

**REVIEWS****Out of the Shade**

*The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith*, Ed. Brian Trehearne. London: Canadian Poetry Press, 2007. lxxvii + 673 pp.

My first response upon seeing Brian Trehearne's important new edition of *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith* was amazement at its bulk. Surely Smith had not produced enough poems to fill this thick and weighty volume of over 700 pages! Had Trehearne discovered a treasure trove of previously unknown poems? In fact he had not. *The Complete Poems* does include some previously unpublished works but they comprise a relatively small proportion of the poems included in the edition. Once I opened the volume, the mystery was soon resolved. To begin with, the publisher, Canadian Poetry Press, has chosen, with a few exceptions, to begin each poem on a new page. This enlightened decision, one which the University of Toronto Press refused to consider, for example, for my own edition of *The Complete Poems of A.M. Klein*, has had the effect of substantially increasing the length of the volume, especially since most of Smith's poems are quite short. In addition, the volume has a substantial critical apparatus—which is not, of course, surprising in a serious critical edition. But a couple of other formatting choices have greatly increased the bulk of this apparatus: the notes are set in the same font size as the main text (rather than in a smaller font size as is usually the case) and the layout makes very generous use of white space. Again, the contrast with the Klein edition, with its notes set in a smaller font and with a more cramped layout is noticeable.

My reason for beginning with these undoubtedly secondary presentational aspects of what is a serious work of scholarship, whatever its format, is to focus on a point that is crucial to this particular edition—that, not only is it an edition; it is also a manifesto, in a tradition of manifestos of which Smith himself was a distinguished representative (xxviii). And this is nowhere more evident than in the presentational choices that I have noted above, which all have the effect of emphasizing that Smith is a substantial poet whose work deserves the respect of a generous and inviting presentation.

Trehearne himself is quite explicit about the nature of his manifesto/edition. In the very first sentence of his Acknowledgments (and hence of the edition as a whole) he says:

The present edition had its first conception when D.M.R. Bentley...invited me in 1998 to be the general editor of a series of scholarly editions of the Canadian modernist poets. It was plain to both of us that A.J.M. Smith deserved pride of place in the series' first publication. (xvii)

Trehearne's point, that *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith* with its "pride of place" in a groundbreaking editorial project is a clarion call, is taken up at much greater length in his Introduction, which begins with a long section on Smith's reputation and, by extension, on the reputation of Canadian modernism in general, issues on which Trehearne takes an unequivocal position:

This edition of the complete poems of the Canadian modernist A.J.M. Smith (1902-1980) is not neutral in its critical purposes. While it certainly hopes to fulfil editorial obligations by presenting the reader with a comprehensive, illuminating, and reliable gathering of Smith's poems,...it also seeks explicitly to correct the indifference to his legacy shown by literary critics and publishers over the last quarter-century. ...Canadian scholars of modernism especially must think of themselves today as custodians of a literature in danger of disappearing from the public record altogether. The series of Canadian Poetry Press editions which this volume inaugurates, under the title *Canadian Modern Poetry: Texts and Contexts*, can hope to play a vital role in the fulfilment of those obligations. (xxi)

This focus on reputation is unusual, to say the least, in a scholarly edition. The introductions to most such editions tend to focus primarily on thematic, or formal or historical/biographical issues, or on matters of provenance or editorial theory and practice. But Trehearne's attempt to replace an outdated and wrongheaded narrative of Smith's achievement with "new narratives from *The Complete Poems*" (xxxvii) is absolutely central to the edition as a whole. At the end of this review I will return to my sense of how successful Trehearne is in this attempt, but first I would like to discuss how well Trehearne "fulfil[s] editorial obligations by presenting the reader with a comprehensive, illuminating, and reliable gathering of Smith's poems."

Trehearne fulfils these editorial obligations well. Although he makes a number of choices that I would not have made as an editor, they are sensible and are generally well explained and justified in his Introduction and notes. In other words, if this is not the definitive edition of Smith, it is only because there is no such thing as a definitive edition of any author. Every edition always has borne and always will bear the mark of its editor and his or her priorities. This being said, *The Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith* is a very good edition of Smith that should serve the needs of readers and students of

his poetry for many years to come. Although it does not break new ground in editorial theory or practice, it is clearly a labour of love that grows out of many years of reading and thinking about Smith and his milieu, and that wears its impressive scholarship lightly.

What choices, specifically, has Trehearne made that he might have made differently? I would focus on three in particular: the order of the texts, the choice of copy texts, and the decision to include only “versions,” not “drafts.”

At the heart of the edition are the poems collected by Smith himself in his *Poems New & Collected*, which are presented in the order in which he himself arranged them. The alternative would have been to arrange the poems chronologically. Trehearne gives two reasons for his decision not to follow a chronological arrangement, one theoretical, the other practical. The theoretical reason is that, Smith, an accomplished editor himself, gave a lot of attention to the arrangement of the various collections of his poems and to ignore this would be to ignore an important part of his intentions as an artist. The practical reason is that, because of a dearth of external and internal evidence, it is not possible to arrive at a precise chronology for many of the poems, which can be assigned only a range of possible dates of composition, sometimes a very wide range. A chronological arrangement would, therefore, have been of limited usefulness since the range of dates assigned to particular poems might have less to do with Smith’s evolution as an artist than with the editor’s degree of certainty about the assigned date based on evidence which happens to be available. This would inevitably create a false impression of the shape of Smith’s career. In any case, Trehearne does supply, in an Appendix, the most complete chronology of the poems that he has been able to arrive at. (In light of the importance of Smith’s role in the selection and organization of the various collections that appeared in his lifetime, it would have been useful to include the tables of contents of these collections in another appendix.) The one problem with following Smith’s own organization of his poems, a problem that Trehearne himself acknowledges (lvii), is that, as noted above, one of his central aims as an editor is to provide new narratives to replace the ones imposed by Smith himself, and it is somewhat paradoxical that, at the heart of his edition, Trehearne has enshrined the most influential version of these narratives, Smith’s own selection and arrangement of *Poems New & Collected*.

A second decision, which Trehearne notes in his Introduction, is to use “the last version published in Smith’s lifetime (excluding appearances in anthologies)” (lv) as his copy text for all published poems. There are two

issues here: the treatment of versions that appear in anthologies; and the relationship of *Poems New & Collected* to the choice of copy text.

For a much anthologized poet such as Smith, the importance of versions of poems appearing in anthologies in the author's lifetime is a vexed one. Not only can these versions be numerous; more to the point, the degree of involvement of the author in overseeing their publication is often impossible to determine. This becomes a real problem in cases where an anthologized version contains unique variants. Should they be treated as authorial and noted in the critical apparatus? Should they be incorporated into the text if the anthologized version happens to be the last to appear in the author's lifetime? This ultimately is a matter of editorial expertise and judgement. However, to be on the safe side, an editor should check all anthologized versions of poems with which the author could possibly have been involved, unless external evidence shows that the anthologized text is simply a reprint of a version that has appeared elsewhere. It is not clear if Trehearne has done this. In my experience even the most unassuming of anthologies can sometimes spring interesting surprises on you.

Trehearne's choice of "the last version published in Smith's lifetime" as the copy texts for published poems is one that many editors, including myself, have made. However, Trehearne elaborates somewhat confusingly on this statement in two other places in the edition, in a note (lxii, n. 33) and again in the introduction to the Textual Notes (372). In the note he states:

The only exception is a mere nicety: having retained the structure and arrangement of *Poems New & Collected* as the core of this edition...I have also for consistency's sake listed *Poems New & Collected* as the copy text for these 120 poems, as long as no subsequent version (for example, from *The Classic Shade*) introduces variant material. (lxii)

The copy text is the version whose readings have final authority. (Some editors argue for a different treatment of accidentals and substantives in the copy text, but Trehearne does not, so I assume he assigns the same authority to all readings in the copy text.) The editor, of course, does not always need to follow the reading of the copy text, since copy texts are as vulnerable to errors as any other texts, and these errors must be emended if detected, as Trehearne himself notes (372). But once an editor decides on his basis for choosing a copy text he should stick with it. The fact that Trehearne has chosen to "retain the structure and arrangement of *Poems New & Collected*" is simply not relevant to the question of which version best represents Smith's final intention for a particular text. Trehearne's actual practice, in fact, contradicts his statement that he is using the versions in *Poems New & Col-*

lected as his copy texts, since he states that he *always* chooses variant readings from later publications such as *The Classic Shade* (as long as they are not demonstrable typos) over readings in *Poems New & Collected* (lxii and 372). What Trehearne seems, in effect, to be saying is that, unless it appears in an anthology, the latest published version of a text is always the copy text since it always determines the choice of variant readings—but since most poems in *Poems New & Collected* that were republished were not revised, you might as well call the version in *Poems New & Collected* the copy text, even though it really isn't. When all is said and done none of this makes much or any difference to the actual texts printed, but this lapse in logic in an otherwise clearly thought through edition is surprising.

The final major editorial decision that Trehearne has made is to include, as a rule, only “versions” not “drafts”:

I have only collated other archival documents (in addition to five typescript collections prepared by Smith) when I felt sure of their interest *and* judged that they had some status as an autonomous version, as opposed to a mere draft stage of the poem in progress of composition. (373)

Trehearne acknowledges that “the distinction between ‘version’ and ‘draft’ is arbitrary” (373), but editing is an arbitrary business and the criteria he uses for making the distinction seem sensible. To have include drafts tracing the complete genesis of Smith’s texts would have meant a much bulkier, more expensive edition, and one that would have taken much longer to complete. Still, in the best of all possible worlds this material would be made available to scholars in one place in an accessible format and perhaps someday an electronic supplement to the edition might serve this purpose. This is something I strongly urge future editors of volumes in this series to consider. Within Trehearne’s self-imposed limit, though, the textual apparatus is clearly laid out with a description of the material on which each text is based; a list of texts collated with an asterisk indicating the copy-text; and lists of emendations and of major variants in the collated texts. I have not actually doublechecked Trehearne’s transcriptions and collations of archival material (a task that I consider above and beyond the duties of a mere reviewer), but in light of my familiarity with his scholarship over the years, I would be very surprised if his work was anything but meticulous and responsible.

The one section of the edition which I have not yet commented on is the Explanatory Notes. Trehearne identifies the function of these notes as “provid[ing] information as to Smith’s allusions, references, historical, cultural, and literary contexts” (lviii) and, in general, the notes fulfil these func-

tions well. Trehearne has done an admirable job of tracking down virtually every allusion that would cause a reader to pause—and many that most readers would not even recognize as such. I found the identifications of allusions to modern poetry, Canadian and otherwise—a subject about which Trehearne is much more knowledgeable than I am—particularly useful. However, as Trehearne himself notes, and all editors would agree, there is no “better lesson in scholarly humility than in the preparation of...Explanatory Notes” (lix). It is in this section of an edition that the gaps in editors’ general culture—and we all have them—become apparent for all the world to see, and there are some areas in which Trehearne clearly is less strong than others. There are problems, for example, with his treatment of a couple of allusions to Shakespeare. Unless I have misunderstood his notes to “pale fire” (530) and “crack of doom” (550–51), he does not seem to be aware that these phrases are from Shakespeare, since he notes their use by Nabokov and Tolkien, respectively but not their sources in *Timon of Athens* and *Macbeth*. Apart from these minor quibbles, I occasionally find Trehearne’s identification of allusions a bit farfetched. (Is “It is not I” really an allusion to Rimbaud’s “*Je est un autre*”; and is every mention of April an allusion to *The Waste Land*?) Finally, although it is customary to deplore the declining standards of cultural literacy, is it really necessary to identify Othello, Juliet, Judas, Cupid, the Sphinx, Peter Pan, Utopia, and the Holy Grail—or to inform readers of a scholarly edition that the Mother of Jesus is the Virgin Mary? I know that in my own work as an editor I have been saved by helpful colleagues from gaffes and excesses much worse than any noted above. Too many cooks may spoil the broth in most cases, but never in the case of explanatory notes, especially when one is dealing with a highly allusive poet like Smith.

To sum up, then, Trehearne has produced an edition worthy of its author. It is a major contribution to Canadian literary scholarship and an excellent flagship for the series of scholarly editions of the Canadian modernist poets that it inaugurates.

The final question that remains is: does this edition succeed, as well, in making a case for the importance of Smith and of Canadian modernist poetry in general? I myself do not need convincing; I have never bought into the tendentious post-modernist critique and caricature of modernism, and I have no doubt that, with regard to the shameful neglect of Canadian modernism, the tide has begun to turn. The work of such scholars as Sandra Djwa, David Bentley, and Trehearne himself over the years, in the form of editions and critical studies, is clearly beginning to bear fruit. The most recent and most striking example of a new wave of interest in Canadian

modernism is the *Editing Modernism in Canada* project conceived of and directed by Dean Irvine, himself a major contributor—as editor, critic and conference organizer—to modernist studies in Canada. To compare small with great (at least in terms of financial resources), this generously funded project is to the world of Canadian editing what the CERN Large Hadron Collider is to the world of high energy physics. It is hard for me to imagine that Smith, as a central figure in Canadian modernism and as a very good poet, will not be borne up on this new wave.

Trehearne's major contribution in his Introduction to the inevitable rehabilitation of Smith's reputation is his meticulous demonstration of the limitations of the narratives promulgated about Smith, not least by Smith himself. But what I feel is lacking in the edition—and perhaps in light of everything else the edition accomplishes it would be unfair to expect this as well—is a compelling new narrative to replace the old one. Trehearne does an excellent job, here and elsewhere in his work, of tracing Smith's responsiveness to the changing literary milieu of his time, but there is something a bit airless about his account, which focusses almost exclusively on Smith's relationship to other writers, or, more accurately, other writings. There is very little sense of how Smith's achievement and development as an artist were enmeshed in his own life and in the life of his times. To draw on my own experience, for one last time, with A.M. Klein, Klein's tragic withdrawal from the world at the height of his career is both the curse and the blessing of Klein scholarship. It is a curse, because it inevitably skews readings of his work retrospectively and raises issues that ultimately cannot be resolved, certainly not by literary critics. But it is undeniably interesting and thought-provoking, especially when considered in the context of Klein's deeply conflicted attitude to his various public roles, which were his deepest source of both frustration and inspiration throughout his creative life. Unlike Klein, Smith seems something of a grey eminence, whatever he actually was in real life to those who knew him. If it were possible to formulate a compelling new narrative about A.J.M. Smith in the world, even on the understanding that, like all such narratives it was partial and would eventually be superseded, he might recapture some of his faded eminence, minus the greyness. In the meantime, though, I have no doubt that the author of "The Lonely Land," "News of the Phoenix," "The Wisdom of Old Jelly Roll," "The Archer," "The Plot Against Proteus," and at least a dozen more of the most challenging and rewarding Canadian poems, will emerge from the shade, not least because of the dedication and scholarship of Brian Trehearne.