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STUDIES

The Socially Conscious Poet from Canada to Spain: Leo Kennedy and *New Frontier*

by Robert G. May

Leo Kennedy's reputation rests mainly on *The Shrouding*, his only collection of poetry, published in 1933 when Kennedy was twenty-six. *The Shrouding* is a remarkable book in that it represents one of Canada's earliest collections of modernist poetry: it predates by a number of years *New Provinces* (1936), as well as the first collections of other key members of the Montreal Group, A.M. Klein (*Hath Not a Jew...* [1940]), A.J.M. Smith (*News of the Phoenix* [1943]), and F.R. Scott (*Overture* [1945]). *The Shrouding* was generally well received: Klein writes that the collection is "incomparably done" and represents "the resurrection of Canadian poetry" (8), and W.E. Collin devotes an entire celebratory chapter on *The Shrouding* in *The White Savannahs* (1936). Although Kennedy hoped to build on his success by assembling a further collection later in his career (Morley 165), it never materialized, and so a large amount of Kennedy's later writing remains uncollected and thus relatively difficult to access.

Despite the lack of a second collection, Kennedy did continue to publish individual poems, occasional essays, and book reviews throughout his career, in publications such as *The Canadian Forum*, *Saturday Night*, and the short-lived *New Frontier*. Based in Toronto, *New Frontier* was, as its subtitle states, "A Monthly Magazine of Literature and Social Criticism" that ran from April 1936 to October 1937. Positioned politically well to the left of *The Canadian Forum*, *New Frontier* aimed, as editor-in-chief William Lawson writes in the inaugural issue's editorial, to showcase socially conscious Canadian writing:

The aims of *New Frontier* are twofold: to acquaint the Canadian public with the work of those writers and artists who are expressing a positive reaction to the social scene; and to serve as an open forum for all shades of political opinion.

Though technically adequate, so many interpretations of the Canadian scene in creative writing, criticism and art, have been singularly disregardful of or unfaithful to the social realities of our time.... On the other hand, certain individual creative artists and groups who are becoming more interested in the social implications of Canadian life, are turning out work which has both social and artistic value. *New Frontier* is anxious to make the best of this work available to a wide circle of Canadian readers. (3)

Kennedy served with Dorothy Livesay and others on the editorial board of *New Frontier* for most of its brief run and contributed several politically and socially themed poems and essays to its pages. Worried that his radical opinions might threaten his employment in the advertising industry (Kennedy worked for much of his career at various advertising agencies in Canada and the United States [Morley 91]), Kennedy published most of his *New Frontier* work under the pseudonyms "Arthur Beaton," "Leonard Bullen," and "Peter Quinn."

Kennedy's work in *New Frontier* represents an important contribution to socially conscious Canadian writing of the 1930s because, over the course of the eight poems, five essays, and one book review (of W.H. Auden's *Spain*), Kennedy develops an explicit link between domestic and international politics. He argues, essentially, that the political forces that led to the fascist sentiment then percolating in Maurice Duplessis's Quebec were also in large part responsible for the Civil War in Spain: the maldistribution of wealth between the working and the ruling classes; a lack of separation between church, state, and industry; and, perhaps most importantly, a startling complacency among the populace to effect political change. Kennedy moves almost seamlessly from levelling scathing criticisms of Duplessis's Quebec in the earlier *New Frontier* writings to delivering caustic rebukes against Franco's Spain in the later *New Frontier* writings. For Kennedy, the social role of the poet both in Quebec and in Spain was thus also the same: to motivate the working classes to unite as one against fascism by satirizing its oppressive excesses and extolling its democratic alternatives, not in aloof or abstract ways (as, for Kennedy, in Auden's *Spain*), but by developing a poetry of concreteness and immediacy that speaks to the working classes on a clear and accessible level. As Kennedy puts it in the closing lines of "Direction for Canadian Poets," his earliest essay in *New Frontier*:

We need poetry that reflects the lives of our people, working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity. We need satire,—fierce, scorching, aimed at the abuses which are destroying our culture and which threaten life itself. Our

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poets have lacked direction for their talents and energies in the past—I suggest that today it lies right before them. (24)

Although Kennedy never had the opportunity to visit Spain personally to witness the atrocities of the Civil War first-hand, his working-class background and his association with the politically active Montreal Group galvanized him to progressive and radical ideas and movements from the mid-1930s onwards, enabling him to empathize with the Spanish cause and to recognize the clear analogues that existed between the situation there and in Quebec.

Just before the onset of the Spanish Civil War, Kennedy's contributions to *New Frontier* focused mainly on domestic politics. In "Epitaph for a Canadian Statesman," for example, written under the pseudonym "Leonard Bullen," the speaker exhorts "Industry's Captains" and other private-sector "Bosses" to "Draft plaintive eulogies" to an unnamed "Tory" parliamentarian, whose death spells the end of the "heavenly dividends" they have hitherto reaped through his underhanded "constitutional guile" (12). The overall tone and satirical thrust of the poem is reminiscent of many of Scott's "Social Notes." Kennedy's "Direction for Canadian Poets" also dates from this period, a polemic on the state of Canadian poetry in which Kennedy laments the lack of social engagement among many of his contemporaries and asserts that such engagement is crucial to the continued existence of Canada and its culture:

In this time of impending war and incipient fascism, when the mode and standards of living of great numbers of middle class persons (from whose ranks Canadian poets hail) are being violently disrupted ... the function of poetry is to interpret the contemporary scene faithfully; *to interpret especially the progressive forces in modern life which alone stand for cultural survival...* (21, emphasis in original).

Kennedy's rhetoric here parallels that in Lawson's editorial in the first number of *New Frontier*, and his reference to a "time of impending war and incipient fascism" could apply almost as easily to Quebec as to Spain. Kennedy expresses a similar sentiment in the poem "Summons for This Generation," in which the speaker urges the socially conscious poet to cultivate just such a powerfully active political voice, to "Assert a tidal wave and advance a flood / With clamour of the lips and pulse of the tongue" (15). Perhaps because they engaged more directly with poetry than with politics, Kennedy published both "Direction for Canadian Poets" and

“Summons for This Generation” under his real name rather than using a pseudonym.

Before turning his attention fully to Spain, Kennedy reserves his harshest criticism for the fascist sentiment then taking hold in Quebec, especially within the Quebec government, the Roman Catholic church, and the French-language press. In a pair of articles published under the pseudonym “Peter Quinn,” Kennedy quotes extensively from documentary evidence to illustrate the fact that a number of fascist and anti-Semitic elements were active in Quebec and potentially undermining Canadian democracy. In “Meet Quebec’s Fascists!”, Kennedy provides a list of various “Fascist, Fascist-separatist, separatist, neo-demi-quasi-and-pro Fascist” (8) groups then operating in Quebec and shows how they connect (sometimes directly) to Duplessis’s Union Nationale, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Quebec, and/or the two main French-language dailies in Quebec, *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*. By demonstrating how seemingly “hole-in-corner organizations” (5) are so closely interwoven with Quebec’s “vested interests” (6) and “the handful of men who own most of Canada’s wealth” (8), Kennedy deflates the myth that fascists in Quebec are a few mere “crack-pots” who dwell on the fringes of Canadian society, but are a part of the Establishment, “dangerous men of resource and cunning” who “must be taken seriously and fought with every democratic weapon at hand” (8). In “Quebec Bait the Jew!”, Kennedy intensifies his attack, singling out specific individuals associated in various capacities with “the Nazi set-up in Quebec” (6), providing facsimiles of their pamphlets and correspondence (complete with swastika-emblazoned letterhead), and even going so far as to publish their home addresses in Montreal. Kennedy’s overarching message in both articles is clear: because “Fascism is still abhorrent to the majority of the Canadian people” (“Quebec” 10), it is the responsibility of this majority to transcend their differences—be they cultural, sectarian, or economic—and combat fascism through every democratic means at their disposal:

It is the duty of every Canadian man, woman and child to help keep Fascism out of Quebec, for that is the first measure towards keeping Fascism out of Canada. By joining or affiliating with groups opposed to Fascism and war, by working for united action, towards a coalition of progressive and liberal forces, trade unions and inter-professional groups, by winning over the hesitant middle-rovers—only by these means will Fascism be routed. (“Meet” 8)

For Kennedy, poetry fulfils its mandate to be socially conscious when it functions as such a unifying force between Canada's diverse races, faiths, and classes.

Kennedy continued to be preoccupied with the social role of poetry in Canada following the outbreak of the war in Spain. In an article called "Hope for Us," published under the pseudonym "Leonard Bullen" in the February 1937 number of *New Frontier*, he meditates on "the artist's function and place in society" (16) by contrasting George V. Plekhanov's Marxist classic *Art and Society* with Bertram Brooker's essay "Art and Society" in the *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada 1936*. For Kennedy, Brooker's contention that "the artist has no obligation to society"—a view that Kennedy fears has become all too common among Canadian artists—represents "immature thinking" because it serves only to placate "the Canadian ruling class" (16) by shifting the attention of the populace away from social issues and onto "abstractions, pretty landscapes, theories of the glorious timelessness of beauty, rhapsodic talk of the artist's relation to the universe," and other fripperies (18). Brooker's position, Kennedy asserts, is not only irresponsible but self-destructive because it actually renders artists more susceptible themselves to "fascist thinking" (18). Brooker's position is also out of date, in Kennedy's view. Kennedy points out that "the view broadly held today" by artists in other countries is that "the artist should be of some use to his generation and time" (16). It was thus imperative for artists in Canada and Quebec also to identify themselves with progressive causes at a time when economic conditions in Canada and Quebec were in rapid decline:

Yearbook of the Arts in Canada 1936 is artlessly unaware of Canada in 1936, '35 or '34 for that matter. More than one tenth of our population is subsisting on direct relief, subject to malnutrition and indignity, preyed [upon] by insecurity, salting their slender ration with despair Fascism is afoot in Quebec. Our middle class is living on the crumbling edge of security, its livelihood threatened, its precious freedom of thought and speech being rapidly curtailed. (18)

Kennedy's remarks about the state of affairs in Canada and Quebec during the 1930s and about the role of poets to address social issues directly—to "align themselves with the forces of progress and social growth" (18)—anticipate his similar exhortations to the republicans in Spain.

With the onset of hostilities in Spain in the summer of 1936, Kennedy's attention shifted significantly towards the Spanish cause. In "Franco's Folly," published under the pseudonym "Peter Quinn," Kennedy makes his

low opinion of Franco abundantly clear. Subtitled “Highlights on the Generalissimo’s Role of Clown,” the article refers to Franco as “a major zany of our time,” a “plump little fascist,” a “boob,” a “swine,” a “murderous simpleton,” among other epithets (22). Amid the name-calling, Kennedy makes the more cogent point that Franco is little more than one in a long line of fascist dictators throughout the world (including Quebec), whose ideology has capitalistic excesses at its roots and who must turn to violence and deceit when that ideology inevitably collapses in upon itself:

Even those who have not yet followed the Marxian logic to the deduction that fascism is the last, ruthless phase of monopoly-capitalism, are agreed that fascist technique everywhere is crimsoned with the brush of bloodthirsty madness. It is monotonously established by historical evidence that there is no crime, brutality, outrage, duplicity or folly that your fascist will stop at, having once put hand to plough. Civilization is blasted to its roots, innocent blood floods the gutters, art and culture and liberty go groaning down that profits and privilege may survive. (22)

Implicit in Kennedy’s thesis is that art and culture, especially poetry written by socially conscious poets, can rebuild the civilization laid waste by Franco, Duplessis, and other oppressors, and replant the democratic roots of society, be they in Spain, Canada, Quebec, or elsewhere.

Such poetry, however, must be authentic to be effective. In “Direction for Canadian Poets,” Kennedy maintains that working-class poetry can be written only by working-class poets who have lived working-class lives, and not by middle-class poets (i.e., members of the Canadian Authors’ Association and other genteel groups [22]) who have never experienced the dire social and economic straits of working-class people:

What phases of the living scene shall Canadian poets write about? *Any—so long as they are genuinely experienced and understood by the poet.* Because I have called attention to poems of factory life by Klein and Livesay, it may be felt that this article invites everyone to write them. Nothing of the kind! Industrial poems cannot be written by middle class poets who have no contact with the subject. (24, emphasis in original)

For Kennedy, working-class poems written by middle-class poets inevitably ring false both emotionally and intellectually, and they thereby fail to fulfil the socially conscious mandate of poetry to unite the classes as one in combating fascism. Auden’s *Spain* is just such an example of falseness in socially motivated poetry, as far as Kennedy is concerned. In his review of the poem, entitled “Quiescent Spain,” Kennedy criticizes Auden for tak-

ing “an aloof, intellectual approach” to “bloody Spain,” resulting in a poem that is “hygienic,” “sterilized,” and ultimately “rather bloodless” (27). Although Auden had notably travelled to Spain to witness the war first-hand, Kennedy sees little in *Spain* to suggest this trip had a profound emotional impact on Auden: “as a poem inspired by the most terrible and moving event of our time—the assault on the liberties of a democratic people by the fascist International—it is remote studio stuff that might just as well have been written in bedroom slippers at home” (27). In Kennedy’s view, Auden had squandered his opportunity to move the passions of the British Left about “the condition of Spanish democracy” by mirroring his poem in “formal emotional restraint” and “static ... intellectual symbols” (27). Kennedy intended to avoid this mistake in his own socially conscious poetry, whether it took Spain or Quebec as its subject matter.

Kennedy puts some of his criticisms of Auden in poetic form in “Advice to a Young Poet,” published under the pseudonym “Arthur Beaton.” The opening several lines of the poem teem with dynamic verbs—“Cling” (1), “Fix” (2), “Hook” (3), “Thrust” (4)—that encourage the young poet to take an active role in reshaping democracy. “Assert the toilers’ State, / Define the workers’ want,” Kennedy writes, “Brandish the knotted fist, / Fuse slogan to your chant” (9-12). Far from languishing at home in bedroom slippers, the socially conscious poet must venture bodily into the field of war and become at one with the natural landscape. Kennedy challenges the poet to “Cling eagerly to grass” (1), to “Thrust tentacles in loam” (4), and to “share your joy in earth” (13) so that the poet might join “With nameless men whose blood / Nourished the trampled plant” (21-22). Poets must not be remote, bloodless, restrained, but they must join in intimate and wholehearted “comradeship” (8) to achieve “freedom” (16). While “Advice to a Young Poet” has received few and mostly negative reviews—Patricia Morley calls it “a low point in his work” for its “beleaguered ... rhetoric” (104) and Peter Stevens criticizes it for “degenerat[ing] into slogan-like phrases” (48)—it nevertheless showcases Kennedy’s vision for a politically conscious poetry more immediate and authentic than Auden’s, a vision that finds its fullest critical expression in “Direction for Canadian Poets.”

Stevens finds the earlier poem “New Comrade,” also published under the pseudonym “Arthur Beaton,” more laudable than “Advice to a Young Poet,” devoting two pages to it in his essay on Kennedy’s poetry. “New Comrade” contains many of the same elements as “Advice to a Young Poet”: use of dynamic verbs, an emphasis on the connection between humankind and the natural landscape, a challenge to the poet to participate

actively in the revolutionary process. For Stevens, however, Kennedy's use throughout the poem of the image "of the new-born child" (Stevens 43)—the eponymous "New Comrade"—is the poem's finest characteristic, since it offers such a stark juxtaposition to the blood and violence of the Spanish Civil War:

We greet this comrade with a look of pleasure
 he is small yet for the discipline and the mass action
 young for the fiery speeches and the blind police violence
 puckered and wailing

he is new and unused to a dying world
 (Kennedy, "New" 1-5)

Whereas in "Advice to a Young Poet" Kennedy only hints abstractly at the object of the revolutionary process of the Spanish Civil War, in "New Comrade" he concretely articulates that the object of the process is the growth and development of future generations. The present generation must have the "purpose and the courage" (23) to win the war so that the ensuing generation can progress to better and more useful enterprises: to "shift mountains" (10), to "span an ocean" (11), to "fetter the atom" (12). Stevens writes, "The visions of the future in this poem are ... images of scientific achievements perhaps to be reached by the new comrade, but this future is still to be conditioned by the revolutionary process" (43-44). The poem culminates in Kennedy's recognition that the birth of the next generation necessitates the death of the present generation, and he employs death and resurrection imagery that is reminiscent of many of the poems in *The Shrouding*:

and we pray of our strength that he survive us—
 we pray of our flung ranks and the aimed rifles—
 of our comrades perishing in a greater birth than this—
 may he inherit the earth

(32-35)

Although this ending disappoints Stevens because it departs from the pattern of concrete imagery Kennedy employs throughout the rest of the poem (44-45), it nevertheless provides a direct link between Kennedy's Spanish Civil War poetry and his non-political poetry in *The Shrouding*.

In "Direction for Canadian Poets," Kennedy himself repudiates these "abstractions of death and rebirth" in his *Shrouding*-era poetry as being too "subjective" and lacking sufficient "contact" with larger social and politi-

cal realities (23). However, in his Spanish Civil War poems, Kennedy still frequently invokes these patterns of imagery to express his sense of revolutionary optimism for the Spanish cause and, by extension, for democracy closer to home. In “You, Spanish Comrade,” another “Arthur Beaton” poem, Kennedy “draw[s] on images of resurrection and rebirth” to evoke “a world reborn” from the ashes of the Spanish Civil War to “a socialist utopia” (Vulpe 167):

a time there'll be to stand and breathe hereafter
when conflict past, fruits ripen in the sun
and men walk upright with a farther vision;
a place there'll be for work and skill and learning,
for peasants turning earth no locust bares,
and girls with flowers, new children springing tall.

(Kennedy, “You” 15-20)

Kennedy establishes a sense of immediacy in this poem by imagining the Spanish republicans as eagles and inspiring them with bold verbs to “Swing ... high over barricades” (1), to “thrust at fascist throats” (4), to “scream ... for workers’ strength” (6-7). This strategy enables Kennedy to create a close identification between the reader and the Spanish republicans, to “plac[e] the reader in the revolutionary situation” (Stevens 48) rather than to take refuge in vague abstractions. For Kennedy, the war in Spain is not just about esoteric principles such as “freedom” (“You” 5) or democracy, but it is also about living and breathing human beings—“bone” (12), “blood” (13), and “flesh” (13)—fighting and dying for those principles. “You, Spanish Comrade” thus illustrates Kennedy’s ability to marry the physical with the metaphysical; he uses death and resurrection imagery to conceive of the Spanish Civil War as a fight for the intellectual principles of freedom and democracy while also employing concrete imagery of the human and the natural world to express the idea that the attainment of these principles comes at the real, tangible cost of thousands of human lives. This concreteness and immediacy renders the poem comprehensible on several levels, as a poem not just about the condition in Spain, but in other places similarly threatened by political oppression.

Kennedy also uses eagle symbolism in “Calling Eagles,” a poem published under his own name. This time, however, the eagles stand in not for the Spanish republicans but for the surrounding intelligentsia who were pontificating about the situation in Spain from every conceivable angle. Nicola Vulpe refers to “Calling Eagles” as “a poetic version of ‘Direction for Canadian Poets’” (Vulpe 165) because both pieces call on artists and

other cognoscenti—“Swift thinkers, readers in books and the bones of nature” (Kennedy, “Calling” 2)—to abandon their intellectual ivory towers—“construing / Life at its conflux, observing nebula, sifting fact from suppose” (2-3)—and “Come down into life” (9):

Come where Spain strangles in blood, Ethiopia
Groans at the ironcased heel, Vienna
Numbers the dead, remembers Weissel and Wallisch;
Scream for Brazilian dungeons where Prestes rots
And fascist madmen rattle gaoler’s keys....

(11-15)

Stevens points out Kennedy’s adept sidestepping of “vague and romantic abstractions” in this poem in favour of a concrete “catalogue of political miseries” (49); Kennedy is not afraid to list specific individuals—Georg Weissel, Koloman Wallish, Luís Carlos Prestes—and geographical locations—Spain, Ethiopia, Vienna, Brazil—then suffering under fascist oppression. In “Direction for Canadian Poets,” Kennedy exhorts artists and intellectuals to abandon “aesthetic flag-pole sitting” (21) and “touch life at a thousand points” to begin creating a poetry that resonates with real “people, working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity” and exposes “the abuses which are destroying our culture and which threaten life itself” (24). Correspondingly, in “Calling Eagles” he urges the same artists and intellectuals to “Join with the groundlings, multitudes, with hope and passion / Lifting their fists with the steel clenched, towering / A new state from the crumble and wrack of the old” (“Calling” 18-20). This level of personal engagement will not only assist those multitudes on the ground in achieving their goals, but it will also have a renovating impact upon the artists’ and intellectuals’ own work. After all, Kennedy asserts, it takes a combination of intellectual and physical efforts to overcome oppression:

You are part of this turmoil, Eagles, knit to its glory.
There is work for your strong beaks and the thundering wings,
For the clean fight of the mind and the sharp perception:

There is only a glacial death on the lonely crags.

(21-24, emphasis in original)

Stevens writes, “this struggle will be an intellectual as well as physical fight. Intellectual strength is needed, not sheer brute force, to overthrow

the old system” (50). The alternative, isolationism, will result only in death, both physical and intellectual.

In “Memorial to the Defenders,” published under the pseudonym “Leonard Bullen,” Kennedy again addresses the Spanish republicans, only this time directly, without the extended metaphor of the eagle. Except for the rhyme scheme, which is irregular, “Memorial to the Defenders” takes the form of a Petrarchan sonnet, with a clearly demarcated octave and sestet. In the octave, Kennedy evokes the physicality of the republicans by means of a blazon, cataloguing their physical attributes in much the same way that sixteenth-century sonneteers often itemized the physical attributes of their beloved. Instead of elaborating on physical beauty, however, Kennedy’s blazon celebrates the physical bravery of the “Comrades” (1) and “Workers” (5) who sacrificed their “bone” (2), “blood” (2), “nerves” (3), “limbs” (7), “eyeballs” (7), and “ribs” (8) for the cause of democracy. As Stevens puts it, “The image of the body is used ... in terms of a barricade and sustains the notion that the single human is the factor which will be the real revolutionary force” (46). In Petrarchan fashion, the sestet of the sonnet provides resolution to this theme of bodily sacrifice by providing “a vision of a revolutionary Spain victorious” (Vulpe 167):

This love will yet set garlands round your names;
This sacrifice bear increment of joy
When the clean world you die for casts its slough;
And newborn men erect as monument
To your dispersed flesh and valiant hearts
The People’s Spain with freedom on its towers!
(Kennedy, “Memorial” 9-14)

Kennedy once again employs death and resurrection imagery in the sestet in an attempt to emphasize the immediate human cost of the Spanish Civil War over political abstraction and propaganda. Stevens is critical of this section of the poem because Kennedy “fall[s] back on the idyllic vision of a left-wing Utopia” with “optimistic generalizations” and “clichés of Marxist dogma” (46). Nevertheless, the poem offers an example of Kennedy’s ability to take a traditional form, in this case the Petrarchan sonnet, and turn it to explicitly political ends. Like traditional Petrarchan sonnets, “Memorial to the Defenders” is about unrequited love, but that love exists not between two individual lovers, but between two generations of human beings estranged by history and circumstance.

In “Revolutionary Greeting,” another “Arthur Beaton” poem, Kennedy experiments with a much different poetic form, the prose poem. Despite

the flexibility that the prose poem form affords, “Revolutionary Greeting” is repetitive in structure, and deliberately so. The poem consists of five long and descriptive lines, each elaborating on various positive human characteristics the revolutionaries should cultivate to be successful in Spain. Each line begins with an imperative sentence exhorting the “Comrade” (1) to assume that positive characteristic: “Be beautiful, be proud” (1), “Be straightlimbed” (2), “Be poised” (3), “O be kind, be tender” (4), “Be brave” (5). The end of each line asserts the importance of the characteristic for the workers’ collective cause: “the workers of the world have need of beauty” (1), “the workers of the world have need of strength” (2), “the workers of the world have need of eagerness” (3), “the workers of the world have need of comfort” (4), “The workers of the world have need of courage” (5). The poem’s repetitiveness and rhetorical symmetry echo the call-and-response songs and slogans of the revolutionaries, the effectiveness of which depended on their brevity, rhetorical simplicity, and ease of memorization. In fact, close to the end of the poem, Kennedy invokes one of the best-known communist rallying cries, from Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, placing it in capital letters: “WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!” (5). For some critics, this strategy of repetition and formulaism works against the poem rather than for it. Stevens calls the poem “cliché-ridden” and “propagandist” (47), and Morley condemns the poem as containing “trite rhetoric” and “political jargon” (105). However, Kennedy’s use of the word “straightlimbed” close to the beginning of “Revolutionary Greeting” connects this Spanish Civil War poem directly to Kennedy’s concurrent preoccupation with domestic politics. In “Direction for Canadian Poets,” Kennedy writes:

Poetry that is real, Canadian, and contemporary can be written tomorrow by poets who worried about “dreams” and their precious egos yesterday. It will be welcomed by millions of Canadians who want their children to grow up straight-limbed to enjoy a heritage of prosperity and peace, and who want the kind of writing that will help bring this about. (24)

Kennedy’s implication is that, whether someone lives in Franco’s Spain or Duplessis’s Quebec, it is imperative for that person actively to battle fascism and other forms of oppression so that ensuing generations may be “straight-limbed,” so that they may develop physical—and, by extension, moral—rectitude.

“Revolutionary Greeting” is also perhaps the most highly personalized poem in Kennedy’s Spanish Civil War oeuvre. Kennedy dedicates the poem to “E.N.,” which stands for Esther Nichamin, whom Kennedy met a

few months before composing “Revolutionary Greeting,” and whom he would marry in 1939 (Morley 104). Thus, the poem operates at once in the public sphere as a political call to action and in the private sphere as an intimate conversation between two lovers. As he does in “Memorial to the Defenders,” Kennedy personalizes the struggle of the Spanish republicans by means of a blazon, meticulously cataloguing the Comrade’s physiognomy, starting with facial features such as “eyes luminous,” “cheeks damasked,” “mouth exquisite” (1), and then moving to the interior of “nerves ravelled,” “blood sweetly sibilant,” “muscle and bone rhythmic” (2). The middle section of the poem takes a decidedly erotic turn, as Kennedy focuses his attention on the “power and leopard grace for thigh’s movement, hip’s sway” (2), “the hair on your nape stirring, the nipples alert bird beak thrust outward” (3). Kennedy’s implication is that those who hope to overcome oppression must come together as intimately as two lovers, they must explore each other as thoroughly as two sexual partners, to prevail in their cause. In the closing lines of the poem, this physical intimacy bears fruit not in the birth of a child but in the form of intellectual and political solidarity. The blazon shifts away from positive physical attributes and onto positive political attributes: “patience for wits slow to grasp the dialectic” (4); compassion “for the head bloodied by nightsticks, the picket felled, the relief marcher choking with tear gas” (4-5); inspiration for “the comrades hesitant, fearful of failure” (5). Kennedy moves from exhorting the revolutionaries to cultivate physical characteristics, to pressing them into political action: “be fearless, hurling the slogans, scornful of violence, urging mass action, raising the banner” (5). Again, Kennedy’s overarching message is that the solution to political problems like the Spanish Civil War and the Union Nationale is “people, working, loving, fighting, groping for clarity” (“Direction” 24).

The Spanish Civil war had a profound influence on Kennedy’s poetry, transforming it from the Eliot- and Frazer-inspired mythical and meta-physical style of *The Shrouding* to a more personalized and politically engaged style that eschewed abstractions and attempted to grapple with political realities directly. In “Direction for Canadian Poets,” his clearest pronouncement about the need for Canadian poets to be politically engaged, Kennedy acknowledges that his poetry in *The Shrouding*, in its “preoccupation with abstractions of death and rebirth,” lacked this political engagement and was thus out of touch “with the larger reality” of what was going on in the world (23). Kennedy’s criticism of Auden’s *Spain* centres on the similar shortcoming that Auden’s poem takes an “aloof, intellectual approach to ... the most terrible and moving event of our time” and is thus

“static” and “sterile” in execution. Implicit in Kennedy’s criticism is that Auden had not seen the horrors of Spain first-hand and therefore could not respond to them with a level of immediacy sufficient to lend his poetry verisimilitude. Kennedy never went to Spain either, but his experience as a working-class radical living in Duplessis’s Quebec rendered his position towards the threat of fascism anything but remote, a position he expresses in the pages of *New Frontier* in articles such as “Meet Quebec’s Fascists!” and “Quebec Bait the Jew!”. For Kennedy, what would unfold in Spain was just a more extreme manifestation of Quebec fascism, and thus Kennedy’s shift from lambasting Duplessis to lambasting Franco seems to be a logical shift of his ideas from the domestic to the international scene.

Appendix A

Kennedy’s Poems in *New Frontier*

Poems are published in chronological order as they originally appeared in *New Frontier*. The bibliographical entry at the end of each poem indicates the name, his own or a pseudonym, under which Kennedy published each poem.

Epitaph for a Canadian Statesman

Now Time has pricked this bag of wind
Which parliamentary thrusts could not;
The iron heel that clicked and rang
Corrodes to bio-chemic rot:
Where orphaned rolls the Ottawa
His cossacks club for other hire;
His lien on heavenly dividends
Is vouched for by the Tory choir.
Industry’s Captains, C.M.A.,
Draft plaintive eulogies for him
Whose swallow tails and penguin paunch
Are fluttering with the cherubim.
O Bosses, wring your chubby hands,
Weep sweetly as the crocodile;
And mourn your prototype brought low
Though versed in constitutional guile.

Leo Kennedy. “Epitaph for a Canadian Statesman.” Leonard Bullen, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.1 (Apr. 1936): 12. Print.

Summons for This Generation

Revoke your ebb's dispersal with arrayed
 Bright flesh on stalwart scaffolding of chalk,
 With hair grown subtly to a thatch, the scooped
 Low-butressed skull that roofs the wits the walk
 Of the time-ghost, with vigorous grouped
 Limbs, with wrists, with hands alertly splayed;
 Assert a tidal and advance a flood
 With clamour of the lips the pulse the tongue
 Bell-clanging in the steeple of the head,
 With thought, with laughter and the loosely-strung
 Spine taut, the light heel spurning the pampered dead,
 With dominant restatements of the blood.

Leo Kennedy. "Summons for This Generation." *New Frontier* 1.1 (Apr. 1936): 15. Print.

New Comrade

We greet this comrade with a look of pleasure
 he is small yet for the discipline and the mass action
 young for the fiery speeches and the blind police violence
 puckered and wailing
 he is new and unused to a dying world
 early for barricades
 among us a stranger
 Gravely we salute him
 comrade with the creased fist thrown back on the pillow
 depressed barely by the slight weight of a head that may shift mountains
 span an ocean with steel
 fetter the atom
 or split like a ripe fruit in the enfilade of dum-dums

 he is not of our blood but ours rather
 to foster and supple the straight back
 guide the hand's grasping
 to clarify past things and the new time

 We are not learned nor honoured
 but men and women with guidance
 painfully unlearning error
 yielding

confusion for freedom inchmeal with difficult labour

we have purpose and the courage of those who fight for the generations

We welcome this comrade gravely (initiate
in a harsh time

 fearful of noise and falling
stung to grimace by strangeness of shape and movement
startled by daylight

 missing the bloodwarmed
swaddle of breathing flesh

 bloodwhispering darkness)
and we pray of our strength that he survive us—
we pray of our flung ranks and the aimed rifles—
of our comrades perishing in a greater birth than this—
may he inherit the earth

 the fruit of our passion
the life sweetness after the bullet spent
may he have peace and work creation where our shadows are

Leo Kennedy. "New Comrade." Arthur Beaton, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.5
(Sept. 1936): 14. Print.

You, Spanish Comrade

Swing, eagle, high over barricades and plunge
boldly, talon and beak flash golden
in Toledo sunlight, bayonet and beak
fierce thrust at fascist throats, the rifle butts
wing-buffeting, whirling, splintering for freedom;
scream, harassed bird, wind-lover, for Asturian
fists death-hurling, for workers' strength
taut, driving invasion seaward:

this struggle is no death in you though fallen,
the season's turn cries up the wind once more,
and life revives which has lain close in ground;
you build foundations here with bone for granite,
spilled blood and flesh for mortar, and the bright
mouths of dead girls to keep a memory green:

a time there'll be to stand and breathe hereafter
when conflict past, fruits ripen in the sun

and men walk upright with a farther vision;
 a place there'll be for work and skill and learning,
 for peasants turning earth no locust bares,
 and girls with flowers, new children springing tall.

Leo Kennedy. "You, Spanish Comrade." Arthur Beaton, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.7 (Nov. 1936): 23. Print.

Revolutionary Greeting (For E.N.)

Be beautiful, be proud, Comrade, your hair like a hawk feather, eyes
 luminous and large, the lashes black curved luxuriant, the cheeks
 damasked, chin moulded the mouth exquisite and bent like a bird wing,
 the voice fluid: the workers of the world have need of beauty;

Be straightlimbed, shoulders sprung firmly, the nerves ravelled, the blood
 sweetly sibilant in its courses, muscle and bone rhythmic, with speed
 for your wrist's play, power and leopard grace for thigh's movement,
 hip's sway: the workers of the world have need of strength;

Be poised, Comrade, delicately, like the spray of a fountain, watersheaf,
 uncut by sickle of wind; be tiptoe, eager for happening, the hair on your
 nape stirring, the nipples alert bird beak thrust outward, hands restless
 for doing, breath quickened: the workers of the world have need of
 eagerness;

O be kind, be tender, with patience for wits slow to grasp the dialectic, with
 arm with breast soft for the head bloodied by nightsticks, the picket
 felled, the relief marcher choking with tear gas: the workers of the
 world have need of comfort;

Be brave as beautiful, as straightlimbed, poised, compassionate, giving
 example: shaming the comrades hesitant, fearful of failure: be fearless,
 hurling the slogans, scornful of violence, urging mass action, raising the
 banner: WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE! The workers of the
 world have need of courage.

Leo Kennedy. "Revolutionary Greeting." Arthur Beaton, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.7 (Nov. 1936): 5. Print.

Memorial to the Defenders (for Bess and Ben)

You Comrades rearing separate barricades
Of bone that's prompt to splinter, blood to spurt
And intricate, swift nerves that shock and dull
At blast of thermite and the bullet's rip;
You Workers gnawed by death astride a cloud,
Shrivelled by flame thrown, churned with mud and steel,
The limbs recoiling at the eyeballs twist,
The breath frayed out between prised, lurching ribs ...
This love will yet set garlands round your names;
This sacrifice bear increment of joy
When the clean world you die for casts its slough;
And newborn men erect as monument
To your dispersed flesh and valiant hearts
The People's Spain with freedom on its towers!

Leo Kennedy. "Memorial to the Defenders." Leonard Bullen, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.10 (Feb. 1937): 15. Print.

Advice to a Young Poet

Cling eagerly to grass,
 Fix passion onto stone,
Hook living hands on air,
 Thrust tentacles in loam,
And bind your breastbone fast
 To men you never knew:
Manifesto for your cords,
 New comradeship to grow.
Assert the toilers' State,
 Define the workers' want,
Brandish the knotted fist,
 Fuse slogan to your chant;
And share your joy in earth,
 Delight in hill and bird
With puzzled men who reach
 To freedom as for sword.
Ancestors such as ours
 Marx, Engels, Luxemburg
Whose precious life stuff thinned
 Limning a cleaner world,

With nameless men whose blood
Nourished the trampled plant
Set precedent to reach
Whether we die or not.

Kennedy, Leo. "Advice for a Young Poet." Arthur Beaton, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.12 (Apr. 1937): 26. Print.

Calling Eagles

Slanting the ragged peaks of the mind, Eagles,
Swift thinkers, readers in books and the bones of nature, construing
Life at its conflux, observing nebula, sifting fact from suppose, swooping
With noble talons arched for the scrap of truth;

Hurl from the frozen roof of the world, splitting
Air with breast feather, diving
Outward and downward, scattering
Hawks with the fear of your purpose noble plunge;

Come down into life, Eagles, where iron grinds bone, hands falter
And brave men perish for a tyrant's peace;
Come where Spain strangles in blood, Ethiopia
Groans at the ironcased heel, Vienna
Numbers the dead, remembers Weissel and Wallisch;
Scream for Brazilian dungeons where Prestes rots
And fascist madmen rattle gaoler's keys;

Drop from your eyrie, spurning the misted heights,
Plunge to the valley where life is and verdure,
Join with the groundlings, multitudes, with hope and passion
Lifting their fists with the steel clenched, towering
A new state from the crumble and wrack of the old;

You are part of this turmoil, Eagles, knit to its glory.
There is work for your strong beaks and the thundering wings,
For the clean fight of the mind and the sharp perception:

There is only a glacial death on the lonely crags.

Leo Kennedy. "Calling Eagles." *New Frontier* 2.2 (June 1937): 14. Print.

Appendix B Bibliography of Kennedy's Contributions to *New Frontier*

I. Poems

- Kennedy, Leo. "Epitaph for a Canadian Statesman." Leonard Bullen, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.1 (Apr. 1936): 12.
- . "Summons for This Generation." *New Frontier* 1.1 (Apr. 1936): 15.
- . "New Comrade." Arthur Beaton, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.5 (Sept. 1936): 14.
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II. Essays

- Kennedy, Leo. "Direction for Canadian Poets." *New Frontier* 1.3 (June 1936): 21-24.
- . "Meet Quebec's Fascists!" Peter Quinn, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.5 (Sept. 1936): 5-8.
- . "Quebec Baited the Jew!" Peter Quinn, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.6 (Oct. 1936): 6-10.
- . "Hope for Us." Leonard Bullen, pseud. *New Frontier* 1.10 (Feb. 1937): 16-19.
- . "Franco's Folly: Highlights on the Generalissimo's Role of Clown." Peter Quinn, pseud. *New Frontier* 2.4 (Sept. 1937): 22-23.

III. Review

- Kennedy, Leo. "Quiescent Spain." Leonard Bullen, pseud. Rev of *Spain* by W.H. Auden. *New Frontier* 2.4 (Sept. 1937): 27.

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