

A Green Inventory

Zailig Pollock, Usher Caplan and Linda Rozmovits, *A.M. Klein: An Annotated Bibliography*, Introd. Zailig Pollock. Toronto: ECW Press, 1993. ix + 390 pp.

A.M. Klein, *Notebooks: Selections from the A.M. Klein Papers*, Ed. Zailig Pollock and Usher Caplan, Introd. Zailig Pollock. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994. xxix + 260 pp.

Zailig Pollock, *A.M. Klein: the Story of the Poet*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994, xii + 324 pp.

For the work of a writer to evolve into a critical industry, it seems that three separate processes must occur. First, there must be some initiative not only to make available all that writer's published and unpublished material, but also to map the evolution of that material so as to give interested readers an accurate sense of the evolution of the writer's imagination. Second, there must exist a collection of critics willing to devote a measure of their energy to exchanging readings of that writer's work. Finally, there must be sufficient interest in the writer's work and the critical responses to it to merit a careful cataloguing of these two bodies of work with bibliographical skill and precision. These three processes coincide rarely enough in Canadian criticism that when they do, it is cause first for celebration and later for retrospection. What aesthetic, political or economic factors, we should ask, have enabled this writer, and so few others, to achieve this degree of canonization, complete with the machinery for that critical industry to perpetuate itself?

Given this definition of the critical industry, it can safely be written that the arrival of three recent publications related to the life and work of A.M. Klein, *A.M. Klein: an Annotated Bibliography*, *Notebooks: Selections from the A.M. Klein Papers*, and Zailig Pollock's critical biography *A.M. Klein: the Story of the Poet*, have established Klein, once and for all, as one of the few Canadian writers around whom a fully developed critical industry has taken form. These three publications have directly or indirectly evolved out of the sustained efforts of the A.M. Klein Research and Publication Committee, which has been responsible for the publication, over the past fifteen years, of such volumes (in the series of The Collected Works of A.M. Klein) as Klein's *Short Stories*, *Beyond Sambation: Selected Essays and Editorials, 1928-1955*, *A.M. Klein: Literary Essays and Reviews* and *A.M. Klein: Complete Poems*. To categorize Klein criticism as an industry may appear unnecessarily cynical, particularly given the fact that Klein, as much as any poet that Canada has produced, richly deserves the attention that his

work, over the past two decades or so, has received. This is the attention for which Klein, during the productive years of his life, yearned, and which relentlessly evaded him. One of the many sad ironies of Klein's life and literary career is that the same financial support for which he applied in order to write his creative work and for which he was consistently refused is now funding the industry studying and celebrating the work that he was able to produce despite the setbacks he suffered.

The question of why Klein is now receiving this attention, as opposed to so many other Canadian literary figures who remain in relative obscurity, deserves some attention before the volumes under review are given individual attention. There appears to be general consensus among Canadian critics on the artistic merit of Klein's work. Like his two primary modernist models, James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, Klein appears at once to have instilled a sufficiently multi-tiered allusive structure in his major works to keep critics probing his *oeuvre* for generations to come, and he has captured the alienation of the modernist experience to a degree unequalled by any of his Canadian contemporaries. But artistic merit alone does not usually stimulate the degree of critical attention and the public funding that Klein's work has received. In this case, there are at least three other factors contributing to the process of Klein's canonization. The first of these factors is the interest that has been generated in Klein's life by the mysterious silence into which he retreated (after an extremely public life) for the last two decades of his life, which could not but attract additional attention to the writing itself. The second factor is the tireless effort of two pioneering Klein scholars, Usher Caplan and Zailig Pollock, both of whom have been instrumental, as editors, bibliographers and critics, in raising interest in Klein's work since his death in 1972, and both of whose continuing efforts in the field are still evident in these volumes. The third factor responsible for generating and perpetuating interest in Klein is the fact that his writing, unlike that of many of his contemporaries, has attracted a secondary following, in that it is equally important to the scholarly discipline of North American Jewish studies as to Canadian literary studies, since he exists as the transitional figure between a European Jewish literary past and a new, emerging twentieth-century Jewish literary voice.

While these three publications all participate in the project of retrieving and canonizing Klein, they are also extremely different endeavours. For this reason, it will be necessary to subdivide this review into three sections, examining each volume individually. The fact that these publications all result from the work of a small number of critics who have edited and exchanged ideas on Klein for many years, and have evolved directly from those critics' earlier studies, suggests that there may be certain consistencies between these volumes, and certain dominant themes in the critical examinations of Klein thus far. It will be the individual reviews, however, that will have to suggest these consistencies.

Perhaps the most significant fact that I can write about *A.M. Klein: an Annotated Bibliography* is that in the brief interval between being asked to review the book and beginning this review, it quickly became an invaluable part of my scholarship. Bibliographers Zailig Pollock, Usher Caplan and Linda Rozmovits have produced a well-organized, reasonably exhaustive and completely necessary instrument for the continued study of the varied writings of and critical responses to Klein. The importance of this bibliography is evident to any Klein scholar; despite the tremendous amount of work published by and on Klein, the only printed reference material previously available appeared as short, selected bibliographies in older works of Klein criticism. A substantial gap in Klein studies has therefore been eliminated. Although a great deal of bibliographical ground-work may be found in the previous volumes produced by the A.M. Klein Research and Publication Committee, this bibliography appears to have been produced independent of the committee. Where all of the committee's volumes were published by University of Toronto Press, this book is produced by ECW Press. The high standards of the previous volumes, however, have been maintained in this publication.

There are a number of challenges inherent in the task of creating a Klein bibliography. Klein's *oeuvre* spans many genres, and appears in publications as diverse as the Young Men's Hebrew Association *Beacon* and the influential *New Directions Annual*. The editors of this volume were forced as well to develop methods logically to catalogue Klein's journalism, poetry, creative prose and critical prose (much of which was being written by Klein almost simultaneously during his most productive periods) side-by-side, without confusing or disorienting the researcher. In addition, Klein published in both English and Yiddish, and his work is often difficult to find by virtue of its being published either unsigned (as anonymous editorials) or under such playful pseudonyms as Appius M. Klandius and Aben Kandel. Moreover, locating and listing all criticism on Klein is an equally daunting proposition. While Klein scholarship includes articles by critics as renowned as Northrop Frye, Leon Edel and Randall Jarrell, Klein's bibliographers had also to account for more obscure articles, like those published in Yiddish journals or student newspapers. Klein criticism has also appeared internationally in English, French, Hebrew, Yiddish and Italian. In his Introduction, Pollock allows that because "a substantial amount has been written on Klein in Jewish books and periodicals throughout the world . . . some items of this sort may have been missed" (ix). Regardless, this book exists as a testament to the flowering of interest in Klein, and to the eclectic nature of the interest that his work has generated.

Among the bibliography's most remarkable achievements are its meticulous itemization of each piece written by Klein and the logic of the arrangement of these items. Thousands of details and topics relating to Klein studies are rendered a matter of instant reference. In the first section of the bibliography, creative works by Klein are categorized and listed alphabetically, while journalistic and editorial works (the topics of which were most often ephemeral) are listed by the dates on which they first appeared in print. Each item is followed by its

publication history and other important information (such as the original authors of translations, the original titles of pieces, or whether an individual poem is part of a series). The bulk of this section is dedicated to Klein's critical and journalistic writing, since his contributions to the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* and the *Keneder Adler* represent the majority of his published work. To facilitate research, there is an index of the many topics addressed in these articles. The index may not be helpful in the case of such common topics in Klein's writing as anti-Semitism or Adolf Hitler, each of which is cross-referenced with hundreds of related articles, and would therefore not aid in locating a specific item. One disappointing aspect of this section of the bibliography is that Klein's manuscripts are acknowledged, but not described in any detail. This material (which includes speeches, rough notes, lecture notes, annotated copies of printed volumes from Klein's libraries and other miscellaneous writings) are of great importance to many scholars, and the opportunity to provide this information may not arise again in the near future. In addition, Pollock notes in his introduction that "[a]ll of Klein's anonymous work for Samuel Bronfman, head of Seagrams's and President of the Canadian Jewish Congress from 1939 to 1959, has been omitted" (ix). This is not the first instance where Pollock's editorial decisions on the matter of Klein's papers related to his association with Bronfman have been challenged. In his review of Pollock's edition of Klein's *Complete Poems*, D.M.R. Bentley questions the decision in that volume "to omit the occasional verses, which Klein produced on demand for members of the Montreal Jewish community, mostly the Bronfmans'" (85). Pollock's interpretation of this material as unworthy of publication is, in both instances, suspect, as it responds only to a narrow view of Klein's career and may therefore handicap scholars interested in comparative studies of Klein's different endeavours.

In the second part of the bibliography, books, articles, reviews and other reference material related to Klein criticism are divided into appropriate sections and listed in chronological order. An index (of critics, not topics) is provided for this section. This chronological arrangement of the available critical material (reviews of Klein's original books are grouped together) on Klein is not only a helpful research guide, but also a good overview of the history of Klein studies. In his introduction, Pollock comments extensively on the details of Klein's life and career (all of which relates to the first part of the bibliography), but he does not provide an outline of the development of Klein scholarship, nor does he attempt to explain the possible reasons why interest in Klein has continued to gain momentum over the decades since his career began. Some overview, however broad, of the history of Klein criticism would have been helpful, and there is no scholar more qualified to provide such a summary than Pollock. Among the issues that Pollock could have addressed in his introduction are the predominant subjects which, to date, have dominated Klein scholarship, how these subjects and studies gesture forward to possible topics for exploration in future Klein studies, and the differences between the critical approaches to Klein before and after his death.

Each critical work listed in the second section of the bibliography is followed by a one-paragraph summation of the major points of the book or article listed, which is accomplished by citing two or three "representative" quotations from the work. While these summations are presented to the researcher as being somehow objective, the critical bias of the editors of the bibliography is reflected, in each instance, both in the quotations chosen for inclusion and in those omitted. It would have been more beneficial had the editors simply acknowledged that entire books and articles cannot be reflected in single paragraphs, and to have announced their critical responses to the works directly. This has become standard practice in many annotated bibliographies, and it should have been followed in this volume as well.

II

Of all the volumes that have been produced by The A.M. Klein Research and Publications Committee in their running series of Klein's Collected Works, *Notebooks: Selections from the A.M. Klein Papers* most deserves two separate reviews, one for the casual Klein enthusiast and one for the professional Klein critic. The volume can most accurately be classified as a sampling of the unpublished material that could not be accommodated by the editions of Klein's poetry, journalism, critical writing, or short fiction. This sampling includes "Raw Material" (brief scribbles of poetry, scattered thoughts and ephemeral observations), two short diary entries, some critical writings and notes from several unfinished novels. (Notably absent from the volume are such writings as those related to Klein's work as speech-writer for Samuel Bronfman as well as material from the large collection of lecture notes from the period of Klein's McGill professorship which are among his collected papers.) The result is that the volume, for the more casual reader, would be uneven and often unreadable. For the professional Klein scholar, the volume is an important, albeit challenging, study of the creative process and of Klein's creative and personal failures.

Among the only items of interest for the more casual reader are the sections entitled "Diary (1944)" and "Diary (1945)," which, Pollock informs us in his Introduction to the volume, "are the only examples of the [diary] form in the Papers" (xii). These sections, which are unfortunately all-too brief, provide a rare glimpse into Klein's keen ability humorously to read the responses of others toward himself. The 1944 diary is dominated by Klein's reflections on his first political campaign (from which he withdrew before the election). Among the most amusing sections is that which was written on April 4, in which Klein playfully catalogues the various responses to his campaign by his contemporaries:

Emily Postish—I hope you win.

Concerned, & hopeful—You're gonna have a tough fight. Secretly gloating with small consolation—So you've written a number of poems.

Argumentative—Since when are you a C.C.F.er?

Probing for an Achilles heel—What will B sat?

Facetious—So you're handing out cigarettes already?

Neumanesque—What can you do for me? I promised him murals of the House of Commons.

Maternal—May those be paralysed who will run against you!

(92)

The second diary entry (1945) is highlighted by Klein's account of his meeting with F. Cyril James of McGill University to address the terms of his visiting professorship, the description of which again reveals Klein's ability to generate subtle humour from the innuendo inherent in the clash of cultures:

I could gather from the Dr. that he was in love with primitive things. The bloody picturesqueness of the Arabs is our most difficult obstacle in appealing to the English. They prefer natives. They are colourful, and easier to deal with. But the goddam Jews, they're always quoting from the same books as you read, unpleasant occidentals.

The doctor did not say that, but that was the wind that blew from his remarks.

(96).

These brief autobiographical sections represent a rare instance in which Klein strives with humour and profound insight to examine the complexities of the relationships between himself and those he must placate to gain a measure of success in his life as a public figure.

The remainder of the volume will interest only the professional, if not obsessive, Klein scholar. Pollock and Caplan attempt to assist the reader with occasional comments on the context and significance of these scattered writings, but these comments are not consistently sustained throughout the volume, nor can they always help in convincing the reader of the relevance of Klein's more fragmented and ill-conceived projects. The most difficult sections of the volume are those that include Klein's three incomplete and previously unpublished novels, "Stranger and Afraid" (a confessional political mystery narrated by a Jewish inmate of a Quebecois prison), "Untitled Novel" (a seemingly autobiographical study of Klein's own engagement with language) and "The Golem" (an extremely fragmented attempt to re-create the myth of the Cabbalistic creation of a clay defender of the Jews in sixteenth-century Prague). Of primary interest in these notes toward Klein's never-completed novels is not necessarily the fact that the reader is permitted a glimpse into Klein's creative process, but rather that these unfinished pieces reveal Klein as a poet who desperately aspired to become a novelist but who, unfortunately, could not gain command over the formal demands of novel-writing. It is significant, then, that the one novel Klein did complete and publish, *The Second Scroll*, is derived largely from his completed journalistic writings, contains very little character development or dialogue, and

includes (almost as a defence mechanism) previously written and published poetry.

The subjects of each of these unfinished novels—personal alienation, the artist's relationship with language, the Golem and the tradition Jewish mystical practice—are all more masterfully and effortlessly explored by Klein in his poetry. The dominant image of Klein that appears in the *Notebooks* is of a writer who, recognizing that the novel would attract the broadest readership, appears to be constantly driven to turn away from his natural vocation as poet toward an enterprise for which he possessed considerably less talent.

III

"This book is about a story," the reader is told in the first line of Zailig Pollock's critical biography of Klein, *The Story of the Poet*, "the story of the poet which A.M. Klein tells and retells throughout his career" (3). The story that Pollock tells in his book, however, is quite obviously less a reflection of the complexities of Klein's life and more a skilful paradigmatic rendering of Klein's career imposed on the poet by Pollock. As the title suggests, there is a single-mindedness to Pollock's reading of Klein which seeks to contain rather than necessarily explain Klein's work. It should be noted that no critic is more qualified to attempt to tell *the* story of Klein than Pollock. It is simply the usefulness of the effort that must be questioned.

The book has evolved directly out of Pollock's career as a leading Klein scholar which began in the late 1970s and culminated in his editing of the authoritative *Complete Poems* of Klein, published in 1990. Many of Pollock's claims in *The Story of the Poet* can be traced back to the findings offered in his articles on Klein, in addition to his introductory and explanatory notes for earlier editions of Klein's works. As a result, Pollock's *The Story of the Poet* is unequalled by any other existing study of Klein in terms of its precision in examining Klein's works, and in its ability to provide the reader with a fully realized sense of the historical, biographical, religious and social framework within which Klein was living and writing.

The version of Klein that Pollock evokes in *The Story of the Poet* is an individual simultaneously grounded in and entrapped by (or, at worst, at odds with) the community and culture in which he was raised. As Pollock himself phrases it, it is Klein's ambition "to unfold his vision of the One in the Many, as it is expressed over and over again in his own story of the poet" (9). It is the dual nature of this relationship with the community (or the "Many") that frustrates him while at the same time resulting in some of his finest work, much of which reflects, if not directly addresses, this struggle at once to champion and to disengage from the community. It is from this point of departure that Pollock contextualizes the entirety of Klein's artistic vision. In order to argue that this central obsession in Klein's life manifests itself "over and over again" in his work,

Pollock must focus his discussion on three works that most clearly support this paradigm, and discuss the remainder of Klein's *oeuvre* as it relates to these three works. The first of these three works, the poem "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens," was written in what Pollock sees as Klein's first great period of poetic productivity (the early 1930s), and addresses the relationship between Baruch Spinoza and his community. The second work, written in the mid-1940s (Klein's second intense period of poetic productivity), is the poem "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." Finally, once the greatest of Klein's poems had been written, he reaches artistic supremacy on one final occasion, with the writing of *The Second Scroll*, in which Pollock's paradigm is most evidently detected in "Gloss Gimel," where Uncle Melech interprets the Sistine Chapel. It is not surprising that Pollock, in this book as in much of his previous Klein criticism, allows his discussion of Klein to revolve around these three works. Not only is he correct in identifying them as three of Klein's most accomplished works, but they all clearly support his paradigm of Klein as a poet in conflict with his community. In attempting to establish the validity of his paradigm, however, Pollock appears to have privileged certain works while at the same time marginalizing many others that are worthy of further attention, but would be less likely to support *the story*. Moreover, the historical framework that Pollock expertly provides is presented only insofar as it conforms to his paradigm. In reading Pollock's *The Story of the Poet*, there is at once a sense of amazement that any critic can examine as complex a body of work as Klein's with the clarity and mastery that Pollock manages, and at the same time a mild sense of apprehension that Pollock may be too good a critic, in that he appears ultimately not attempting to facilitate future readings of Klein but to control readers' responses to Klein's work. To a certain extent, this may be the function of all critical biographies, but Pollock appears more strenuous than most in his efforts to narrow interpretations of Klein. Perhaps the book should have presented itself more as "*A* *Story of the Poet*, that is, as one attempt to interpret one of the most complex and evasive literary figures that Canada has produced. Pollock's criticism requires more of a sense that his version of Klein (originating from the privileged position of being among the first critics to approach Klein's original papers) is being designed and offered to participate in a dialogue with other critics, rather than presenting itself as the final word on a writer whose life and work obviously requires further debate.

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Having recognized how these three publications contribute to the institutionalization of a critical industry around the literary contribution of Klein, what remains to be determined is how this industry will evolve in the near and distant future. This issue is particularly pertinent at the present moment, since the upcoming publication of Klein's *Selected Poems* (another volume produced by the A.M. Klein Research and Publication Committee) will make it possible and practical for the first time for university courses in Jewish and Canadian literary studies to be designed around Klein's work. Among the tasks for the next generation of Klein critics will be the responsibility of assessing the vast

quantities of new Klein material that has rapidly appeared in recently years, and, on the basis of those new readings, to challenge existing impressions and representations of Klein by refocusing critical discussion onto some of the works that have been neglected in existing studies. As with other critical industries that have formed around other writers and their works, for the Klein industry to thrive, there must be as many stories as there are readers seeking the poet in his numerous poems.

Works Cited

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Harold Heft
