

LITERARY ATTITUDES IN ENGLISH CANADA,  
1880-1900

by

Thomas Donald MacLulich  
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APPROVAL

Name: Thomas Donald MacLulich  
Degree: Master of Arts  
Title of Thesis: Literary Attitudes in English Canada,  
1880-1900

Examining Committee:

Bruce Nesbitt  
Senior Supervisor

Lionel Kearns

John Mills

G.L. Cook  
External Examiner  
Assistant Professor of History  
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

Date Approved: July 29, 1971

## ABSTRACT

An examination of articles in literary periodicals and of many other separately published works shows that Canadian literary criticism of the late nineteenth century is not part of the history of ideas in the highest academic sense, but is part of the history of popular taste. Most of the prevailing attitudes are present in the initial reactions to the work of the Confederation Poets. Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and Campbell were largely responsible for a change in the tenor of Canadian criticism from pessimism to optimism. They were welcomed for their distinctively "Canadian" qualities and also, paradoxically, for their similarities to recognized British writers. Some critics, however, deprecated their work as mere nature descriptions with no spiritual or human meaning.

Critics debated whether Canada had a "distinctive national literature" or not. Their arguments were influenced by Canada's ambiguous political status. Some thought she could have no "national" literature because she was not a nation; others thought the development of a literature would hasten nationhood. Because the concept of literary development used was based on European models, it was thought Canada lacked traditions which would endow the Canadian scene with the allusive potential of European backgrounds.

Canada offered a writer only natural landscape or the picturesqueness of French Canada, both subjects incompatible with the highest art. Canadian critics often placed themselves in the awkward position of calling for a distinctively Canadian literature, yet believing that the characteristics which made it Canadian also made it inferior.

Critics felt literature had a strong influence on society, principally through its effect on morality. They demanded that literature express Christian attitudes, or at least not deal with morally offensive ideas. Advocates of "realism" and "idealism" debated whether literature should depict the world as it is or the world as it ought to be. Both sides, however, used moral arguments to support their views, and both positions were frequently coloured by a liking for the "romance" or novel of adventure and escape. It was usually held that art had a duty to be optimistic and cheerful, and several writers expressed a barely concealed distrust for all art. Canadian critics generally lagged behind advanced British thought, and took a conservative position on the critical issues of their time.

Critics often pointed out the failure of Canadians to support their own authors. As causes they cited Canada's newness, the influence of materialistic American attitudes, and the low standard of literary criticism in Canada. However, Sara Jeanette Duncan said that Canadians were poor critics and readers because they were Philistines at heart,

not because of any external influences. The way Canadian critics deferred to foreign judgments and to conventional opinions, their belief that some things are intrinsically "poetic," and their demands for optimism and amusement all support Miss Duncan's contention that the prevailing mentality was strongly Philistine. Literary attitudes in Canada were frequently middle class symbols of respectability, not signs of any real understanding of literature.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is misleading to assert, as does Norman Shrive, that the "only research" yet done on literary attitudes in nineteenth century Canada is Claude Bissell's article, "Literary Taste in Central Canada During the Late Nineteenth Century."<sup>1</sup> Everyone who has undertaken any extended critical work on a writer from this period has necessarily formed opinions about the prevailing climate of opinion, even if his observations were not set forth systematically, or were based on incomplete evidence. A. J. M. Smith, Roy Daniells, Alfred Bailey, Frank Watt, Carl Klinck, John P. Matthews, and Desmond Pacey, as well as Bissell and Shrive himself have all at some time considered the conditions surrounding literature during Canada's first years. In his Ph.D. thesis Robert L. McDougall has studied the nineteenth century Canadian background by means of the periodical literature of the time, and Carl Ballstadt has written an M.A. thesis dealing with nationalism in pre-Confederation literary criticism.

Nevertheless, the existing studies of the period offer a somewhat distant, generalized viewpoint. The short studies,

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. x. For Bissell's article, see Canadian Historical Review, XXXI (1950), 237-51.



in particular, are forced to simplify and omit the detail of their topic. In order to convey some aspects of late Victorian Canadian thought, and to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of certain attitudes it is really necessary to quote and paraphrase to an extent only possible in a longer study. Bissell and McDougall describe the prevailing attitudes in Canada with care and insight, and relate them to world-wide intellectual currents. But their work leaves room for study which would inquire into the mental processes underlying Canadian attitudes. To what extent were Canadian writers the prisoners of their ideas, not the masters? Did Canadian thought move only within certain narrowly prescribed boundaries, or was there room for innovation? How suitable for dealing with Canadian problems were the prevailing ideas of the time? Were Canadian writers part of the advancing frontier of thought, or were they behind their age? Answers to these questions are interesting in themselves, and provide a useful addition to our knowledge of the intellectual background of Canadian literature in the late nineteenth century.

Like Bissell's and McDougall's work, this thesis is based mainly on material drawn from Canadian literary periodicals. The files of these magazines have not been read in toto, but have been scanned for reviews and articles on current books, articles on particular writers old and new, and articles on general literary topics. As well, much of the separately published literary criticism of the period has been consulted.

For the most part this material consists of attempts to describe the historical development and current state of literature and culture in the new Dominion. Some works along more orthodox lines, especially studies of well-established writers such as Shelley, Tennyson, or Browning, also found their way into print in Canada, and have been examined.

The principal magazines of the period were Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly and National Review,<sup>2</sup> The Week,<sup>3</sup> and the Canadian Magazine, all published in Toronto. Except for a short gap in 1883, these magazines span the period. They were all serious in tone, with some intellectual pretensions, and all were conducted partly with the missionary motive of raising the intellectual life of Canada to a level equal with that of the Old World. Despite carrying a good deal of fiction and poetry, these magazines were not "literary" in the narrow sense of the term; however, they all carried regular sections of book reviews and frequent articles on literary subjects, and all attempted to promote the emerging literature of Canada. Rose-Belford's was the continuation of the intellectually prestigious Canadian Monthly and National Review<sup>4</sup> after its merger in 1878 with Belford's Monthly Magazine, a more popularly-oriented publication. The Canadian Monthly had been modelled on serious British journals such

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<sup>2</sup>Cited hereafter as Rose-Belford's.

<sup>3</sup>Cited hereafter as Week.

<sup>4</sup>Cited hereafter as Canadian Monthly.

as the Fortnightly Review and Blackwood's Magazine,<sup>5</sup> and its successor followed a very similar programme. The Week too was based on British examples, emulating weekly reviews such as the Spectator. Both Rose-Belford's and the Week were directed at an educated minority audience, which wished to keep abreast of the latest developments in the intellectual world, although the Week had the added topical appeal of dealing on a weekly basis with current events in Canada and elsewhere. Aimed at a broad middle-class audience and facing increasing American competition, the Canadian Magazine appeared in a more popularly appealing format, making greater use of illustrations and photographs, and using more spacious typography than the cramped double columns of the Canadian Monthly and Rose-Belford's or the folio pages of the Week. It also aspired to educate its readers up to the proper level of taste and knowledge, particularly with regard to their own country.

These were not by any means the only magazines of interest. Massey's Magazine, established in 1896, was called by John A. Cooper<sup>6</sup> "a brave attempt to make a ten cent magazine pay in Canada,"<sup>7</sup> and thereby to meet the Americans

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<sup>5</sup>The resemblance of Canadian Monthly to the British reviews is also pointed out by Elisabeth Wallace in Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>John Alexander Cooper (1868- ? ) was a journalist and author. He edited the Canadian Magazine from 1895 to 1906.

<sup>7</sup>"A Century of Canadian Magazines," Canadian Magazine, XVII (June, 1901), 149.

on their own ground. It failed to generate sufficient support and was merged into the Canadian Magazine in 1897.<sup>8</sup> Goldwin Smith's Bystander<sup>9</sup> made a periodic appearance, whenever its proprietor felt that his personal viewpoint was not being fully articulated elsewhere. At Queen's and McMaster Universities magazines of more than parochial interest were founded. Throughout the years under study the Methodist Magazine<sup>10</sup> was issued from the Methodist Book Room in Toronto. Although having strong religious preoccupations, it carried occasional reviews or articles on literary topics. J. W. Bengough's humorous weekly, Grip,<sup>11</sup> had a lengthy and presumably successful career from 1872 to 1894; in relation to this study, however, it can only be noted with regret that Bengough's talents were aimed almost exclusively at politics and politicians. Many other magazines appeared, most attempting to appeal to a general audience, but almost without exception

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<sup>8</sup>" . . . Massey's Magazine was published by Hart Massey, uncle to our new governor-general. He thought he could help Canadian Art and Literature. After eighteen months, he gave up the idea, and turned his subscription list over to Canadian Magazine, of which I was their editor" (Letter from John A. Cooper to the University of British Columbia Library, March 26, 1952, a partial copy of which is bound in volume III of the University's file of Massey's Magazine).

<sup>9</sup>The Bystander was published monthly from January 1880 to June 1881, and quarterly during 1883. A further series was issued monthly from October 1889 to September 1890.

<sup>10</sup>The title of this magazine varied. From 1875 to 1888 it was called the Canadian Methodist Magazine, from 1889 to 1894 the Methodist Magazine, and from 1895 to its demise in 1906 the Methodist Magazine and Review. It has been referred to throughout as Methodist Magazine.

they lasted only a short time.<sup>12</sup>

Although chronological boundaries are given in the title of this study, they have not always been strictly observed. Whenever it seemed appropriate evidence has been drawn from earlier and later publications, on the grounds that many attitudes necessarily originated prior to the period under scrutiny, and continued after the nineteenth century had ended. However, the present title has been retained in order to avoid echoing too closely the title of Bissell's article. In conducting the discussion the terminology adopted, especially with regard to fiction, has been as far as possible the terminology of the critics themselves. Extensive use of a conceptual framework drawn from the usual academic forms of criticism would tend to distort the way these writers actually thought about literature. For example, rather than any modern set of terms, the opposing terms "realism" and "idealism"<sup>13</sup> along with the term "romance" have proved best

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<sup>11</sup>Grip was edited by Bengough from its founding in 1872 until 1892, when Bengough departed for greener pastures in Chicago journalism.

<sup>12</sup>For a full listing of Canadian literary periodicals of the time see Dorothea D. Tod and Audrey M. Cordingley, "A Bibliography of Canadian Literary Periodicals, 1789-1900," Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd ser., XXVI, (1932), Section II, 87-96.

<sup>13</sup>These terms have been taken over from Robert L. McDougall's analysis of nineteenth century Canadian critical attitudes in "A Study of Canadian Periodical Literature of the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. Thesis (University of Toronto, 1950).

suitied to describe the critical categories applied to the novel.

The period covered by this study has been chosen to coincide with the rise to public recognition of the group of writers often known as the School of the Sixties or the Poets of Confederation. The Confederation Poets are not the only writers to achieve recognition during this period, but they are the most important. Many other poets emerged at this time and, as Gordon Roper points out in the Literary History of Canada, after about 1890 there was a marked increase in the output of fiction.<sup>14</sup> Novelists such as Gilbert Parker and "Ralph Connor" attained an initial reputation which has not lasted as has the reputation of the Confederation Poets. This group marks a distinct stage in the literary development of Canada. They are the first Canadian writers who have not been relegated to the darkness of literary histories and university lecture halls, once the spotlight of contemporary interest passed them by. To the general public, the names of Roberts, Lampman, Carman, Campbell, and D.C. Scott are still almost synonymous with Canadian poetry. Nor have they faded from academic view, although naturally the reasons for which they are admired have altered with time. The initial reaction to these writers has a particular interest. Within the period covered by this study they rose in status

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<sup>14</sup>"New Forces: New Fiction: 1880-1920," Literary History of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 260.

from unknown and aspiring versifiers to widely acknowledged Canadian classics. The eagerness with which they were acclaimed suggests that they filled a deeply-felt need of their time. An examination of the contemporary reactions accorded their books can tell us much about Canadian critical attitudes.

Accordingly, the first chapter, "The School of Canadian Poetry," discusses the initial reception given to the Confederation Poets. Reactions to the work of Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and Campbell are used to introduce most of the prevailing attitudes of the time. Chapter Two, "Nationalism," deals with ideas influenced by Canada's political position and by commonly held concepts of nationhood. The third chapter discusses attitudes reflecting widespread basic habits of thought. The mentality of the Canadian critic forms a major influence on the literary climate; the way issues are treated by writers reveals much about the kind of person who is dominating critical discussions, and thereby shaping popular attitudes. This factor is discussed in the fourth chapter, "The Philistine in Canada."

# I

## THE SCHOOL OF CANADIAN POETRY

The first of the Confederation poets to achieve recognition, and the recipient of the highest and most universal acclaim, was Charles G. D. Roberts. The year 1880 saw the publication of his Orion, and Other Poems, a book which has become a landmark in Canadian literature. The importance of Roberts as an example and inspiration to other Canadian writers has been attested by Archibald Lampman's well-known description of his reaction to Orion,<sup>1</sup> as well as by the writers cited here. In addition, it is particularly useful to begin this study by examining the reaction to Roberts, because the discussions of his work bring out almost all the main issues which faced a Canadian critic during the closing years of the nineteenth century.

Nationalistic considerations lay behind much Canadian criticism of the time. On the whole, although there was a strong tendency to depreciate merely descriptive poetry, the patriotic impulse to welcome that which was identifiably Canadian was the strongest single factor in the Canadian critical response. Or, when it was not the strongest, it ran a close second to the moral aspects of literature. The

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<sup>1</sup>"Two Canadian Poets: A Lecture by Archibald Lampman," University of Toronto Quarterly, XIII (July, 1944), 410.



way Roberts was first welcomed for his similarities to recognized English writers, the Canadian reliance upon foreign critical opinion, and the very desire to see a "school" of Canadian writing were part of a national insecurity. Canadians could feel more secure about their own writing (and thus about their own country) if it could be shown to be similar to European models. At the same time, the prevailing literary climate was one of expectancy and hope. The lack of Canadian books of international stature was felt as a blot on the national reputation, for literature was a necessary attribute of a civilized nation, and so far Canada had not produced a literature. Confederation, by conferring an ambiguous near-nationhood on Canada, raised both hopes and doubts. Many writers felt uneasy about Canada's position, suspended halfway between colonial status and nationhood. Perhaps the achievement of a literature worthy of a nation could help to allay the doubts about Canada's stature? Perhaps cultural nationhood could precede, and even hasten, political nationhood, which was thought by many to be Canada's destined goal? Such considerations go a long way to explain the sometimes inflated rhetoric which greeted Roberts' first books.

Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly and National Review hailed Orion as both a finished accomplishment and a sign of good things yet to come:

But first we would ask, does not the publication of such a book as this by Mr. Roberts, of New Brunswick, justify us in auguring good things of the spread of a genuine literary spirit in Canada? Here is a writer whose power and originality it is impossible to deny--here is a book of which any literature might be proud. 2

Roberts' second volume, In Diverse Tones, was greeted with even greater enthusiasm. In the Week the book was given a separate review article by Sara Jeanette Duncan,<sup>3</sup> rather than the usual anonymous review in the book section. Her review, like the reviews of Orion, saw Professor Roberts' poetry as the realization of a long-held hope for true literary merit in Canada:

There are few announcements in which the Canadian literary public might be expected to feel a livelier concern than in the appearance of a volume of verse by Professor Charles G. D. Roberts. For a long time they that watch and grow not weary over the germination of the divine art beneath our northern sun have comforted themselves with Professor Roberts' performances. The vehicle of his pen has carried Canadian thought farther we think along metrical paths than any other of British inspiration. Such bays as have been wrested from our silent forests, so full of ideality yet so unproductive of it, are his. And lest this be construed into meagre and unwilling concession we must add that they have been more than fairly won. 4

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<sup>2</sup>"Book Reviews," V (November, 1880), 553.

<sup>3</sup>Sara Jeanette Duncan (1862-1922) began her writing career as a journalist in Washington and later in Toronto and Montreal. After marrying and moving to India with her husband, she wrote many novels of Anglo-Indian life, besides her well-known The Imperialist (1904) which is her only book with a Canadian setting.

<sup>4</sup>"In Divers Tones," IV (March 31, 1887), 280.

In fact, Roberts was taken as established. His current work confirmed an opinion already held, but did not come as a surprise. In particular, he was already seen as the best poet English Canada had yet produced. A review in the Methodist Magazine said that In Diverse Tones was "one of the most important contributions yet made to our native literature."<sup>5</sup> While not attempting to rank him in relation to other Canadian poets, it did call him "the accomplished author of Orion," and said that his second book was "worthy of his fame."

With Roberts, as with Charles Sangster and Charles Mair, it was a resemblance to accepted British writers that earned him his first plaudits, not his distinctive Candianness.<sup>6</sup> The review in Rose-Belford's pointed out Roberts' debt to Keats and Shelley, and emphasized a resemblance to Tennyson, while defending him from charges of being a mere imitator. These names served to enhance Roberts' prestige by association, rather than to condemn him or demonstrate his limitations. In a similar way, the review in the Methodist Magazine stressed Roberts' skill in dealing with "classic [i.e. Greek] themes."

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<sup>5</sup>"Book Notices," XXV (April, 1887), 382.

<sup>6</sup>For comment on the critical reception of Sangster's The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay see John P. Matthews, Tradition in Exile (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), pp. 57-8. Norman Shrive's comments on the reception of Mair's first book are not so clear-cut on this point as Matthews' observations; nevertheless see Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p. 48, for useful information.

No other Canadian poet had ever caught the "classic mood" so well; Landor, Keats, and Swinburne were all invoked as appropriate comparisons to illustrate the level of Roberts' accomplishment. Roberts' Canadian publishers saw fit to advertise his second volume on the basis that it would be acceptable anywhere despite its origins:

Mr. Roberts has written a volume which will commend itself to every lover of literature. Although the themes he has selected are in many instances Canadian, his style and manner have all the breadth and finish of a cosmopolitan writer. These poems would command attention anywhere. 7

"Canadian" has been used as a term of derogation, and "cosmopolitan" as a term of praise: the colonial attitude, as described by A. J. M. Smith and John P. Matthews, is plainly operating here.<sup>8</sup>

The Methodist Magazine's review of In Divers Tones also introduced another important theme. Although their reviewer took Roberts' Greek subjects for granted as suitable for late nineteenth century poetry, he did not automatically apologize for the non-traditional, Canadian subjects of the other poems. On the contrary, he said: "We prefer, however, his Canadian ballads, in which he sketches with loving hand the 'long dikes of Westmoreland,' 'the green plains of

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<sup>7</sup>Week, IV (April 7, 1887), 312.

<sup>8</sup>A. J. M. Smith, "Colonialism and Nationalism in Canadian Poetry before Confederation," Canadian Historical Association Report (1944), 74-85; John P. Matthews, Tradition in Exile, pp. 58-9.

Tantramar,' the brown streams and flashing rapids of his native New Brunswick." Roberts was praised for his "sympathy with nature," a quality which came more and more to be considered the chief criterion for distinctively Canadian writing. The article also praised Roberts for the "stirring patriotic pulse" which throbbed in several of his poems.

As Frank Underhill reminds us:

Here in Canada we began our national life in 1867 as if still living in the early instead of in the later nineteenth century. Those who welcomed Confederation did so in romantic, idealistic enthusiasm. 9

Idealistic enthusiasm soon faded in discussions of politics, but it still found expression in Canadian literature, and was even more prominent in the response to that literature.

After his second book, Roberts assumed sufficient stature to become the subject of articles in the Week and the Dominion Illustrated. He could even provoke a romantic outburst by H. H. Pittman, "To Charles G. D. Roberts, on Reading 'In Diverse Tones'":

As feels the organ's soul at master's will,  
The full-toned diapason strain,  
And passionate grows; or, with equal skill  
Is soothed to tenderness again.

So, Master of the classics oaten-reed!  
Thy skillful strains me deeply move--  
Now, to some ardent, high-born, patriot deed  
And now, to gentle thoughts of love! 10

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<sup>9</sup>The Image of Confederation (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1964), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Dominion Illustrated, V (December 6, 1890), 379. The spelling in line 2 is Pittman's.

The Week included Roberts in their series on "Prominent Canadians." This article was the first of many to appear from the pen of Thomas Guthrie Marquis, a former pupil of the poet.<sup>11</sup> In many respects Marquis echoed previous opinions. He was not troubled by the effect of Keats or Shelley on Roberts; he liked Roberts' patriotic poems. But his article did introduce a significant new element into the discussion of Roberts' poetry. Although Marquis emphasized that Roberts' poems grew out of a close association with nature, he sometimes had reservations about the use of nature in the poems themselves. Besides minor faults of diction, Marquis said,

Another error is due to his love of being realistic. In the "Potato Harvest" he leaves nothing to be imagined, in "Tantramar Revisited" the description of the shore laden with ropes, nets, blocks, etc., becomes too much like a catalogue.

Rather than realism, what Marquis liked was idealism, or the seeing of the moral and spiritual truths veiled behind material appearances. Although he occasionally fell down, Roberts usually fulfilled this criterion to Marquis' satisfaction:

One of the great beauties of the whole of Professor Roberts' work is that, while he is true to his art, he has not fallen into the degrading Materialism or enervating Pantheism, which has wrecked so many of our younger poets. He sees clearly that the only permanent work is that which appeals to the eternal part of man, the spiritual.

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<sup>11</sup>"Prominent Canadians.--XXI: Professor Charles G. D. Roberts, M.A.," V (July 26, 1888), 558-9. Thomas Guthrie Marquis (1864-1936) was a high school teacher and Principal in Stratford, Kingston, and Brockville, Ontario.

The demand that art inculcate moral and spiritual lessons was widespread. Literature was often viewed as an adjunct to religion, or given a quasi-religious significance in itself. Marquis approved of Roberts' poetry because it generally supported Marquis' religious preconceptions. He disapproved of Roberts' purely descriptive poems because such attention to mere external appearances was too much like idol-worship. This indicates the essentially conservative role which it was held art should fulfill. Literature should reinforce or subtly bolster the received values of society. Literature should fit within the reader's preconceptions of what "good literature" is. Obviously, such feelings of recognition were behind Pittman's paean of praise.

The article on Roberts in the Dominion Illustrated was part of a series on "New Brunswick Authorship" by W. G. McFarlane.<sup>12</sup> McFarlane accorded Roberts the highest place in Canadian literature, calling him "Canada's laureate." His attitude to Roberts' nature poetry was closer to that of the Methodist Magazine than it was to Marquis' outlook. Indeed, McFarlane went further. He approved of Roberts' poetry not only because it was good, but also because it was distinctively Canadian. The distinctiveness came from its intimate relationship to the Canadian landscape, and was a quality which could be found in other writers besides Roberts:

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<sup>12</sup>"New Brunswick Authorship: Part III," VII (November 21, 1891), 494.

The poetry of Canada is distinctive. In its ideal it is a true reflection of its scenery. It is marked by a natural grace, charming melody and beautiful word painting peculiar to itself. It is characterized more by brilliant fancy than by a sublimer form of imagination. The beauty is picturesque rather than majestic. But besides this the ideal Canadian poetry is robust and pure in tone, and breathes a sentiment of true patriotism.

One who makes a careful study of Roberts' poems will find that he fulfills this ideal. There are other Canadian poets, particularly Lampman and Campbell, single poems of whose may be laid alongside Roberts' and will be found of equal or even greater excellence. But they do not fulfill all the requirements of the ideal as does Roberts. One is a Canadian nature poet, but not a patriot. Another is very fanciful, but not robust. Roberts' is all.

McFarlane's attitude still glorified the ideal aspects of art, and could not escape moral and patriotic overtones. It should also be noticed that even as he insisted on the close connection between Canadian art and Canadian scenery, he placed Canadian art in a lower, less exalted category, the picturesque, than the best and most sublime European art. Nevertheless, his insistence on the distinctive quality imparted by the Canadian landscape was a significant contribution to a theme which would be discussed by many other writers.

When the Canadian Magazine began publication in 1893, it soon contained an article on Roberts, again written by Marquis.<sup>13</sup> By now, Marquis had changed his ideas somewhat. He was much more ready to approve of Roberts' poems on Canadian nature, and less prepared to approve of his classical poems.

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<sup>13</sup>"Roberts," I (September, 1893), 572-5.



The classical poems were seen as rather forced and artificial exercises, which "show the scholar and the artist rather than the poet." They were not expressions of Roberts' own particular talents. "Given a certain amount of Hellenistic culture and the Grecian spirit, and any man with a fine ear might produce exquisite work in that line," Marquis suggested. Roberts' poems on the New Brunswick landscape were seen as his chief achievement:

Too much could not be said in praise of the poems mentioned. They are absolute transcripts of Nature. To one acquainted with Acadia, with sea-sights, sea-sounds, and sea-odors, they have the power of bringing these things vividly before the mind's eye. Roberts has done more to give the outside world an insight into the scenes of his native land than any historian or essayist could have done.

However, Marquis had not entirely discarded his prejudice against descriptive poetry. The article was chiefly about Roberts' recent tribute to Shelley, called "Ave, an Ode for the Centenary of the Birth of Percy Bysshe Shelley." Marquis wrote, "'Ave' is, I believe, the strongest and most original work of our poet. It is free from the faults of his early classical work, and from the intense realism of his more Canadian poems." In it, Roberts showed his great word-mastery: "The poem is a masterpiece of diction; every word is chosen with unique power, and yet is free from that obtrusiveness that mars the work of even such a word-master as Tennyson." As a lyrical outburst of feeling, the poem ranked with Adonais by Shelley and with Keats' "The Pot of

Basil." These comparisons indicate the international stature Marquis wished to give Roberts. He insisted that Roberts should not be considered merely a Canadian poet, for "to speak of a man in that insular way is apt to detract from his influence, even in his own land."

Nevertheless, without any sense of contradicting himself, Marquis ended his article by asserting that the most important task Roberts had set himself was the creation of a national spirit in his fellow Canadians. He saw Roberts as a spokesman for Canadian independence, rather than annexation or imperial federation:

Prof. Roberts might be considered the Coryphaeus of the Independence movement in Canada. His "Collect for Dominion Day," his "Canada," his "Ode for the Canadian Confederacy," are all full of the fire that makes a nation; and if the tide of national feeling only rises to the height that the hopeful amongst us anticipate, these songs will become deeply graven on the hearts of all patriotic sons of the "Child of Nations."

The publication of Songs of the Common Day in 1893 drew another review from Marquis, this time in the Week.<sup>14</sup> It appeared on September 22, in the same month as Marquis' article in the Canadian Magazine. The volume included "Ave" and Marquis repeated several of his previous comments on that poem. But mainly he concentrated on the nature sonnets, and on placing the book in relation to Roberts' previous work. Now, he said, it was obvious that Orion was immature, albeit

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<sup>14</sup>"Songs of the Common Day," X (September 22, 1893), 1023.

skillful, work, and In Diverse Tones was "unsatisfactory," although an improvement. But Marquis was able to approve wholeheartedly of the new book's stated desire to

see what beauty clings  
In common forms and find the soul  
Of unregarded things!

This sentiment accorded well with his own fondness for idealized or moralized nature poetry. He was able to impute his own dearest prejudices to Roberts:

Roberts has learned the lesson that mere description will not satisfy the heart, that beauty alone is not sufficient, that his creations must be given soul. At times he is almost didactic in his "application of ideas to life," but in every case the poem is, we think, greatly enhanced by the thought deduced from it.

Marquis' articles on Roberts held several ideas in unresolved tension. The desire to have a Canadian literature which could hold its own in international circles was at variance with the desire for a literature which would be identifiably and proudly Canadian, for to be a Canadian was to be provincial and second-rate. The apparent predominance of nature poetry in Canada was at odds with a desire for the most spiritual and ideal kind of art. In addition, the difficulty in accommodating Canadian nature poetry to current critical categories was part of a wider controversy between theories of "realism" and "idealism" in art. These are conflicts which recur constantly throughout the critical writings of the times, in relation both to prose and poetry.

Many of the issues raised by critics of Roberts' poetry are also mentioned in comments on the work of Archibald Lampman. Lampman, for some reason, attracted notice mainly from female writers. Among the Millet was reviewed for the Week by Mrs. Suzie Frances Harrison ("Seranus"),<sup>15</sup> with a second article appearing by Agnes Maule Machar ("Fidelis"),<sup>16</sup> while the article on Lampman for the Week's "Prominent Canadians" series was written by Lilly E. F. Barry.<sup>17</sup> Mrs Harrison noted that Lampman could remind one of Keats and Shelley, but that his inspiration really derived from Canadian nature and was therefore original. She commended Lampman's technical facility; in fact, she said, he was too good ever to be widely popular. Miss Machar also commented on the prevalence of nature poetry; but she, writing from an even more fixedly Christian moral viewpoint than Marquis, wished that Lampman offered less description and more interpretation--that is, more moralizing. Miss Barry introduced nationalism into the discussion, and pointed out that poetry was the highest form of national culture; a country was known by its poets. Therefore Canadians should pay attention to Lampman, even though he might not be a truly great poet. She also emphasized Lampman's sympathy

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<sup>15</sup>"Among the Millet and Other Poems," VI (December 28, 1888), 59. Mrs. Suzie Frances Harrison (1859-1935) was a journalist, poet, and novelist. She wrote frequent articles on literary subjects.

<sup>16</sup>"Some Recent Canadian Poems," Week, VI (March 22, 1889), 251-2. Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927) frequently contributed to Canadian magazines, and also wrote novels and poetry.

<sup>17</sup>"Prominent Canadian--XXXV: Archibald Lampman," VIII (April 10, 1891), 298-300.

with nature, tracing it back to a youth spent in rural Ontario. Even more, she emphasized his high spiritual tone and irreproachable morality: "It [Among the Millet] is, in a word, the product and exponent of a great soul, a gentle heart, a refined taste and a pure life." Lampman attracted this sort of comment more than any other of the Confederation poets.

In his article for the Canadian Magazine Arthur J. Stringer also commented on Lampman's seriousness.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, he said, "There is one strongly marked characteristic of the existing generation of Canadian poets--that is, intense seriousness." Canadian poets lacked the humour of their American counterparts, "but they have an earnestness and a loftiness of ideal that is sadly lacking in much American verse." Lampman was seen as the most Canadian of all Canadian poets. His nature poems were interpreted as near-literal transcriptions of natural scenery, evoking the Canadian landscape in all moods and all seasons. Stringer was not embarrassed by the extent of description in Lampman's work; on the contrary, he cited Lampman's descriptive accuracy as evidence of his power:

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<sup>18</sup>"A Glance at Lampman," II (April, 1894), 545-8. Although better known for his poems and novels, Arthur John Stringer (1874-1950) was a journalist in Canada before moving to the United States.

Lampman is a town man who likes to leave the fret and fever of the city and wander out into the quiet country, find a pleasant or striking landscape, and then examine and absorb it. Having done this he reproduces, with faithful minuteness, the scene, and it is in reproduction that one is impressed with his power of delineation and unerring detail.

Stringer's romantic concept of nature as the renewer of energies lost in town life was a better tool for dealing with nature poetry than was Marquis' distinction of realism and idealism. Stringer could concede that "Lampman sees nature in a peculiarly simple light; . . . his word-painted scenes . . . are more real than ideal." Yet he could still insist: "I do not mean that Lampman is what is called 'a realist'-- what poet could be one?" Description could serve a distinctly poetic purpose when it revealed something hitherto ignored or concealed: "It is the poet who finds the latent beauty in what the world thoughtlessly passes over as prosaic or repulsive." Even before his early death, Lampman seemed able to evoke the romantic image of the poet as a retiring, but uncannily perceptive person, somewhat ill at ease in the crass commercial world. Yet the picture was a happier one than that created by subsequent critics. Stringer wrote:

This poet is a healthy child of nature, nursed by that broad, strong mother, the innocent earth. Happily he has none of the morbidness to be found only too easily in several young Canadians; grey children grown old in their youth.

One of the "grey children" whom Stringer had in mind was surely Wilfred Campbell. Campbell's early publications received an enthusiastic welcome. In A. Ethelwyn Wetherald's

review of his first small book, his many publications in American magazines were cited, and his nature poetry was praised.<sup>19</sup> Campbell's winter poetry in Lake Lyrics was liked by Miss Wetherald and by a reviewer for the Dominion Illustrated. Miss Wetherald commended his success in solving the typical problem imposed by Canadian scenery; it was not his descriptive accuracy, but his skill in turning Canada's unbeautiful "mis-shapen crags" and dreary winter days into the occasions of beautiful poetry that pleased her.<sup>20</sup> In addition to praising the nature poetry, the Dominion Illustrated was equally enthusiastic about the poems in which spiritual and ideal themes predominated, such as "Lazarus."<sup>21</sup> Somewhat the same preference probably lay behind W. G. McFarlane's comment that the "Rev W. W. Campbell . . . is the Canadian Swinburne."<sup>22</sup>

With The Dread Voyage in 1893, Campbell's own preference became apparent. He had opted for the dramatic poem,

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<sup>19</sup>"Snowflakes and Sunbeams'," Week, V (November 29, 1888), 845. Agnes Ethelwyn Wetherald (1857-1940) was a journalist and poet.

<sup>20</sup>"Lake Lyrics," Week, VI (August 30, 1889), 615.

<sup>21</sup>"Editor's Table," III (August 17, 1889), 103.

<sup>22</sup>"New Brunswick Authorship: Introduction," Dominion Illustrated, VII (October 24, 1891), 401.

the spiritual and ideal theme. The Week's reviewer pointed out the apparent influence of Tennyson, and perhaps of Browning, on Campbell.<sup>23</sup> But it was Tennyson he approved, not Browning. He showed a great interest in "Sir Lancelot," while complaining that "The Dread Voyage" and "The Mother" were unpleasant reading. He preferred poems that were "joyous and hopeful in tone" and as examples he cited two nature poems. In general, however, the critical reaction to Campbell's shift was favourable. Pelham Edgar, then teaching at Upper Canada College, immediately set out to amend the Week's opinion. A month after the initial review, he published a rejoinder which said that The Dread Voyage was an improvement over Lake Lyrics, for it had a "robuster tone" and more variety.<sup>24</sup> The feminine "clinging dependency" of the first book had been replaced by a proper manliness. Edgar said that Campbell's nature poems were merely descriptive, and lacked high intellectual qualities, a failing which was general in Campbell's work and was most strikingly illustrated by his inability to write a good sonnet. Nevertheless, Campbell's best poems, such as "The Mother" and "Lazarus,"

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<sup>23</sup>"Library Table," X (August 25, 1893), 930.

<sup>24</sup>"William Wilfred Campbell's Earlier and Later Poems," Week, X (September 29, 1893), 1043-4.



were worthy of Coleridge or Poe.

Colin A. Scott presented a similar viewpoint in the Canadian Magazine.<sup>25</sup> If anything, he was more enthusiastic about Campbell's work. In The Dread Voyage, he said, Campbell had revealed his true inclinations:

He is manifestly feeling after something which he regards as more human than the weather or the wild flowers and the woods. He is not satisfied with this earthly paradise, however fair.

Although Lake Lyrics contained primarily descriptive poetry, occasionally there occurred "lines which seem to break through, and in their very raggedness reveal a depth of passion not sufficiently exhausted by the calm placidities of mere description." A slight at most Canadian poets was surely implied here. Unlike them, Campbell "is seeking some means of expressing more directly the great emotions which fill the hearts of men when they ask after the meaning of life and the mystery of death." It is evident that Scott wanted poetry to serve a near-religious function of spiritual guidance and reassurance. He defended Campbell from charges that his poetry was too "gloomy or pessimistic" by arguing that art had a responsibility to "bravely face the facts as they appear," not to avoid them:

It is no criticism to complain that Mr. Campbell's poetry deals so frequently with the gloom and tragedy of life. This gloom exists, and if art is to be true to herself, it must also be represented; and, indeed, is it not rather an alleviation of the misery natural to existence to have it called to our remembrance in beautiful words?

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<sup>25</sup>"William Wilfred Campbell," II (January, 1894), 270-4.

Scott was able to place Campbell in categories which he regarded as higher than the categories usually applied to Canadian poets. He said Campbell's "tendency is towards the sublime rather than the beautiful, the romantic rather than the classical." Plainly, he wished to include Campbell in a more universal classification than that of "Canadian," which was characterized by the prevalence of mere description. Similarly, his dislike for the "classical" in art was based on the feeling that restrained, self-contained technical mastery was a mere surface characteristic, and revealed no inner moral truths. Scott interpreted Campbell's winter poems as meditations on Death, not simply as description. He chose the controversial "The Mother" along with "Pan the Fallen" as the two "most completely satisfying" poems in the book. Although Scott disclaimed any desire "to fix Mr. Campbell's position in the great hierarchy of universal art," it is plain that he actually did wish to place Campbell on a level of near-equality with the best poets of England and in particular with Tennyson.

The initial reaction to Bliss Carman's work followed a familiar pattern. Several years before his first book was published, he was hailed by George Stewart as "A New Canadian Poet" in the mould of Roberts, his cousin and fellow "New

Brunswicker."<sup>26</sup> Stewart was impressed by Carman's inclusion in the Atlantic Monthly and by the "swing and force" of such poems as "Low Tide on Grand Pré," which he quoted in full. He approved of the aroma of Keats and Shelley, of Poe and Mrs. Browning, which clung to Carman's verse "like the bouquet which delicately rises from Château Lafitte." He approved of Carman's choice of Canadian subjects, and especially he liked Carman's hopeful, positive outlook, which was just the viewpoint a patriotic Canadian ought to have:

A poet of nature and patriotism he is bound to be. But little older than the Dominion in years, he, growing with the country, is full of hope for the future of Canada. And this feature of his work cannot be too highly commended. If we have no faith in ourselves, it is difficult for us to inspire others to have faith in us. Carman and Roberts rightly see that they are natives of a country which is full of possibilities. Canadian fruit, flower, manhood, and incident are the well chosen subjects of their songs, and they have invested some of the commonest things in every day life with a grandeur that almost reaches sublimity.

"Almost," but not quite: that was the best that could be done with Canadian materials.

As Carman developed he did not follow the path Stewart had mapped out for him. By 1891 Carman's tendency towards the weird and the supernatural had shown itself sufficiently that W. G. McFarlane could characterize him as a "Norse" writer and could find "a loftier imagination, a weird mystery not seen in Canadian song"<sup>27</sup> in Carman's poems. In the Week

<sup>26</sup>"A New Canadian Poet," Week, V (October 11, 1888), 734-5. George Stewart (1848-1906) was a prominent journalist. He edited Stewart's Literary Quarterly Magazine (1867-1872) and was editor of the Quebec Daily Chronicle from 1879 to 1896.

of 1892 a controversy broke out that would probably amaze the present-day readers of either poetry or magazines. The contentious issue was the alleged "obscurity" of Carman's poetry, specifically a poem called "Marjory Darrow," which had appeared in the New York Independent. The initial article was an editorial in the Week, entitled for the occasion, "What Does it Mean?"<sup>28</sup> The writer, citing Browning as the chief offender and example, complained about the current prevalence of poems which were accessible only to a select few readers. While he was proud to see Canadian poems in American magazines, lately he hadn't been able to understand many of them. He quoted two stanzas from "Marjory Darrow" and asserted his utter inability to make sense of them.

This article, not surprisingly, triggered a considerable response. Two weeks later the same writer returned to the topic, particularly disagreeing with comments by D. C. Scott in the Toronto Globe. Scott had argued that the apparently meaningless lines were in fact imitative of a thrush's song, and that the poem probably contained a "story, lyrically hinted at, after Mr. Carman's manner."<sup>29</sup> The Week's

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<sup>27</sup>"New Brunswick Authorship: Part II," Dominion Illustrated, VII (October 31, 1891), 424-5.

<sup>28</sup>IX (September 16, 1892), 660.

<sup>29</sup>"Marjory Darrow'," IX (September 30, 1892), 691. D. C. Scott's discussion appeared in the column "At the Mermaid Inn," September 24, 1892.

writer said that although the poem might be acceptable as a piece of verbal music, it was still (to him) obscure from an intellectual viewpoint. His opinion was seconded in the next issue by J. A. T. Lloyd, who cited examples from Homer and Virgil to show that sense, as well as sound, must be present in onomatopoeia.<sup>30</sup> Lloyd compared Carman's poem unfavourably to "The Throstle" by Tennyson, and complained that it was the current fashion to be obscure in poetry. This was not the end. The following week the other side was given a turn, when the Week quoted at length from a letter written by "an admirer and personal friend of Mr. Carman," who suggested that the poem told the story of a girl whose lover had died.<sup>31</sup> This letter was followed shortly by another, which revealed that Carman's admirer and friend had been "Pastor Felix" (Rev. Arthur John Lockhart).<sup>32</sup> Since writing the first letter, Lockhart said, he had been in touch with the poet himself, and Carman had told him that the poem was in fact the story of a betrayed maiden. The discussion finished here. Although the fundamental disagreement had probably not been resolved, it had at least been thoroughly aired. But it is interesting

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<sup>30</sup>"Onomatopoeia and Mr. Bliss Carman," IX (October 7, 1892), 709.

<sup>31</sup>"'Marjory Darrow' Again," IX (October 14, 1892), 723. Arthur John Lockhart (1850- ? ) also wrote poetry and contributed articles to Canadian periodicals.

<sup>32</sup> "Marjory Darrow Again," IX (November 11, 1892), 793.

to note that by 1895, when he had a weekly column entitled "The Reviewer," the Week's critic appeared to have come to terms with Carman; nevertheless, it was the nature poems in Low Tide on Grand Pré that he praised for their depiction of the "contrast between our feverish, futile lives and the calm, significant majesty of this world's beauty," rather than poems such as "Marjory Darrow."<sup>33</sup>

In an article in the Canadian Magazine for September 1895, Hector W. Charlesworth used the "wretched obscurantism so prevalent in the efforts of Mr. Bliss Carman and some of his imitators" as a horrible contrast to the laudable "health and sanity, and earnestness" of Pauline Johnson's work.<sup>34</sup> The view of Carman as an "obscure" poet seems more the result of certain preconceptions on the critic's part than of any actual difficulty in Carman's verse. Both J. A. T. Lloyd and the Week's own writer seem conditioned to regard anything of less than Tennysonian explicitness as part of the suspect school of Browning. Perhaps because of his "obscurity" and more certainly because of a lessening of Canadian themes in his work, Carman's subsequent books did not attract as much

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<sup>33</sup>"The Reviewer," XII (January 11, 1895), 155.

<sup>34</sup>"Miss Pauline Johnson's Poems," V (September, 1895), 478-80. Hector Willoughby Charlesworth (1872-1945) was a prominent Toronto journalist.

attention in Canada as his initial notices would lead one to expect (perhaps his removal to the United States had an effect as well). The trend is evident in Harry W. Brown's review of Behind the Arras, in which the Canadian characteristics were singled out but Carman was seen as becoming less of a "Canadian" poet.<sup>35</sup>

The reaction to the Confederation poets in great measure created a revolution in the tenor of comments about the state of Canadian literature. The comments of John George Bourinot<sup>36</sup> provide a good illustration of the change in the Canadian outlook during the last two decades of the century. In 1881 he emphasized Canada's recent emergence from the frontier state and the undeveloped state of her literature: "Some humorous writings, a few good poems, one or two histories, some scientific and constitutional productions, are alone known to a small reading public outside Canada."<sup>37</sup> But in 1900 he was able to cite the surprising progress which had come about mainly as a result of the efforts of poets born during the sixties:

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<sup>35</sup>"Bliss Carman's latest Book of Poems," Canadian Magazine, VI (March, 1896), 477-81.

<sup>36</sup>John George Bourinot (1837-1902) was Clerk of the House of Commons from 1880 until his death, and was an authority on constitutional law and on Canadian history.

<sup>37</sup>The Intellectual Development of the Canadian People (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, 1881), p. 117.

Perhaps the best estimate of the progress of literary culture in Canada can be formed from a careful perusal of the poems of Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman, Professor Roberts, Wilfred Campbell, and Frederick George Scott, whose poetic efforts have frequently appeared in the leading American and Canadian magazines, and more rarely, in English periodicals. I mention these names particularly, because from the finish of their verse and their freshness of thought they are confessedly superior to all other Canadian poets, and may fairly claim a place alongside those who now stand foremost amongst American poets since Longfellow, Emerson, Whittier, Bryant, and Lowell have disappeared. 38

The turn of the century brought other retrospective comments on the development of Canadian writing. Professor DeMille<sup>39</sup> wrote in the Canadian Magazine for September, 1900: "It is but recently that we arrived at what may fairly be called a national literature."<sup>40</sup> He saw Orion as the real beginning of Canadian poetry and cited the poets born during the sixties as an influential "school." Professor Horning,<sup>41</sup> writing in Acta Victoriana, asserted that Canada had now "a very respectable beginning towards a good literature," and that a "great change" was coming over both Canadian publishers

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<sup>38</sup>"A Short Review of Canadian Literature" (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1968), p. 196. First published London, 1900.

<sup>39</sup>Alban Bertram DeMille (1873- ? ) was professor of English and History at King's College, N.S. He was the son of James DeMille, the author of A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder (1888).

<sup>40</sup>"Canadian Celebrities 16: The Roberts Family," XV (September, 1900), 426-30.

<sup>41</sup>Lewis Emerson Horning (1858-1925) was Professor of Classics and Modern Languages, 1886-1891, and Professor of German and Old English, 1891-1905, at Victoria University, Toronto.



and readers, who were becoming more receptive to work by Canadian authors.<sup>42</sup>

But in the early eighties Canadian critics were anything but confident about the position of Canadian literature. In the Week for July 3, 1884, J. W. Longley<sup>43</sup> raised a call for "a distinctive national literature,"<sup>44</sup> implying that Canada as yet had no such thing. On August 28, 1884 J. E. Collins claimed there was no "Canadian Literature" worthy of the name--it was all bad.<sup>45</sup> Canada was still at the materialistic, near-frontier stage; people with their "sleeves rolled-up" didn't write poetry. Furthermore, Canada couldn't possibly have a "national literature" while she was so politically disunited. Nevertheless, as the best of a non-too-eminent bunch, he cited the young Roberts (who had at that time just completed a short term as editor of the Week). Collins' article appears aimed at debunking the claims of Canadian literary excellence being made by some other writers. Perhaps he was repelled by a form of double standard sometimes used by Canadian critics. For example, Mrs. Harrison said:

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<sup>42</sup>"Canadian Literature," XXIII (November, 1899), 312-3.

<sup>43</sup>James Wilberforce Longley (1849-1922) was a judge, historian, journalist, and politician. He was Attorney-General of Nova Scotia from 1884 to 1896.

<sup>44</sup>"A Field for Canadian Achievement," I, 485-6.

<sup>45</sup>"English-Canadian Literature," Week, I, 614-5.

A Canadian book can be viewed in two ways: it can be regarded as simply a Canadian book, and valued accordingly for its treatment and choice of Canadian subjects, or it can be compared with books published in other countries with regard to conception, execution, style, and weight and value of thought. 46

But the number of Canadian books which could stand the latter test was no more than six, she said. Roberts was included in this group, along with the older writers Heavysege, Sangster, Kirby, and Kate Seymour Maclean. But the rest of Canadian literature--except Isabella Valancy Crawford, who was actually the subject of the article--was dismissed as beneath notice.

As more of the Group of the Sixties published their first books, the older writers began to be supplanted. In 1887 the Week's editorial column answered a reader's query as to who was the best Canadian poet by citing Roberts, Charles Reade, and Charles Sangster, with a supplementary nod to Charles Mair.<sup>47</sup> But in 1889, after Lampman and Campbell had both published books, William Douw Lighthall,<sup>48</sup> fresh from compiling his anthology of Canadian poems for a London publisher, recognized that Canadian literature was no longer just a few scattered books:

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<sup>46</sup>"Isabella Valancy Crawford," Week, IV (February 24, 1887), 202.

<sup>47</sup>IV (March 24, 1887), 270.

<sup>48</sup>William Douw Lighthall (1857-1954) was a lawyer in Montreal. He wrote both novels and poetry, and edited Songs of the Great Dominion (London: Scott, 1889), an early anthology of Canadian poems.

A Canadian literature, promising to be fine, conscious and powerful, is budding and blossoming, book after book, writer after writer. The nature of it shows that it is a result of Confederation. Its generation is that which has grown up under the influences of the united country. 49

The writers he cited, in addition to F. G. Scott whose Soul's Quest he was engaged in reviewing, were Roberts, Mair, Crawford, Carman, and Campbell. Of these, only Mair was of the old guard. At about the same time, Louisa Murray<sup>50</sup> was moved to write an article defending the claims of Charles Sangster, whom she felt had been neglected amid the recent spate of publicity about the newer writers.<sup>51</sup> In the same volume of the Week Agnes Maule Machar cited Lampman's Among the Millet and A Gate of Flowers by Thomas O'Hagan, both recently published, as evidence that Canada did have its own literature.<sup>52</sup>

Thomas O'Hagan himself, who was perhaps even more active as a critic than as a poet, noted the emergence of the new poets. In 1890 he said, "But, perhaps, the foremost name to-day in Canadian song is that of Charles George Douglas Roberts, Professor of English Literature in King's College,

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<sup>49</sup>"Canadian Literature: F. G. Scott's 'The Soul's Quest'," Week, V (December 28, 1888), 56.

<sup>50</sup>Louisa Murray (1818-1894) was a frequent contributor to Canadian magazines, and wrote novels and poetry.

<sup>51</sup>"The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," Week, VI (December 7, 1888), 9.

<sup>52</sup>"Some Recent Canadian Poems," Week, VI (March 22, 1889), 251-2.

Windsor, Nova Scotia."<sup>53</sup> In 1888 he had grouped Mair and Roberts as evidence of "a distinctively national literature."<sup>54</sup> But in 1891, in a letter to the Week occasioned by the publication of Campbell's "The Mother" in Harper's Magazine, it was the whole group of new writers that received his commendation:

It is a matter of pride for every true Canadian that at present much of the healthiest and most virile verse appearing in the leading magazines of this country [he was writing from the United States] is the product of Canadian thought and inspiration. There is truly more than promise in Roberts, Lampman and Campbell, there is present achievement. <sup>55</sup>

Perhaps in reaction to Lighthall's 1889 anthology, which had attempted to be historically inclusive, another anthology was issued in 1893, chosen on quite different lines. J. E. Wetherell's Later Canadian Poems<sup>56</sup> boasted in its preface that it included no poem published before 1880. It contained extensive selections from the work of Cameron, Campbell, Carman, Lampman, Roberts, and F. G. Scott, as well as a "Supplement" containing poems by women writers such as Pauline Johnson and Isabella Valancy Crawford. The book was, as might

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<sup>53</sup>"Canadian Poets and Poetry," Week, VII (May 23, 1890), 389. Thomas O'Hagan (1855-1939) was a poet, essayist, and journalist. He also taught for a time in the Catholic high schools of Ontario.

<sup>54</sup>"Two Canadian Poets," Dominion Illustrated, I (October 27, 1888), 263.

<sup>55</sup>"A Poem of Great Merit," Week, VIII (June 12, 1891), 446.

<sup>56</sup>J. E. Wetherell, ed., Later Canadian Poems (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1893).

be expected, well received by Canadian critics. S. E. Dawson,<sup>57</sup> writing in the Week, said it was "redolent" with Canadian feeling, and was the best Canadian anthology yet produced. It could be shown to other English-speaking countries "with more satisfaction" than any other anthology.<sup>58</sup> The Canadian Magazine's reviewer also saw the book as distinctively Canadian, and emphasized the nature poetry it contained, as well as the patriotism:

Canadian scenery, Canadian life, and the vague aspirations of Canadian sentiment, find expression, sometimes in an exquisite manner, in nearly all of the writers; in fact, the volume is a distinct evidence that Canada has a literature peculiarly its own. 59

By 1896, the young poets had achieved a sufficiently eminent position to become the centre of a full-scale critical controversy in the pages of the Canadian Magazine. The attack began with a remarkable article by Gordon Waldron.<sup>60</sup> Waldron asserted that, while there was a considerable poetic output in Canada, its quality was poor--much lower than mere physical difficulties and lack of historic associations could explain. Most Canadian writers, he said, were "servile imitators" of a debilitating example:

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<sup>57</sup> Samuel Edward Dawson (1833-1916) was a partner and then head of Dawson Bros., publishers, of Montreal. He was Queen's Printer from 1891 to 1909. He also wrote books of criticism and history.

<sup>58</sup> "Later Canadian Poems," X (July 7, 1893), 756-7.

<sup>59</sup> "Book Notices," I (August, 1893), 507-8.

<sup>60</sup> "Canadian Poetry, A Criticism," VIII (December, 1896), 101-8.

A closer study of later publications discloses the fact that poetic inspiration runs fairly in the narrow channels made by a small coterie of writers, the chief among whom are Campbell, Carman, Lampman and Roberts. These poets, having won the ear of a generous and patriotic, though uncritical press, have been raised to an imposing authority, which restrains all originality and determined devotion to poetry as a fine art.

What Waldron objected to was the predominance of nature poetry in the work of these writers. He railed against "this everlasting plague of description," and his objections have a family resemblance to Marquis' reservations about Roberts' nature poetry. Using an Aristotelian formulation, Waldron said that poetry might imitate human action, universal ideas, or particular scenes. Of these, the imitation of human action was intrinsically the most interesting to readers; the detailed description of scenery was the least interesting, due to the natural unsuitability of words to perform a task better suited to paint and canvas.

Campbell, Carman, Lampman and Roberts can hardly be said by the most generous to have written anything of lasting merit . . . . Action they scarcely attempt, unless it be action to strut before impossible landscapes. Their works are singularly barren of ideas of universal human interest, although there is a constant recurrence to Wordsworth's idea of kind mother earth.

Waldron criticized each of his four targets in turn. Roberts was compared unfavourably to Wordsworth, because his descriptions were too detailed, whereas Wordsworth always kept his general moral lesson before the reader, and used only generalized descriptions. As a result, claimed Waldron, "Mr. Roberts inverts the usual relation of poet and reader.

The poet should awaken general images in the reader's mind, not force upon him the poet's own particular images."

Lampman was guilty of the same mistakes. Although his poems often began well, they were not properly developed: "He has a habit of broadly suggesting scenes which is very effective, and of going on to treat them in a way that is very tiresome." His poems would have been improved if he had only stopped short "after the moral proposition, the human interest, has been announced." The resemblance is clear between Waldron's desire for "human interest" and Marquis' desire for ideality.

Waldron attacked Bliss Carman because he felt the narrow range of Carman's poetry, its obscurity of narrative line, and the weirdness of its subject-matter made it less than first rate. But Carman appeared in the article mainly as a stick with which to beat Lampman and Roberts. "Although he is a descriptionist," said Waldron, "he is often more effective than Roberts or Lampman." Carman had faults,

And yet readers will turn from Roberts and the others to Carman for relief. He is a greater artist; he writes to affect our imaginations, not to teach them the images of his own. He deals with life, vague and fantastic though it be.

Wilfred Campbell, on the other hand, fared even harder than Roberts and Lampman. With particular relish, Waldron detailed Campbell's descriptive excesses:

If description be the crowning effort of poetry, he is entitled to take his place beside Ariosto and Bombastes. A new order of beings must be created to appreciate him, for surely, there is not in all the stores of imagination the material of his fancy.

Campbell was taken to task for lack of taste, inept metaphors and inappropriate words, and for expressing unorthodox opinions. It was Waldron's sense of the proprieties, his sense of decorum, that Campbell offended most. Even his better poems, those which possessed some human interest were spoiled to a great extent by insensitive excesses:

In these days of liberal thought, a poet even may go a long way in satirizing the clergy without giving offense. But the reader of poetry is disposed to be very manly, and will find his pleasure destroyed by the iteration of an unfriendly sentiment, where it is spoken gratuitously and not addressed to an offensive individual suffering poetic justice.

Campbell's "The Mother," which so pleased Thomas O'Hagan and others, incurred Waldron's severest censure. It showed Campbell's "unrefined taste" carried to extremes. "Poetry cannot tolerate the disagreeable, except in rare instances," Waldron said. But Campbell gave a "wanton repetition of coarse suggestions of the charnel-house." Moreover, Campbell offended against feminine modesty: "The physical conditions of maternity are regarded with so great reserve and delicacy that only the most veiled allusions may be made to them." Campbell's treatment simply was not admissible in poetry. Waldron ended his article by suggesting that the failure of Canadian poetry might be part of the general failure of "moral enthusiasm" throughout the world. This of course was a common viewpoint: things are always going downhill, in some people's eyes. But it is typically a moralist's argument, not a literary critic's.



It is obvious there is a strong streak of the Philistine in Waldron. Some of his opinions are interesting for this very reason. Yet he was not without insight. His isolation of the particular characteristics of Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and Campbell agrees reasonably well with present-day conclusions. It is the way he evaluated this data with which we would quarrel today. What Waldron considered to be weaknesses in Roberts and Lampman we would consider strengths. The virtues he found in Carman are the qualities which have relegated him to a position beneath Lampman and Roberts. Only in the case of Campbell might we agree to an extent, but we find merit in others of Campbell's poems which Waldron would criticize. Of course, if a sufficiently high standard is used, a case can be made for Waldron's rejection of these poets; admittedly, they are not among the major figures of English literature. But Waldron's judgment was not of this kind. The violence of his reaction shows that it was based on deeply ingrained prejudices, which these poets appeared to him to violate. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, the article made an important contribution to Canadian criticism by insisting on considering these poets together, as a group having similar poetic characteristics, despite their differences.

Waldron's viewpoint was unpopular enough to provoke an answer in the Toronto Globe, as well as a full-length rebuttal in the Canadian Magazine by A. B. DeMille.

DeMille's article was entitled "Canadian Poetry--A Word in Vindication."<sup>61</sup> It set out to show that Waldron was wrong in his general theories and his particular judgments. First, DeMille appealed to foreign opinions. Many poems by these poets had been published in American magazines such as The Century, Scribner's, and Harper's "and the editors of these periodicals are not without knowledge as to what constitutes literary worth." Then he pointed out that Waldron's blanket condemnation of description would exclude a great many recognized classics of English poetry. While it might not fit Waldron's definition, Canadian poetry did fulfill the requirements of the noted critic E. C. Stedman: "'Poetry is rhythmical, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion and insight of the human soul'." Furthermore, Canadian poets demonstrated the education, technique, and originality required of good poets. Waldron had simply failed to notice the human interest that was present in Canadian poetry. DeMille proved this by quoting in full "The Sower," which Waldron had also quoted, but for the opposite purpose. DeMille's method, in the main, was to quote Canadian poems and assert that they were good. His article was really more affirmation than it was argument. Once he pointed out Waldron's prejudice against description he was

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<sup>61</sup>Canadian Magazine, VIII (March, 1897), 433-8.

confident his readers would be convinced by an authoritative-sounding voice, backed by foreign authorities, urging the merits of Canadian poetry. DeMille was confident that he was presenting the popular side of the argument; he felt he was saying what his readers wished to hear.

Roberts' reputation remained high during the years under study, and the tendency to refer to a Canadian "school" of writers increased. The revised perspective at the end of century is well illustrated in an article by Duncan Campbell Scott, himself one of the poets involved. In the Canadian Magazine for June 1901, Scott gave an account of recent developments in Canadian poetry.<sup>62</sup> "Modern Canadian poetry may be said to have begun with the publication, in 1880, of 'Orion,' by Charles G. D. Roberts," he began. Of the earlier poets, only Heavyside was comparable in quality. Scott's explanation of Roberts' appeal is revealing:

Almost for the first time a Canadian reader whose ear was attuned to the music of Tennyson, Keats and Arnold might, in quoting one of his own poets, do so with the feeling that here at last was verse flowing with the stream of general poetical literature.

Later, Scott referred regretfully to the fact that Roberts' "classical manner . . . has unfortunately in succeeding books quite disappeared." Scott then described the early development of "the now existing school of Canadian literature," listing books by Cameron, F. G. Scott, Lampman, and Campbell.

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<sup>62</sup>"A Decade of Canadian Poetry," XVII (June, 1901), 153-8.

His attitude to the grouping of these poets as a "school" is worth examining:

The term, School of Canadian Poetry, might be accepted with hesitation and some diffidence had not various competent critics adopted it uniformly. As applied to the group of writers usually mentioned under the appellation it may be too pretentious. It is valuable in that it conveys the idea of nationality, and if the Canadian people cannot thank its poets for immortal verse it may thank them for having forced the recognition of a growing national literature separate from that of the American Republic.

It was the political implications of the label that pleased Scott most. Canada had made a declaration of independence in her poetry, if nowhere else.

Scott cited a great many names, but he gave by far the greatest amount of space to Lampman. In discussing his late friend, he might well have still been thinking of Waldron's attack of five years earlier. Referring to the collected poems which he edited, he said:

I trust the collected poems dispelled the illusion that had arisen, that he was a poet occupied altogether with descriptions of nature. Nature in his interest came very near to man, but did not occupy the foremost place.

Scott insisted: "There are but few of Lampman's poems that do not lead from nature by a very short path to human life." He cited such poems as "The City of the End of Things" and "The Largest Life" as evidence that as Lampman developed he had become less descriptive, and had observed "a more just balance between the division of his genius." Had Lampman lived, Scott said:

it is clear that the power for growth and the solid philosophy which possessed his mind would together have produced a finer, more spiritual poetry, a poetry giving more of comfort and more of insight into life than any he has left.

It is evident that Scott's theories coincide closely with Waldron's: poetry must have "human interest"; it must offer some uplifting thought or moral comfort. But Scott is not as blinded by his theories as is Waldron. He is able to sense the human relevance of Lampman's nature descriptions. Yet it is plain from his approval of Lampman's development away from pure description that Scott's theories cannot quite keep pace with his natural sympathies. At the time it was written, the poetry for which Lampman and the whole "school" are best remembered did not fit easily into critical concepts of what constituted good poetry, although some of Wilfred Campbell's poetry fitted more readily into the accepted categories, and Scott could comment approvingly on the "essentially dramatic quality of his [Campbell's] gift." "None of our poets have so frequently grappled with the greatest problems of life and destiny," and "the humanism of his poems is their most striking quality," he asserted. The other poets who received more than passing mention were Carman and Drummond. Carman was praised for his individual manner, and Drummond for the picturesque distinctiveness of his French-Canadian characterizations.

Scott concluded his article by observing that there had been a lack of appreciation of Canadian poetry by the

Canadian people. The ambiguity of their national position made Canadians uncertain how to take Canadian poetry: "Our time, if not out of joint, is at least thewless. It is the uncertain aim, the lack of any national solidarity that acts and reacts upon everything thought and done." There was no Canadian poetry which could be said to be "popular" in Canada; foreign approval had played a large part in achieving such success as existed. It had not been England that welcomed Canadian verse, he said, but the United States "with whom we share mental affinities." "Mr. William Dean Howells made the success of Lampman's first book," and E. C. Stedman's inclusion of Canadian poets in his Victorian Anthology "did much to gain acknowledgement for our poets as worthy to rank in a final summing up of the work of the era." In his recognition of the North American quality of Canadian poetry and in his judiciously balanced judgments, Scott seems more perceptive than most of his fellows. His final summary could stand even to-day:

At present it is wise to judge this poetry in the mass, and not by particular example. So judged it gathers into a sphere of very considerable importance. It is inspired by wholesome ideals and filled with the genuine spirit of nature; it is an advance upon pre-Confederation poetry, and it forms a standard and reference for future Canadian writers.

## II

### NATIONALISM

Politics and literature have always been linked in  
Canada. Early Canadian critics, especially when they were  
dealing with Canadian materials, could not for long confine  
themselves to the realm of pure esthetics. Their reactions  
frequently merged into, or were confused with, their feelings  
on other matters. One main source of such interactions is  
the political emotion of the critics; the feelings known  
variously as nationalism, patriotism, or national spirit play  
a prominent part in their deliberations. This is not simply  
an emotional matter. The critics thought literature and  
art had important roles to play in any nation's life.  
Literature and art were expressions of the spiritual and  
non-material aspects of man; they determined the maturity  
of a nation; determined, in fact, its degree of civilization.

The Dominion Illustrated asked:

if the word is ever true that man was not made to  
live by bread alone, and that no progress is of  
real worth which does not include the exercise of  
man's higher faculties, must not a nation's  
development, too, be measured by the success with  
which its mind has found expression in scholarship,  
in thought, in imagination, in invention? <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Literature in Canada," V (October, 1890), 243.

Art and literature, viewed in this way, acted as indicators of the moral and spiritual worth of a nation. "Its literature, more than all else, proclaims the depth of the life of a nation," observed Massey's Magazine.<sup>2</sup> But often, one suspects, less noble motives intruded. Lilly E. F. Barry proclaimed:

a nation's patent of nobility is her poet's list.  
 Not Alexander, but Homer, immortalized his country,  
 Virgil is greater than Caesar; the land of  
 Shakespeare takes precedence of the land of Wellington;  
 the pen of Longfellow is mightier than the  
 sword of Washington. 3

Any critic who thought in this way might feel compelled to press the claims of his own country's artists and writers, and might scan the literary horizon with unusual eagerness, searching for the rising young writer who could redeem Canada from the literary wilderness. After all, every other great nation-state had her own well-established literature. Canada too needed a literature. Canada also aspired to national greatness, and "Has any nation ever become truly great until she have [sic] given birth to a literature?"<sup>4</sup> the Canadian Magazine asked.

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<sup>2</sup>"Valedictory," III (June, 1897), 447.

<sup>3</sup>"Prominent Canadians.--XXXV: Archibald Lampman," Week, VIII (April 10, 1891), 298.

<sup>4</sup>A. H. Morrison, "Education vs. Cram," I (April, 1893), 175.



{The critic's task was complicated by the political facts of life in Canada.) As Underhill says, Canadian nationalism began in a burst of "romantic, idealistic enthusiasm."<sup>5</sup> Nationhood was to be Canada's salvation, the solution to her every problem. In literature, the emergence of a "distinctive national literature" was eagerly awaited. But by the eighties, the ardour had cooled somewhat. Confederation had not healed her regional, linguistic, and religious divisions. { Moreover, Canada had not jumped "from colony to nation" in one bound. Her leap had fallen short, and she hung in limbo, uncertain which way she would finally fall. Would she stay under the protective wing of Great Britain in some kind of imperial federation? Would she achieve a fully self-sufficient independence? Or would she be swept into the United States' orbit of power? } No one could tell. Only one thing was certain: she would not stay as she was. "That this great country can for ever remain in the present limbo between dependency and nationality, nobody ventures to assert,"<sup>6</sup> wrote Goldwin Smith. Most people agreed.

{But in her present state, Smith said, Canada was disqualified from achieving a fully developed literature:

What dependency ever had a literature? The whole history of mind shows us that there is a close connection between the intellectual fruitfulness of a nation and its general life. The stirrings

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<sup>5</sup>The Image of Confederation, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>"Imperial Confederation," Bystander, I (March, 1880) 121.

of literary activity appeared in this country simultaneously with a faint beating of the pulse of nationality. 7

For Canada to have a "national" literature was impossible, a contradiction in terms. "What is wanted to give birth to a national literature is a nation," said Smith bluntly.<sup>8</sup>

It was not necessary to agree with Smith's annexationist ideas in order to agree that lack of nationhood had a debilitating effect on Canadian literature. F. Blake Crofton,<sup>9</sup> whose sentiments inclined to imperial federation, asked (in commenting on a letter by Goldwin Smith):

May not the somewhat disappointing growth of Canadian literature be in some part due to the lack of a full national life, with its wider horizon, its more important political issues, and its more stimulating environment? 10

Nationhood would give Canadian writers the self-confidence and sense of their own importance which was needed to produce literature of significance. A nation would also create the deepest feelings of patriotism, which a dependency could never elicit. And patriotism, said William Douw Lighthall, had the

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55           <sup>7</sup>"Canadian Literature," Bystander, I (January, 1880)

<sup>8</sup>"Free Public Libraries," Bystander, III (January, 1883), 67.

<sup>9</sup>F. Blake Crofton (1841-1912) was librarian to the Legislature of Nova Scotia from 1882 to 1906, and was a member of the Haliburton Society.

<sup>10</sup>"Glimpses at Things," Week, XI (September, 1894), 1020.

power to inspire: "Patriotism is part of religion. If we have real patriots, then a literature will follow--the burning word will accompany the burning deed."<sup>11</sup> Other writers pointed out that patriotism or national feeling could not be created from nothing; they required a sense of a common past and shared deeds. ] Perhaps Canadians must take part in some great struggle or historical event before they could take themselves seriously as figures of universal importance. "We must have something strong and great within us before we can produce anything strong and great. Canada must be born again," said L. O'Loane.<sup>12</sup> M. F. Libby wrote that "The world is too old to allow us to hope that we shall achieve great works of art without national struggles and sacrifices."<sup>13</sup> One can sense that a forceful assertion of Canada's full political independence, even in the face of opposition, would be welcomed by these two writers. Perhaps Colonel Denison's "rattling war"<sup>14</sup> with the United States would satisfy their prescriptions. The lack of such events constituted a highly regrettable deficiency in the

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<sup>11</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 1894), 416.

<sup>12</sup>"Our Chances for a Literature," Week, VII (February 28, 1890), 200.

<sup>13</sup>"Canadian Literature," Week, X (March 3, 1893), 318-9.

<sup>14</sup>See Tradition in Exile, p. 84. Col. George Taylor Denison (1839-1925), a Toronto lawyer and magistrate, was a member of the "Canada First" group. He was fascinated by things military, especially by the cavalry.

Canadian past. Something needed to be done. "Without a history of great deeds, and a literature to honour it," wrote G. Mercer Adam<sup>15</sup> in 1886, "the happiness of a people, in times like these, is not likely to be very marked, or to find expression in a career which is patriotic or in any other way commendable."<sup>16</sup>

However, this was not the only viewpoint. George Stewart said, "I do not believe in the idea, that until Canada is an independent nation, she can never have a literature."<sup>17</sup> Earlier he had suggested that the "growth of a large leisure class" would further the development of Canadian literature more than even independence would.<sup>18</sup> Many writers saw Canadian materialism and Philistinism as the chief obstacles to literary development. These writers often felt that the chief opponent of Canadian literature was the Canadian public itself. The apathy and lack of patriotic feeling among the Canadian people bordered on the treasonous. John A. Cooper exclaimed:

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<sup>15</sup>Graeme Mercer Adam (1839-1912) was a journalist and author. He edited the Canadian Monthly for all but one year of its life, and wrote numerous articles and books.

<sup>16</sup>"A Well-Nigh Forgotten Chapter of Canadian History," Week, III (September 9, 1886), 652.

<sup>17</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 30, 1894), 415.

<sup>18</sup>"Letters in Canada," Week, IV (June 16, 1887) 461.

Talk of patriotism--there isn't enough patriotism in the literary tastes of Canada to keep one good novelist from starvation. Talk of patriotism--and the whole nation fattens its literary flesh on paper-covered trash and subscription books, all the work of literary hacks who never had an ideal in their lives. 19

G. Mercer Adam complained, "We may found new magazines . . . but without patriotic feeling, or any well-defined national sentiment to support them . . . they are in danger of sharing the fate of their ill-starred predecessors."<sup>20</sup> The lack of spiritual support was just as serious as the lack of material reward. Sara Jeanette Duncan observed:

A spirit of depreciation of such faint stirrings of literary life as we have amongst us at present has often been remarked in Canadians, a tendency to nip forth-putting buds by contemptuous comparison with the full blown production of other lands, where conditions are more favourable to literary efflorescence. 21

The achievement of Canadian writers, Adam said, had occurred despite the political situation and the negative attitude of the Canadian public:

If the native intellect in literature has achieved anything creditable in Canada, it has been in spite of colonialism and the chilling influence of a non-descript and heterogeneous people, lacking in national sentiment and the ennobling characteristics of a nation. 22

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<sup>19</sup>"People and Affairs," Canadian Magazine, XVII (September, 1901), 484.

<sup>20</sup>"Literature, Nationality, and the Tariff," Week, VII (December 27, 1889), 59.

<sup>21</sup>"Saunterings," Week, III (September 30, 1886), 708.

<sup>22</sup>"Native Literature and the Scoffing Spirit," Week, V (January 5, 1888), 85-6.

He lamented that "The difficulty in some quarters seems well-nigh insurmountable of getting our people to see that Canada has a history and something more than the mere beginnings of a literature."

Adam's article continued in a revealing way. "It is not affirmed, or course," he wrote, "that the one [history] is of phenomenal interest or that the other [literature] is of transcendental merit and importance." Adam was caught in a typical Canadian dilemma. The claims of nationalism and the claims of literary merit seemed to be contradictory. There were frequent complaints that Canadian reviewing was often uncritical puffing of the homegrown product, and equally frequent complaints that Canadian readers rejected Canadian books out of hand as incapable of meeting the highest international standards, merely because they were Canadian. We can observe these contradictory attitudes at work in the Week's review of Crowded Out, a book by Mrs. Harrison:

Few Canadians will read Mrs. Harrison's little volume without being obliged to struggle against the temptation to say too much about it. It is only, we must tell ourselves again and again, a volume of sketches, and can by no means be set up as the measure of our general possibilities as a people, or our particular possibilities as the author. Yet it is so full of a spirit that is strange to Canadian literature that we may easily pardon ourselves if in our pleasure in apprehending it we rejoice more than beseemeth us. It is the true spirit of art that we find informing these pages of Mrs. Harrison's. They are fraught with poetic instinct, and they have an aim beyond the mere presentation of certain more or less picturesque facts. 23

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<sup>23</sup>"Recent Fiction," IV (February 3, 1887), 160.

John A. Cooper explained the dilemma, at the same time as he showed that he was caught in it. The attitude which welcomed Canadian books merely for the sake of their origin had existed in the past, he admitted. But now in 1899 "The Canadian books and periodicals that were good enough for the last generation of readers, are not good enough for this."<sup>24</sup> Yet two years earlier he himself had written:

If cultivating a national literature is taken to mean unduly encouraging young and inexperienced writers, lauding everything that is printed regardless of inherent merit, buying Canadian books simply because they are Canadian, and petting Canadian writers simply because they live in the land of "The Maple Leaf," then we are "faddists" indeed. This is encouragement, but it is not judicious encouragement. 25

But he was still capable of urging, even in 1899, that

Canadian journalists and Canadian readers own a duty to themselves and their country, the sense of which should be strong enough to insist that Canadian literature should have first place on their reading tables and on their bookshelves. 26

In the years immediately following Confederation, the critical assessment of Canadian literature inclined to pessimism. The Canadian Monthly and Rose-Belford's confined their writing on Canadian literature to reviews and occasional articles on older writers such as Heavyside and McLachlan.

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<sup>24</sup>"A Volume of Reviews," Canadian Magazine, XII (April, 1899) 552.

<sup>25</sup>"Current Thoughts," Canadian Magazine, VIII (January, 1897), 276.

<sup>26</sup>"Editorial Comment," Canadian Magazine, XII (November, 1898), 81.

There were no articles on "Canadian Literature" as such. Yet the tone was by no means completely negative. On the publication of Kirby's Chien D'Or, the Canadian Monthly's reviewer remarked that, "The impetus given to the national feeling by Confederation, is beginning to bring forth fruit in a nascent literature, redolent of the soil, and entirely our own."<sup>27</sup>

Yet only a year earlier the same magazine had greeted a Canadian book containing a drama and an ambitious long poem by asking: "For what audience was it prepared, and where, in Canada, are the sympathetic readers with taste for such compositions?"<sup>28</sup>

The Week, with a publication schedule which allowed a controversy to proceed swiftly enough to generate some heat and interest, was always open to discussions of whether or not there existed a "Canadian literature." Both sides of the question found expression on its pages. In many articles G. Mercer Adam, who was one of the most vocal proponents of Canadian literature, castigated those who denied there was or could be any such thing. Of articles which questioned the existence of a Canadian literature, he said, "They are simply pieces of senseless journalistic atheism, happily rare--wicked and

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<sup>27</sup>"Book Reviews," Canadian Monthly, XI (May, 1897), 564.

<sup>28</sup>"Book Reviews," Canadian Monthly, IX (January, 1896), 82.



unscrupulous denials that any literary good has come out of the Canadian Nazareth."<sup>29</sup> J. E. Collins noted in 1884 that, "Mr. G. Mercer Adam has always been identified with our literature, saying good words for it when it hardly deserved good words, and blowing breath into its nostrils when it looked so like a corpse."<sup>30</sup> But Collins' own viewpoint, as expressed in the very article containing his tribute to Mercer Adam, was that "There is no Australian literature, no Heligoland literature, no Rock-of-Gibraltar literature: neither is there a Canadian Literature." In Canada in 1884 "We are yet only the pioneers of the future Canada; our wealthy classes are not yet born; and a people who have their sleeves rolled up could be no more expected to read than to produce polite literature." Not only was Canada backward in a material sense, but she was politically too divided to have a unified literature. Naturally, the quality of the writing produced so far reflected this primitive state of development. Collins thought that "In historic literature we have a number of books, most of them very poor, the balance of them not very good," and "In fiction we can make only a wretched exhibit," while "In poetry we have some that is very good, and some that is very bad." Only in scientific writings would he admit: "we have very prominent names and conspicuous

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<sup>29</sup>"Native Literature and the Scoffing Spirit," Week, V (January 5, 1888), 86.

<sup>30</sup>"English-Canadian Literature," Week, I (August 28, 1884) 614.

work." Pessimism seems to have been in the air at this time, when Canada was mired in a prolonged period of economic recession. Even the usually hopeful Mercer Adam thought there was a general "interregnum" in literature, which in Canada could be explained by "the ebbing out of the national spirit, a growing intellectual callousness, and a deadening of interest in the things that make for the nation's higher life."<sup>31</sup>

Attitudes changed in the nineties. By the end of the decade economic prosperity had returned. In literature, the advent of new writers such as Roberts, Lampman, Carman, and Campbell also had created a more confident outlook. Assurance radiates from the opening sentences of Thomas O'Hagan's article on "Canadian Poets and Poetry":

Canadian poetry is racy of the soil. It has within it the life and national aspirations of our people. It voices the past--the heroism of our fathers in the wilderness, the growth of Canadian manhood, the deeds of each battlefield, the hope and promise which are fast ripening into the heritage of a nation. Canadian poetry is prophetic in its inspiration. In it we read the larger life of our future. It has caught up, too, the sounds and hues of Canadian skies, Canadian lakes, Canadian streams and forests. While acknowledging a loyalty to the mother land, it sings the birthright of a new nation in notes that greet the stars. 32

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<sup>31</sup>"An Interregnum in Literature," Week, I (June 12, 1884), 439.

<sup>32</sup>Week, VII (May 23, 1890), 389.

O'Hagan cited as evidence poems by the French Canadians Fréchette and John Talon Lesperance<sup>33</sup> and the English-Canadians Roberts and McLachlan.<sup>34</sup> In all but McLachlan's case, it was a ringing patriotic piece which he quoted. At this time Mercer Adam also turned out a series of articles which argued that only by achieving independence could Canada achieve a truly national literature, but in the meantime patriotic writing could help bring the day of independence nearer.<sup>35</sup> Professor L. E. Horning, in opening his series of articles on "Canadian Literature" in the Week in 1894, considered that the state of Canada augured well for the progress of Canadian literature:

The two great factors which inspire to grand and lasting work in any department of national life are faith in the Fatherland and faith in the future perfecting of the conditions of life. . . .

Applying this to Canada, may we not reasonably draw the conclusion that what we need is, not so much wealth and leisure, but hope, full, enthusiastic, and such as inspires to great deeds? 36

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<sup>33</sup> John Talon Lesperance (1838-1891) was a journalist and author. He was editor of the Canadian Illustrated News and the Dominion Illustrated.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander McLachlan (1818-1896) immigrated from Scotland to Canada and farmed at several locations in Ontario. He wrote several volumes of verse, based partly on his Canadian experiences. He was sometimes called the "Canadian Burns."

<sup>35</sup> "Canadian Literature," Week, VII (July 4, 1890), 486; "Literature, Nationality, and the Tariff," Week, VI (December 27, 1889), 59-60; "The Repression of Art Culture," Week, VI (May 31, 1889), 405-6.

<sup>36</sup> "Canadian Literature: Introductory," XI (May 18, 1894), 583.

The present state of Canada--in economics, in politics, and in morals, public and private--was such, said Horning, as to inspire this hope. The Week's own editorial staff emphatically stated their faith in Canada, as they refuted that arch-enemy of Canadian nationalism, Goldwin Smith. The Week asked:

Why should Mr. Goldwin Smith--a modern Hamlet--delight in throwing a big squirt of ice-cold water on every little sprout in Canadian life which gives evidence of underlying warmth and vitality? The attitude he assumes towards all Canadian desires and enterprises, if shared in by our people, would mean eternal stagnation.<sup>37</sup>

Goldwin Smith said Canada could not have a national literature because she was not a nation. The Week felt this argument was a mere quibble:

Perhaps it is not strictly accurate to say that there is a national feeling in Canada, for a colony is not a nation; but there is a Canadian sentiment strong and vigorous and animating, and this sentiment must and will find expression in native production and from a native press. What we want is men of faith and generous feeling, not belittlers and dismal sceptics. Canadian literature is all right. There is nothing the matter with it beyond what time will rectify. . . .

But there were factors associated with Canada's dependent status which not even the most enthusiastic patriotic rhetoric could conceal. Not only did Canada stand in the cultural shadow of Britain and the United States in point of age and size, but also the facts of international law worked

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<sup>37</sup>"Mr. Goldwin Smith and Canadian Literature." XI (September 7, 1894), 965.

against her literary interests. In its early years the Week called for the establishment of "international copyright" in order to abolish the literary "communism" that resulted from piracy of books,<sup>38</sup> and Goldwin Smith pointed out the economic evils that resulted from lack of protection for Canadian publishers.<sup>39</sup> But a Canadian copyright bill was not introduced until 1889, and was rejected by the British Parliament, both then and again in 1895. By then it had been realized that additional factors had to be considered, namely the Berne Convention and American International Copyright Act. The Berne Convention provided international recognition of copyright among all signatory nations and guaranteed accessibility of markets. The American Act recognized foreign copyright in all nations which extended reciprocal protection to United States authors. However, all books sold in the United States had to be printed there, from plates made up within the country. The United States did not sign the Berne Convention, and the requirement for domestic

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<sup>38</sup>J. E. Collins, "International Copyright," I (December, 1883), 5-6; G. Mercer Adam, "The Doom of Literary Communism," I (February 21, 1884), 183.

<sup>39</sup>Week, I (December 20, 1883), 35; Week, I (June 26, 1884), 466. Goldwin Smith's views of copyright were, as usual, unique to himself. In 1880 Smith examined the issue as a question of conflicting commercial interests, and predicted that the big battalions would win: that is, that the American producers of cheap reprints would succeed in preventing any international copyright agreement. The American publishers could then keep on pirating British books (Bystander, I [September, 1880], 518-20). Indeed, Smith went so far as to predict the complete demise of copyright, even in England, due

printing was actually at variance with the Convention (although it was tolerable because of the large size of the American market).

It appeared that the Canadian legislation might violate the Berne Convention in the same way; although the plates could be imported, Canada too would require books to be printed domestically. Moreover, when Britain entered the Berne Convention, she had brought her Empire with her, as part of the same market. Some people claimed the Canadian act was simply an attempt at legalized piracy by a small group of publishers, who wanted the right to reprint foreign books at small cost, as provided by the act, if no authorized edition was arranged with a prescribed time limit. It was also feared that the requirement for Canadian printing would exclude many books, since the Canadian market could not support separate printings of any but the most popular books. Despite these very real economic questions, the copyright issue really resolved itself into a political question. Was Canada a sovereign nation, or was she still a colony? Could she legislate for herself, or couldn't she? Mercer Adam cited

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39 (continued) to the public's demand for cheap editions (Bystander, II [May, 1881], 258-61). The end of copyright was justified by Smith, on good Manchester principles, as the triumph of free trade (Bystander, III [July, 1883], 169-70). Yet he appeared to desire a Canadian copyright law, when he blamed the lack of copyright laws for the financial failure of a Toronto publisher (Week, I [December 20, 1883], 35). Smith opposed the requirement for Canadian printing in the proposed Canadian act because he felt the Canadian market was not large enough to make it commercially viable. The result would simply be the exclusion of most books (Canadian Magazine, V [October, 1895], 551-3).

Britain's 1889 veto of the Canadian copyright bill as evidence that Canada was not a nation.<sup>40</sup> In 1895, when the bill was again being considered in Britain, some writers urged that Canada enact and enforce her own laws, regardless of what the English Parliament said. Others asked why Canada would want to do anything that would tend to lead her out of the friendly confines of the Empire. No satisfactory solution was worked out at the time, despite a flying visit by Hall Caine, on behalf of the British Authors' Association.

Like many Canadian issues, the copyright question could be viewed not simply as a debate over Canada's colonial status, but as an argument between independence and imperialism. Imperialism coloured many attitudes, including those involving literature. Many Canadians, whether they had been born in Britain or not, claimed English history and literature as their own. The Canadian Magazine could say of a book which appeared to favour France over England: "The man who slanders my heroes, who depreciates my nation's victories-- why should I love him even long enough to review his book sympathetically?"<sup>41</sup> The Dominion Illustrated, in declaring that it had no party bias, could equate "national spirit" and "loyalty to Great Britain":

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<sup>40</sup>"Literature, Nationality, and the Tariff," Week, VII (December 27, 1889), 59-60.

<sup>41</sup>"Books and Authors," XII (November, 1898), 86.

But we do intend to show a national spirit; to uphold with whatever power we have a Canadian nationality and loyalty to Great Britain; to stimulate to as great a degree as possible the feeling of pride in the Dominion and in the Empire. 42

Anyone who could ask, with A. H. F. Lefroy, "What is there in this conception of a united British Empire which so stirs the minds and warms the hearts of men?"<sup>43</sup> would not be receptive to the idea that Canada should emancipate herself from the domination of British art and culture. He would see Canadian literature as an integral part of "English" literature: that is, he would divide the English-speaking world into just two spheres of influence, the British and the American. Membership in the one would mean exclusion from the other. Given the prevalent anti-American bias, there was little doubt which he would choose; he would look for and approve the resemblances of Canadian literature to British models, not its differences from them.

The dependency of Canadians on British models is apparent in other, subtler ways, which could affect even those who were not overtly imperialistic. One of the chief romantic metaphors for understanding literary development was the

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<sup>42</sup>"Our Position," VI (March 7, 1891), 218.

<sup>43</sup>"British Hopes and British Dangers," Canadian Magazine, I (May, 1893), 177.



analogy with the organic growth of a plant. But when this metaphor was adapted to Canadian conditions it took on some new implications. Canadian literature was seen as a "stem" planted in a new country,<sup>44</sup> or as an "offshoot" on English literature "growing under new conditions."<sup>45</sup> Mercer Adam described both art and literature in Canada as being

occupied in the patriotic work of redeeming the country from the thorns and briars of a literary and an artistic wilderness, and of nursing into flower the tender but thriving plant of Canadian nationality. 46

From these passages a composite picture can be constructed: Canada was a literary wilderness, uncultured and uncultivated; the literary plant which must replace the native "thorns and briars" was a foreign variety, a grafted "stem," or an "offshoot" of a non-native plant. The local flora were not considered worth cultivating; they were the weeds which threatened the vulnerable new growth. The underlying attitude revealed here saw Canadian literature as modelled on British or European examples, but as a smaller and inferior version of the parent stock, requiring special care and an apology for

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<sup>44</sup>J. W. L. Forster, "Art in Canada Today," Week, VIII (March 13, 1891), 233. John Wycliffe Lowes Forster (1850-1938) was prominent Canadian painter, specializing in portraits which were praised for revealing character, not just cataloguing facial features. He also painted Canadian historical pictures.

<sup>45</sup>George Stewart, "Letters in Canada," Week, IV (June 16, 1887), 461.

<sup>46</sup>"The Repression of Art Culture," Week, VI (May 31, 1889), 405-6.

its undeveloped appearance.

The call for a "distinctive national literature" takes on new dimensions if, instead of examining the meaning of the word "national," we now turn to writers who chose to explore the implications of the word "distinctive." Although many writers desired a "Canadian" literature, very few actually faced squarely the problem of describing what would distinguish a Canadian poem or novel from any other poem or novel.

In poetry, the chief distinguishing characteristic was generally said to be the preponderance of verse descriptive of the natural landscape. In fact, so common was this view that it became the target for satire. Jeremy Clay's poem, "The Poet's Debt," described the method of operation of a typical Canadian poet:

A poet sat upon the shore,  
And watched the waters flow,  
Oh, what a debt, indeed, he cried,  
To nature do I owe!  
A magazine did buy his rhymes,  
And paid him promptly, too;  
But somehow still that poet's bill  
Is running overdue. 47

In an environment and society lacking European traditions, the early critic might well be pardoned for thinking that there was no other subject but nature available to the Canadian artist or writer. Canadians, as Hector W. Charlesworth argued, were rendered insignificant by their surroundings, so that

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<sup>47</sup>Canadian Magazine, V (October, 1895), 559.

Canadian scenery was a more appealing subject than Canadian humanity:

We in Canada grow up so near to Nature that the little doings of men have somehow been viewed by our poets merely in relation to the vastness of Nature as we know her. The throbbing song of heartbeats is drowned by the music of the trees and winds and many waters. Canada's people occupy a very small portion in the vast landscape of Canada herself, and no one cares to look too closely upon life while there is still so much of the green things of the earth to love. 48

Thomas O'Hagan traced the close connection of nature and Canadian literature back to pioneer days:

Girdled with the mighty wilderness in all its multiplying grandeur, the soul, though bowed by the hardships of the day, was stirred by the simple but sublime music of the forest, and drank in something of the glory and beauty of nature around. Poetic spirits, set in the very heart of the forest, sang of the varying and shifting aspects of nature-- now of the silvery booklet whispering at the door, now of the crimson-clad maple of the autumn-tide, now of the mystical and magic charms of the sweet season, "the summer of all saints." 49

In general, two points of view could be expressed about the close identification of poetry and natural scenery. The connection could either be approved and encouraged as a way of defining the specific Canadian identity, or it could be criticized as cutting Canadians off from the subjects of the best art. Those who approved of the connection usually saw some kind of special merit in the relationship between man

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<sup>48</sup>"The Canadian Girl," Canadian Magazine, I (May, 1893), 186.

<sup>49</sup>Canadian Essays (Toronto: Briggs, 1901), pp. 55-6.

and nature as inculcating a special virtue into his life:

It is not to be wondered at, then, that the heroism of our fathers in the forest gave soil to a spirit of heroism in Canadian poetry, and that the wholesome virtues of honesty, uprightness, industry and good cheer find reflection in the life interpretation of our people. 50

W. A. Fraser,<sup>51</sup> in a speech to the Canadian Press Association, found a quality in our stern climate which would infuse a superior virtue into Canadian writing and writers.<sup>52</sup> Fraser's ideas also distinguished between the non-British softness of continental literature and the stern Saxon morality of British writing, and were tinged with racism and imperialism. The word "literature," he said, "has much too soft a ring. It is suggestive of dilettantism, of Lake Como in everlasting sunshine. It is trippingly sweet." On the other hand:

What we need here in Canada, and, for the matter of that, wherever the elongated, crimson-dotted postage stamp goes,<sup>53</sup> is a literature that abounds in stories of strong, true, beautiful deeds. But above all else we must have Truth. We are strong, rugged people. Our country is great in its God-given strength--its masculine beauty. Canada is one of Mother Earth's bravest, sturdiest sons. Even our climate is boisterous and strength-producing. Strength begets Truth, and Truth makes strength God-like.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> William Alexander Fraser (1859-1933) was a poet and novelist, but was best known as the author of popular animal and adventure stories. He was sometimes called the "Canadian Kipling."

<sup>52</sup> "Literature: An address made at the recent annual banquet of the Canadian Press Association, by W. A. Fraser," Canadian Magazine, XIII (May, 1899), 34-7.

The way to obtain the desired truth and moral uplift in our writing was to send our young writers out into the Canadian wilderness: as Fraser put it, "out into the university of God."

The emphasis on nature coloured the critical judgments made about writers who had worked in Canada, and were therefore considered "Canadian." In an article dealing with the immigrant poet Alexander McLachlan, Donald McCaig said that, like most poets who had written in North America, McLachlan was not distinctively North American in his writings.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Whitman was the only undeniably "American" poet. McLachlan portrayed Old World values with only "a stage setting of Canadian backwoods." In describing the hypothetical truly Canadian poet, McCaig commented that "The Canadian poet has little else than natural scenery wherewith to build." By this standard, while he might be a praise-worthy writer, McLachlan was not truly "Canadian." Similarly, it could be made a point of criticism against F. G. Scott that his poems were "too cosmopolitan."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>This stamp was issued by Canada to commemorate the introduction on Christmas day, 1898, of imperial penny postage (actually two cents in Canada). "It shows a map of the world on the Marcator projection, with the Empire indicated in red. At the foot of the design is the motto 'We hold a vaster Empire than has been!' The motto is taken from a line in A Song of Empire, an ode by Sir Lewis Morris, which was composed in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the reign of Queen Victoria" (Harrison D. S. Haverbeck, The Commemorative Stamps of the British Commonwealth [New York: Van Nostrand, (1955?)], p. 57).

<sup>54</sup>"Alexander McLachlan," Canadian Magazine, VIII November, 1897), 520-3.

Later Canadian poets did develop a poetry which was based on Canadian scenery and was therefore distinctively Canadian. Although some critics, such as Waldron, still objected to nature poetry, most writers greeted this development with approval. But the terms in which their approval was granted deserve to be examined more closely. These critics did not face the Canadian situation as something new which required new reactions. Instead, they interpreted Canada in terms of the old critical categories. In attempting to include Canadian nature poetry within the European idea of art, the category most often invoked was that of the picturesque. This is plainest in discussions of painting. In a series of articles on "Canada as a Field for the Artist," T. Mower Martin leaned heavily on the word "picturesque" in describing the various subjects potentially available to the Canadian artist.<sup>56</sup> To the foreign visitor in Canada "the picturesqueness that is detected by the artist" was not apparent. But Martin described the various tribes of Indians "all picturesque and waiting for the artistic eye and hand

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<sup>55</sup>"A New Book of Poems," Canadian Magazine, IV (January, 1895), 287.

<sup>56</sup>"Canada as a Field for the Artist," Week, X (July 28, 1893), 824-5; "Canada From an Artist's Point of View," Week, X (October 20, 1893), 1111-3; XI (February 2, 1894), 225-7; XI (June 20, 1894), 729-31; XII (June 21, 1895), 706-7. Thomas Mower Martin (1838-1934) was known as a painter of Canadian landscapes. He illustrated Campbell's Canada.

to perpetuate their peculiarities";<sup>57</sup> he pointed out the artistic quality of the Quebec habitants and the German settlers in Ontario, and of farmers and rural landscape in general. He concluded his series:

Yes, on the whole the Canadian artist need not wander far for subjects for his brush, while he has not only the peculiar features of Canadian life proper to draw upon, but in one part of the country, the old French life and in another the old fashioned German, not to mention the peculiar features of Indian and halfbreed life and manners for his field of supply. 58

An emphasis on the picturesque was equally plain in McFarlane's articles on New Brunswick authors. Like Fraser, he suggested a link between Canadian scenery and virtue. Mainly, however, he emphasized that Canadian poetry was "picturesque rather than majestic," and was "characterized more by brilliant fancy than by a sublimer form of imagination."<sup>59</sup>

These qualities placed Canadian art on a lower level than the highest European art. "Louis Lloyd" (Mrs. Lillian Rood),<sup>60</sup> writing in the Week, stressed the difference between English and Canadian scenery, and the need for a completely different artistic approach:

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<sup>57</sup>Week, X (July 28, 1893), 824.

<sup>58</sup>Week, XII (June 21, 1895), 706-7.

<sup>59</sup>"New Brunswick Authorship: Part III," Dominion Illustrated, VII (November 21, 1891), 494.

<sup>60</sup>Mrs. Rood was journalist in Montreal. Before her marriage she had been the "Orthodocia" of Sara Jeanette Duncan's A Social Departure: How Orthodocia and I Went Round the World by Ourselves (1890).

To treat our wild, wayward country according to the dictates of the English school would be certain death. Ours is not a landscape of great trees, as tufted and prim as funereal plumes; embryo rivers, and velvety fields; but of unfinished aspect, akin to what one finds in a country lad, to whose delineation must be brought quite a peculiar talent. 61

Not just the differentness, but the less civilized character of the Canadian scene is stressed; Canadian landscape (and the artists who depict it) are being patronized. The same attitude was assumed by other writers, including the redoubtable Goldwin Smith. Smith's comments were made about painting, but they apply equally to descriptive nature poetry:

We have no "old poetic mountains," to breathe inspiration, nor anything historic or romantic to lend a human interest to the scene. If we could even give birth to a Turner, the materials for his imagination to work upon would be wanting. 62

Agnes Maule Machar made a similar comment when she wrote that "Canadian art suffers inevitably from the bare newness of the country, and the almost utter lack of the picturesque elements which the old world derives from medieval and classical antiquity." 63

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<sup>61</sup>"Montreal Letter," V (February 9, 1888), 169.

<sup>62</sup>Bystander, III (July, 1883), 213.

<sup>63</sup>"The Art Aspects of the Centennial," Canadian Monthly, XI (February, 1877), 152.



That is, Canadian nature was unable to provide the highest kind of beauty, that of hoary antiquity or of scenery rendered evocative by historical association. Yet the Canadian writer was faced with conventions of subject-matter derived from life in Europe. Anything which violated the reader's past experience would be suspect, unless its strangeness has been rendered quaint or exotic. W. P. Begg complained that the indentifiably Canadian poems of Alexander McLachlan were that poet's weakest work:

There is in them a good deal that seems a commonplace and tame; various limping and broken rhymes; and some indications of coarseness--which latter fault may belong perhaps to the subjects dealt with. For there is much that is rough in the backwoods. But why should subjects incompatible with true artistic taste be introduced into poetry at all? 64

The objection here is more one of violated expectations than of actual artistic faults.

The subject-matter of Canadian fiction was not as restricted as that of poetry. Any part of the Dominion and any aspect of its life was potential material for the Canadian novelist. However, critics and writers were presented with a distinctly Canadian problem. John A. Cooper reported that "a much debated question among Canadians" was:

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<sup>64</sup>"Alexander M'Lachlan's Poems and Songs," Canadian Monthly, XII (October, 1877), 361.

"Is Canadian life as a whole romantic and artistic, or is it commonplace?"<sup>65</sup> He tried to refute the prevalent opinion that English Canadians and English Canada, in particular, were "flat, inartistic, and without colour." He cited Professor Mavor<sup>66</sup> as referring to "the unpaintable character of the atmosphere, and also of much of the landscape, and of all domestic interiors" in Ontario. Cooper suggested that the fault really lay with Canadian artists (with the honourable exception of Homer Watson), and he cited the example of American novelists to prove that contemporary North American life could be made into the stuff of art. However, his language betrays a peculiar bias. He holds out the hope that some day English Canada may have "a painter or a novelist, who will show us the artistic and romantic side of Ontario life." What he means is, not that ordinary life is an adequate subject for an art that would be realistic, but that Ontario life has as much quaintness and picturesqueness as the Old World, if only someone would look closely enough.

In contrast to Ontario, Quebec had a particular appeal to the sensibilities of Canadian writers. This came about largely because the concept of the picturesque included more

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<sup>65</sup>"Editorial Comment," Canadian Magazine, XI (July, 1898), 264-5.

<sup>66</sup>James Mavor (1854-1925) was Professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, 1892-1923.

than just scenery. It also covered whole peoples or societies which to European eyes appeared less developed than their own, or perhaps simply appeared exotic or quaint. Thus, the histories of the French and the Indians in Canada were especially amenable to being included under the category of the picturesque. William Kirby's The Golden Dog and John Talon Lesperance's The Bastonnais were early Canadian novels which appealed to the public interest in this era, as did the novels of Gilbert Parker. A review of Gilbert Parker's The Pomp of the Lavillettes said approvingly that "any story with scenes laid in the Province of Quebec must possess a great deal of the picturesque and the romantic."<sup>67</sup> Parker himself, in an interview conducted for Massey's Magazine, declared that, except for Quebec, Canada was not a good subject for a novelist. Most of Canada was "serenely unpicturesque;" Canada was too new, and "the life of the people . . . has no glamour on it."<sup>68</sup> By an ironic twist, much of the Canadian attitude to Quebec can be traced to one American source: the works of Francis Parkman. Parkman's histories were popular enough to be ranked among the favorite reading of a group of six Toronto gentlemen, who expressed their preferences at a dinner-party poll reported by John A. Cooper.<sup>69</sup> It was Parkman who had shown that Canada was a fit subject for the poet and

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<sup>67</sup>"Books and Authors," Canadian Magazine, IX (May, 1897), 90.

<sup>68</sup>W. J. Thorold, "Gilbert Parker: An Interview," III (February, 1897), 118-9.

novelist, or so many Canadians thought. An anonymous reviewer in the Week wrote:

The whole period of the French régime in America, as Parkman's prose epics so vividly show, abounds in heroic achievements, daring adventures, and romantic incidents; and it is a matter of surprise that novelists and poets have not more frequently sought in this treasury for themes for romance and song. 70

The influence of Parkman spanned the entire period. Even in 1907 Wilfred Campbell was certain that:

When one reads Parkman, Canada ceases to be a mere northern desolate region of iron-bound, inhospitable coasts, trackless forests, and lonely lakes and rivers. It becomes at once a romantic and enchanted land, the theatre of incidents and events both heroic and historic, and as beautiful and sublime in its vast backgrounds as the glamour which heroism, religion, the charm of race, and love of adventure can throw over the characters and communities which made it their stage and ideal. 71

When they did not take it over as their own, as Kirby did in The Golden Dog, English-Canadian writers envied the colourful history of French Canada, believing that Quebec's history gave French Canadian writers a more solid foundation of subjects and traditions on which to base their work. The French-Canadian poet was often pictured as deriving his inspiration from his province's picturesque and romantic

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<sup>69</sup>"The Strength and Weakness of Current Books," Canadian Magazine, XII (May, 1899), 10.

<sup>70</sup>"Onnalinda," V (March 8, 1888), 235.

<sup>71</sup>Canada (London: A. & C. Black, 1907), pp. 49-50.

history. J. Howard Hunter told the readers of Rose-Belford's:

M. Fréchette, and his poetic brethren of Lower Canada, Lemay and Crémazie, revel in the romantic past, which, in the presence of inspiring scenery, induces in them a wild ecstasy.

. . . . .  
The source of M. Fréchette's inspiration lies in the romantic legend and scenery of his own Province. His style retains a flavour of the days of Gouverneur Frontenac and the Grand Monarch. . . . 72

John George Bourinot expressed similar romantic assumptions about the sources of French Canadian poetry:

When we compare the English with the French-Canadian poets, we can see what an influence the more picturesque and interesting history of French Canada exercises on the imagination of its writers. . . . Dollard, and the lady of Fort La Tour, are themes which we do not find in prosaic Ontario, whose history is only a century old--a history of stern materialism as a rule, rarely picturesque or romantic, and hardly ever heroic except in some episodes of the war of 1812-15, in which Canadians, women as well as men, did their duty faithfully to king and country, though their deeds have never yet been adequately told in poem or prose. 73

G. Mercer Adam thought that "The French members [of the Royal Society] . . . have the insuperable advantage of possessing what the English section has not: a history and a literature to inspire them in their work."<sup>74</sup> What is really meant by such statements is that French Canada is more like Europe than English Canada. Only the French Canadian had a history

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<sup>72</sup>"The Canadian Laureate," VI (January, 1881), 57-8.

<sup>73</sup>Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness (Montreal: Brown, 1893), p. 24.

<sup>74</sup>"Book Notices," Week, I (May 1, 1884), 349.

in the New World lengthy enough to serve as a pedigree for a fully civilized society. English Canadian history and society were thought to be inferior to their European counterparts; even the United States possessed more of history and tradition than did English Canada. The underlying assumption was that art must follow the European model exactly; since Canada did not have the same lengthy history of cultural development as European countries, its art necessarily could not be on a level with theirs.

Reliance on a European model is most plainly apparent in an article by "Barry Dane" (J. E. Logan) on "National Literature," in which he argued that Canada did not have a distinctive literature precisely because she did not have a history analogous to that of England.<sup>75</sup> Dane said Canada could not have a "distinctive Canadian literature" until "all the unknown and undreamt changes and influences of centuries have wrought their impress on the people," and our "history, itself grown old, is phosphorescent with the halo of romance." A quick healing of all the political and regional differences of Canada would not be enough to bring about a national literature: "It would encourage literature; but how a 'distinctive literature,' without the protoplasm of a remote national infancy?" A distinctive literature required an

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<sup>75</sup>"National Literature," Week, I (August 21, 1884), 600-1.

unbroken history from primitive times to the present:

Take such a land. It has grown in the lapse of ages from an infancy of barbarism to a manhood of civilization. A history abounding with tradition; a religion whose precursor was a mythology; whose mountains, rivers and forests were the homes of gods and heroes, to whom thunder was the voice of and lightning the 'red right hand' of offended and avenging deity. Such an origin will develop [sic] a national literature.

It is different with us here in Canada. We have had no barbarous infancy moulded by the natural features of the land. No divinities have sanctified to us our mountains and streams. No fabled heroes have left us immortal memories.

If there have been invasions, the invaders must have been assimilated to the native way of life and thought; in this way the conquering Normans, said Dane, were in the end "equalled and overpowered" by the conquered Saxons. In Canada, however, the native Indians had been almost obliterated by the onrush of white civilization:

We have not amalgamated with the native and woven the woof of our refinement in the strong sinuous web of an aboriginal tradition and religion. In our civilized arrogance we swept away that coarser fabric, knowing not that we destroyed that which we would now, as a garment, be proud to wear. We have come almost full grown into the world, not unlike some unbred specimens of the canine race.

In consequence, we could never have a national literature.

We might eventually produce writers who were recognized as great, but "unless they write in Anglo-Ojibbeway, and educate a nation to look upon Nana-bo-johu as a Lancelot or a Guy of Warwick," these writers would not be authentically Canadian. They would simply be extensions of British literature.

Such a point of view is self-defeating; Dane's rigid definition of a national literature excludes even the possibility of a Canadian literature. The problem, of course, is not that English Canada possesses no history; rather, the history which exists was not perceived, or was not the kind of history which certain writers would wish existed. The moral is plain: any attempt to understand Canadian art by means of European categories of analysis invariably led the writer to see Canadian art as inferior, immature, or part of a minor mode. It has often been said that Canadians have been afflicted with a "colonial" habit of mind, which has led them to judge Canadian art by its resemblance to accepted modes of foreign art. We can see that this is precisely the reason why early critics often denigrated as raw and uncouth the work now considered the best Canadian art. In addition, such a colonial attitude made a truly great Canadian art appear impossible. In consequence, some Canadian critical remarks need to be scrutinized carefully. I. Allan Jack affirmed:

The picturesque features of the Dominion have never received the attention which they deserve, and the future only will prove their influence upon the development of the intellects of her people.

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 If we have but faith in our own resources there need be no doubt that we can produce a literature which will be at the same time excellent and essentially Canadian. 76

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<sup>76</sup>"The Academy and the Grove in Canada," Rose-Belford's, I (October, 1878), 456, 461.



It is probable that the standard of excellence used here was silently understood to be lower than the standard used throughout the rest of the world. We must eventually ask whether this has had an inhibiting effect on Canadian writers.

Other writers were not so strict as Barry Dane in their interpretation of what would make a literature Canadian. Canada, after all, did have a history, for things had happened there. A Canadian literature would necessarily emerge if those events were depicted in a body of creative writing. John A. Cooper disagreed strongly with anyone who held that Canadian writers should strive to "be cosmopolitan in style, quality and matter."<sup>77</sup> He felt that Canadian literature should depict Canadian conditions; it followed automatically that Canadian literature would be different from any other nation's literature. He said: "In the first place, we have a history which differs very materially from that of any other nation"; and "In the second place, the people of Canada differ from the people of any other country in the world"; and moreover, "nature presents to the people of Canada a face which is unlike the face she presents to any other of the world's nations." A Canadian literature was possible, then. At first it might still display a strong influence of British models, but as Canada developed and a body of

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<sup>77</sup>"Current Thoughts," Canadian Magazine, VIII (April, 1896), 544-5.

literature grew up, "the literature produced in this country will grow less and less like that of any other country, though still resembling all of them." Two years later Cooper repeated his belief in the inevitable distinctiveness of Canadian literature:

The man who is truly Canadian will produce Canadian literature if he lives and thinks in Canada. His characters, his colouring, his history, his estimate of freedom and equality, his narrowness, his breadth, his phrases--all these will be Canadian. There may be much about his work that is not Canadian, but the native will be exhibited somewhere. 78

Carter Troop, who eventually became editor of the Week, lamented that "The Canadian novel is not yet written," despite the wealth of material available:

In Canadian scenery the Canadian novelist will have a rich and varied background for his schemes and plots and characters, which few countries can equal and fewer still surpass. Neither is our land altogether without the influences which historic and time-honoured associations exercise in older countries. We are a people with a history--a history the most romantic and picturesque of any country on the western Hemisphere. 79

Canada, he said, had public men, men rich and poor, and men eccentric and odd; had enough of them to satisfy any novelist. W. A. Fraser listed in more detail the subjects available to a Canadian novelist.<sup>80</sup> "We have a great field for our story writers and poets in the Northwest. There is local

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<sup>78</sup>"Editorial Comment," Canadian Magazine, XII (December, 1898), 179.

<sup>79</sup>"A Note About Ourselves," Week, VI (December 28, 1888), 57.

<sup>80</sup>"Literature," Canadian Magazine, XIII (May, 1899), 35-6.

colour in abundance, and the colour of God, which is the beauty of the universe." We had yet to read the truth about the Indian and the French Catholic priests who had inhabited this land, said Fraser, and we had yet to read a true portrayal of a northwest blizzard. He complained that contemporary writers were presenting stereotyped pictures of the world around them, or were lost in a romanticized past:

If our young writers would try to give us stories dealing with the problems and trials and mysticisms of the life all about us, they would do more to build up a national literature than they ever will by posing over the more or less inaccurate records of the life that is extinct.

John A. Cooper also complained about the misleading pictures of Canada that were presented in fiction. "Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and the Northwest have the reputation of being more romantic"<sup>81</sup> than Ontario. As a result, "the parts of Canada which retain some touch of French or Indian civilization or barbarism are thought to offer a field in which the novelist may work, and the parts which are purely Anglo-Saxon do not." But Cooper said:

Personally, I cannot bring myself to agree. I cannot convince myself that the English-Canadian life is not possessed of characteristics which are just as capable of artistic treatment as the French-Canadian life. To my mind, the novelists and artists who confine themselves to Indian and French-Canadian characters, historical and present day, and to such phases of our life as have been affected by Indian and French civilization, are doing only part of their work, and are misrepresenting us to ourselves and to foreigners.

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<sup>81</sup>"Editorial Comment," Canadian Magazine, XI (July 1898), 264.

But George Stewart was concerned that even the portrait of the Indian which had emerged from North American fiction might not be accurate. "The Indians of Cooper and Longfellow have served their purpose," he said, "but the real Indian of the forest [is] yet to come."<sup>82</sup> The man who had finally captured the true Indian, Stewart claimed, was the American novelist "Adirondack" Murray (William H. H. Murray). This writer, Stewart said,

had long held the idea that the true Canadian idyl remained to be written. That is must be composed leisurely, flower out of an aboriginal germ, and derive its colour and fragrance from aboriginal light and soil, were facts which were admitted at once. <sup>83</sup>

The resulting book, Mamelons, Stewart praised highly. However, Stewart's romantic language, and his citation of extremely melodramatic passages as examples of realism show that he was not really responding to the accuracy of Murray's book, but to the qualities which made it a romantic "idyl."

Unlike Canada, America, it was frequently admitted, was developing its own distinctive literature. Yet the possible relation of Canadian writing to American literature was never mentioned; it was always England that served as a model. Politics overcame geography almost completely in this respect. Even when Canadians were not politically in

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<sup>82</sup> Essays From Reviews (Quebec: Dawson, 1893), p. 103.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-3.

favour of imperial federation, they were often cultural imperialists. John George Bourinot could perceive that "Whitman's success, relatively small as it was in his own country, arose chiefly from the fact that he attempted to be an American poet, representing the pristine vigour and natural freedom of a new land."<sup>84</sup> Yet Bourinot's chief comments were that Whitman was part of an international movement towards a degenerate realism, and he was pleased that Whitman had "not influenced to any extent the intellect of his generation." Bourinot, apparently, did not want Canada to have "the pristine vigour and natural freedom of a new land." Canada, one assumes, was to be a continuation of the old traditions of England.

It is apparent that even the most "Canadian" of these critics expressed a very limited viewpoint, and were prevented by their biases from confronting the Canadian situation directly. George Stewart's praise for Adirondack Murray's Indians was based more on a fondness for Sir Walter Scott's type of novel than on an objective judgment of the realism of Murray's book. W. A. Fraser urged Canadian writers to portray realistic missionaries and realistic Indians, and generally to seek subjects in the more distant and wilder parts of Canada, yet one doubts whether Fraser's moral views would have let him see wilderness life with unbiased eyes. "What we want is realism," Fraser said,

<sup>84</sup>Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness, p. 23

a modern realism that will let the world see us as we are--a strong, healthy, growing, nation; full of life, and aspirations, and determination; and through it all you may weave the golden thread of love if you like, for all that is founded on love is good and true. The literature of Christ was all love. 85

In this passage moral and patriotic concerns have quickly replaced the discussion of "realism." Fraser set out to tell Canadians how to portray their own country accurately, but he was soon seduced away from his original intention, and he ended by preaching a sermon on quite another topic.

Like Fraser, many Canadian writers called for a distinctively Canadian literature, but they were almost all severely handicapped from recognizing or producing it by a theoretical, rather than empirical definition of what it meant to be "Canadian." They all sought to impose a foreign model of literary development on Canada, just as they sought to impose a foreign model of nationality. The fervent desire for Canadian nationhood or at least for some regularization of Canada's status blocked an appreciation of Canada's actual progress, and caused unreasoned, emotional agitation for independence, annexation, or imperial federation. Similarly, a concept of literary growth based on European history prevented a dispassionate assessment of Canada's literary situation. Canada was not a nation and it was absurd to speak of a "national" literature; Canadian books

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<sup>85</sup>"Literature," Canadian Magazine, XIII (May, 1899), 35.

there might be, but the qualifier "Canadian" could indicate nothing about their inner themes and attitudes, and only served to indicate the author's place of residence; Canada did not have a history of centuries of interaction between life and literature, and so her literature was doomed to be shallow and rootless, consisting only of the lower kinds of expression, really little more than a curiosity: these were some of the attitudes which disparaged Canadian literature even before it was examined. Alternately, since literature was necessary to national dignity, anything remotely "Canadian" could be welcomed with effusive enthusiasm, and its merits magnified beyond all reasonable bounds. The inevitable deflation, when it came, was rendered even more devastating to Canadian self-confidence. Canada was not a nation and therefore was incapable of literary greatness; Canada was a nation and therefore her books must comprise a great literature: these were the horns of the dilemma. Both positions prevented a recognition of Canada's true state which, as always, was a compromise located somewhere on the middle ground, and merited neither total scorn nor partisan enthusiasm.

### III

#### IDEAS

Canadian critics were not always preoccupied with nationalism. Some of their ideas had no nationality, and could have been debated in much the same terms almost anywhere in the English-speaking world. Sometimes, of course, it is hard to draw the line between local and international ideas. The idea that literature could help create a new nation was only a particular application of the widely held idea that literature and society were intimately related. Many writers believed that literature and society were not separable; the state of society depended on the state of literary culture.

Let me but write the songs of a nation,  
And I care not whose laws they obey,  
For the author of "Dear Molly Doolan,"  
Gets more than a senator's pay. <sup>1</sup>

This poem, which appeared over the initials "P.T." (Phillips Thompson?) in the Canadian Magazine, repeated in a humorous way an aphorism which had a wide currency. Speaking of patriotic poems by Louis Fréchette and Charles G. D. Roberts, John George Bourinot wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>"A New Light on an Old Adage," Canadian Magazine, V (June, 1895), 197.



Such poems are worth a good many political speeches even in Parliament so far as their effect upon the hearts and sympathies is concerned. We all remember a famous man once said, "Let me make all the ballads, and I care not who makes the laws of a people." <sup>2</sup>

The famous man (Andrew Fletcher) was cited or quoted--or misquoted--by many other writers, including Emily McManus, <sup>3</sup> John Reade, <sup>4</sup> Agnes Maule Machar, <sup>5</sup> and Goldwin Smith. <sup>6</sup>

The chief means by which the arts could affect society were thought to be their power of promoting national spirit, and their influence on morality. For many writers art served a function similar to that of religion in distinguishing man from the animals. John A. Cooper felt that literature gave expression to the immortal and spiritual part of man, the part that made him more than a mere beast: "Rob our lives of their artistic parts, and we would be mere animals. Take away our art and our literature and we would be a nation of automatic imitators." <sup>7</sup> As O. A. Howland, M. P. P., put it in his article on "The Art Spirit": "The oyster may go on supporting its limited and motionless existence through its

<sup>2</sup>Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>"O'Hagan's Poems: A Study," Canadian Magazine, I (October, 1893), 665.

<sup>4</sup>"Thomas D'Arcy McGee--the Poet," New Dominion Monthly, V (February, 1870), 17.

<sup>5</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 23, 1894), 392.

<sup>6</sup>"Cowper," Canadian Monthly, IV (September, 1873), 215.

<sup>7</sup>"Editorial Comment," Canadian Magazine, XI (July, 1898), 265.

mouth alone; civilized men and women feed also through the eye and the ear, the mind and the heart."<sup>8</sup> An anonymous writer in the Week agreed with the opinion of Professor Cappon of Queen's University that English Literature should be studied in the universities because it had replaced Classics as a means of conveying both general culture and moral values to students.<sup>9</sup>

Canadian attitudes can be set in perspective by referring to a debate then taking place in the United States. At this time a struggle was being waged in American literary circles between what Grant C. Knight describes as the "romanticists" and the "realists." The "realists" tended to see man as being biologically and socially conditioned, and in their art they sought to portray the truth about the human condition, however unpleasant it might be. The dominant Canadian outlook, however, resembled that of the "romanticists":

Fundamentally . . . romanticists were striving to preserve a pre-Darwinian concept of man as a creature of divine origin and heavenly destiny, responsible for his choices and therefore justly to be punished or rewarded, striving to preserve the eighteenth-century idea of the goodness of natural man. <sup>10</sup>

As Knight points out, "At bottom the romantic attitude resembled some of the tenets of orthodox Christianity," and it

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Magazine, IV (March, 1895), 493.

<sup>9</sup> "The Study of English Literature," VI (October 25, 1889), 741.

<sup>10</sup> The Critical Period in American Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 17.

should come as no surprise that the degree of morality often served critics as a direct measure of a work's worth. Often the moral yardstick used was explicitly Christian, and most writers at least required that literature inculcate morality either by example or by exhortation. John A. Cooper feared that sensational novels would inspire boys to commit horrible crimes, in the manner of certain children who had committed crimes after reading "penny dreadfuls."<sup>11</sup> An anonymous reviewer in the Canadian Magazine wrote: "There is a moral in everything, and it is the artist's work and duty to discover it, to reveal it, and to celebrate it so that, the world may know and feel."<sup>12</sup> "The only ground on which the artist can stand is, not Art for Art's sake, but Art for righteousness' sake," declared a writer in the Week in 1889, firmly dismissing the decadents.<sup>13</sup> Agnes Maule Machar's For King and Country: A Story of 1812 was commended by the Canadian Monthly for its high moral tone:

Above all, there is a healthy tone of morality and a warm, though not obtrusive vein of practical piety, which ought to secure for it a wide circle of readers, apart from merits of a purely aesthetic character. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>"Our Children and their Reading," Canadian Magazine, VI (January, 1896), 282.

<sup>12</sup>"Books and Authors," VI (February, 1896), 389.

<sup>13</sup>D. W., "The Value of a Picture," VI (August 16, 1889), 586.

<sup>14</sup>"Book Reviews," VI (December, 1874), 572.

One can sense how the reviewer's approval grew as he read through the book and felt his own moral certainties reinforced, one by one. In addition, it is interesting to note the separation of moral and "aesthetic" responses, and the unquestioned primacy given to morality.

The position accorded to Tennyson gives a good illustration of the critics' moral attitudes. Tennyson was the favorite poet of the period, but it was his unimpeachable moral teaching, especially in the face of creeping doubt, that was cited as the chief component of his greatness. A writer in Rose-Belford's affirmed Tennyson's inspirational value:

The Poet Laureate, in 'In Memoriam,' has been more successful in plumbing the depths of human hopes, doubts and fears, than any writer of the present age, and has given a Catholic prayer which many an infidel adopts, and which also aids the doctrine of many a lukewarm Christian. 15

In Memoriam and the Idylls were of course the works most prominently cited, but each new book from the Laureate was faithfully reviewed, until his death in 1892. In that year his whole opus was examined in an opportune series of articles by Professor William Clark<sup>16</sup> of Trinity College, which was planned even before news of the poet's death made such a review a matter of immediate concern. The series was delivered as a group of public lectures, a fact which further illustrated

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<sup>15</sup>"Book Reviews," III (August, 1879), 221.

<sup>16</sup>William Clark(1829-1912) taught Mental and Moral Philosophy at Trinity University, Toronto, from 1882 to 1908.

Tennyson's status as a public monument. Professor Clark also published book-length studies of In Memoriam and The Princess. Dante, Cowper, Coleridge, and Burns were other writers favoured with articles from Professor Clark's pen. All of these pieces emphasized the moral qualities of their subject's writings. For example:

Dante is indeed a preacher of righteousness, who has the deepest insight into the things of man, and the things of God. He has received the homage of the best and the wisest of men for many centuries, and we may do well to try our own spiritual vision and insight by our success in wrestling with his thoughts. 17

Many other writers received the benefit of a critic's moral approval. "Wordsworth is a great moral instructor," wrote Professor Lyall. "If he had not always written with a moral aim, his writings have always a moral tendency."<sup>18</sup> George Eliot, of course, was sheltered under the moral umbrella. J. M. Buchan told his readers, "Great works of art of any kind elevate, refine and instruct, and this is particularly true of George Eliot's novels."<sup>19</sup> Of Longfellow it was said: "He has allowed nothing unworthy to come from his pen, nothing but what is pure and good, and beautiful and true."<sup>20</sup> Some new writers also passed this test; indeed, many ministers

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<sup>17</sup>"Dante's Divine Comedy," Canadian Magazine, XIII (June, 1899), 116.

<sup>18</sup>"Wordsworth: A Criticism," Belford's Monthly Magazine, III (April, 1878), 625. Rev. William Lyall taught briefly at Knox College, Toronto, and at Dalhousie College, N.S.

<sup>19</sup>"George Eliot, The Novelist," Rose-Belford's, VI (March, 1882), 255.

wrote books which were widely popular, such as the Scottish novels of Ian Maclaren (Reverend John Watson). Hall Caine's Manxman was praised as "lofty in tone and pure in moral,"<sup>21</sup> and Caine himself drew the moralist's approving glance:

"He is not merely a clever man, but his conviction that this is a moral universe, shines through every page he has written, and transfigures his daily life and conversation."<sup>22</sup> Despite such shining examples as Hall Caine, the general trend of artictic morality was (of course) downward. The "simplicity, force, and vigour" of the Canadian poet Alexander McLachlan were contrasted favourably with the "pruriency, effeminacy, and bestiality of the so-called Latter Day poets, who glory in their shame."<sup>23</sup> The sister-art of painting was subject to the same decay, and any reversals of the downward progress were welcomed with enthusiasm: "In these degenerate days, is the world of art aroused to enthusiasm by dastardly brutality dexterously displayed on canvas? No! the good are not all dead,"<sup>24</sup> declared J. A. Radford.

The sternest strictures were reserved for those writers who combined an apparent immorality with a high degree of

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<sup>20</sup>W. D. Armstrong, "Longfellow," Rose-Belford's, VIII (May, 1882), 488.

<sup>21</sup>"Recent Fiction," Week, XII (December 21, 1894), 82.

<sup>22</sup>Bernard McEvoy, "An Appreciation of Hall Caine," Week, XII (November 1, 1895), 1162.

<sup>23</sup>Daniel Clark, "Prominent Canadians.--XI: Alexander M'Lachlan: The Bard of Amaranth," Week, V (February 9, 1888), 169.

<sup>24</sup>"Art at the World's Fair," Canadian Magazine, II (December, 1893), 128.

public acceptance. Zola and Flaubert, who were achieving a wide circulation in cheap editions, and whose popularity was based mainly on a reputation for sensational realism, were decried in language bordering on the excremental. It was often assumed that moral writing demanded a moral writer. A man whose own life was not exemplary would automatically be disabled from producing a book which could serve as a moral exemplum. Critics were forced into strange contortions in order to reconcile the known facts about certain writers with their acknowledged literary worth. T. G. Marquis argued that Marlowe was only immoral part of the time, his bouts of dissipation and atheism occurring between his creative periods; he was a "theist in his better moments."<sup>25</sup> Swinburne was disqualified from the highest excellence because "No man could be that [a great poet] who deliberately chooses to exalt sensuousness before purity, and to proclaim his unblushing 'worship of folly'."<sup>26</sup> The life of Robert Burns gave trouble to critics like Professor Clark who viewed art and artists as a source of moral inspiration.<sup>27</sup>

A running controversy took place between advocates of the rival theories of "realism" and "idealism" in fiction.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>"Marlowe," Week, X (June 9, 1893), 656-8.

<sup>26</sup>"Book Notices," Week, I (October 23, 1884), 749.

<sup>27</sup>"Robert Burns: A Biographical Sketch," Massey's Magazine, I (June, 1896), 399-405.

<sup>28</sup>The terms "realism" and "idealism" seem best adapted to describe the critics' own perceptions. The dichotomy between "realism" and "romanticism" described by Grant C. Knight tends to put the conflict into a present-day rather than nineteenth century perspective, and elevates it to a level of self-awareness which Canadian critics seldom reached.

These terms were used in many ways, and their shifting significance reveals many attitudes. In an article on the Norwegian writer Bjornstjerne Bjornson, Stuart Livingston explained what he said were the "ordinary and well-understood meanings" of the terms:

I take it that . . . realism, as applied to fiction, is the doctrine of the superior importance of the real facts of life; that is, the reproduction of actual life utterly devoid of any striving for romance, poetry, or uncommon incidents and situations. Idealism, I take it, is the doctrine of the superiority of ideal creations over the facts of life. 29

Livingston favoured idealism, because it was "filled with a great purpose to benefit mankind," whereas realism only resulted in reprehensible works such as those of Zola and the French school. Nevertheless, both parties in the debate were actually part of the moralistic school of critics. Their ideas, although introducing an additional and welcome complexity into the straightforward moralistic argument, indicated at bottom only a difference about how art could best fulfill its moral responsibilities. The existence of moral responsibility was taken for granted by both sides. The issue was simply whether art could best instill its message by portraying the world as it was, or by portraying the world as it ought to be.

"Idealism" could have several meanings. Many writers interpreted art within a Christian framework, and applied

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<sup>29</sup>"Bjornstjerne Bjornson," Canadian Magazine, I (April, 1893), 98.



the same standards to literature as they would have applied to a sermon:

The truth is that Art has a nobler mission than to address the sense alone. She comes to us with "messages of splendour" from the grand unapproachable Central Source of light and beauty, telling us of a larger and fuller life beyond and around this present one, and giving us glimpses, too swift and short, of its supersensual glories . . . . 30

Similarly, writers could be likened to ministers:

The noblest poets are God's ministers, who sing of higher worlds and nobler life; they take us away from the heated, vitiated atmosphere in which we are toiling and call us to the valley through which the brook ripples musically, or to the mountains where pure, bracing breezes blow. Notwithstanding the sneers of a sordid secularism or the scorn of a small specialism, poetry, philosophy and religion will continue to speak to man as a child of the unseen. 31

In both cases the writers see art as directing our attention to another, higher realm, which is closely allied to, if not identical with, the Christian heaven. ) Slightly more subtle was the following prescription for poetry, by one of the Week's columnists, "Rambler":

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<sup>30</sup>Gervas Holmes, "Concerning the Relations of Science and Art," Canadian Monthly, II (July, 1872), 75.

<sup>31</sup>W. G. Jordan, "Tennyson as Poet of the Nineteenth Century," Week, XIII (October, 1896), 1069.

In true poetry there must be life-blood and backbone. Images must be used as symbols--not always--but often enough to persuade us that there is something over and above the cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces of rosy and jasper cloud which meet our eyes at day-rise and day-set. In short, our poets must command for us the Ideal. Without Ideality a literature may live, but it does not take a leading place in the ages. 32

Here the realm of the ideal was less specifically Christian, and it is possible to interpret the writer simply as meaning that art must contain some human message or moral. The passage was similar in intent to Marquis' comments on Roberts' Songs of the Common Day and repeated in a general context the viewpoint that mere "description" in poetry is not enough.

More commonly, idealism simply insisted that art embody a moral or spiritual meaning. Such work could elicit the highest praise:

To say that a story is written by George Macdonald implies that it is inspired by the power of a peculiarly rich and delicate imagination, a true and beautiful idealism, a pure and noble philosophy of life, and, last but not least, a deep, far-reaching spiritual insight. 33

In its least extreme and most reasonable form, idealism's viewpoint was similar to ideas expressed by John R. Sinclair in the McMaster University Monthly.<sup>34</sup> Because the novelist "reveals the mind of man and makes it tell its tale," said Sinclair, "He is forced to have a system of philosophy, gotten unconsciously, however it may be. From the conceptions

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<sup>32</sup>"The Rambler," Week, VIII (November 13, 1891), 801.

<sup>33</sup>"Book Reviews," Canadian Monthly, VII (April, 1875), 367.

<sup>34</sup>"Novels and Novel Reading," I (February, 1892), 218-25.

he forms of the motives of life, he presents his characters as ideals and guides for readers." Instead of being guides to another world or another level of reality, the novelist's characters have become merely teachers or good examples for the reader to follow. This is quite a descent. However, Sinclair remained insistent on the moral function of the novelist. And a novel could not teach merely by being realistic; the lack of an underlying philosophy deprived fiction of its proper unity and consistency. This could be seen in many current popular books:

The lack of artistic conception may account for the ephemeral existence of so much present-day fiction. The writers have no true philosophy of life, and hence fail to satisfy the reader's craving for a story. Even realism, with its hideous deifications of vice, and its grossly sensual effusions, fails in the very purpose for which it was intended.

Sinclair takes "realism" to mean truth to the facts of life. As such he condemns it, because some of the facts of life are disagreeable to contemplate. Apparently one can learn nothing from seeing an unpleasant truth brought home without comment; an editorial viewpoint is necessary. C. Davis English discussed this very problem at length in an article in the Week called "The Immoral in Fiction."<sup>35</sup> His purpose was to disagree strongly with two women novelists

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<sup>35</sup>II (October 8, 1885), 709-10.

("Ouida" and "Vernon Lee") who had just published articles advocating freedom of subject-matter for the novelist, including the right to depict behaviour usually classed as immoral:

There is undubitably an enormous amount of immorality in this world, and therefore it is contended that fiction should display its workings, its effects and its influences . . . . A girl, according to this, should be made conversant about the "realities of life" (more euphemism for adulteries, intrigues and lusts), else is her knowledge only of partial "practical utility." Bah! If it is not sophistry, how foolish is this pretended necessity for "knowledge of the world"! Is that "a ridiculously partial idea of life" which believes it is not permeated with sensuality and lawless self-gratification? . . . Yes, much of all this a girl must know; but she should learn it at her mother's knee, in the secrecy of private and inviolable converse. Fiction is primarily designed for amusement, and while it may inculcate a moral lesson, it must not play upon the mind a can-can, or imprint upon it a loathsome picture.

This passage illustrates the violent rhetoric which any violation of middle-class taboos could provoke. It was not permissible to question the image of man as primarily good, innately moral, and religious. When evidence to the contrary escaped the internal censorship of any writer, it was to be suppressed by the mutual agreement of society. In particular, the female of the species was to be protected: "What man would prefer to marry a girl who knew as much of the world as he did, even though her knowledge were gleaned from books? Show me such a man, and I will show you the lowest type of man," said English. Even for men, immorality in fiction was dangerous. Unless each sin promptly received its proper punishment, a book might seem to teach "the idea that it is

a man's proper act to sin . . . a sort of prerequisite to the attainment of the much-coveted title of man-of-the-world." Which, in C. Davis English's world, it certainly was not.

However, the trend towards realism was viewed with approval by many critics. Surely truthfulness should be a virtue in literature, as it was in everyday life, they argued. A review of Trollope's book on Thackeray claimed that Thackeray was a superior writer to Dickens precisely because he wrote realistic novels, while Dickens produced "idealised romances":

What gratitude will not after ages feel on reading Thackeray, to find in his pages the life of Englishmen and women as they really existed, not as people imagined them in the first half of the nineteenth century? The ideal style may be good as showing what were the standards of heroism at such a period; but as a matter of history it is far more important to know to what a nation attained, than at what it aimed. 36

Realism, then, was a matter of social responsibility; it was necessary if the novel was to accurately hold up the mirror to society. A writer in the Canadian Magazine dismissed the author of a new book of criticism by saying, "As a critic of modern drama he is insignificant, because he keeps up a pose of contempt toward that which is realistic."<sup>37</sup>

Those who advocated realism saw it as evidence of progress in man's ability to understand himself and his society. Realism was part of the general advance of knowledge; it was

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<sup>36</sup>"Book Reviews," Rose-Belford's, III (August, 1879), 224.

<sup>37</sup>"Books and Authors," Canadian Magazine, V (October, 1895), 586.

the literary counterpart of the exacting experimental method of science, or of modern cosmopolitan culture:

The novel of today, in order to please, must either present recurrent phases of thought and action, minutely pictured with almost photographic clearness, or, if in narrative style, must contain the elements of culture, sympathy, and humour; no compromise will do. 38

The portrayal of society, and even more the portrayal of the individual's reactions to society, was becoming more and more accurate. The subtlest nuances of thought and behaviour were being captured on the wing by the increasingly deft modern novelist. In an article on Robert Louis Stevenson, Hector W. Charlesworth said, "Analysis is the trump card of the modern novelist."<sup>39</sup> Stevenson combined a "modern analytic insight" with his narrative gift; as a result he had "added psychology to the romance." John A. Cooper considered it greatly in Conan Doyle's favour that his book The Stark Munro Letters reflected "the contemporary life of the period" both with regard to social conditions and contemporary religious doubts.<sup>40</sup>

It is easy to discover some confusion in the use of the term "realism." Many writers favoured "realism" yet proscribed writers such as Zola. Some of the apparent contradictions can be resolved if we realize that "realism" as

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<sup>38</sup>"Some New Novels," Week, IV (August 18, 1887), 615.

<sup>39</sup>"Robert Louis Stevenson," Canadian Magazine, V (May, 1895), 28.

<sup>40</sup>"Conan Doyle's New Book," Canadian Magazine, V (October, 1895), 573.

commonly used by these writers did not extend to include the kind of writing usually called "naturalism." "Realism" to these writers meant fiction in which the characters were of everyday stature, and had common human weaknesses and foibles. Often "realism" was set in the present. "Idealism," on the other hand, meant fiction in which the characters were of heroic stature, or in which their weaknesses and foibles were exaggerated to extreme dimensions. "Naturalism," if used at all by these writers, was a term of abuse applied to realism which had become objectionable because of its portrayal of low-life or of morally unorthodox behaviour. Louisa Murray distinguished in this way between W. D. Howells' and Zola's forms of realism. Howells' novels were not great literature because they did not depict "men in those aspects of greatness which raise them above the crowd,"<sup>41</sup> but they were nevertheless morally unobjectionable. Zola was a writer of another, lower kind than Howells. For her Zola's subjects moved his fiction outside the boundaries of civilized literature. Although Miss Murray did not use the term "naturalism," she plainly had some such concept in mind.

"Romance" was the third major category used by these writers, and in some respects it was the most important. The concept of "romance" seems to have been a stronger and broader one than either "realism" or "idealism." In explaining

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<sup>41</sup>"Democracy in Literature," Week, VI (August 2, 1889), 550.

how Stevenson embodied the romance tradition, Hector W. Charlesworth gave a good working description of the genre. Stevenson, he said, "has preserved the tradition of Scott and Dumas--that is, the narrative tradition of telling a story with a boy's indifference as to whether it reflects the conditions of society in such and such an era."<sup>42</sup> Other writers saw romance as a more adult genre, but their views do not really contradict those of Charlesworth. Stevenson appeared to one writer as a return to healthy normalcy in English fiction:

"Kidnapped" . . . is a return to the picturesqueness and dramatic action of these earlier romance writers [Marryat, Cooper, Scott] with the addition of a power of subtle characterisation of which they knew little or nothing. <sup>43</sup>

Unlike the novels of Howells and James in which "nothing ever happens," Stevenson's books had an active plot to maintain reader interest. Not only could a "romance" be "realistic" or "idealistic," but also when the term was used in conjunction with either "realism" or "idealism" its connotations over-rode those of the other term, so that the writer was much more concerned with the book in question as a "romance" than as "realism" or "idealism."

We can watch this attitude at work in an article by George Stanley Adamson on "The Coming Novel." The novel of

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<sup>42</sup>"Robert Louis Stevenson," Canadian Magazine, V (May, 1895), 30.

<sup>43</sup>W. Allen Neilson, "Robert Louis Stevenson," Week, XII (December 21, 1894), 79.



the future would incline strongly to realism, he said, with a dash of romance added:

The probability, however, is strongly in favour of imaginative realism, or the romantic and realistic--not the realism of Zola, but that in which human nature is depicted in its varying moods, and as we know it on the street or in the parlour. It will doubtless have a high moral tone, and be full of life and movement. There is nothing society enjoys better than to find itself mirrored in literature, and particularly so when invested with an air of romance. 44

Adamson's "realism," with its strong admixture of "romance" and its avoidance of anything that smacks of low-life or degeneration, sounds more like a form of "idealism." Partly, this simply shows how standards have changed. In addition it shows that Adamson was more concerned with the power of art to entertain and please than with its power to instruct. He took the moral probity of art for granted and passed on to other matters. Like Adamson, those proponents of realism who placed entertainment value first also liked books which had a "high moral tone, and [were] full of life and movement." Especially, they liked Sir Walter Scott's books.<sup>45</sup> Except for his emphasis on a contemporary setting, Adamson's comments

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<sup>44</sup>Week, VIII (July 17, 1891), 528.

<sup>45</sup>John P. Matthews cites an unpublished study by Robert L. McDougall on Scott's influence in nineteenth century Canada. Matthews himself emphasizes the strong influence of Scott on the development (or lack of development) of Canadian fiction in Tradition in Exile, pp. 115-6.

might well be describing one of Scott's romances. In a remarkable address given on the centenary of Sir Walter Scott's birth, Scott was even cited by Goldwin Smith both for realism of character portrayal and for historical accuracy, as well as for almost every other novelistic virtue.<sup>46</sup>

In the ambiguous significance of realism we can see a tendency to avoid, and even to deny, the unpleasant aspects of existence. The work of Rider Haggard drew these words from Carter Troop:

Those who minister to this depraved and morbid taste; those whose joy it is to lay bare all that is most revolting in human life, all that is darkest, blackest in man--these are they who should be shunned as we would shun the deadliest pestilence. Their ways are not the ways of wisdom and light, neither are their deeds the deeds of the brave and the true. 47

In the following assessment of Thomas Hardy, by Mercer Adam, we can sense a nostalgia for the good old days of moral romance in the style of Sir Walter Scott:

The effort to be realistic, and to depict actual life with an unsparing hand, is in truth an unpleasantly painful one, and leads the modern novelist into many an extravagance and libel on the race. Even Mr. Hardy, great writer than he is, has been led away by this dangerous gift--witness his "Tess of the D'Urbervilles"--into unpleasant paths which he hitherto knew not, and to the depicting of unsavory details, which he was not given to in his earlier creations. 48

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<sup>46</sup>"The Lamps of Fiction," in his Lectures and Essays (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, 1881), pp. 69-75.

<sup>47</sup>"On the Horrible in Fiction," Week, VI (February 8, 1889), 158.

<sup>48</sup>"Recent Fiction in Britain," Canadian Magazine, IV (January, 1895), 219.

In these two passages a significant fact is laid bare. It was a comfortable and reassuring morality, not a difficult and demanding one, that these writers expected from their writers. Haggard was taken to task, not for the untruth of what he depicted, but for its repulsive and loathsome truth to life. A despairing picture of human nature, or a morality so strict as to defy attainment would be equally unwelcome to these critics.

An intelligible philosophy lies behind this trend, although it seldom found open expression. The clearest explanation came in an article in Rose-Belford's, by the American pacifist Elihu Burritt, on "The Reality and Mission of Ideal Characters," in which he demonstrated the necessity for "idealism" in all aspects of life.<sup>49</sup> The usefulness of mythical, Biblical, and heroic ideal characters was plain; we would all be the losers were we to know too much about their actual fleshly existence and shortcomings:

Suppose, now, that some malignant power could and should demolish the ideal David, and put the real, historical David, in all the baldness of his actual life, before us . . . . Why, the loss to the Christian world would be greater than the loss of a dozen of the brightest stars that shine in the heavens above.

But the process of idealization could operate in everyday life, not just with respect to historical or fictional characters:

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<sup>49</sup>II (February, 1879), 145-56.

It is one of the happiest faculties of the human mind that we can attribute these qualities, even to those nearest and dearest to us; that, while they walk by our side through life, we can robe their real beings with the soft velvet of our idealism, hiding all the unwelcome discrepancies and unpleasant features of bare fact which we do not wish to see.

Scarcely veiled here is the attitude that the world is a place tainted with sin, and all things in it necessarily imperfect and to some degree unpleasant. A similar attitude prompted these comments by Norman Patterson:

I am afraid that the people generally have not discovered that an art education--that is, a learning to love and appreciate good pictures--doubles the pleasures to be derived from this monotonous life. 50

Art could even take on some of the redeeming power of religion, since like religion it provided insight into an unseen but ever-present spiritual reality. Agnes E. Wetherald said that poets appealed not to the senses, "but to the sensibilities and imagination"; "it is to them [poets] that the world looks to redeem it from the burden of sordid cares that daily oppresses it,"<sup>51</sup> she affirmed. An editorial in the Week titled "Realism and Romance" explained why, although realism might appeal to a cultivated minority, the mass of men wanted romance in their fiction:

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<sup>50</sup>"The Academy Exhibition," Canadian Magazine, X (April, 1898), 514.

<sup>51</sup>"One Vice of the Poets," Week, III (May 27, 1886), 414.

Give us that which lifts us above the low level of our daily surroundings and events, into a purer air, a more radiant sunshine, a loftier aspiration and achievement than the daily experience can ever bring. Thus shall you best help us to endure the tameness, the monotony and the ugliness inseparable from life in the real and the actual.<sup>52</sup>

Critics who could take their realism straight were rare. Usually, they performed some sort of mental gymnastics, in order to accommodate any one of the dangerous books in which they recognized merit, while excluding the rest. Consider the judgment of Flaubert's Salammbô offered by Mrs. Harrison: "Salammbô is not an immoral book," she wrote, "although its realism is not surpassed by that of Zola with regard to the brutal, the ugly, the diseased, and the merely horrible."<sup>53</sup> She reminds one of a modern judge and jury, handing down a verdict of "redeeming social value" at the obscenity trial of a book they do not understand. Sara Jeanette Duncan is one of the few writers who welcomed the new fiction with anything approaching an open mind. Yet even she could write: "The modern school of fiction, if it is fairly subject to any reproach, may bear the blame of dealing too exclusively with the corporealities of human life, to the utter and scornful neglect of its idealities."<sup>54</sup> More often, however, she

<sup>52</sup>XII (March 29, 1895), 418.

<sup>53</sup>"Flaubert's Salammbô," Week, III (August 19, 1886), 613.

<sup>54</sup>"The Art Gallery of the English Language," Week, III (July 15, 1886), 533.

defended contemporary writers such as James and Howells from the attacks of the censorious Philistines. She complained that a current craze for printing articles in which various people recommended books was misleading because "our wise friends do not come within a quarter of a century of to-day's literature."<sup>55</sup> The so-called expert's latest choice "does not leave him within hailing distance of Mr. Howells and Mr. James, gentlemen both engaged in developing a school of fiction more closely and subtly related to the conditions and progress of our time, of which we all should know something." She thought that fiction was abandoning the old, conventional patterns, and was instead discussing issues or problems from contemporary life.<sup>56</sup>

Opponents of realism usually attacked it on moral and religious grounds. Neatly lumping together two of their pet aversions, American life and atheism, they often characterized realism as being "materialism." Just as a life based on the acquisition of material goods went hand in hand with atheistic attitudes, so a concentration on describing external appearance was an implicit denial of the primacy of spiritual reality. The United States, of course, was the epitome of such a grasping, godless way of life, and realism sprang either

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<sup>55</sup>"Literary Pabulum," Week, IV (November 24, 1887), 831.

<sup>56</sup>"Outworn Literary Methods," Week, IV (June 9, 1887), 450-1.

from the new crassness of America or the worn decadence of continental Europe. "L. C." in the Week said that "Zola is universally admitted to be without the pale of civilization; he writes for the masses and his materialistic tendencies are really appalling."<sup>57</sup> Louisa Murray, in the very title of her polemic against "Democracy in Literature," made a tacit connection between American politics and literature.<sup>58</sup>

"Democracy," she said, could be seen as the triumph of mob rule in fiction:

We know that democratic France at present possesses such a literature as might well have been bred in the Commune which produced the terrible petroleuse and other forms of horror; a literature in which the worst vices, diseases and deformities of debased humanity are employed in the service of a degraded art, and of which M. Emile Zola is the great high priest.

This sort of immorality was so obviously harmful that steps were being taken to suppress it (she cited with approval the imprisonment of a London bookseller for selling Zola's novels). But there was another, and more insidiously pervasive, kind of literary democracy. This was the cult of the mass man, which led authors to write down to the level of the mass audience. She cited Howells as a writer who began as a poet, but found there was no money in it:

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<sup>57</sup>"Social Clubs and Foreign Literature," Week, III (June 10, 1886), 446.

<sup>58</sup>Week, VI (August 2, 1889), 550.

It was therefore clear to him that under the reign of democracy the only true and living art must be realistic, or, as he has presented it to us, the prosaic details of commonplace life, with every vestige of poetry carefully eliminated.

Her attitudes concerning these writers were shared by many other Canadian critics. The central point of her argument was not artistic dullness, but irreligious tendencies.

Speaking of Howells' novels, she said:

His novels, if accepted as true pictures of the best that life can give, could scarcely fail to check all aspirations after the higher possibilities of existence, without which life would certainly not be worth living.

As a virtuous counter-example of a writer who used common people as subjects, yet was neither dull nor unread, she cited Sir Walter Scott. Dickens and George Eliot she also praised, making a kind of novelist's trinity. G. Mercer Adam displayed similar attitudes when he complained:

The good old romantic and imaginative novel of our grandmothers' time seems wholly a creation of the past. What we have in its place is the English melodrama of such books as "Called Back"; the intellectual vivisection methods of the American schools of James and Howells; or, worse still, the loathsome realism and putridity of the school of Zola and France. 59

In spite of the prevailing emphasis on morality, many critics expressed a distaste for overt didacticism. Literature with a blatant "message" did not usually make for good entertainment:

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<sup>59</sup>"Some Books of the Past Year.--II," Week, II (January 15, 1885), 103.



Poetry's first business is to give pleasure, and this can be done only through Beauty . . . . Poetry as the vehicle of Beauty is legitimate, but poetry as the vehicle of Religion and Philosophy per se is quite illegitimate. 60

Mercer Adam asked: "Besides, is the novel the legitimate place for the discussion of the serious problems which have of late invaded it?" He answered himself promptly, "We think not."<sup>61</sup> But his opinion was expressed in a passage complaining about the number of women "who have taken to the writing of the propagandist novel: in popular phrase, the 'novel with a purpose'." Earlier in the article he had observed:

why the novel, in the hands least of all a woman, should become the vehicle for the revolting outpourings of a medical treatise, or for the depicting of inconceivably callous pictures of the effects of disease-smitten heredity, is beyond all decent conjecture. 62

His complaint against didacticism was obviously a piece of special pleading, not a universal principle. In the main, expressions of disbelief in the didactic purpose of art meant in practise that the writer disliked the current crop of "novels with a purpose" or "problem novels." Typical of the books which incurred critical wrath on these grounds were novels on the "woman question," or novels written to espouse particular social, political, or religious theories. Even

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<sup>60</sup>A. W. Crawford, "Archibald Lampman," Acta Victoriana, XVII (December, 1895), 77-81. Reprinted in Michael Gnarowski, ed., Archibald Lampman (Toronto: Ryerson, 1959).

<sup>61</sup>"Recent Fiction in Britain," Canadian Magazine, IV (January, 1895), 222.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 218.

anti-didactic statements usually concealed a moral bias. The Canadian Magazine's book reviewer said: "it appears to us that if a novel conforms to the law of the true, the good, and the beautiful, it must teach."<sup>63</sup> Goldwin Smith proclaimed:

Scott does not moralize. Heaven be praised that he does not. He does not set a moral object before him, nor lay down moral rules. But his heart, brave, pure and true, is a law to itself; and by studying what he does, we may find the law for all who follow his calling. <sup>64</sup>

God could never be far away when his emanations, Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Purity were mentioned.

Not all ideas about literature were directly resolvable into moral and religious considerations. When the debate between realism and idealism did not turn on a moral issue, it usually involved a question of the appropriateness of particular subjects for artistic treatment. There was a prevalent tendency to insist on a special "poetic" subject-matter for art. The various acceptable subjects also tended to be ranked in a pre-determined scale of merit. The place of the picturesque, for example, has already been considered; in both poetry and prose the picturesque was a lower form of beauty than the sublime, which was usually invoked as the highest type. In novels, a preference for historical events,

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<sup>63</sup>"Books and Authors," XI (June, 1898), 177.

<sup>64</sup>"The Lamps of Fiction," in Lectures and Essays, p. 69.

exotic peoples, and heroic deeds was part of the liking for the romance, rather than the realistic or naturalistic novel firmly grounded in the everyday life of the present. In poetry, Biblical subjects, nature subjects, nature descriptions, and patriotism were favorite themes. In poetry too the tendency to rank according to subject-matter was evident. Gordon Waldron insisted, "The subjects with which poetry may deal are human action, ideas of universal human interest and scenery,"<sup>65</sup> thus listing in descending order of merit the three categories of subject-matter which he recognized. Anything modern was usually anathema. For example, photography could be objectionable both for its newness and for its suggestion of realism. The mere word prompted one writer to observe:

The line

'Tis nature's spirit photographed in art,'  
 betrays the fact that Mr. Evans is not an artist, or even a connoisseur in art. He would not otherwise have used an expression the reverse of eulogistic when the context shows he intended it as the highest praise. The ideas conjured up by the word 'photograph' moreover, are too raw and modern, and withal too 'base and mechanical' to be fitted for use in poetry. 66

Such a reaction is not untypical. These critics could only attempt disinterested contemplation of works on certain subjects which were hallowed and sanctioned by tradition.

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<sup>65</sup>Canadian Magazine, VIII (December, 1896), 101.

<sup>66</sup>"Books Reviews," Rose-Belford's, III (July, 1879), 107.

Even more prominent than the fondness for ranking works by their subject-matter was the proclivity to assign each literary type a place in a hierarchy of values. Perhaps this is not so true of novels, where the various sub-genres are not always clearly defined, but it certainly holds for poetry. First of all, poetry was ranked above prose. When Louisa Murray said that the best and purest sort of novels "rank, though in a lower degree, with the plays of Shakespeare,"<sup>67</sup> we can infer that their lower rank was due to their prose form, not to any intrinsic difference of quality. No novels could ever rank "in an equal degree" with Shakespeare. Charles Mair began his reply to L. E. Horning's request for an assessment of the state of Canadian literature by saying: "By the term Literature you mean, of course, poetry; that imaginative and creative form of literary effort, which, by common consent of mankind, stands at the head of letters."<sup>68</sup> In his reply to the same request Wilfred Campbell placed epic and dramatic poetry in a higher category than lyric poetry, and said: "no poet can be called great who has not reached high grade in one of these departments of literature."<sup>69</sup> Other writers agreed with this ranking, with the exception that they often accorded a special place to the sonnet as

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<sup>67</sup>"Democracy in Literature," Week, VI (August 2, 1889), 550.

<sup>68</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 9, 1894), 344.

<sup>69</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 16, 1894), 369.

the highest form of lyric poetry, if not the highest form of all. Pelham Edgar remarked that Wilfred Campbell's lack of the highest intellectual seriousness was betrayed most strongly by his inability to write a good sonnet,<sup>70</sup> and Archibald Lampman thought that perhaps the dearth of good sonnets and sonneteers in America was due to the "unsettled social atmosphere" which was "not fitted to develop that particular union of austere dignity and lyric fervour which makes the fine sonnet writer."<sup>71</sup> The sonnet apparently had aristocratic, not democratic, associations. Interest in the sonnet form is evidenced by a number of articles devoted exclusively to this subject, and in particular by a long series of articles by "Sarepta" (E. P. Brownlow), which were ended only by their author's untimely death. Brownlow collected sonnets on particular subjects, and presented them, together with a generous admixture of appreciative commentary, to his waiting readers, who apparently were highly appreciative of his efforts.

Another question commonly debated, even after moral criteria were satisfied, was whether or not art had a duty to its readers to be cheerful and optimistic. "Pessimism"

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<sup>70</sup>"William Wilfred Campbell's Earlier and Later Poems," Week, X (September 29, 1893), 1043-4.

<sup>71</sup>"At the Mermaid Inn," Globe, September 17, 1892.

and "morbidness" were two of the strongest terms of critical disapproval. Louis Murray wrote:

Worlds away as Mr. Howells' representation of life is from M. Zola's theory of realistic art, or Count Tolstoi's tragic stories of oppression and cruelty, it appears to me as thoroughly pessimistic in its tendency. 72

Miss Murray's fear that realistic novels ultimately supported the view that life was not worth living shows that her distaste for pessimism was, in part, a reaction against that worst of Christian sins, despair. All art, another writer said, was supposed to help us "spurn the blasphemous question, Is life worth living?"<sup>73</sup> Emily McManus said of Thomas O'Hagan: "No chilling pessimism mars his verse, no mistrust darkens it."<sup>74</sup> Her choice of words indicates clearly her distaste for "pessimism." Hector W. Charlesworth trumpeted that "Stevenson's message to his contemporaries was that life is worth living."<sup>75</sup> Charlesworth reported that Stevenson "has been called a reactionary because he persistently considered life as a pageant, whereas it is our modern fashion to look upon it as a problem." Charlesworth was unashamedly on the side of the reactionaries. In his report on "My Contemporaries in Fiction," published in the Canadian

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<sup>72</sup>"Democracy in Literature," Week, VI (August 2, 1889), 550.

<sup>73</sup>D. W., "The Value of a Picture," Week, VI (August 16, 1889), 587.

<sup>74</sup>"O'Hagan's Poems: A Study," Canadian Magazine, I (October, 1893), 668.

<sup>75</sup>"Robert Louis Stevenson," Canadian Magazine, V (May, 1895), 27.

Magazine, the British writer David Christie Murray suggested that from his viewpoint as a member of the "old school" of writers, it appeared that "an essential part of the fiction writer's duty is to be harmless."<sup>76</sup> He held that:

To offer it as our intent to give delight and hurt not is no mere profession of an artistic Grundyism. It is the proclamation of what is to our minds the simple truth, that fiction should be a joyful, an inspiring, a sympathetic, and a helpful art.

Colin A. Scott, it will be remembered, had felt it necessary to defend Wilfred Campbell from charges of gloom and pessimism. This he did most strikingly by claiming that since life "is already so hard and evil, . . . it is surely more utterly pessimistic to refuse to have it expressed than to bravely face the facts as they appear, an attitude which involves courage and is already half a victory."<sup>77</sup> Other writers were not so tolerant. For them, pessimism was pessimism and no clever argument could change it into optimism.

A related question was the issue of "obscurity" in literature, which has already been mentioned in connection with the controversy over Carman's "Marjory Darrow." This

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<sup>76</sup>IX (June, 1897), 39.

<sup>77</sup>"William Wilfred Campbell," Canadian Magazine, II (January, 1894), 272.

criterion applied more to poetry than to fiction. Browning was the chief offender here, and was often seen as the model for other writers whose obscurity gave cause for complaint. Mercer Adam objected that he "had never the superabundant leisure and brains to understand" Browning.<sup>78</sup> Agnes E. Wetherald wrote: "'What is not clear,' says Voltaire, 'is not French.' Apparently, Browning thinks it is English, and his readers can only regret that he thinks so."<sup>79</sup> Even Goldwin Smith complained about "The Poet Browning's Obscurity." "Is it not the business of the poet," Smith asked, "to sing or to speak melodiously and harmoniously? If he cannot do this, had he not better, as Carlyle somewhere suggests, put down his thoughts in prose."<sup>80</sup> Charles G. D. Roberts wrote:

I believe Browning to be a truly great poet who has willfully obscured his gift in the effort to be startlingly original in expression. He is handicapped by his fad; but, fortunately, is strong enough to carry his handicap . . . . It also seems to me that the Browning of the Browning Societies is not the Browning that will live. Browning, the psychological analyst, will not be as towering a figure in the eyes of posterity as Browning, the poet, will be. 81

Although, as here, Browning sometimes drew praise for his moral teaching or his lyric gift, he was in general widely

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<sup>78</sup>"Some Books of the Past Year.--II," Week, II (January 15, 1885), 102.

<sup>79</sup>Agnes E. Wetherald, "Once Vice of the Poets," Week, III (May 27, 1886), 414.

<sup>80</sup>Bystander, new ser. (May, 1890), 263.

<sup>81</sup>"Robert Browning," Dominion Illustrated, IV (March 22, 1890), 183.



condemned for his difficultness. No wonder Claude Bissell remarks that W. J. Alexander may have thought of his book on Browning as "an epistle to the Philistines."<sup>82</sup> These complaints against obscurity all take as their premise the belief that art should be "popular," or at least accessible to a wide public without special knowledge or training. The artist should bend to meet the public, and not the reverse. Wilfred Campbell asserted that the "power of impressing the public is to my mind the true test that marks the real poet from the mere clever scribe-writer."<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, he went on immediately to discredit his argument by citing as the one American poet "who is in real touch with the people as a whole" James Whitcomb Riley.

Another doctrine which received general condemnation was the idea of art for art's sake. The condemnation is especially pronounced in the pages of the earlier magazines, the Canadian Monthly and Rose-Belford's. In an article on Swinburne's poetry, George H. B. Gray admitted: "The theory that art is a law unto itself was advanced by the defenders of Swinburne's verse, and is, we believe, the doctrine of the poet himself."<sup>84</sup> However, he had already stated his own

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<sup>82</sup>"Literary Taste in Central Canada during the Late Nineteenth Century," Canadian Historical Review, XXXI (1950), 247.

<sup>83</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 16, 1894), 368.

<sup>84</sup>"The Poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne," Canadian Monthly, XII (November, 1877), 511.

belief that "no art, unless it be purely imitative, can exist without conveying some lesson," although he conceded that art should not be merely "a handmaid to religion, or morality or science." Professor Lyall implied his disapproval of the art for art's sake aesthetic, and urged: "It is time, we think, that poetry was redeemed from the inane subjects which modern poets choose to impose upon the world."<sup>85</sup> Martin J. Griffin spoke of "that school which cries out, 'Art for art's sake,' in order that it may outrage morality with impunity."<sup>86</sup> Reverend R. W. Boodle saw Pater's form of aestheticism as part of a general response to the widespread "Philosophy of Pessimism" engendered by the loss of religious faith. "A reaction is taking place," he said, "but the cure is as bad as the disease, for it is equivalent to the abandonment of noble aims, and has for its object merely the killing of the sense of pain by opiates of pleasure."<sup>87</sup> Louisa Murray spoke contemptuously of the "Aesthetic cult, with its exaltation of the fringings of existence, and its other absurdities."<sup>88</sup> Although realism replaced aestheticism as

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<sup>85</sup>"Tennyson: A Criticism," Rose-Belford's, I (October, 1878), 486.

<sup>86</sup>"Another View of Matthew Arnold's Poems," Rose-Belford's, I (November, 1878), 546.

<sup>87</sup>"Modern Pessimism," Rose-Belford's, III (December, 1879), 601.

<sup>88</sup>"A Defense of Carlyle's 'Reminiscences,' Partly Written by Himself," Rose-Belford's, VII (August, 1881), 130.

the chief bugbear of the Week and the Canadian Magazine, aestheticism was not forgotten. Helen H. Hicks pointed out with approval that

Considering the vast amount of unremitting labor [sic] and the great talents which have been devoted to it, the creed of "Art for art's sake" seems to have had a surprisingly slender hold on the popular imagination.<sup>89</sup>

The creed which appealed to popular taste, she said, was the gospel of the commonplace, and its good tidings are not artistic but ethical. Among Anglo-Saxon nations a literature has always been more valued for the teaching it conveys than for the form it displays.

In a similar vein, the moral criticism of John Ruskin was commended to the readers of the Canadian Magazine:

Mere formal art, of "art for art's sake" as the materialists and sensualists will have it, is his abomination unutterable, even spite of his powers of utterance. But art for the ideal, for faith and hope and love, for the human hand and head and heart that are back of it, and for the one God who is good and eternal back of these--real art, that is, was adopted by him, and inculcated, and defended, and by every possibility of his life advanced.<sup>90</sup>

To which a good many conscientious readers doubtless replied: Amen.

Several writers expressed an attitude of distrust towards all art. John George Bourinot complained that the novel-reading public "seeks amusement rather than

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<sup>89</sup>"Books and Points," Canadian Magazine, I (May, 1893), 230.

<sup>90</sup>W. J. Llamon, "John Ruskin as a Political Economist," Canadian Magazine, VIII (November, 1896), 49.

knowledge."<sup>91</sup> Although he took the trouble to urge that novels be written from "a higher and purer aim" than commercial gain, his deepest conviction was that a good book of history "has assuredly a much deeper and more useful purpose in the culture and education of the world than any work of fiction can possibly have even when animated by a lofty genius." James Douglas,<sup>92</sup> in assessing "The Intellectual Progress of Canada" for the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, reported the reassuring fact that the sales of fiction from Toronto bookstores had declined from 44% to 36% of the total sales. But the apparent decline in novel-reading might be an illusion, he cautioned his audience: "as nearly all novels now come out in periodicals before assuming book shape, there may be a decrease in the number of novels sold, while there is in fact an increase in the number read."<sup>93</sup> These attitudes reflect either a puritanical distrust of all that is pleasant or frivolous and does not aid directly in salvation, or a utilitarian distaste for everything that is not immediately useful in dealing with the material world. Probably, in good Protestant fashion, both motives were at work in the minds of these men.

Theoretical discussion of the nature of art and literature were virtually non-existent. However, from passing

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<sup>91</sup>Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness, p. 30.

<sup>92</sup>James Douglas (1837-1918) was successively a Presbyterian minister, a chemist and mining engineer, and Chancellor of Queen's University.

references it is plain that the prevailing ideas were romantic in temper. It was widely held that the artist was a special kind of person, who wrote under the influence of the "divine afflatus," or of irresistible emotional pressures. The Week's "Critic" complained that the highest art was impossible in the late nineteenth century because of an increase in self-consciousness and analytic thought. He referred disparagingly to "that ——— trait so often commented upon as observable in cis-Atlantic productions," and "this taint of self-consciousness, fatal to the highest art."<sup>94</sup> The true artist was he who surrendered wholly to the divine afflatus. Self-consciousness was "a trait destructive of that spontaneity and simplicity which would underlie all art." Colin A. Scott pictured Campbell's true poetic powers as breaking through "the calm placidities of mere description" in spite of the author's initial intentions.<sup>95</sup>

Professor Lyall, who acquired his ideas in Britain (he received his degree from the University of Glasgow),<sup>96</sup> gave clearest expression to the romantic view. He used terminology and logic derived from the Romantic movement to explain his concept of poetry:

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<sup>93</sup>"The Intellectual Progress of Canada during the Last Fifty Years, and the Present State of its Literature," Canadian Monthly, VII (May, 1875), 471.

<sup>94</sup>"The Critic," IX (October 28, 1892), 759.

<sup>95</sup>"William Wilfred Campbell," Canadian Magazine, II (January, 1894), 270.

<sup>96</sup>"Thomas Campbell: A Criticism," Rose-Belford's, I (August, 1878), 197.

Imagination is "ideas seen in the light of emotion," or "possessed in the element of emotion." In that state they generally assume a figurative form--the form of a simile or metaphor or proropeia, &c. Hence, poetry and poets. And, according to the character of the emotion, will be the style or character of the poetry. 97

Elsewhere he wrote:

What is this poetic instinct? We take it to be that tendency in the thoughts and emotions to assume a certain modulated character, so that they cannot help uttering themselves in such form . . . . 98

Under pressure of his emotions, the poet became specially inspired. He radiated both truth and feeling in a god-like manner. Richard Lewis exulted: "In Shakespeare's company, and under his guidance, we are gifted with the insight of genius, and, with the privilege of gods, behold at a glance the inevitable issues."<sup>99</sup> Dr. Daniel Clark<sup>100</sup> said that some of Heavyssege's earlier sonnets were

scintillations of the central fires which subsequently burst forth with volcanic grandeur, in the elevated manifestations of epic power and in the midst of dramatic ebullitions of sublimity not equalled in the annals of our country. 101

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<sup>97</sup>"Wordsworth: A Criticism," Belford's Monthly Magazine, III (April, 1878), 612.

<sup>98</sup>"Tennyson: A Criticism," Rose-Belford's, I (October, 1878), 477.

<sup>99</sup>"Shakespearian Studies: Macbeth--Act I," Belford's Monthly Magazine, II (June, 1877), 70.

<sup>100</sup>Daniel Clark (1835-1912) was a physician and author. He was superintendent of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto from 1875 to 1905.

<sup>101</sup>"The Poetry of Charles Heavyssege," Canadian Monthly, X (August, 1876), 127-8.

Can we see here a hint of the phoenix poet who consumes himself by his own intensity, but rises to live on in his poetry? At any event, Heavysege, along with many another lesser Canadian poet, was often pictured as the suffering artist, beset by a plague of unappreciative contemporaries.

Many other writers employed the image of the artist as a man apart. Charles Mair said that a fine and tender nature was not enough to make a man a poet, for "Something more is required; that mysterious something . . . which distinguishes him from the cultivated and literary herd."<sup>102</sup>

Wilfred Campbell announced:

The poet must be, first and foremost, a man of ideas and ideals, a burning soul, lifted above the ordinary plane by a passionate interest in the race as a whole, and in the relationship of the individual to the great Unknown. <sup>103</sup>

A poem by John Imrie presented the poet as having all the attributes of a god:

What work are the poets doing?  
 Teaching men to live:  
 Not like slaves with scourges driven,  
 But like men with powers God-given,  
 Using them for God and heaven,  
 Gaining while they give.

What work are the poets doing?  
 Teaching men to think:  
 That this life is man's probation,  
 Fitting for a nobler station,  
 Rising higher in creation,  
 Up from Chaos' brink!

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<sup>102</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 9, 1894), 345.

<sup>103</sup>"Views of Canadian Literature," Week, XI (March 16, 1894), 369.

What work are the poets doing?  
 Teaching men to see  
 God in nature every hour,  
 Beauty in each leaf and flower,  
 Wonders wrought by sun and shower,  
 Winds, and waves, and sea.

What work are the poets doing?  
 Teaching men to think:  
 Drawing nearer man to man,  
 Doing all the good we can,  
 Working out "the golden plan"  
 Taught by God above! 104

In short, poets acted as God's deputies, teaching men their place in the world, teaching them how to relate to their fellow men and to the next world. To this unselfish task the poet was wholly devoted; he loved his work "more than life." In return for his efforts the poet received, not "wealth or station," but the "love of men" and their praises for his handiwork. "What do poets want with gold?" asked Archibald Lampman.

Amidst this chorus of romanticism, Gordon Waldron's article stands out as one of the few instances of a calmer, more intellectual and disciplined approach to art. He spoke for traditional humanistic values, rather than the late nineteenth century decadence which he identified in Canadian poetry. However, his was an isolated voice. His opponent, Professor DeMille, used a romantic definition of poetry, obtained from the American critic E. C. Stedman, to refute Waldron's arguments. A call, such as that repeated by John

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<sup>104</sup>"The Poet's Work and Wages," Week, IX (January 22, 1892), 122.



A. Cooper for "not more books, but better books,"<sup>105</sup> was really a plea for an end to provincialism, not an advocacy of classical craftsmanship and restraint in literature. The one genuine statement of the classical humanist position came, as might be expected, from Goldwin Smith. In his Centenary speech he described the merits of Scott's characters in language reminiscent of Dr. Johnson's famous remarks on Shakespeare:

The materials of the novelist . . . must be idealized. The artist is not a photographer, but a painter. He must depict not persons but humanity, otherwise he forfeits the artist's name, and the power of doing the artist's work in our hearts . . . . Scott's characters are never monsters or caricatures. They are full of nature; but it is universal nature. Therefore they have their place in the universal heart, and will keep that place for ever.<sup>106</sup>

For Smith's contemporaries, idealization was a more superficial and less specific process. A strong suspicion arises that Smith's meaning for "idealism" is the root source of all the various senses of the word, as it is used by other writers. Through the years the concept has been vulgarized and attenuated by an admixture of romantic attitudes, until only a man with Smith's classical education and reverence for the past could use it in its original signification.

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<sup>105</sup>"Current Thoughts, Canadian Magazine, VIII (January, 1897), 277.

<sup>106</sup>"The Lamps of Fiction," in Lectures and Essays, p. 70.

In their ideas Canadian critics of the late nineteenth century lagged behind the critical opinions of England.

Jerome H. Buckley writes:

Like their eighteenth-century predecessors, most early Victorian aestheticians strove to relate the beautiful to some fixed pattern in the harmony of nature, to an unchanging truth beyond the immediate objects of contemplation. If art was to mirror a larger totality, its function, they thought, must be at least implicitly "moral"; the picture or the poem, the play or the statue was to edify as well as to delight by its reflection of an immutable design. 107

Such a description fits all the Canadian advocates of "idealism" and also most of the proponents of "realism." Romantic idealism was the critical norm in Canada long after realism had acquired articulate and forceful spokesmen in most other countries. When Canadian critics did accept realism, it was in a weakened and chastened form; in particular, truth to the facts of Canadian life was equated with participation in the lesser modes of art. Canadian critics still exalted Tennyson long after his poetry had become identified with middle-class taste, and they began to champion Browning only after he had become the institutionalized poet of the Browning Societies.<sup>108</sup> Hall Caine and Marie Corelli were two of the most spectacularly popular novelists of the late years of the century, but in Canada though we read much of Hall Caine we read very little of Marie Corelli. About the most advanced

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<sup>107</sup> The Victorian Temper (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), p. 143.

<sup>108</sup> The first Browning Society was established in 1881. See Amy Cruse, The Victorians and their Books (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 202.

literary developments in England, such as the Yellow Book or The Book of the Rhymers' Club, we likewise hear nothing.

A time-lag caused by distance from Europe is not an adequate explanation for Canadian conservatism, for Canadian writers were not uninformed about literary developments in England and followed with interest many of the latest crazes and controversies. It seems more correct to assert that Canada simply did not offer the social conditions necessary to produce a radical intellectual. In nineteenth century Canada the promotion of culture was viewed as a spreading of the accumulated stock of art and literature and knowledge, not the development of new art and new ideas; to think of art and culture was to focus one's attention on the Old World rather than the New. The desire for culture represented a desire to see Canadian artists emulate European, and particularly English, models; it represented a desire to see Canada become more like an established European nation and different from the United States. The arts interested Canadian critics mainly as they could be related to the precarious and ill-defined identity of Canada, or to the moral and social standards of polite society. Any heterodox opinions would appear as attempts to destroy the insecure Canadian identity or to overthrow social norms. Consequently there was little truly independent or original critical thinking. Rather, the work of Canadian critics was a

reflection of the common mind as it exercised its conventions, predilections, and senses of decorum and morality on the literature of the day.

#### IV

#### THE PHILISTINE IN CANADA

Laments about the materialist outlook and philistinism of Canadians have been a recurring feature of our cultural self-assessments. Canadians are materialists who do not read books; if they do read, Canadians only read the books of other countries and will not support their own authors; alternately, Canadians puff the work of their own countrymen outrageously, regardless of its true merit: such complaints abound in late nineteenth century Canadian criticism. "For we are the imported essence of British Philistinism, warranted to keep in any climate, and affording in our own proper persons a guarantee that it will increase in force and efficiency in this one."<sup>1</sup> Thus did Sara Jeanette Duncan describe the English Canadian people. She was not alone in her views.

Even at this early stage the apathy of the Canadian public drew critical fire. Daniel Clark pointed out that Heavyside's Saul "met with a chilling reception from the

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<sup>1</sup>"Saunterings," Week, IV (January 20, 1887), 120.

Canadian public"<sup>2</sup> until it was noticed favourably in foreign publications such as the North British Review and the Atlantic Monthly. Clark lamented:

An educated people of four millions are so dead to the worth of native genius, that not one of its many sons or daughters of song has met with success, in a financial point of view, or favour from the masses of the people.

W. P. Begg explained the neglect of Alexander McLachlan's poetry by saying:

I am inclined to believe that, in a very large measure, it is the same old story over again, viz., that 'a prophet is not without honour save in his own country' and in his own times. 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' it was asked of old; and Canadians, by birth and adoption, have been asking of their own country, in the same sceptical way, can anything good from a literary point of view come out of her? And so doubtful have they been of the fact, that no work which is originally published within the Dominion, I am told, is likely to succeed financially, unless it be sold by subscription and be specially canvassed; but if it first be published in the Old Country, or in the neighbouring Republic, and then appear as a reprint, it may sell--but hardly otherwise so as to pay. 3

Barry Dane questioned J. W. Longley's assertion that "a large and appreciative audience" was waiting in Canada to welcome worthy Canadian books. He claimed:

Canadian works have been issued from Canadian publishing houses, some wrought by the hand of genius, some polished by the touch of the scholar, that have not paid the cost of publication, while inferior compilations and unreadable literary "bosh" have, I am informed, put satisfactory shekels in the pockets of the compilers or authors. 4

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<sup>2</sup>"The Poetry of Charles Heavysege," Canadian Monthly, X (August, 1876), 128.

<sup>3</sup>"Alexander McLachlan's Poems and Songs," Canadian Monthly, XII (October, 1877), 356.

Although Roberts and his contemporaries achieved considerable recognition in Canada, in some ways they fared little better than their predecessors, for their reward came mainly in the form of praise. Canada, as Thomas O'Hagan complained, did not support her poets in a practical way:

"Praise is a beautiful thing, very consolatory, but not quite a tonic and totally unfit as regular daily diet for even the gods."<sup>5</sup> Canadian poets had to earn their living by tedious occupations which took their energies away from their main work. The work for which they were most suited was denied them: "There are twelve or fifteen universities in Canada. How many of our most gifted poets held chairs in them?"

Only Charles G. D. Roberts, answered O'Hagan. He felt that for someone seeking a position in a Canadian university it was a handicap to have published a book of poems. As a salutary contrast, he cited the way the United States often gave her writers professorial positions, or appointed them as diplomatic ambassadors. The best that could be said of Canada was that

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<sup>4</sup>"National Literature," Week, I (August 21, 1884), 600.

<sup>5</sup>"The Future of Canadian Poetry," Week, XIII (July 24, 1896), 834-5.

A few of our best and most gifted writers, such as Lampman, Scott and Campbell, have been fortunate or unfortunate enough to get into the wheel of the Civil Service at Ottawa and for labour performed are drawing a salary which secures them against "chill penury."

Robert Barr,<sup>6</sup> writing from England, where he had achieved a considerable success as a journalist and novelist, urged all aspiring young Canadian writers to "Get over the border as soon as you can."<sup>7</sup> No writer could make a living in Canada, for "The bald truth is that Canada has the money, but would rather spend it on whiskey than on books. It prefers to inflame its stomach, rather than inform its brain." Canada had very little chance of producing a literature, Barr said "because she won't pay money, and money is the root of all literature."

The main reason advanced to explain the neglected condition of Canadian writers and literature was the materialism of the Canadian people. Mercer Adam said both the United States and Canada suffered from

the dissipation of time and brain in the reading of newspapers, and absorption of every faculty of the mind in business. With Commercial men, notably, there is no interval for intellectual enjoyment and refreshment; and even the professional classes seem to be losing their poetic sensibilities and becoming indifferent to the claims of culture. 8

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<sup>6</sup>Robert Barr (1850-1912) was a journalist in Detroit before moving to England, where he became a successful novelist and was also co-founder with Jerome K. Jerome of the Idler Magazine.

<sup>7</sup>"Literature in Canada," Canadian Magazine, XIV (November, 1899), 3-7.



Charles Mair ascribed much of the difficulty experienced by Canadian writers to the influence of "the people who openly profess interest in Canadian letters, but in private content themselves with the erotic novel and the imported newspaper."<sup>9</sup>

Archibald McMechan wrote:

The two chief causes for national humiliation are, the prevailing Philistinism and our politics. We have authors, but no Canadian publisher will take the risk of publishing their work. We have artists whose pictures pass the severe tribunal of the Salon, but they are not bought in Canada. Artists and writers must seek markets outside their own country. 10

The books and journals that were popular, lamented an unnamed writer in the Week, were "those devoted to sensationalism, gossip, and erotic twaddle in the form of fiction."<sup>11</sup> John A. Cooper agreed. It was his experience that Canadians "do not buy books, and know very little about them."<sup>12</sup> A Canadian publisher had told him that Canadians bought mainly three classes of books:

first, cheap paper-covered novels by such writers as Bertha M. Clay and Mrs. Southworth; second, cheap cloth-bound books, such as the Pansy, Elsie, and Swan books; third, high-priced subscription books. 13

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<sup>8</sup>"An Interregnum in Literature," Week, I (June 12, 1884), 439.

<sup>9</sup>"Souvenirs of the Past," Week, XIII (May 29, 1896), 643.

<sup>10</sup>"The Inferiority of Canadians," Week, XIII (September 11, 1896), 1002.

<sup>11</sup>"Toronto's Taste," Week, XIII (March 13, 1896), 367.

<sup>12</sup>"Canadians as Book-Buyers," Canadian Magazine, IX (September, 1897), 437.

Cooper's description of Canadian book-buyers was scarcely flattering:

Those who purchase the first class have neither taste in regard to the appearance of a book, nor judgment as to literary value. Those who invest in the second class are those who cannot see any virtue in a book which does not depict the life of either a saint or a devil. The persons who purchase subscription books are those who judge a book by its size, and do not know that it is more profitable to print a large book on poor paper than a small book on good paper.

Anti-intellectual attitudes were virtually legislated into Canadian government policy, maintained George Munro Grant.<sup>14</sup> In an article in the Canadian Magazine, written almost more in sorrow than in anger, he set out to attack some of the "Anti-National Features of the National Policy."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>I have been unable to identify Bertha M. Clay. Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth's famous initials identified novels which enjoyed a wide popularity from the 1850's until after 1900. During the eighties and nineties her books were coming out of copyright and were gaining wide circulation in cheap editions. The "Pansy, Elsie, and Swan books" were all highly moral fiction, suitable for Sunday school reading. The Methodist Magazine said of one of Isabella Alden's seventy-five "Pansy" books: "Like all the 'Pansy' books, it has a distinctly moral purpose, and will be very suggestive of helpful methods in religious training of the young" (XXXII [August, 1890], 192). The "Elsie" books related the progress of the pure and religious heroine, Elsie Dinsmore, from child to grandmother, in twenty-eight volumes. The "Swan" books were the work of Annie S. Swan, and had a wide popularity.

<sup>14</sup>George Munro Grant (1835-1902) was Principal of Queen's University, 1877-1902, and was a prolific author. He was also an ardent imperialist.

<sup>15</sup>Canadian Magazine, I (March, 1893), 9-13.

The aspect he chose to criticize was the fifteen per cent tariff on books. He complained:

What matters it [to the government] whether a few professors or a few thousand students are fined for the sin of endeavouring to acquire knowledge? They have no solid vote to sell, and will not sell themselves to any party.

The government could impose this tax because

The government knows that Canadians do not read books. The great body of voters are satisfied with newspapers or cheap novels, pirated as a rule, and are satisfied because the papers are not only un-taxed, but carried at the public cost from the offices of publication all over the country.

In this matter, Grant claimed, Canadians were shamed by the whole world. Even the United States had more liberal laws concerning books for university libraries. He had looked into the laws of countries the world over, but found none so unfriendly to learning as Canada's.

Along with complaints about the lack of interest in good literature went a series of comments on the low standards of Canadian literary criticism. A writer in Rose-Belford's suggested that "in so far as criticism and reviewing are concerned our great Canadian papers are woefully behind the times"; he claimed, "The smallest English or American newspaper employs a literary editor, and a feature in the journal is a column or two of carefully prepared reviews of new books, every week or oftener."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, in Canada

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<sup>16</sup>E. N. G., "Round the Table," Rose-Belford's, I (December, 1878), 758.

It is melancholy to see the way in which the Canadian editor, proper, notices the books which publishers send to him. Generally only the title and names of author and publisher, and bookseller, are given; rarely anything more, except perhaps a few lines written from the Preface.

Barry Dane also complained about the poor standards of Canadian criticism.<sup>17</sup> "Flattering and fulsome praise is so recklessly bestowed" on even the most ordinary books that when a truly good book appeared "the journalistic vocabulary of laudatory phrases is already exhausted, and merit receives no adequate reward." The result of the present system was to lower book reviews to the level of the other cheap journalism which filled Canadian papers. He announced:

Until such time as criticisms are written by capable men who have read the books they review, not simply glanced at the title pages, and with a view to give a correct idea of the merit of the work, and not as a mere bookseller's advertisement, book reviews will be as reliable as patent medicine advertisements, and probably as fostering to good literature.

Dane felt that Canadian journalism was doing a disservice to literary culture in another way. In too many papers "bad grammar and slang run a close race up and down the columns," thus educating people in poor habits of expression, instead of good ones. The Week's "Reviewer" made similar comments. He thought that conscientious Canadian criticism was especially needed for two reasons:

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<sup>17</sup>"National Literature," Week, I (September 4, 1884), 632-3.

The first is that we have stultified ourselves by our habit of crying up literary shoddy and rubbish as good ware. All our literary geese are swans. We seem to think that every Canadian who writes a book deserves a statue for achievement . . . . In the second place, this indiscriminate praise harms the very men who most need appreciation and encouragement. 18

"The net result," he said, "is that Canadian literary judgement is a laughing stock; and 'Canadian literature' is hardly discussed outside of Grip." In the pages of the Canadian Magazine the chief advocate of an improved criticism was John A. Cooper. He complained the most of what passed for Canadian "literature" was produced by "amateurs," who would not listen to criticism, and indeed did not consider criticism as a fair reaction to their work. "Up to the present," Cooper said,

the unskilled litterateur has refused to allow his work to be criticized, and he has been backed up in such a refusal by a small body of admirers who have been too ready to believe that a certain number of printed pages, sewn together and bound in cloth, make a book, and that all books have a great value . . . . The result of this has been that Canada has developed no critics. There has been no tolerance of the man who has dared to point out a defect here and there. And because Canada has produced no persons who have studied standards and are prepared to compare, in an expert way, all productions with such standards, there has been little progress in the art of writing. 19

Most critics of Canadian culture attacked in a direct, headlong and sometimes clumsy manner; but as John P. Matthews

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<sup>18</sup>"The Reviewer," Week, XII (January 4, 1895), 128.

<sup>19</sup>"Another Amateur Production," Canadian Magazine, X (March, 1898), 461.

points out, the words of Sara Jeanette Duncan in the Week were "sharper, more sophisticated and worldly-wise than those used by any other contributor to that journal."<sup>20</sup> She used the rapier, rather than the bludgeon, to deflate Canadian egos. She too tried to analyze why literature seemed to be in such a poor state in Canada. Her answer had a family resemblance to those of other writers, but it was constructed with a greater subtlety than theirs. In fact, Miss Duncan's way with words provoked E. W. Thomson to complain: "She's a clever woman, a perfect adventuress, an admirable reporter-- and I can't read any of her prose because she will be smart."<sup>21</sup> Thomson was speaking of her novels, but in her journalistic writing as well Miss Duncan was "smart" at the expense of the Canadian Philistine--though perhaps "witty" would be a word more in keeping with her own intentions.

In one remarkable article she borrowed a term from her favorite critic W. D. Howells, and in ringing Arnoldian fashion castigated the Canadian people as "Maoris" (A term which John Matthews appears to have misread as "Majores").<sup>22</sup> The meaning of this odd word was perfectly plain in context: a Maori was a provincial Philistine. As such, the Maori had certain well-defined characteristics. He was self-important:

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<sup>20</sup>Tradition in Exile, p. 117.

<sup>21</sup>Letter to Archibald Lampman, June 3, 1893, in Arthur S. Bourinot, ed., Letters of Edward William Thomson to Archibald Lampman, 1891-1897 (Ottawa: Editor, 1957).

<sup>22</sup>Tradition in Exile, p. 117.

Nothing is more palpable to the average Maori than the fact that he is as good as anybody else. He may not possess as many wampum strings, and his wife may be uglier, he will admit; but in all other respects he is any man's fellow. 23

He was a materialist, and had no sense of tradition; "Old things convey to him only a sense of deterioration; he finds his supremest architectural delight in new bricks and fresh mortar," Miss Duncan said. He liked gossip and scandal, especially that which gave him the illusion of sharing the private lives of famous people. The average Maori "knows a great many distinguished people intimately to speak of, and an American Maori invariably alludes to the executive heads of his republic as 'Grover' and 'Frankie.'" In literature his tastes were simple and definite; he liked to be informed or entertained, in both cases without great expenditures of energy on his part:

The well-regulated Maori affects a history and biography and all useful reading to a laudable extent. The almanac, in his opinion, ranks well in literature, since it contains something that he desires to know. In fiction he likes a story with a good deal of incident and accident--though he condemns sensationalism--and he likes it to end well. He is particular about the ending, and it not infrequently determines the whole merit of the book for him.

But the chief characteristic of the Maori, the virtue he was most at pains to build up and maintain, was his respectability:

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<sup>23</sup>"The Maori," Week, III (July 22, 1886), 547-8.

He is eminently--arrantly--respectable, usually well-to-do, and he wears an expression so complacent that it excites one's wrath or compassion, according to the temperature. He steps briskly through the fabric of ideality that some kind hand has clothed the world with. Let us praise heaven that the rents close up after him!

The Maori, then, was the middle class man, the bourgeois. It was he who, particularly under a democratic ethos, possessed the combination of money and leisure which could determine the main cultural trends of a society. It was he who finally took the blame when Miss Duncan set out to discover why Canadians were "still an eminently unliterary people."<sup>24</sup> She contemptuously dismissed an American suggestion that the cold Canadian climate was to blame, and almost as quickly decided that a lack of good education was not the reason. If anything, Ontario was over-laden with educated young men, so that "our farm lands lie untilled while our offices are filled to unprofitable repletion." Nor would she accept the argument that Canada was not rich enough to produce a leisure class from which writers could emerge:

While authorship is a profession with pecuniary rewards like any other, those who are truly called to it obey a law far higher than that of demand and supply . . . . When the great Canadian litterateur recognizes himself he will not pause to weigh the possibilities of Canada's literary market before he writes the novel or the poem that is to redeem our literary reputation.

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<sup>24</sup>"Sauterings," Week, III (September 30, 1886), 707-8.



Besides, she declared, "a great deal of the talk of Canadian poverty is the veriest nonsense." If a Canadian genius were to appear, Canadians would buy his work: "We are well fed, well clad, well read. Why should we not buy our own books!"

"We would buy them if they were written," Miss Duncan insisted. The chief reason they were not written was that Canadians were preoccupied with material affairs, and did not look for or value artistic insights:

We are indifferent; we go about our business and boast of the practical nature of our aspirations; we have neither time nor the inclination for star-gazing, we say. The Province of Ontario is one great camp of the Philistines.

Miss Duncan found her strongest evidence in the newspapers, which were narrow-minded, crude, and partisan. But she did not content herself, as the other writers tended to do, with blaming the shortcomings of the press for the shortcoming of the people. She pointed out that a people usually get the newspapers they deserve. "The influence of the daily newspaper upon public opinion is not greater than the influence of public opinion upon the daily newspaper," she wrote.

In a very great measure we dictate what manner of editorial we shall take with out coffee; and either of our great morning dailies is eloquent of our tastes. Politics and vituperation, temperance and vituperation, religion and vituperation; these three dietetic articles, the vituperative sauce invariably accompanying, form the exclusive journalistic pabulum of three-quarters of the people of Ontario. No social topics of other than a merely local interest, no scientific, artistic, or literary discussion, no broad consideration of matters of national interest--nothing but perpetual jeering, misconstruction, and misrepresentation for party ends of matters within an almost incredibly narrow range.

And the public, apparently, did not object to the dearth of book reviews and the plethora of advertisements. Miss Duncan reported a revealing personal experience:

"Why do you print no book reviews?" I asked the editor of a leading journal recently.

"People don't care about them, and it interferes with advertising," was his truly Philistinish response.

One additional factor drew Miss Duncan's fire: the marked tendency of Canadians to depreciate themselves and their productions.

A spirit of depreciation of such faint stirrings of such literary life as we have amongst us at present has often been marked in Canadians, a tendency to nip forth-putting buds by contemptuous comparison with full blown production of other lands, where conditions are more favourable to literary efflorescence. This is a distinctly colonial trait; and in our character as colonists we find the root of all our sins of omission in letters.

"Our politics are a game of grab," she said. National patriotism was overpowered by regional self-interests. Implicitly, her conclusion pointed to independence as the most desirable goal for Canada: "A national literature cannot be looked for as an outcome of anything less than a complete national existence."

Miss Duncan's arguments suggest that those who presided over the fate of literature in Canada might be responsible for the very conditions they decried. Except for her comments, there is a certain shrillness of tone evident in all the attacks on the Canadian Philistine. We can detect a ready assumption of superior virtue on the writer's part, and an

eager willingness to believe that Canadians deserve the worst that can be said about them. Critics are quick to perceive the failings of the average Canadian, and equally quick to assume a condition of present-day degeneracy; they are convinced without much examination that things are worse than they used to be in the old days or in the old country. All this suggests we are dealing with a group of writers who are partly blinded by their own prejudices. They are too quick to include themselves in an élite group set above the uncultured many, and are far too ready to see faults in others and virtues in themselves. Could they actually be part of the problem they are describing? If the Canadian audience was by and large an audience of Philistines, might not the critics who served this audience also participate in the Philistine mentality?

To discuss this question, it is first necessary to decide more precisely just what constitutes a Philistine. According to Miss Duncan's definition, a Philistine is materialistic and pragmatic in outlook: he measures personal worth according to one's possessions and power in society. He is eminently respectable, which means he regulates his behaviour according to what he thinks other people consider correct, not according to his own inner convictions. He practises the socially approved virtues, and makes sure these are well-known. His vices, if any, are minor or well hidden. He probably has no hidden virtues. He is very moral, but his

morality is of a piece with his respectability: that is, he is good because other people expect him to be good, and he is only as good as they expect--no better. As long as his own morality is not called into question, he is willing to admit (he may even enjoy admitting) that other people are immoral, or that the times as a whole are immoral. Whether utopia is placed in the past, present, or future is not a contentious issue with him, so long as he can believe that he personally is better than he has ever been. He may think society is just fine as it is, or he may feel it is going rapidly downhill, but no matter what he thinks about society in general, in his own life he is conservative; he resists all changes to his habits and ideas.

His ideas about literature the Philistine obtains second-hand, either by consulting recognized authorities, or by extending his ordinary social code into the realm of literature. This means that the ultimate desideratum of literature, as of life, is that it be comfortable: that it cause no physical or mental hardship, and that it urge no one to perform a difficult or unprofitable action. The average Canadian reader, said Miss Duncan, wanted to be amused. He didn't mind moral uplift or noble heroism, but he did object strongly to didactic novels, especially in the field of religion:

But this interference with his own private and unassailable convictions of dogma, this gratuitous instruction in matters where he firmly believes his education complete, above all this trickery whereby he has been induced to enter an argument, in which there is no personal satisfaction in talking back, he very naturally resents. 25

The Philistine wants to be reassured by his reading, and told that his standards and his world are righteous and stable. His theoretical concepts take precedence over his direct personal reactions to literature. His perception of a work can be distorted to fit previously established categories; or, if the work resists distortion, it can be relegated to a lower level of achievement, or rejected entirely as immoral or degenerate and crude. The Philistine's interest in literature may even be part of his respectability, rather than a true expression of his personality. He may merely regard literature as part of the "culture" which is appropriate to his station in life. A knowledge of literature can be a kind of status symbol; it indicates that the possessor does not have to spend the whole day earning a living. It is an essential attribute of the gentleman or gentlewoman. Literature is in many ways a luxury item; its cultivation requires both leisure time and a refined, non-utilitarian sensibility. It is particularly appropriate for women, to demonstrate their superiority to the time-consuming round of daily menial

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<sup>25</sup>"Sauterings," Week, V (August 2, 1888), 574.

household tasks.

All of these attitudes are seldom found conveniently grouped together in one article or in one man. But a sufficient number of them occur sufficiently often to support the contention that Philistinism is one of the chief characteristics of the Canadian literary criticism of the period. For example, preconceived attitudes frequently coloured the literary judgments of Canadian critics. When critics accept Roberts' use of Greek themes, when they welcome his resemblance to Keats, Shelley, or Tennyson, they are really demonstrating that Roberts has successfully met their test of what literature should be. When they praise his patriotic poems they are really demonstrating that the ideas he has expressed are ideas they already hold. The low status frequently given to nature poetry is a result of an a priori judgment, not a direct result of reading the poems themselves. A predisposition towards romances often causes critics to reject other kinds of fiction out of hand, without attempting to meet the offending book on its own terms. The belief that Canada lacks interest for the artist and writer betrays a rigid system of prejudices as to what constitutes proper subject-matter for art. In addition, the belief that some things are intrinsically poetic is often an expression of an attitude which demands that the arts avoid disturbing contemporary questions; indeed, that they avoid any disturbing subjects at all. Trees, mountains, past ages, gods and

goddesses are poetic because they are non-controversial and are sanctified by tradition. Biblical subjects and patriotic breast-beating are poetic both because they are traditional and because they reinforce accepted values. Demands that literature avoid pessimism or morbidity, and prejudices against certain kinds of realism are other ways in which the distaste for anything disturbing is expressed. The Philistine critic is unable to suspend judgment when faced with any challenge to his preconceptions, or with any contemporary or controversial subject. In such a situation he has a convenient set of attitudes which enable him to issue a snap verdict even before he has weighed the evidence.

It is typical of the Philistine that he bases his judgments of literature on non-literary considerations. His morality is often mixed with his literary judgments in obvious ways. The simplest level, as in this passage by C. Davis English, could be a requirement for complete purity of plot and character:

What the novel readers of to-day want is not an amalgamation of the good with the bad, requiring mercurial analysis. The moral purpose must be so obvious as to subordinate all considerations of a contrary nature. The raison d'être of all "improprieties" of plot or incident must appear at once. Immorality should never be allowed to prosper for more than a short time, and then its downfall should be greatly emphasized. 26

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<sup>26</sup>"The Immoral in Fiction," Week, II (October 8, 1885), 710.

"We must confess to an old-fashioned fondness for stories in which wrongs are righted before the closing of the last chapter," declared another of the Week's writers.<sup>27</sup> Mercer Adam felt that the "unspeakable character" of many recent novels might soon necessitate a severe censorship. "Indeed, if morals and decency are to be preserved, some autocratic interposition will become imperative,"<sup>28</sup> he maintained. The literal equation of life and art upon which such comments were based seems distinctly Philistine. At a slightly more sophisticated level were the arguments for eliminating excessive realism and pessimism from literature. Although David Christie Murray conceded that Zola was an "honest and honourable artist," he felt that Zola violated the artist's duty to be "harmless" and "joyful" and "inspiring."<sup>29</sup> The artist should help us get through life, not make us see the unpleasant aspects of living. He should uncover the good in the midst of the bad, but he should conceal (not reveal) the bad in the midst of the good. Thomas Hardy, Murray said, was another writer who in his latest novels had begun to fail

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<sup>27</sup>"Briefer Notices," Week, XIII (October 30, 1896), 1173.

<sup>28</sup>"Recent Fiction in Britain," Canadian Magazine, IV (January, 1895), 218.

<sup>29</sup>"My Contemporaries in Fiction," Canadian Magazine, IX (May, 1897), 39.



in this duty. Surely these opinions indicate a superficial understanding of the authors in question, and show an unwillingness to confront a view of life which challenges the critic's own.)

Politics was another factor which could be combined with literary judgments. Often literature was treated as an adjunct to national development, not as an end in itself. We have seen how writers were restricted in their understanding of Canadian literature by their European model of literary growth. The complaint that Canada lacked an interesting history, and lacked events and locations rich with traditional associations only makes sense if we realize it was based on a comparison of the short record of Canadian development with the much longer recorded history of European countries. But this comparison is hardly a fair one. Canada simply is not Europe. ( It might be expected that the natural country to use as a standard of comparison would be the United States. This was seldom done, however, mainly for political reasons. ( History dies hard, and in Canadian eyes the United States has long been associated with a brasher and coarser way of life than Canada's. Canadian Canadian institutions and habits were modelled on more refined and polite British precedents, unadulterated by any tinge of American republicanism. ) Consequently we find the Week declaring: "Of the two ideals [British and American]

the British is by far the one to be preferred."<sup>30</sup> The Week had earlier been quick to defend Matthew Arnold from the protests which his criticisms of American life, made on the occasion of his visit to the States, had provoked:

Mr. Matthew Arnold is clearly of the opinion that something has been lost from American civilization which helps to beautify that of the Old World . . . . Upon the whole, we incline to agree with Mr. Arnold's opinion . . . . 31

When Canada was likened to the United States, it was usually done with intent to criticize, not flatter. The Week lamented that "The interests in this new world are material. Those of the old world are more intellectual."<sup>32</sup> This expression of regret was followed by a plea for Canadians to abandon their materialistic, newspaper-reading ways and come to the aid of the Week, which was held up as the only Canadian publication which maintained the intellectual standards of the great British weekly reviews. Thus, while the average Canadian might be little better than his American counterpart, the Week invited its readers to feel superior to the general level, and identify themselves with British excellence. Most Canadian critics would have agreed with another of the Week's writers that "American authors write down to the level of their readers. English authors try to write their readers up to

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<sup>30</sup>"Ourselves," Week, VI (November 30, 1895), 6.

<sup>31</sup>"The Wounds of a Friend," Week, V (July 12, 1888), 522.

<sup>32</sup>"Literary Energy," Week, XIII (May 22, 1896), 610.

their level."<sup>33</sup> In the articles written for Canadian magazines, British authors gained a majority of the space allotted to foreign writers. Canadian critics, with the honourable exception of Sara J. Duncan, slighted the importance of American authors such as James and Howells, grouping them, along with other suspicious characters, as pernicious realists and authors of unpleasantly probing psychological novels. Mercer Adam said that from "the present high-priests of American fiction" readers could expect "only mannerisms, and more, deeper, and unpleasanter psychology, and less of all that is breezy, lofty, wholesome and bright."<sup>34</sup> Only in the book review pages did the more popular and romantic American novelists, such as F. Marion Crawford and "Charles Eggbert Craddock" (Mary N. Murfee) receive their fair share of attention from Canadian critics.

Few indeed were the writers who would listen to Miss Duncan's suggestion that Canada and the United States were in many ways likely to become culturally identical:

like the Americans, we have a certain untrammelled consciousness of new conditions and their opportunities, in art as well as in society, in commerce, in government. Like them, having a brief past as a people, we concentrate the larger share of thought, energy, and purpose upon our future . . . . We have greatly their likings and their dislikings, their ideas and their opinions. In short, we have not escaped, as it was impossible we should escape,

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<sup>33</sup>E. S., "English Influence on Canadian Thought," IV (July 28, 1887), 566.

<sup>34</sup>"Some Books of the Year.--II," Week, II (January 15, 1885), 103.

the superior influence of a people overwhelming in numbers, prosperous in business, and aggressive in political and social faith, the natural conditions of whose life we share, and with whom we are brought every day into closer contact. 35

It was undeniable that Canadians were being influenced by American ways of life and thought. The majority of the novels and journals "devoted to sensationalism, gossip, and erotic twaddle in the form of fiction" which were so eagerly bought by Canadians were of American origin. Miss Duncan asserted:

Any bookseller in the city will tell us that for one reader of Blackmore or Meredith he finds ten of Howells or James; any book reviewer will testify to the largely American sources from which the volumes of his praise or objugation come; any newsdealer will give us startling facts as to the comparative circulation of the American and the English magazines, and if he be a Toronto newsdealer may add a significant word or two about the large sale in this city of the Buffalo Sunday Express.

Earlier the Week had drawn attention to a similar claim, made in the St. John Globe:

It is, we believe, quite within the mark to say that, averaging all together, there are one hundred American journals circulated here to one English journal. The English journals read are confined almost entirely to professional people and merchants, and a small literary coterie, but the great bulk of the people read the productions of the American press. In books it is the same. 36

After reading these assessments, one is less inclined to take the British orientation of the magazines as being completely

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<sup>35</sup>"American Influence on Canadian Thought," IV (July 7, 1887), 518.

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in Week, I (September 25, 1884), 684.

representative of the outlook of the people at large. Certainly a large number of critical writers looked primarily to England, but they and their audience seem to have formed something of a self-chosen elite. A larger and equally important group of Canadians, although probably without great intellectual pretensions, chose to read primarily American publications. In her usual forthright way, Miss Duncan suggested: "he [the Canadian reader] buys the American book in part because it is the cheapest, but in greater part because he is in every respect the sort of person whose existence in great numbers in the United States makes its publication profitable."<sup>37</sup> There were also a great number of Canadian writers, such as J. MacDonald Oxley or E. W. Thomson, who wrote for American magazines and therefore to some extent cultivated an outlook which would be congenial to American readers.

Philistine attitudes were often quite obvious. Several writers openly confessed their desire to be amused by their reading, rather than challenged in any way. A reviewer in the Week betrayed a great distaste for all difficult poets such as Browning:

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<sup>37</sup>"American Influence on Canadian Thought," Week, IV (July 7, 1887), 518.

Some of us find it a great relief to turn from the sentimental or psychological poetry, so-called, which is much in vogue at the present, to narrative poems, verses with a meaning so clear that he who runs may read, and into which we have not to dig deep to find out the author's conception, and all the while very doubtful if the meaning be worth the digging. 38

A mixture of moral complacency and desire to be amused are apparent in Agnes E. Wetherald's comments on Louisa Murray's fiction. Again we can detect a reaction to much of the fiction which was current at the time:

Everything that Miss Murray has written has a distinct moral tone, without being clogged with the faintest shadow of a moral purpose. Her object is not to denounce wrongs, expose abuses, or teach a lesson, but to entertain the reader, and this she never fails to do; but the entertainment leaves a pure taste in the mouth, and pleasant thoughts in the heart. 39

Miss Murray's own article on "Democracy in Literature" described her favorite books in the following terms:

The books which live for ever are those which we follow with breathless interest--the fortunes of such heroic hearts as Robinson Crusoe making for himself a little kingdom and obedient subjects of his desert island and its wild creatures; Monte Cristo escaping from his prison; Amyas Leigh throwing his sword into the sea; Skimmer of the seas giving that last "Ahoy" to his matchless Water Witch, and the sails, like sentient beings, fluttering at the sound; or the great tragedies of love and anguish, like the Bride of Lammermoor, The Scarlet Letter, or that wonderful book in which the bewitching picture of the gipsy Esmeralda and her little white goat dancing to the sound

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<sup>38</sup>"Poems of Henry Abbey," Week, XII (March 1, 1895), 327.

<sup>39</sup>"Some Canadian Literary Women.--III: Louisa Murray," Week, V (April 19, 1888), 335.

of the tambourine is so quickly followed by her terrible death on the scaffold . . . . 40

A fondness for romance above all other forms is obvious, and it is the sensational and sentimental aspects of romance which appeal most.

A writer in the Canadian Magazine's book review section (almost certainly John A. Cooper) presented a brief theory of fiction, based on the promise that a novel should "amuse, entertain and inspire":

It should amuse by leading the reader outside of himself and causing him to forget his own worries and troubles. It should entertain by describing life and nature in new ways. The picture which the powerful artist paints interprets nature or life better than the ordinary unskilled individual could interpret it for himself. Through the education and pleasure thus imparted the individual, he finds entertainment . . . . Again the novel should inspire. It should arouse the reader's sympathies for certain people, or for certain phases of civilization or nature. The novels that inspire Canadians with a love for Canadian nature, Canadian life, Canadian people, or Canadian civilization, are just as important as the patriotic hymn, or the soul-stirring address or sermon. 41

Here we find almost all the elements of the Philistine view combined in one brief paragraph. The writer wants fiction to provide pleasure, to furnish interesting and useful knowledge, and to help the reader forget the mundane world around him; he wants the novelist to create characters with whom the

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<sup>40</sup>Week, V (August 2, 1889), 550.

<sup>41</sup>"Books and Authors," Canadian Magazine, XI (June, 1898), 176.

reader can identify strongly; and he wants the plot to include events which attract the reader's sympathies to a certain people or place, preferably the Canadian people and the Canadian scene. Not only does the novel distract, educate, and please, but it arouses patriotism, and even, the concluding statement implies, shares some of the power to provide ultimate consolation that is characteristic of religious text.

The arts appeared quite openly as status symbols or badges of rank in the writings of some critics. Miss Wetherald, in a piece entitled "Unliterary People," described at length the kind of people who most set her teeth on edge.<sup>42</sup> People who knew little of literature and who unconsciously flaunted their ignorance, people like the young lady who asked in all innocence, "Is it not said that George Eliot was a woman?"--these were the people who irritated Miss Wetherald. "No other branch of ignorance can be relied upon to produce this effect of half-pitying scorn in the mind of a person who is not unliterary," she informed her readers:

such an one is in imminent, deadly danger of unwittingly confessing that he has never moved in the best society--that very best society which, from our bookshelves, continually woos us with its myriad voices of authority and insight, of thrilling eloquence and tender beauty.

Miss Wetherald is perhaps right to draw a sharp line between "literary" and "unliterary" people, between those who love

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<sup>42</sup>Week, IV (March 17, 1884), 250.



literature and those who do not. But she is quite unjustified in attaching a moral superiority to the literary person. There are people quite pronouncedly "literary" who are just as insufferable as the unliterary boors Miss Wetherald describes. Between literary and unliterary people the certain distinction is not one of worth, but simply one of taste and habits. A similar fallacy was at work in the mind of the writer who wrote to the Week suggesting that "a regular good Shakespeare discussion" would be a good thing for the intellectual muscles of the Week's readers.<sup>43</sup> As Frank Luther Mott points out, Shakespeare was still a popular subject in American magazines at this time.<sup>44</sup> But his popularity probably was as much a result of his unquestioned supremacy in English letters, as of any genuine popular concern with his works. As a towering public figure, Shakespeare was good copy, even if he had been dead for over two hundred years. An article or letter on Shakespeare allowed the writer (and reader) to feel that he was participating in a truly high-level intellectual discussion. As a result, the magazines contained many pieces on individual plays or on single aspects of Shakespeare's work, as well as quibbles over punctuation, and some fresh contributions to the Shakespeare/

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<sup>43</sup>Grant Seymour, "Shakespeariana," III (August 19, 1886), 606.

<sup>44</sup>A History of American Magazines, 1885-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 132.

Bacon controversy.

When the rhetoric becomes particularly elaborate, and the subject is art or literature, one is inclined to suspect a peculiar process at work. The following passages convey their meaning principally by the tone in which they treat their subjects, not by any process of logical argument. The first specimen is by A. H. Morrison, a frequent contributor to the Canadian Magazine:

What inducements is Canada holding forth to literature, to its excellence of true culture and true refinement, to make it worth her while to settle in her midst, brooding over the land like a fair dove, softening asperities of being, enlightening dark places of intellect, elevating low phases of morality, sublimating human entities into something like the semblance of the Divine? 45

The message here is conveyed simply by the elaborate images and high-sounding words with which the idea of literature is surrounded. Morrison conveys an attitude of exaggerated reverence, but does not present any evidence to justify his faith in the redeeming powers of literature. The second passage is from a review in the Week of the archly titled Poems and Pastels by "Keppel Strange" (W. E. Hunt):

Carping critics have asserted that no song birds fill our native woods with melody, and no poets are numbered in our rough-hewn Canadian literature. That the one is as unauthorized a statement as the other, dainty little volumes of tuneful verse, upon whose pages pure thought and living truths are clothed in melodious measure, are issued by our Canadian press to prove. 46

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<sup>45</sup>"Education vs. Cram," Canadian Magazine, I (May, 1893), 175.

<sup>46</sup>M. A. F. G., "Poems and Pastels," Week, XIII (August 21, 1896), 933.

The prose sense of this passage is not really very important. The writer's chief meaning is conveyed in the very tone he adopts to deal with his precious and delicate subject-matter.

It is typical of the Philistine that he institutionalizes his values. Corporate solidarity gives his activities added prestige, and confers authority on what might otherwise be no more than individual opinion. Consequently, it is no surprise to meet with pleas for the formation of official bodies for the promotion of culture, and to hear about literary "evenings" sponsored by such bodies as the Young Liberals Club.<sup>47</sup> John George Bourinot thought that the promotion of public libraries by the National Council of Women would help to solve a moral problem which he had detected among the women of Canada. He greeted the Council's resolution with the following delightful sentiments:

When I think that even the women are in many places--actually in Toronto--devoting their afternoons to card parties, I think it is high time we had a National Council to point out other methods of refreshing the intellect than euchre and poker in daylight. 48

Magazines were conscientious in reporting the formation of bodies such as the Ontario Society of Artists, the Royal Canadian Academy, and the Royal Society of Canada. The various

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<sup>47</sup>"A Canadian Literary Evening," Week, IX (January 29, 1892), 133-4.

<sup>48</sup>"Notes in my Library," Week, XII (April 5, 1895), 444-6.

yearly art shows were reviewed faithfully, and the Royal Society's yearly volume was duly noticed. In 1894 Harriet Ford described the Royal Canadian Academy as "the youngest of a whole group of Academies which propagate the Academic idea to the British Philistine at home or abroad . . . ." <sup>49</sup> The Canadian Academy, she said, was modelled on the Royal Academy in London, which "in the eyes of Britain generally, and of *Philistia* in particular, dominates the art universe." Miss Ford apparently meant her words seriously. She admitted it was possible to doubt the wisdom of forming a Canadian Academy at this time, but she argued that "Academies are the recognized order of things; some society is indispensable." She then went on to find a usefulness for the Canadian Academy, and to find merit in the paintings on display at that year's exhibition.

Another institution, though of a different kind, which concerned the Philistine classes was the theatre. Like cheap American books and magazines, theatres had a large public in Canada, but were not quite reputable places for a respectable, upstanding citizen to venture into. As Murray D. Edwards points out in his book on early Canadian theatre, theatres had to outlive an early association with bars and saloons, as they had often occupied the second floors of such

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<sup>49</sup> "The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts," Canadian Magazine, III (May, 1894), 45-50.

establishments.<sup>50</sup> The "respectable" classes, needless to say, frowned upon this association. In addition, the actors who ventured into Canada in the early days were usually fly-by-night opportunists.<sup>51</sup> In the pages of the Week one often encounters brief, somewhat supercilious notices of the attractions currently playing in the local professional theatres. The touring famous names were listed, and often the chief features of the play were indicated. Two particularly intriguing notices appeared in consecutive issues of the Week in January of 1892. One described a current play in which a real steam engine and realistic train-wreck were shown on stage, and the other drew attention to a scene containing a rescue from the imminent deadly danger of being bisected by circular saw.<sup>52</sup> (Apparently a real saw was used on stage; one wonders if accidents ever occurred.) The attempts by writers like Mair and Campbell to create an "indigenous" Canadian theatre were also attempts to create a socially respectable and intellectually uplifting theatre. The populace apparently refused to be raised, and it was therefore left to the foreigners to provide the entertainment demanded by the people at large.

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<sup>50</sup> A Stage in our Past (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Week, IX (January 22, 1892), 122; (January 29, 1892), 139.

However, Canadian critics, like critics everywhere, occasionally took their turn at attempting to raise the level of the theatre and of the recalcitrant populace. "I was induced two nights ago to attend one of Toronto's theatres," wrote Arnold Haultain after one particularly unfortunate experience.<sup>53</sup> The show was called Evangeline, and had reportedly been a hit in New York and Chicago:

This "Evangeline" was not a tragedy, nor yet a comedy, nor yet an opera; yet it contained elements of all three. Perhaps "variety show" would be the best name for it. Its prominent features were literally variety and show: its constituent parts might be classified under every species of histrionic art, not excluding clog-dancing and somersaulting; and as for show, the costumes of the "sixty artistes" led one to believe that to this feature all things else were made subservient--indeed, these "sixty artistes" were doubtless chosen for their respective parts more by the shapeliness of their nether limbs than by their ability to sing or act.

It sounds as if Haultain has been exposed to an American musical comedy, and has found the experience hard to digest. It is really the differentness of Evangeline that he is perceiving, but he assumes that his discomfort comes about because his moral sensibilities have been violated. He could not deny that Evangeline "draws audiences" and "has triumphed." But these facts, he said,

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<sup>53</sup>"The Modern Stage," Week, IV (February 24, 1887), 199-200.

are symptoms (I use the word advisedly, for I cannot but think they are signs of disease, not of health), they are pathognomonic symptoms, of the degeneration of the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic tone of the larger portion of the population.

The question to which he then addressed himself was: "what are the causes of this deterioration of modern drama?" His answer was that "The lower classes have been steadily rising--rising in intelligence, influence and wealth." "But," he added,

what has to be kept in mind is that the taste of these rising classes has not kept pace with their upward movement in intelligence, influence, wealth--or perhaps it will be safer to say that their taste has not yet been sufficiently cultivated to allow of their appreciating anything above the common, and (and this is my point) the theatre has descended to their level.

The theatre has lowered itself to the level of the lowest taste that exists: this was Haultain's final judgment. He has turned a distasteful evening at the local "Opera House" into a matter of social class and snobbery. He may be right in asserting that the rising middle classes were vulgar in their tastes and habits, and preferred mass art to high art. But Haultain has chosen to interpret this circumstance in the way that is the most flattering to himself. He has cast himself as the representative of higher standards and higher social class; the audience he has made into not just Philistines, but members of a cruder, less worthy social caste, in need of guidance from on high. The contemporary actors, directors, producers, and playwrights actually were

the chief culprits, in Haultain's view, for allowing their standards to be influenced by the demands of an uncultivated audience.

No doubt Haultain's observations were approved by many of the Week's readers. But at least one person questioned his logic. Two weeks later Sara Jeanette Duncan turned her weekly column into a rejoinder to Haultain's article.<sup>54</sup> She also saw the theatre as deteriorating, but she shifted the responsibility directly onto the audience, rather than blaming those who put on plays for catering to the lowest level of taste. She insisted that the audience for theatre in Canada was not lower class, but middle class. That is, the spectators at Evangeline were men of Haultain's own social level. Haultain's artistically responsible middle class, whom he saw as the proper arbiters of taste, simply did not exist, in Miss Duncan's view. As we have already seen, she viewed Ontario as "one great camp of the Philistines." Haultain made his own different tastes into a point of superiority. By his argument, a person's artistic preferences became a test of his personal worth and a badge of his social rank, not just an indication of his personality and education. Similar assumptions were operating when the Week's editorial columns, in a piece entitled "Can the Theatre be Elevated?" urged that theatre should provide "pure and refined pleasure to

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<sup>54</sup>"Sauterings," Week, IV (March 10, 1887), 232-3.



audiences of the best taste and standing."<sup>55</sup> The innately conservative role of the arts in Canada has been pointed out. The desire to develop Canadian literature and art was part of a desire to make Canada resemble as much as possible a country of the old world. Standards were to be preserved, not changed, in this part of the new world. Haultain's strictures on the theatre were partly a plea for the preservation of the old standards of morality, decency, and decorum; they also contained an implicit assumption that a small minority should continue to dictate the norms of society at large, as they had in the past.

It is common now to regard art as a force for social change. Such a view was not unknown to these critics, but it was regarded by them as a reprehensible version of the didactic theory of art. The "problem novel" dealing with the "woman question" or some other current issue did not generate much critical enthusiasm. The conventional values of society, as we have seen, were defended at every turn. Thus, when class distinctions become an overt critical issue, the writer usually displayed some kind of prejudice, as Haultain did. He invariably saw literature as helping to maintain the status quo, not disrupt it. W. A. Fraser told the Canadian Press Association that Canada needed

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<sup>55</sup>Week, XII (April 19, 1895), 485.

a literature that will bring the classes to a better understanding of each other and each other's needs--not that will bring them together, for that is an Utopian realization that would only bring disaster; rather that will keep them lovingly apart; teach them not to plot against each other, not to hate each other, but to know that each one in his allotted place is the order of the universe. 56

From such a viewpoint, the democratizing of literature was not wholly a good thing, since it would take men's reading habits out of the hands of those who had hitherto exercised control. The widespread distribution of cheap books, and the trend towards a realism which portrayed the lower classes as the chief characters of some novels posed the threat that literature might become dominated by the bottom end of the ladder, not the top. Instead of having the literature of the upper classes filter down and raise the level of the lower classes, the literature of the lower classes might gain sufficient influence to lower the level of the upper classes. At least such was the fear of John R. Sinclair in the McMaster University Monthly:

Fiction serves as a great leveller. Its reading exalts the lower classes in much the same way that anything better than their present state helps them to new regions of thought. It brings down the more intellectual, when too closely followed, to the level of the other. In the one case the finer feelings are enervated, and high ambitions removed, in the other the coarser tendencies are turned so as to serve a noble purpose. 57

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35. <sup>56</sup>"Literature," Canadian Magazine, XIII (May, 1899)

<sup>57</sup>"Novels and Novel Reading," McMaster University Monthly, I (February, 1892), 218-25.

The undertone of unease should be obvious. When mass literature was accepted and praised, it was because the writer identified himself with the healthy, vigorous, virile majority, rather than the effete, artificial minority. Comparing new books by Gilbert Parker and Robert Barr, John A. Cooper wrote:

Mr. Parker creates literature; Mr. Barr tells stories. Mr. Parker is an aristocrat; Mr. Barr is a jolly comrade. When you are with Mr. Parker you feel you would like to go abroad to finish your education; when you meet Mr. Barr you want to take him with you on a fishing trip, with a good cook and a well filled hamper. The one seeks to improve the world; the other to brighten it. I read every page in both these new books. Mr. Parker's impressed me; Mr. Barr's delighted. 58

When confronted with a choice between being "improved" or being "brightened," it is plain where Mr. Cooper's preferences lay.

No matter which class or viewpoint they might identify themselves with, these critics assumed that their outlook was the correct one and had small tolerance for dissenting views. In 1864 Edward Hartley Dewart had complained that the Canadian indifference to poetry was more than could be accounted for merely by the materialistic tendencies of a new country. Canadians simply did not understand literature; they viewed poetry as "a tissue of misleading fancies."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "Books and Authors," Canadian Magazine, XII (December, 1898), 181.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Hartley Dewart, ed., Selections from Canadian Poets (Montreal: Lovell, 1864), p. x.

By the eighties and ninties Canadians had caught up with Dewart's romantic view of poetry, but they had not caught up the advanced thought of their own times. As John A. Cooper said:

The educated Canadian is conservative. Before acknowledging anything to be pure gold, he must have seen it tried in the fire. He prefers the book which has weathered the criticisms of half a century to that which is new and untested. 60

As Robert Barr pointed out, Canadian were even slow to import their critical opinions.<sup>61</sup> Canadians assumed they already possessed answers to the questions which the future might put to them. Their prevalent notions tended to insulate them from the literary currents of the time, or to filter the information they received, so that they only acquired a hazy and incomplete knowledge of any new development with which they were not in sympathy. If they mentioned the latest developments, it was usually to disapprove of them. Gordon Waldron's article on Canadian poetry is a case in point. He demonstrated a clearer grasp of current trends in poetry than almost any other writer, but he did it by finding fault with the poetic characteristics he isolated. In Waldron's aversions, we can read the main features of later nineteenth century British poetry. Instances in which the writer's opinions represented carefully thought-out, independent

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<sup>60</sup>"The Strength and Weakness of Current Books," Canadian Magazine, XIII (May, 1899), 10.

<sup>61</sup>"Literature in Canada," Canadian Magazine, XIV (December, 1899), 130-1.

reasoning, based on his own judgments and reactions, were singularly rare.

Against such a background, the work of writers like Lampman, Roberts, and Scott stands out as an achievement requiring considerable effort and independence of mind. These writers had little support, at least in public, which they could truly trust or respect. They were constantly in danger of being overwhelmed by the prevailing tide of nationalism, or becoming part of somebody's theory of poetic decorum. The careers of Charles Mair and Wilfred Campbell illustrate the reality of these dangers. It is easy to sympathize with Archibald Lampman's complaint:

The Canadian litterateur must depend solely upon himself and nature. He is almost without the exhilaration of lively and frequent literary intercourse--that force and variety of stimulus which counts for so much in the fructification of ideas. 62

In such a context, the relationship of the poets to each other, and the private comments of a few discerning critics must have assumed a large importance in enabling these poets to carry on their self-appointed tasks.

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<sup>62</sup>"At the Mermaid Inn," Globe, (August 27, 1892).

## CONCLUSION

Late nineteenth century critics, like other Canadian writers, demonstrate what D. G. Jones, following Patrick Anderson, has identified as a typically Canadian habit: the interpretation of the Canadian situation as a confirmation of ideals already held, and the rejection of any divergent aspects of experience.<sup>1</sup> The critical emphasis on an idealized morality is part of this process; as Jones remarks: "In principle, if not always in practise, it [the church] has been the backbone of the garrison culture."<sup>2</sup> The critics' emphasis on nationalism is another aspect of the same pattern, for they envisaged Canada as a precarious outpost of the European cultural empire. They would not open themselves to the New World as Americans had done. Jones says of Lampman, Carman, and D. C. Scott:

Each of these writers turned his back to some extent on the traditional piety and conventional morality of their day and, like Roberts, looked to nature or the wilderness to discover a larger and more vital vision of life. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

The critics, in contrast, never questioned the traditional assumptions of the society surrounding them. They remained bulwarks of the garrison. Culturally, even if not always politically, they saw their new nation as constructed on the European model, which meant it had to be, at least at the beginning, a beleaguered state defending itself against a difficult, alien land and a dangerously lawless southern neighbour.

It was natural, given the importance generally attached to art and literature, that the relationship of the arts to national consciousness preoccupied Canadian critics. They lived in a new land, whose formation most of them had experienced firsthand. In such a country the position of the arts was precarious. What had the arts to offer to a country whose concerns were opening new lands, developing industries and railroads, and preserving herself from the political ambitions of her southern neighbour? English-speaking Canadians, who had inherited certain attitudes which placed a high value on traditions of art and culture, now saw themselves living in a nation without traditions. The arts were one of England's glories, and one of the sources of an Englishmen's pride and sense of identity. But the arts had no secure and well-defined place in Canadian life; Canada had no universally recognized great art which the individual citizen could use to reassure himself of his country's (and therefore his own) high place on the scale of human evolution. His

training told him art was supremely important, yet in Canada this proposition was threatened as it could never be in England. England had officially established institutions, whose positions were unassailable, devoted to the preservation and advancement of the arts. In Canada the position of the arts was not established yet; it was up to these men (and women) to determine the status of the arts in the life of the new Dominion. If they did not always perform their task as we might now wish they had, they at least performed it with gusto. Moreover, the ideas they held concerning literature and nationalism have a relevance to the attitudes of writers and critics in to-day's new nations. Indeed, have we in Canada entirely left their ideas behind?

One of the reasons for the lack of deep intellectual content in the writings under consideration is the fact that the writers were seldom primarily literary men, and often not professional scholars or thinkers of any kind. They were representatives of the middle class, self-styled as "cultured." Consequently, their writings were not original thought, but expressed widespread and diffuse opinions, often unconsciously held. It is not the detailed logic of their arguments which is of interest, but their implicit assumptions. Canadian writers continued the preoccupations of Romantic and early Victorian artists and critics, but in a simplified, sometimes simple-minded form. Instead of dealing in the highest realms of critical thought, they produced the kind



of criticism which is usually dismissed with the merest nod in orthodox literary histories, if it is mentioned at all. Canadian critics judged literature according to its moral effect on its audience, according to its power to entertain, according to its power to elevate and refine, and according to its effect on national spirit and national prestige. They rejected anything which might corrupt or coarsen the reader, or which brought him face to face too forcefully with any of the many distressing aspects of reality. They assumed that art was the supreme expression of man's spirit, and that it had a well-known, clearly-defined nature, which was in accord with their conception of it. In Canada critics were particularly concerned with defending the worth and dignity of art from the destructive influences of the primitive and uncultured multitude by whom they were surrounded. They employed middle class standards but for the most part they did so unconsciously, in the name of raising the general cultural level of Canadians. In the main they were the type of critic Meyer Abrams considers briefly when he writes:

The mode of criticism which subjects art and the artist to the audience also continued to flourish, usually in a vulgarized form, among influential journalists such as Francis Jeffrey, who deliberately set themselves to voice the literary standards of the middle class and to preserve unsullied what Jeffrey called "the purity of the female character." <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Meyer Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 28.

The work of these critics probably does not represent the best that was thought and said in Canada at the time. Acuter, more independent comments must occasionally have been made in university lecture halls,<sup>5</sup> in private conversations and private letters, and sometimes even in the public press. But this study has been primarily concerned with ideas that were held and expressed by a large number of people. The ideas circulated in the periodical literature of the time were located somewhere in the middle range of elevation--between well-informed theorizing and vague emotional rhetoric. The Canadian attitude to art was largely conditioned by the moral attitudes generally prevailing, and by the political concerns of the day. Canadian critics lacked any understanding that art might have a new relationship to North American society; they saw art as part of a European model to be imported, not as a means of developing and expressing a new culture. They saw art as a force supporting established standards, rather than a force for any kind of change. They often assumed a tone of superior culture, yet demonstrated a lack of any real understanding of art. All these facts strongly suggest that the prevailing mentality was a Philistine one.

Yet we should not be too harsh in our assessment of

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<sup>5</sup>The lectures of W. J. Alexander, for example, are said to have been of very high quality. See M. W. Wallace and A. S. P. Woodhouse, "In Memoriam: William John Alexander," University of Toronto Quarterly, XIV (1944), 1-33.

these critics. Philistines they called each other, and Philistines they often were. But the term, as used in this study, is ultimately more a description than a value judgment. It succinctly indicates a person whose complacency about his own ideas prevents him from directly confronting his own actual situation (and complacency, for Matthew Arnold, was the distinguishing mark of the Philistine). Canadian critics operated within strictly defined limits, but within those limits they exhibited a vigorous, varied mental life. A close examination of their writings shows that they participated in a well-developed system of ideas, although their deliberations were not conducted on the highest intellectual level. However tempting it may be to condescend to their unexamined enthusiasm for literature and culture, we should consider their ideas with patience and sympathy-- although not with indulgence. The tendency to cater to the common denominators of public taste was obviously increasing during the years under study; nevertheless, the cultural missionary campaign waged by these magazines demonstrates a faith in the intellectual capacity and willingness of the general reader that is refreshing in an age of cynical commercialism and dryasdust specialism. The modern reader turns from these magazines with a certain regret, almost wishing it might be so again.

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