph on the past. We felt that there was nothing more to be said, that nothing more truly meaningful could be said in prose or rhyme. (2: 23)

"We came to know all his work by heart," Bailey continues, "and soon we could think and speak and write only in terms of his images, cadences, and meanings" (1: 24).[5]

Bailey admits that the conviction that "the last word had been said" was an "illusion" bred perhaps by "having read too much Spengler," but he nevertheless goes on to provide further evidence of the impact of Eliot on Canadian poets. "[I]t was difficult to find a readable poet who had not been touched by the hand of the master. Even such accomplished poets as . . . Smith and Abraham Klein . . . reflected this ubiquitous influence" (1: 24). That Bailey mentions Klein's debt to Eliot in "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens" and "Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger" (both were first published in the *Canadian Forum* and both are rigorously impersonal) but does not name Pratt in this context is perceptive, for Pratt's work of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties in such volumes as *The Titans* (1926) and *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* (1930) does not bear the screamingly obvious stamp of Eliot, whose manner is, however, evident—and fully assimilated—in *The Titanic* (1935). Not surprisingly, Eliot's presence is almost everywhere felt in *New Provinces*, the small and all-but stillborn anthology of Modernist poetry that F.R. Scott published in 1936, the same year as the appearance of W.E. Collin's *The White Savannahs*, an appreciative study of Pratt, Scott, Smith, Klein, and Leo Kennedy that itself draws heavily on Eliot (he is the most cited author in the index).

Addressing what Eliot describes as the experience of being "completely carried away by the work of one poet" – an "inundation . . . of the undeveloped personality . . . by [a] stronger personality" (*Selected Essays* 394) – Bailey's analysis is characteristically astute (and interestingly anticipatory of Harold Bloom's theories of literary influence):

> In order to escape, one could not reject Eliot, which would in any case have been impossible; it was necessary to pass through that phase, incorporate its effects, and transcend it, if possible. Even when we read, as we soon did, such poets as Auden, Day Lewis, Rex Warner, William Empson, Spender and Eberhart, did we feel that a new direction had been taken, in spite of Marxist contrasts

> with [Eliot's] Anglo-Catholicism. Books like F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* [1932] merely served to confirm the faith although we soon felt that he had over-praised Ronald Bottrall. (1: 24-25)

In Bailey's case the transcendence of Eliot that is largely complete in his *Border River* collection of 1952 was greatly assisted many years earlier by his postgraduate year (1934-35) at L.S.E., where he encountered Geoffrey Grigson's influential magazine *New Verse*, the April 1934 number of which contains Dylan Thomas's "Our Eunuch Dreams."[6] "The poem was so unlike anything I had read before," he recalls,

> that I undoubtedly recognized, as anyone would have recognized, that here was a new turning point in English literature, the first since Eliot. While it did not have the profound effect on me that Eliot's work had had, it stimulated me to write in a way that I had not done before. I did not imitate his style, but it touched a spring which led me . . . to invent a new verse form in inchoate images, syncopated, galloping, and off-beat, as exemplified by . . . "The Winter Mill" and "The Feat of Flame," which I wrote during that winter in London. On returning to Canada I found that none of my literary friends [who included Northrop Frye as well as Daniells] knew anything of Dylan Thomas . . . (1: 33-34)

Seldom has the felt experience of the unbalanced relationship between the metropolitan centre and colonial periphery that Bailey discusses at some length elsewhere in "Literary Memories" (see 2: 21)[7] been expressed so succinctly and poignantly.

A year or so before he completed his Ph.D., Bailey struck up a friendship with Earle Birney and Robert Finch, who, together with Daniells, "became accustomed to meet at lunch every week, to select a topic or a verse form, or both, and to bring the resulting poem back the week following for mutual criticism," an arrangement that proved beneficial and productive for both Finch and himself (1: 25). "We were following Eliot's dictum favouring constant practice," he writes, "so that our techniques would be ready "like a well-oiled fire-engine"[8] when the moment of inspiration came (1: 26). More important than Daniells or Finch for Bailey, as for Modernism in Canada, was Birney, whose most pronounced characteristic at the time was the deepening involvement with leftist politics that led him from the C.C.F. to Trotskyism (1: 29). Most of Bailey's friends and acquaintances in Toronto – among them J.S.

Woodswoth and F.H. Underhill – were on the left, "[b]ut for a short period, because of Birney, [he] heard most about the theories and aims of the Trotskyites, and met the very pretty and, in every way, attractive Sylvia Johnston," who had introduced Birney to Trotskyism and became briefly his first wife (and an early casualty of his tumescing Ponce-de-Leónism). Bailey states that "Earle . . . at this time wrote very little," but did show him "four poems which he had recently written and which were characterized by much verbal wit, of a kind in which he was later to excel" (and had "something in common" with *Finnegans Wake* and the poems of E.E. Cummings) (1: 28).[9] Perhaps of greater significance to Bailey as a poet than Birney's poetry and politics in the early 'thirties was a "remarkable book" that Birney lent him: *The European Caravan: An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature, Part I: France, Spain, England and Ireland* (1931), "which contain[s] works by the Dadaists, Surrealists, Cocteau and many others; as well as photographs by Man Ray (whom . . . Finch knew")," a "book that opened up . . . many previously unfamiliar aspects of European literature." Thomas may not have been familiar to Bailey's literary friends in Canada, but at least one of them knew some of the work of, among others (and in addition to Cocteau and Man Ray), Samuel Beckett, Blaise Cendrars, H.D., Hugh MacDiarmid, and Tristan Tzara.

A final episode in the complex relationship with Eliot that Bailey describes in "Literary Memories" occurred during the three years in which he was living in Saint John (1935-38). At that time he conveyed his "enthusiasm for Eliot and Pound and other modern poets" to Allan McBeath, a teacher at Saint John High School (and later Mount Allison University), whose students included John Sutherland (2: 9). McBeath asked Bailey to visit Sutherland in the East Saint John Tuberculosis Hospital where he was a patient, which Bailey did:

> I told him about Eliot and Pound, and Hopkins, and other modern poets. I think I read *The Waste Land*, or some other Eliot poems to him, and I believe this was his first contact with modern poetry, and that these events . . . were crucial to . . . [his] development. (2: 9-10)[10]

Bailey did not "see Sutherland again until [a] party at Frank Scott's house" in Montreal some years later (2: 10).

That party took place a few months after the publication of A.J.M. Smith's *Book of Canadian Poetry* in 1943. Indeed, it may well have been, at least in part, a celebration of that event, for in the course of the evening Smith read a review of the anthology by Elsie M. Pomeroy in the

Maritime Advocate and Busy East that was "greeted with hilarity and derision" by the guests, who included, besides Scott and Sutherland, "Patrick Anderson and his wife [Peggy Doernbach], Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Bill [William C.] Connell, the short story writer from British Columbia, and Neufville and Kit Shaw" (2: 9). Since Pomeroy's review appeared in April 1944 number of *Maritime Advocate and Busy East*,[11] Scott's party must have been held after that, which is somewhat surprising, given that the guests included members of both the *Preview* and the *First Statement* groups, whose relationship had been ruptured by the notorious attack by Sutherland on Anderson in *First Statement* in May 1943; perhaps Sutherland's subsequent retraction a month later had at least partially healed the rupture or reduced tensions between himself and Anderson enough to allow them to be in the same room together.

Bailey's presence at Scott's party may have been because he had published nearly thirty poems in *Preview*, as well as four in *The Book of Canadian Poetry*: "Variations on a Theme," "Colonial Set," "Ideogram," and "Uncrowned." The epigraph to "Variations on a Theme" is taken from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach") (380), and the poem as a whole is A.G. Bailey's a charming poetic tribute to the writer most responsible for his "transmogrification" (2: 24) into a Modern poet.

Notes

I am very grateful to Francesca Holyoke and her colleagues in Archives and Special Collections at the Harriet Irving Library at The University of New Brunswick for sending me copies of material related to Bailey's "Literary Memories" and to his nephew Ray Bailey for his kind permission to publish them. I am also grateful to Brian Trehearne for conversations about the party at F.R. Scott's house in Montreal that Bailey attended in the early 'forties. In quotations from "Literary Memories," I have silently corrected errors in spelling and punctuation.

1 Bailey and I shared an (increasingly) unfashionable liking of the work of Bliss Carman and an immense respect for another Carman admirer, Malcolm Ross (see "Literary Memories" [1: 26-27]; hereafter cited by part and page numbers). "I was delighted to learn from M. Travis Lane's "Interview with Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey" that he was "astonished . . . to read . . . a short article by the editor of *Canadian Poetry* which shows that Bliss Carman was an influence on Pound and Wallace Stevens!" (241).

2 In a 1974 review of *Thanks for a Drowned Island*, A.J.M. Smith sees Bailey's "work . . . [as] squarely centered in the modern metaphysical line to which Hopkins, Eliot, Hart Crane, and Empson belong," and praises "The Muskrat and the Whale" and other of his "simpler delightful nature poems" for eschewing the "grand or grandiose or picturesque aspects of scenery" in favour of "humbler flowers and animals" ("Poetics" 105, 106).

3 Canned heat was an alcohol-based solid fuel sold in canisters. Alcohol was extracted from it and sold.

4 Of course "hog butcher to the world" is from Carl Sandberg's "Chicago" (1914) and

"ash can school of poetry" is an adaptation of the name given to the early twentieth-century school of American painters whose work depicts working-class life in New York.

5 Lampman experienced a similar stylistic infection, not by Roberts but by Keats. As he famously wrote to his friend Edward William Thomson in 1894, "The Keats at the beginning [of "Lisa"] was very natural, for I could not write anything at all at that time with[out] writing Keats. I am only just now getting quite clear of the spell of that marvellous person; & it has taken me ten years to do it. Keats has always had such a fascination for me and has so permeated my whole mental outfit that I have an idea that he has found a sort of faint reincarnation in me" (Lynn 119). Thomson had written that "a considerable number of lines" in the poem are "strongly suggestive of the diction . . . method" and "tone" of Keats (117).

6 Later in the same year the poem was published in Thomas's first collection, *Eighteen Poems*. It is the subject of an Empsonian new-critical analysis by Smith in "Ambiguity as Poetic Shift" (1962).

7 In some ways, Bailey's experiences with Eliot and Thomas reflect in small his larger theories about culture. Discussing Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and its only partial applicability to Canada in "Literary Memories," he writes that "[t]he student of the subject is here confronted with the paradox that to become fully oneself, one must first lose oneself – flood oneself in the immediate age, as Whitman puts it – in the vastness and infinite variety of the metropolitan processes. Instead of trying to achieve identity by building a Chinese wall around one's home territory, one should open one's mind to all the winds that blow. Colonies must imitate before they can successfully emulate and equal the achievements of the mother country" (2: 21).

8 The well-known simile that Bailey quotes appears in Eliot's Introduction to his 1928 edition of Ezra Pound's *Selected Poems*: the poet "must be experimenting and trying his technique so that it will be ready, like a well-oiled fire-engine, when the moment comes to strain it to the fullest" (16-17). When Bailey founded the Bliss Carman Society at The University of New Brunswick in 1940 he introduced the practice employed by Daniells, Flint, and himself with the aim, not of imitating Carman's "way of writing," but of "bring[ing] the Fredericton literary tradition 'to the point of contemporaneity'" by learning to "write in the current mode" (2: 4).

9 In a letter of 3 December 1980 to me Bailey observes that Birney "credits . . . [him] sand Roy Daniells . . . with having stimulated him to start writing poetry."

10 See also Bruce Whiteman's Introduction to Sutherland's *Letters* x.

11 Prior to its publication, "Some Books of Canadian Poetry Published in 1943" was an "address delivered before the Canadian Literature Club of Toronto, on January 17, 1944" (10). Dank with adoring references to Charles G.D. Roberts, the omnibus review canvasses collections by Audrey Alexandra Brown, E.J. Pratt, Mona Gould, and others, and then turns with palpable distaste to "the book commonly referred to as 'The Anthology by A.J.M. Smith'," the "correct title" of which is "much more pretentious; viz. *The Book of Canadian Poetry: A Critical and Historical Anthology*" (which later in the review mutates into "*The Canadian Book of Poetry*") (12, 13). Noting that, while pre-Confederation poetry is allotted 74 pages in the anthology and Confederation poetry 99 (with a paltry seven each to Carman and Roberts), Modern poetry is treated to 149, Pomeroy warms to her task with scornful comments on Smith's handling of Carman and Roberts in his Introduction and headnotes, even disparaging his admiration of "a forceful attack on the school of Roberts as poets of mere scenery" by Gordon Waldron, who in 1896 had the temerity to describe "Tantramar Revisited" as "'mostly an ineffectual twaddle of description'" (13). When she turns finally to "what Mr. Smith calls 'the new poetry'," Pomeroy focuses her scorn on four poets: Ronald Hambleton, Margaret Avison, F.R. Scott, and Bailey. The second stanza of Hambleton's "Sockeye Salmon" and "a few lines from Scott's "Tourist Time" are quoted as examples of anything but

"'the language of the intelligence'" that Smith values, Bailey's "Ideogram" is simply unintelligible ("I haven't the slightest idea what it means"), and the final lines of Avison's "Maria Minor" – "I go down among the leaf mould / To mash my head" – provoke violent agreement (and probably raucous guffaws from Pomeroy's and Smith's audiences, albeit for very different reasons): "[i]t seems to me that any person who would write such a poem would want to 'to mash her head'" (13, 31). Smarting from Smith's "dismiss[al] of many of Roberts's poems as erotic," Pomeroy quotes "a few lines" of Hambleton's "A Lover and His Lass," presumably to unmask Smith's hypocrisy. To heal the damaged sensibilities of her hearers/readers Pomeroy "feel[s] the need" to conclude her address/review by quoting "something entirely different – some poem which is associated with the beauty and majesty of life," predictably, "one of the great mystical sonnets by Charles G.D. Roberts, 'In the Wide Awe and Wisdom of the Night'" (32). Bailey's response to Pomeroy's review is typically generous and accurate: she displays "obvious sincerity" and fails to produce "arguments of a sort that perhaps might have been marshalled on her side" (2: 8-9). He may well have realized that she should not have been ridiculed for failing to understand that "Ideogram" was intended as "an affirmation of the pessimism of the cyclic theory" of history" (2: 29).

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