

THE IMAGE OF CANADA  
IN THE LITERATURE OF THE UNITED STATES

by

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B.A., Laurentian University, 1965

M.A., University of Toronto, 1967

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the  
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November, 1974

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the extent, nature, and significance of the image of Canada in the literature of the United States, with particular reference to the nineteenth century. After a preliminary chapter on Colonial American writing, the dissertation traces the development of various ideas about Canada as evinced in the work of obscure or "popular" writers as well as authors of acknowledged literary reputation, from 1776 to 1900, and concludes with a summary chapter on twentieth-century achievements and prospects.

To the British American authors of various journals and captivity narratives in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Canada is mainly the stronghold of French Roman Catholic heresy and Indian barbarism. To post-revolutionary authors, Canada becomes the last enclave of British imperialism in the New World, although a few Loyalist dissenters view Canada more favorably. Some writers of travel narratives and of anti-Catholic novels express their aversion to the French Canadians, and a few authors compare unfavorably the exiled Canadiens on the American prairies to American frontiersmen. James Fenimore Cooper evokes an indirect but symbolically suggestive conception of Canada in the *Leatherstocking Tales*, but most subsequent historical romancers emphasize the alleged religious decadence and racial

inferiority of French Canadians. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in Evangeline (1847), expounds a more sympathetic--but very idealized--view of the French in North America.

Pre-eminent among the many nineteenth-century American narratives of travel in Canada is Henry Thoreau's "A Yankee in Canada" (written 1850). Thoreau postulates an irreconcilable conflict between the civilized sensibility and the northern wilderness, and suggests that Canadians have failed to meet the unique challenge of their geographical and historical situation. Francis Parkman's epic history, France and England in North America (1865-92) attributes the fall of New France partly to the savagery of the northern wilderness, but primarily to the decadence of the anti-democratic French regime. William Dean Howells suggests in Their Wedding Journey (1872), and other novels, that the great age which Parkman depicted has given way to a tranquil period when American tourists use Canada to test their optimistic view of New World society. In the fiction and essays of various "local color" writers, Canada serves similarly as a vast tourist resort where Americans can reassess their political and social values, which are usually revealed as superior to those of Canada. One writer who expresses a completely favorable reaction to Canada is Walt Whitman. The exuberant optimism of his Diary in Canada (1880) is echoed by various American authors who discovered the Canadian northwest in the last two decades of the century, but is qualified by Hamlin Garland,

whose Trail of the Gold Seekers (1899) is a nostalgic lament for the disappearance of the "wild places" in America.

In the early twentieth century, Jack London sees Canada mainly as the setting of a stark and elemental struggle for survival. The successors of London include James Oliver Curwood, who wrote many novels of northern adventure, and Sinclair Lewis, whose Mantrap (1926) is an ironic treatment of the "back-to-nature" theme. Other twentieth-century novelists, including Willa Cather in Shadows on the Rock (1936), have turned back to Canadian history. Eminent twentieth-century American writers who have written about Canada include Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Edmund Wilson, but none of these writers seem to have been very interested in the country. In general, it appears that twentieth-century writers have continued to express basic attitudes about Canada which were defined and articulated in the nineteenth century by such writers as Thoreau, Parkman, and Howells.

CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	1
I Canada in the Literature of Colonial America . . . . .	9
II Canada in the Literature of the Early Republic . . . . .	23
III Cooper and the Historical Romance. . . . .	49
IV The Acadian Tragedy: Longfellow and Others. . . . .	70
V "A Yankee in Canada" and Other Travelers . . . . .	88
VI The Northern Frontier. . . . .	124
VII Parkman: <u>France and England in North America.</u> . . . .	144
VIII The Successors of Parkman: Howells and Others . . . . .	165
IX Farnham, Burroughs, the Regional Realists. . . . .	203
X Whitman and the Northwestern Frontier. . . . .	227
XI Conclusion: the Klondike and After. . . . .	241
A Selected Bibliography. . . . .	262

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia Library, for their help in my consultation of the Colbeck Collection of travel literature. I also received vital assistance from the Library's Microfilm and Inter-Library Loan Divisions. I am very grateful to the staff of the Rare Book Division of the New York Public Library for their courteous and efficient assistance during my consultation of the Beadle Collection of Dime Novels. I would like to offer my particular thanks to Professor Bruce L. Grenberg of the University of British Columbia Department of English, who first suggested this topic, and who provided invaluable advice and encouragement throughout the research and writing.

## INTRODUCTION

In the imaginative literature of the United States, Canada has always been a vague, peripheral, and extremely ambiguous concept. Those authors who have looked northward beyond the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence and forty-ninth parallel, whether in actuality or imagination, have reported an almost kaleidoscopic variety of images involving strangeness and familiarity, hostility and amiability, primitive wildness and highly developed civilization. To the early inhabitants of the colonies which ultimately comprised the United States, Canada was a remote stronghold of French "popery" and Indian barbarity. This is the image projected, for instance, by the Reverend John Williams of Deerfield, Massachusetts, in his personal narrative of captivity in Canada, The Redeemed Captive (1707). To many post-revolutionary authors, such as the Georgia humorist William Tappan Thompson (Major Jones's Sketches of Travel, 1848), Canada was the last retreat of decadent British imperialism in the New World; while in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Evangeline (1847) part of the northern regions appeared as a nostalgic and idyllic vision of prelapsarian peace and contentment. Henry Thoreau, after visiting Quebec City and environs in 1850, wondered in "A Yankee in Canada" (1866) whether he had found a grim sub-arctic region of exploration and adventure or some fantasy



world of medieval romance; while Francis Parkman, in his epic history France and England in North America (1865-92), constantly struggled to reconcile or explain the ambiguities and contradictions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New France. "Neither a republic nor a monarchy, but merely a languid expectation of something undefined," announced Charles Dudley Warner after a visit to Cape Breton Island in 1874; and William Dean Howells, writing of Quebec province in 1871, frankly acknowledged his inability to comprehend the incongruities of the region, with the bemused comment "It is not America; if it is not France, what is it?"<sup>1</sup>

This variety of response is obviously related not only to the fact that the writers usually saw or contemplated a small part of a vast territory, but also to the extraordinary process of change and development that has characterized the history of the New World as a whole. Both the "United States" and "Canada" are relative terms which have been applied at various times to widely different political and geographical entities. Before 1761, the term "Canada" was applied with geographical imprecision to the widely scattered French settlements and outposts on the St. Lawrence River. After the British conquest, Canada was successively an ill-defined agglomeration of the former French possessions, a British colony consisting of two provinces, a large united province in central British America, and a confederation of provinces which grew steadily to encompass all the territory north of

the great lakes and the forty-ninth parallel, from Atlantic to Pacific. Similarly, the region which eventually became the United States has embodied a small group of British colonies on the Atlantic coast, a loose union of states, and finally a strongly centralized, rich and powerful nation extending from Atlantic to Pacific and from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico.

And yet in this context of constantly shifting objective conditions and subjective viewpoints, it is possible to discern considerable form and substance. The following chapters are concerned with demonstrating in detail the form, substance, and extent of the image of Canada in the literature of the United States. "Canada" in the subsequent discussion refers to all those regions of North America, regardless of their political status or their local appellation at any given time in history, which constituted the nation after Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949. The "image of Canada" is also understood to include the inhabitants and exiled former inhabitants as well as the land; so Canadian emigrés in the United States will occasionally be the object of consideration.

This study, after a brief review of some representative works of the pre-revolutionary period, will concentrate primarily on the nineteenth century, and will conclude with a summary of some achievements and prospects after 1900. This emphasis is not intended to suggest that nothing of value has been written about Canada in the twentieth-century United States. Rather, it represents a general agreement with the

assumptions propagated by such scholars as F.O. Matthiessen, Leslie Fiedler, Charles Feidelson, and others, that the nineteenth century was a crucial formative period for American literature, and that subsequent developments are in large measure outgrowths of achievements and possibilities which appeared within a relatively brief extent of time.

It has to be acknowledged at the outset that Canada is not a large topic in the profusion of imaginative and intellectual matters which occupied the writers who contributed to a distinctive national literature in the United States. William Dean Howells, who maintained a life-long interest in Canada, commented in 1907 that "the cultivated American who is keenly alive to the existence of a dominion bordering us beyond the seas, is comparatively dead to the presence of a Dominion bordering us beyond the lakes and rivers."<sup>2</sup> And a modern Canadian historian has observed that "Americans, caught up in their own vibrant life, are not noted for their readiness to devote sustained attention to any other society for its own sake."<sup>3</sup> But this lack of interest in Canada is not nearly so extensive as an uninformed assumption is likely to make it. It would have been very unusual if imaginative Americans had not expressed some response to the vast northward extension of the continent and to the various contrasts and parallels with their own society which the northern settlements presented. Besides the authors previously mentioned, prominent American literary figures who have written

about Canada have included Richard Henry Dana, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Hamlin Garland, Jack London, Willa Cather, and Edmund Wilson. In terms of mere quantity, without regard to quality of literary achievement, the bibliographical record is fairly substantial. Lyle H. Wright's three-volume American Fiction 1775-1900 (1965-69) lists about fifty novels with Canadian settings. Harold F. Smith's American Travelers Abroad: A Bibliography of Accounts Published Before 1900 (1969) lists about forty travel narratives partially or entirely concerned with Canada. And Joseph-Delphis Gauthier's Le Canada français et le roman américain (1948), covering the period 1826-1948, lists over one hundred novels in its bibliography of primary sources.

But with the exception of Gauthier's study, there has been virtually no critical and analytical attention devoted to this minor but significant aspect of American literature. Gauthier's work is a valuable introduction to a neglected subject; but besides imposing geographical and generic limitations as indicated in his title, the author expresses much more interest in le Canada français than in le roman américain, and his critical observations are almost entirely confined to demonstrating how the "real" French Canada differs from American misrepresentations. "Un roman," says Gauthier rather dogmatically, ". . . est . . . un document qui dépose un témoignage sur une époque et fait revivre l'atmosphère d'un milieu. . . . Avant d'être romancier aimable, il faut être

chroniqueur fidèle."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, those novels are pronounced good or significant which are most faithful to what Gauthier defines as the discoverable realities of French-Canadian life, and those novels are declared bad or trivial which distort these realities.

It should not be necessary to enter into a discussion of the complex relationship between art and empirical reality in order to demonstrate the limitations and fallacies of Gauthier's approach to the subject. The image of Canada presented by writers who have seen the country very briefly and partially (or in some cases not at all) and whose main interests are intensively directed towards their own national experience will inevitably be sociologically unreliable. The literary critic's main concern should not be with how well the image of Canada in American literature conforms to whatever propositions are accepted as facts about the country. Rather, he needs to consider such questions as these: what kind of imaginative impulse has Canada given to those relatively few American writers who have turned their attention northward? How significant and valuable are the resultant artistic creations? The answers to such questions inevitably involve some concern with social and political factors, and with the degree of distortion between imaginative construct and discoverable fact; but primarily they should involve a detailed critical and analytical consideration of the literary works with reference to the development of

imaginative literature in the United States.

The development of literature in the United States is conventionally assumed to begin with the journals, diaries, and histories of the early Puritan settlers of New England. The seventeenth-century British colonists who left literary records of their experience in the New World were far too busy struggling with the harsh climate and wild forest landscape of their own part of the continent to pay much attention to a forbidding northern wilderness inhabited by hostile Indians and French heretics. They were not, however, entirely silent on the subject of Canada. With the first stirrings of literary consciousness in Colonial America, writers began to make some acknowledgement of the mysterious regions to the north. It is in these first faint stirrings that the American literary image of Canada begins to emerge and take form.

Notes to Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Charles Dudley Warner, Baddeck, and that Sort of Thing (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1874), p. 29; William Dean Howells, Their Wedding Journey, ed. John K. Reeves (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, 114 (Jan., 1907), 317.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald M. Craig, The United States and Canada (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph-Delphis Gauthier, Le Canada français et le roman américain, Diss. Laval 1948 (Paris: Tolra, 1948), pp. 7, 149.

## I

## CANADA IN THE LITERATURE OF COLONIAL AMERICA

The British American colonists were bound to become involved with their French counterparts to the north, for the two races were traditional enemies and both considered themselves the rightful owners of the New World north of Mexico. In 1613, a ship from Virginia made a piratical foray against a peaceful French settlement in Acadia. In 1633, a group of Plymouth men set up a trading post in territory which nominally belonged to the French.

But the French . . . came in their beginning before they were well settled and displanted them, slew two of their men and took all their goods to a good value.<sup>1</sup>

Thus William Bradford, who was not in sympathy with the traders' exploits, briefly depicts in Of Plymouth Plantation one of the earliest encounters between British Americans and the inhabitants of Canada.

A more extensive encounter is described in the Journal of John Winthrop. The governor of Massachusetts Bay was drawn into the quarrels of Charles d'Aulnay and Charles de la Tour, the rival French proprietors of Acadia, and the fascinating account of the Englishman's attempts to play one side off against the other while arranging matters to the best advantage of his own colony weaves in and out of the journal like a refrain.

La Tour coming now to us, and acquainting us how it was with him . . . though we thought not fit to give him aid, as being unwilling to intermeddle in the wars of any of



our neighbors, yet considering his urgent distress, we could not in Christianity or humanity deny him liberty to hire for his money any ships in our harbour, either such as came to us out of England or others.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity, humanity, and money: the d'Aulnay-La Tour affair, as recorded in Winthrop's Journal, indicates the extent to which the Puritan attitude to French North America was governed by economic, rather than religious and racial considerations. As long as the French were intent upon fighting among themselves, the New Englanders were quite willing to stand back and reap whatever profit the situation might yield.

In the long run, however, Winthrop's repeated attempts to avoid commitments with the rivals of Acadia suggest that he would have preferred to have no contact with his northern "neighbors" whatever. And he almost succeeded in keeping Massachusetts Bay aloof from New France; but by the beginning of the eighteenth century, such isolationism was impossible.

On the twenty-ninth of February, 1703-4, not long before the break of day, the enemy came in like a flood upon us. . . . They came to my house in the beginning of the onset, and by their violent endeavors to break open the door and windows, with axes and hatchets, awaked me out of sleep; on which I leaped out of bed, and running toward the door, perceived the enemy making their entrance into the house.<sup>3</sup>

The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion (first published 1707), by the Reverend John Williams of Deerfield, Massachusetts, is one of the earliest and most exciting "captivity narratives" written by a New Englander carried prisoner by the French and Indians to Canada. Unlike Winthrop, who was involved only in

brief negotiations with the aristocratic proprietors of Acadia, Williams traveled (albeit with considerable reluctance) to Quebec, where he mingled with a wide representation of the population, including rough canadien militiamen, erudite Jesuit priests, and even the Governor of New France. The image of the country in Williams' narrative is disappointingly vague, however, for he was not really interested in observing and analyzing the northern society. His overriding concern during his captivity in Canada was to avoid contamination from the "papist" heretics; and his narrative subsequent to the gripping story of the winter march from Deerfield to Montreal is almost entirely devoted to arguments with the Jesuits and accounts of his attempts to save fellow prisoners from damnation. Nevertheless, The Redeemed Captive provides a few glimpses of representative inhabitants of early eighteenth-century New France, through the eyes of an intransigent but dignified and charitable New England Calvinist. There are, for instance, the bon vivant Jesuits at Quebec who regale the distinguished Deerfield preacher at their table, and are subsequently reduced to confusion by his skillful arguments and superior biblical knowledge. There are also the "Macquas," the Canadian Indians who are later to become the incarnations of treachery and cruelty in James Fenimore Cooper's fiction, but for whom Williams is able to express some admiration even after experiencing and witnessing unspeakable cruelties at their hands. And there are the

Canadian habitants, such as the woman at Chambly who defies the Indian captors to offer the wretched prisoners food and shelter. "The French were very kind to me," says the Deerfield pastor. "Wherever we entered into houses, the French were very courteous."<sup>4</sup>

The kindness and hospitality of the Canadian settlers is further commended in another early eighteenth-century New England captivity narrative, John Gyles' Memoirs of Odd Adventures (published 1736). Gyles was abducted in 1689 from his farm on the Penobscot, and carried by the Abenaki Indians into the French-controlled wilderness which was later to become New Brunswick. Like Williams, Gyles tells of Indian cruelties and of Jesuit deceit--or, at least what seemed deceit to a seventeen-year-old brought up in the strict Calvinist tradition and taught to prefer death to eternal damnation:

The Jesuit gave me a biskit, which I put into my pocket and dared not eat, but buried it under a log, fearing that he had put something in it to make me love him: for I was very young, and had heard much of the Papists torturing the Protestants.<sup>5</sup>

And at first, he is similarly repelled by the prospect of living with a "papist" family:

Sold!--to a Frenchman!--I could say no more!--went [sic] into the woods and wept till I could scarce see or stand! The word sold, and that to a people of that persuasion which my dear mother so much detested and in her last words manifested so great fears of my falling into!<sup>6</sup>

As events develop, however, Gyles finds himself gradually becoming quite fond of the habitant couple to whom he is

enslaved. "Monsieur" and "madam" [sic]--he apparently could never grasp the exotic sound of their name--treat him with kindness and trust, the woman providing him with homespun clothing, and the man allowing him to help in the operation of his trading post. Finally, Gyles has the opportunity to repay their generous treatment: the English invade the region while his master is away, and instead of deserting the French-woman he helps her escape, in return for which he is granted his freedom.

The narratives of Williams and Gyles call particular attention to the affinities between the British and French in North America. In spite of the foreign language and customs, in spite of the "popish" menace of Jesuits and half-Christianized Indians who force their religion on the captives, Canada appears as a frontier society remarkably similar to the English settlements, populated by sturdy and energetic pioneers trying to transform the wilderness into an outpost of European civilization. Not all the American colonists who wrote of their experiences in Canada presented such a balanced view of the country, however. The Narrative of the Captivity of Nehemiah How in 1745-1747 is mainly devoted to accounts of torture and murder, and concludes with a cryptic and pathetic note by another prisoner telling of the author's miserable death in a Quebec prison. There is also the narrative poem by a soldier named John Maylem, Gallic Perfidy (Boston, 1758), which is supposedly based on first hand experience of the

massacre at Fort William Henry, where hundreds of the author's cohorts succumbed (in the words of the poem) to "fell Canadian rage," and whence Maylem was carried prisoner to Quebec.

In general, the literary effusions of colonial American military prisoners in Canada tend to be rather chauvinistic and melodramatic, compared to the narratives of non-combatants who are caught up in the struggle against their will. While writers like Williams and Gyles can look upon the Canadians with sympathy as people much like themselves, the soldier-authors attribute to the French all the treachery and racial inferiority which the rhetoric of war has bestowed on "the enemy" from time immemorial. This point of view is prominently illustrated in the Memoirs of Robert Stobo (1727-1770), a Virginia officer taken hostage to Quebec after Major George Washington surrendered to the French at Fort Necessity in 1754. Stobo, a shamelessly vain individual, describes himself as the "little hero of the following memoirs, whose dauntless courage, constant zeal, and still greater sufferings, well deserve the attention of every lover of his country,"<sup>7</sup> and represents himself at Quebec lying "in a dungeon, . . . on a bag of straw, with a morsel of bread and a pan of cold water by his side. . . ."<sup>8</sup> In actuality, as his officer's commission guaranteed, most of his captivity was spent on parole, which he violated at the first opportunity because "he was heartily convinced of the faithless regard paid by [the French] to any

treaty."<sup>9</sup>

Stobo is too occupied with his own dashing figure to devote much attention to Quebec or its inhabitants, who are merely "Britain's faithless enemies," but he does mention his exploits in various salons, where he learned French, "in which pursuit he was greatly assisted by the ladies. . . . As he had very little other employment at that time, he endeavored to make himself as agreeable as he could with the ladies . .

. . ."<sup>10</sup> One lady in particular he describes in a rhythmical prose style which he apparently mistakes for elegant writing:

There dwelt, by lucky fate, in this strong capital, a lady fair, of chaste renown, of manners sweet, and gentle soul; long had her heart confessed for this poor prisoner, a flame best suited for the spirit of the times to smother. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Salons and dungeons, charming Frenchwomen and villainous Frenchmen, courtly conversation and exciting pursuit over the dark Canadian countryside, and as a flamboyant climax, a meeting with Wolfe just before the battle of the Plains of Abraham: Stobo's narrative of his captivity in Canada, clumsily written though it may be, is a startling prefiguration of the nineteenth-century romantic adventure novel. It is not surprising that the Canadian writer of historical romances, Sir Gilbert Parker, should adapt Stobo's memoirs into a novel of adventure and intrigue, The Seats of the Mighty (1896). Stobo's romantic and over-simplified image of Canada is an early version of the picture of New France during the French and Indian wars which subsequent authors were to

exploit in a long tradition of American fiction.

Stobo's Memoirs end with the fall of Quebec. The battle of the Plains of Abraham takes place off stage because Stobo admits that he was not present; but he makes up for this loss by claiming to have given Wolfe secret information which enabled him to take the city, and by describing his own exploits while carrying dispatches to Louisbourg. He probably regretted the loss of a magnificent opportunity, however, for the fall of Quebec subsequently proved to be a very popular literary theme. In colonial America the event was commemorated in a noteworthy blank verse drama by George Cockings (d. 1802) entitled The Conquest of Canada (published 1773).<sup>12</sup>

In the preface to his play, Cockings declares his intention to write "an historical tragedy" which will present the exploits of the British army in Canada "as rival actions of those patriotic deeds of the so much admired ancient Greeks and Romans." As analogues of his subject matter he mentions "the siege of Calais" and "the gallant defense of the Thermopylaean pass"; for a literary model, he refers to the popular eighteenth-century classical imitation, Joseph Addison's Cato.<sup>13</sup> Cockings tries to make General Wolfe a tragic hero on the classical pattern, in ominous scenes where he takes his farewell of his mother and his fiancée, and in scenes where Wolfe expresses forebodings about his own fate. But a closer analogue to the play as a whole (although Cockings' preface does not mention Shakespeare) is Henry V, with its

parallel scenes in the two opposing camps the night before the battle, its chorus of low characters to comment on the main action, and the on-stage presentation of crowded and violent battles.

The important point about The Conquest of Canada, however, is not that it imitates any specific literary work, but that it is one of the earliest attempts in American literature to relate the French-English conflict in North America to a classical tradition of tragedy, epic, and myth. Before the fall of Quebec, the literary chronicles of this conflict are for the most part brief and prosaic first-hand reports by writers who have few literary pretensions and whose main purpose is to interpret their experience in the light of their religious and nationalistic presuppositions. Robert Stobo's crude narrative draws attention to the romantic and melodramatic potential of the French and Indian wars and the Canadian setting; but Cockings' play deliberately tries to elevate the conflict and its setting to a higher level of literary tradition. The attempt is not very impressive, for Cockings is not a great author; his play is full of rhetorical bombast and noisy spectacle. But the idea that the French-English conflict constitutes a distinctive North American myth with elements of epic and tragedy is significant; it will be developed later, in greater detail and with much greater skill, in the histories of Francis Parkman.

Another important and more direct precursor of Parkman



is Alexander Henry (1739-1824), author of Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the Years 1760 and 1776.<sup>14</sup> Henry, born in New Jersey, "first came to Canada with the British forces that in 1760 completed the mopping up of French resistance after the fall of Quebec."<sup>15</sup> Attracted by the economic prospects of the fur trade, he set out to make his fortune, and soon fell completely under the spell of the northwest wilderness. Reaching Michilimackinac in the summer of 1761, he found himself the first British trader to enter the region, and the object of intense suspicion on the part of the Indians who had been the allies of the French during the war. Caught up in an Indian uprising, he narrowly escaped death through the grudging intervention of the French-Canadian settlers. Undaunted by this setback, he went on with his trading and exploring expeditions, which kept him in the British northwest for more than five years and eventually took him almost as far as Lake Athabasca.

Henry's book is the acknowledged source for Parkman's version of the massacre at Michilimackinac in The Conspiracy of Pontiac.<sup>16</sup> But in more general terms, Parkman's professed admiration for Henry is related to the fact that Henry found in northwestern Canada the same kind of opportunity to live a life of rugged adventure among Indians and plainsmen as the historian found on the Oregon Trail. Parkman's American prairie and Henry's British northwest are sociologically as well as geographically similar: both regions were largely

inhabited in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by nomadic Indian tribes and French-Canadian hunters and trappers. Like Parkman, Henry expresses ambivalent feelings towards these denizens of the plains. On the one hand, he admires their capacity to survive in an intolerably cruel environment where a severe climate and almost barren topography seem to conspire to keep the inhabitants on the edge of starvation. On the other hand, he deplores the Indians' ignorance and the French-Canadians' lack of initiative which keep them attached to this environment. In a similar way, Henry's attitude toward the wilderness is divided between his love of unspoiled nature and his interest in the prospects for economic development of the British northwest. Henry does not, however, express any awareness of a contradiction between progress and primitivism: there is no reason, as far as he is concerned, why one cannot enjoy both the primitive life and the advantages of wealth derived from the fur trade. But in subsequent years the tension between the two poles of wilderness and civilization is to become increasingly evident in American literature, and numerous writers will look northward to the region of Henry's explorations and beyond, in search of a frontier to replace the one being gradually eroded by industrial and mercantile development.

In the meantime, Henry's account of his travels and adventures stands poised at a crucial point in both American

history and American literature. After more than a century of rivalry and warfare between British and French North America, during which the English-speaking colonies looked upon their northern counterparts as little less than the Babylon or the Carthage of the new world, almost the whole continent was united--at least in administrative theory--in one vast empire of infinite potentiality. Henceforth "Canada" should have been a vestigial and unofficial name for the northern regions formerly under French control. But as Henry unobtrusively points out at the end of his narrative, a new alignment of loyalties was about to give new meanings to old political and social concepts, and bring new concepts into being.

Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup>William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>John Winthrop, Journal, 1630-1649, ed. J.K. Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), II, 127.

<sup>3</sup>John Williams, The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion (1908; rpt. New York: Kraus, 1969), pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>5</sup>John Gyles, Memoirs of Odd Adventures, Strange Deliverances, &c., in the Captivity of John Gyles, Esq. (Boston: S. Kneeland & T. Green, 1736), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Stobo, Memoirs of Major Robert Stobo, of the Virginia Regiment (Pittsburgh: John S. Davidson, 1854), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>The Conquest of Canada was one of only two plays by native-born playwrights produced in the thirteen colonies before the Revolution (the other was Thomas Godfrey's The Prince of Parthia). See Frank P. Hill, American Plays Printed, 1714-1830: A Bibliographical Record (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>George Cockings, The Conquest of Canada: or, the Siege of Quebec (Albany: Alexander & James Robertson, 1773), pp. iv-v.

<sup>14</sup>Henry's Travels were written several years after the events they describe, and were first published in 1809. But the journalistic immediacy of the narrative and the dramatic reference in almost the last sentence to the crucial events of 1776 render uniquely appropriate the discussion of Henry's work at the conclusion of a chapter on pre-revolutionary writing.

<sup>15</sup>L.G. Thomas, ed., "Introduction to the New Edition,"

Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the Years 1760 and 1776, by Alexander Henry (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1969), p. vii.

<sup>16</sup>Francis Parkman, The Conspiracy of Pontiac, Frontenac ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), I, 321-67.

## II

## CANADA IN THE LITERATURE OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC

## 1.

Alexander Henry set out on his return journey from the British Northwest on the fourth of July, 1776.

On an island in the Lake of the Woods, we saw several Indians, toward whom we made, in hopes to purchase provisions, of which we were much in want; and whom we found full of a story, that some strange nation had entered Montreal, taken Quebec, killed all the English, and would certainly be at the Grand Portage before we arrived there.<sup>1</sup>

The Indians' fears proved extravagant, for when Henry reached Montreal on the fifteenth of October, the Continental army had long since withdrawn from Canada, having lost one of its generals in a reckless assault on Quebec, and having failed to enlist either the support or the sympathy of the northern colonists.

Almost a year before Henry reached the Lake of the Woods, a young American soldier from Pennsylvania whose name, coincidentally, was John Joseph Henry, had emerged with the ragged and exhausted remnants of the army led by Benedict Arnold from the forest wilderness into the St. Lawrence Valley.

On the morning of the 6th Nov. we marched in straggling parties, through a flat and rich country . . . decorated by many low houses, all white washed, which appeared to be the warm abodes of a contented people. Every now and then a chapel came in sight; but more frequently the rude, yet pious imitations of the sufferings of our Savior, and the image of the virgin. These things created surprise, at least in my mind, for where I expected there could be little other than barbarity, we found civilized men, in a comfortable state, enjoying all the benefits arising from the institutions of civil

society.<sup>2</sup>

Henry's surprise at finding an oasis of civilization in the remote northern wilderness is echoed by another member and chronicler of the expedition, a soldier named Abner Stocking:

The French people received us with all the kindness we could wish, they treated our sick with much tenderness, and supplied us with every thing they could for our comfort. They seemed moved with pity for us and to greatly admire our patriotism and resolution, in encountering such hardships for the good of our country.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the invading Americans have serious reservations about the northern colony and its people. The French Canadians, says Stocking, "were too ignorant to put a just estimate on the value of freedom." And Henry hastens to explain that his remarks are intended only as

. . . a description of our sensations, entertained in our minds by the conveniences we now enjoyed, in opposition to our late privations. We had just arrived from a dreary and inhospitable wild, half-starved and thinly clothed, in a land of plenty, where we had full rations and warm quarters; consequently our present feelings, contrasted with former sufferings, might have appreciated in too high a degree the happiness of the Canadian--What is now said, ought not to be taken in anywise as an allusion to the political rights, but be confined solely to the apparent prosperity and economy of families.<sup>4</sup>

Like numerous subsequent authors, Henry finds to his surprise that Canada presents an inviting image of domestic contentment and spiritual refinement set against the "dreary and inhospitable" wilderness, an image which seems to be a close reflection of the American social experience. On closer inspection, however, Canada is found to be populated by a suspiciously alien race of people, who do not share the American zeal for

such abstractions as "freedom" and "patriotism" and "political rights."

A more uncompromising republican view of Canada--a view based, significantly, on imagination and hearsay rather than experience, and expressed in consciously literary rhetoric--is featured in another work inspired by the 1775 invasion. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, later to become famous as the author of Modern Chivalry (published in parts between 1792 and 1815), was an Episcopalian clergyman and schoolmaster in Philadelphia when the news of the defeat at Quebec reached the American settlements, and he immediately set to work on a commemorative blank verse drama entitled The Death of General Montgomery (published 1777). Brackenridge had never seen Quebec, and his representation of the northern colony is consequently brief and generalized; but it is significant as an attempt to exploit the semi-legendary implications of both the setting and the events. With his mind running on the medieval romances which are to form part of the inspiration for Modern Chivalry, Brackenridge has Montgomery say to his aide:

It seems to me, MacPherson, that we tread  
The ground of some romantic fairy land,  
Where knights in armour, and high combatants  
Have met in war. This is the plain where Wolfe,  
Victorious Wolfe, fought with brave Montcalm;  
And even yet, the dreary, snow-clad tomb,  
Of many a hero, slaughter'd on that day,  
Recalls the memory of the bloody strife.<sup>5</sup>

To Brackenridge, Wolfe's victory was the climax of a long chronicle of conflict and heroism forming the basis of a North



American mythology, the main theme of which is the rise of the New World as an entity distinctive from the Old. Ideally, the Revolution should form an even more important climax by conclusively detaching North America from its European roots. But the main theme of The Death of General Montgomery is the tragic failure of the revolutionary army and its leader: Canada is apparently destined to remain a bastion of European decadence in America. Brackenridge was too infused with the prevalent optimism of the early stages of the Revolution to consider in detail the implications of Montgomery's failure for the vision of a triumphant republican North America; but the survival of Canada as a vestige of the Old World was to haunt the American imagination for many generations.

While Brackenridge was commemorating the tragic attempt to forcibly extend republicanism to Canada, another author was arguing that the northern colony represented an ideal which the rebellious colonies would do well to emulate. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, the famous "American farmer," had chosen the loyalist side in the Revolution, and was trying to illustrate the advantages of preserving the status quo by presenting an idyllic picture of the peace-loving French-Canadian habitants:

Before their conquest . . . no society of men could exhibit greater simplicity, more honesty, happier manners, less litigiousness; nowhere could you perceive more peace and tranquility. . . . England has found them the best of subjects. If the influence of religion was more visible here than in any other of the English colonies, its influence was salutary; . . . for what else do we expect

to gain by the precepts of religion but less ferocious manners and a more upright conduct?<sup>6</sup>

To Crèvecoeur, both the Conquest of 1761 and the American Revolution are disruptions of the "peace and tranquility" which the New World citizen has the unique opportunity of achieving, and which has been the particular attainment of the French Canadians. "Had they been slaves before [the Conquest]," he continues, "this change would have improved them, but they perhaps were happier than the citizens of Boston, perpetually brawling about liberty without knowing what it was."<sup>7</sup>

Crèvecoeur is probably the most famous of the American anti-republican writers of the Revolutionary period. But his interest in Canada was extremely limited: in spite of his experiences at Quebec as an officer in the army of Montcalm; and when conditions in America became intolerable during the Revolution, he fled to his native France. Other writers, meanwhile, joined the thousands of loyalists who took refuge in the northern provinces. The English-born poet Joseph Stansbury (1743-1809), who had settled in Philadelphia in 1767, regarded Canada as an abhorrent region of exile and wildness, as he makes clear in the opening stanza of his lament, "To Cordelia":

Believe me, Love, this vagrant life  
O'er Nova Scotia's wilds to roam,  
While far from children, friends, or wife,  
Or place that I can call a home  
Delights not me;--another way  
My treasures, pleasures, wishes lay.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Stansbury, another literary exile enthusiastically embraced Nova Scotia as "the retreat of freedom and security from the rage of tyranny and the cruelty of oppression."<sup>9</sup> Jacob Bailey (1731-1808), a Massachusetts-born Episcopal clergyman, was hounded from his backwoods mission on the Kennebec by vigilantes acting as representatives of the Continental Congress, and took up a new charge in the remote wilderness of Nova Scotia. His journal of these experiences, covering the years 1775 to 1808, was edited some forty years after his death by William S. Bartlet and published as The Frontier Missionary (1853). Bailey's initial enthusiasm for Nova Scotia gradually gives way to discouragement, as the preacher describes the relentless ignorance and poverty in the Annapolis Valley, where "there is not a building equal to the houses of the middling farmers of New England."<sup>10</sup> But he remains optimistic and firm in his belief that British North America will eventually surpass the United States in prosperity and cultural development.

The authors who stayed in the United States after the Revolution, whether loyalist or republican in sympathies, were inevitably too busy with the concerns of their new nation to pay much attention to Canada. Among the few writers who had occasion to comment on the northern provinces was the eminent Pennsylvania-born Moravian missionary John Heckewelder (1743-1823). Heckewelder was the author of various treatises on the Delaware and Mohegan Indians (his Account of the

History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States [1819] was the main source of James Fenimore Cooper's knowledge of Indians), and he kept detailed journals and diaries of his many expeditions both as missionary and government emissary to the Indian settlements on the western and northern frontiers. He visited Canada twice, in 1793 and 1798, mainly to inspect the Moravian mission in the village of Fairfield in Upper Canada, and on the earlier occasion he made a side-trip to Montreal. Having decided in favor of supporting the new republican government in his own country, he was gratified to find in Canada some evidence of the wisdom of his choice. At the village of Queenston, "we were visited at our camp by many people of this neighborhood, some of which were very sensible that they had changed better for worse, in coming from the United States to these parts."<sup>11</sup> At Montreal, he found some indication of mercantile progress comparable to that in his own country, but he found the French Canadians rather ignorant and unenergetic, and he was repelled by descriptions of the harsh winters of the region.

Another early republican notice of Canada is The History of Maria Kittle (1797), by Mrs. Ann Eliza Bleecker (1752-1783). Maria Kittle is a brief epistolary romance about a New York girl who is carried off to Montreal by Indians during the French and Indian war. Very little is said about Canada in the course of the narrative, the author's main interests

being in vivid descriptions of Indian atrocities and dramatized discussions of various topics of presumable interest to contemporary female readers. But there is an interesting development towards the end of the novel, when one of the English prisoners, rather like her true-life counterparts who wrote captivity narratives in the early part of the century, declares her new-found sympathy for the French inhabitants of Canada.

I now reject all prejudices of education. From my infancy I have been taught that the French were a cruel and perfidious enemy, but I have found them quite the reverse.<sup>12</sup>

Towards the end of the century, another noteworthy author expressed a more emphatic and uncompromisingly favorable view of Canada. John Cousens Ogden (1751-1800) was a New Jersey-born Episcopal clergyman who, unlike many of his professional colleagues, refused to abandon his native country after the Revolution. The fact that he was not forcibly ejected during the waves of anti-loyalist enthusiasm is surprising, for Ogden was a vehement opponent of the independence movement. In 1799, he published A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada, describing his recent excursion to Kingston, Montreal, and Quebec City. It is clear that Canada represents for him a political and social ideal which the United States has willfully and ill-advisedly forsaken. Of Lower Canada he comments:

An happy harmony prevails among all orders of the inhabitants. . . . An urbanity, hospitality, and interesting

gentility of manners pervades most classes of people. .  
 . . .

Lower Canada appears upon examination to enjoy as many of the blessings of life as are needful to make men happy.<sup>13</sup>

And of the more recently settled, predominantly English-speaking Upper Canada, he says:

People of every language and nation have come hither and formed prospering colonies. Heaven has blessed their labors, industry, and enterprize. Few have experienced greater success. The nation of England has fostered them with great care. . . .<sup>14</sup>

He is especially partial to the French-Canadian people, and even approves of their religion:

A decent, respectful, affability of manners prevails among the French peasantry. . . .

Religion appears truly venerable, not only in its temples and other edifices, but in the hospitality, politeness, and genteel deportment of most of its professors.<sup>15</sup>

The basic object of Ogden's approbation is the order and stability which he believes the Catholic church creates in Lower Canada, and which he opposes to the situation in his own country:

The people of the States are divided into parties about religion, and are not at unity among themselves--Union, order, harmony, and prosperity universally extend among the Catholics in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

"Few conquered countries have been better protected or governed," Ogden continues. Politically, Canada has achieved at least as much as, and perhaps more than, the United States, without resorting to revolution:

In the year 1790, the wisdom of the British government

was eminently evinced in dividing this large country into two separate governments, and granting to each a constitution, on the most liberal and disinterested principles, a constitution for freedom and the rights of man, perhaps unequalled in the historical page, with all the advantages enjoyed by the British colonies in America previous to the revolution, and with many additions. . . .<sup>17</sup>

But Ogden is obviously idealizing Canada, just as Crèvecoeur idealized the French Canadians, in order to place in bold relief what he sees as the defects of American republicanism. His book is full of such abstractions as "harmony," "order," "prosperity," and "happiness," but he seldom illustrates these abstractions with reference to specific individuals and situations. Nor does he mention such problems as French-English racial and religious rivalry; indeed, he would have the reader believe that the Churches of England and Rome in Lower Canada exist side by side in perfect accord.

Ogden was not unique in his extravagantly favorable attitude to Canada. In 1808 another Episcopal clergyman, William Jenks of Boston, published a Memoir of the Northern Kingdom which purported to be a history written in 1901 describing the ultimate disintegration of the American union. While the New England and Virginia of Jenks's book decline economically and founder politically, the "Northern Kingdom" with its mercantile metropolis of "Quebeck" flourishes under the benevolent paternalism of the British crown.

Like London, Quebec was now the mart not only of trade, but of literature; the "Royal American Board" of which, under the fostering patronage of a discerning Prince, became highly instrumental in the promotion of science.<sup>18</sup>

Eventually, New England forms a union with the Northern Kingdom; Virginia is annexed by France; and republicanism, degenerating to a licence for riot and self-indulgence, makes a last stand among the ignorant frontiersmen of Illinois.

The war of 1812 inevitably aroused further American interest in Canada, although during and immediately after the war ideas about the northern colonies tended to be subordinated to the strong partisan feelings provoked by the contention with England and by opposing attitudes within the United States. A New York pamphleteer named Jacob Bigelow ridiculed the war hawks' notions of continental conquest by having the fictitious commander of "The Gulls" (the U.S. in the allegorical context of his pamphlet The Wars of the Gulls, published 1812) make plans for a "viceroy of Labrador" and "military governor over the fragments of Quebec." Most of Canada, says the author contemptuously, can be captured at any time, "for the ice never breaks up."<sup>19</sup> Typical of the more vociferous pro-war propaganda are Samuel Woodworth's fictionalized history The Champions of Freedom (1816), in which the oppressed Canadian colonists are eager to join the American invaders, and Mordecai Noah's extravagant stage spectacle She Would Be a Soldier; or the Plains of Chippewa (1819), which suggests that the settlers of Upper Canada are rustic Jacksonian democrats, intrinsically superior to the British aristocrats who govern them.

A much more detailed literary consideration of Canada



which reflects the experience of the 1812 war is Joseph Sansom's Sketches of Lower Canada (1817). Sansom, a retired soldier, traveled to Quebec City and Montmorency, and like many of his countrymen had both blame and praise for this curious region of North America. Seen as a part of the archetypal New World experience of creating a new civilization out of the wilderness, the northern settlements are inferior to those of the United States:

It is only on the banks of its rivers, that Canada pretends to any population, or improvement, whatever; whereas with us the cheering "tract and blest abode of man," is scattered . . . over the whole surface of the soil, by hardy Adventurers. . . . And we have inland towns little inferior in population to the Capital of Canada.<sup>20</sup>

But in some other respects, Canada is unified with its southern neighbor in opposition to Europe:

There are no beggars in Canada, any more than in the United States. The stranger is nowhere importuned for money, or disgusted by the shameless display of natural or acquired deformity with which European roads and cities universally abound.<sup>21</sup>

Not surprisingly, Sansom believes that the political ties with Britain are the principal cause of Canada's inferiority to the United States, and he predicts that the northern provinces will eventually be absorbed into the republic by a combined process of assimilation and military conquest:

I left Quebec with a confirmed opinion that . . . its citadel, reputed the strongest fortification in America . . . might possibly, in future wars between the two countries . . . fall a prey to American enterprise and intrepidity. . . .

I say not the same of Upper Canada, whose population

is, or will be, essentially American, and whose attachment to the government of Great Britain must inevitably yield to the habits and opinions of their continental neighbors.<sup>22</sup>

Sansom has mixed feelings about the French-speaking people. On the one hand, he admires their honesty and garrulous friendliness, which qualities he illustrates by contrasting two individuals he met on his travels, a candid young French Canadian and a haughty English-speaking colonist. On the other hand, he distrusts the European decadence implicit in the foreign language and religion. His ambivalent feelings are reflected in the uncertainty with which he envisages the ultimate disposition of the French in Canada:

By the next competition between England and America . . . Upper Canada will be nearly Americanized. Montreal itself will have become to all efficient purposes an American town; the French population there, will gradually assimilate, or disappear; unless, indeed, French Canada should be consolidated by national independence. . . .<sup>23</sup>

It is clear from the repeated denunciations of Roman Catholicism in Sketches of Lower Canada that Sansom would much prefer the French to "assimilate or disappear." Fear and distrust of the habitants' religion is an almost obsessive feature of early nineteenth-century American accounts of travel in Lower Canada. Sometimes it is related to the general idea of a decadence inimical to American political and social ideals:

Despotism seems to have stamped a feature of low submission upon the plodding, unambitious peasantry, whose minds are, moreover, awed into superstition by the displayed crucifix of their Catholic priests. . . .<sup>24</sup>

But usually it is presented as a very serious qualification to the appealing qualities of a people who "appear to be very temperate, honest, industrious, and hospitable, but remarkably ignorant, and zealously devoted to their priests."<sup>25</sup> An American guidebook, The Northern Traveller (1825, and several subsequent editions), informs its readers that

The French Canadians, notwithstanding the common prejudices against them, appear on acquaintance to be an intelligent people. They certainly are amiable, cheerful, and gay, and their backwardness in improvements is attributable to the system under which they live. They are generally brought up in great ignorance, and they are taught to dislike and avoid not only Protestant principles, but Protestants themselves.<sup>26</sup>

The Northern Traveller is attributed in the Library of Congress catalogue to Theodore Dwight (1796-1866), son and namesake of one of the "Connecticut Wits." Dwight has also been identified as the author of one of the most notorious best sellers in the history of American publishing, the Awful Disclosures of "Maria Monk" (1836), which purports to be the true revelations of a former inmate of the Hotel-Dieu nunnery in Montreal.<sup>27</sup> Four years before the appearance of Awful Disclosures, an Episcopal clergyman from New York named George Bourne published a similar work, entitled Lorette. The History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun, in which the habitants are portrayed as degenerate beings who indulge in every kind of vice with the assurance of eventually receiving absolution from their priests. The setting of Lorette moves from an infertile, perpetually snowbound landscape of rural Lower Canada, featuring gloomy forests,

lonely granges and sinister monasteries, to the grottoed interior of a convent where the innocent heroine is held prisoner while repeated assaults are made on her chastity by vicious priests abetted by ugly and dissolute nuns. In Dwight's Awful Disclosures the same kind of Gothic trappings are evident: lecherous priests, mad nuns, subterranean passages and dungeons, infant corpses buried in quicklime, and an innocent narrator-heroine who describes her ordeal with a suitable combination of gruesome explicitness and titillating suggestion.

In both Lorette and Awful Disclosures there are obvious similarities to M.G. Lewis's famous tale of seduction and murder, The Monk; and Bourne's use of the North American forest as a scene of terror recalls the innovative novels of Charles Brockden Brown. As Gothic romances, the works of Bourne and Dwight are historically interesting and even mildly entertaining to the twentieth-century reader, who inevitably discovers a pervasive unintentional humor in the extravagances of plot and character. As sociological treatises on the actual state of affairs in French Canada, it is hardly necessary to say, they are obvious libels. Even the unsophisticated element of the American reading public to which they were originally addressed very quickly lost interest in them, particularly after the crusading New York journalist, William Leete Stone, published his exposé Maria Monk and the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu (1836). But Lorette and Awful Disclosures

were only extreme expressions of a set of stereotyped ideas about Canada which were being formed in the American imagination and propagated by authors of various degrees of ability and influence.

2.

Another unfavorable view of French Canadians was being presented in early nineteenth century American literature, in a series of semi-historical writings. The true (or in some cases, purportedly true) narrative of exploration and adventure on the American western frontier often featured the expatriate voyageur who wandered down from Canada or remained in isolated communities of Illinois, Missouri, and Louisiana after the fall of New France. One of the earliest notable appearances in American literature of this exotic figure is in Washington Irving's history of the ill-fated attempt to develop an independent American fur trade, Astoria (1836).

Irving's purpose in Astoria is to glorify American initiative and energy, particularly as they are manifested in the execution of far-sighted capitalist enterprise, and to illustrate the inevitability of the expansion of American industrial and commercial civilization. The individuals involved in this view of American destiny are set forth in a very clearly delineated hierarchy, in which the French Canadians are relegated to a decidedly inferior position. The "hero" of Astoria, although he appears very briefly in the book, is the initiator and guiding spirit of the enterprise,

John Jacob Astor; below him are the managers and leaders of the expedition. Next in precedence come the Kentucky back-woodsmen who do most of the hunting and trapping for the party: they are dead shots with a rifle, intrepid and resourceful in all the skills necessary for survival in the wilderness. Finally, at the bottom rank of the organization come the cheerfully inept and unambitious voyageurs:

The Canadians proved as patient of toil and hardship on the land as on the water; indeed, nothing could surpass the patience and good-humour of these men upon the march. They were the cheerful drudges of the party, loading and unloading the horses, pitching the tents, making the fires, cooking; in short, performing all those household and menial offices which the Indians usually assign to the squaws; and like the squaws, they left all the hunting and fighting to others. A Canadian has but little affection for the exercise of the rifle.<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, Irving associated the Canadians not simply with the Indians, who throughout Astoria are represented as a brutish and violent race doomed to extinction, but with the Indian women. The Canadians are thus seen as passive, almost irrelevant appendages to the great American experience of taming the western frontier: they are the virtual antithesis of the resourceful, active, unmistakably masculine American pioneer.

The Canadians' inadequacies as frontiersmen, particularly as compared to their American counterparts, are explicitly set forth in another of Irving's true-life stories of the prairies, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville (1837):

Here we would remark a great difference, in point of character and quality, between the two classes of trappers,

the "American" and "French" as they are called in contradistinction. The latter is meant to designate the French creole of Canada or Louisiana; the former, the trapper of the old American stock, from Kentucky, Tennessee, and others of the western States. The French trapper is represented as a lighter, softer, more self-indulgent kind of man. He must have his Indian wife, his lodge, and his petty conveniences. He is gay and thoughtless, takes little heed of landmarks, depends upon his leaders and companions to think for the common weal, and, if left to himself, is easily perplexed and lost.

The American trapper stands by himself, and is peerless for the service of the wilderness. Drop him in the midst of a prairie, or in the heart of the mountains, and he is never at a loss. He notices every landmark; can retrace his route through the most monotonous plains, or the most perplexed labyrinths of the mountains; no danger nor difficulty can appal him, and he scorns to complain under any privation. In equipping the two kinds of trappers, the Creole and Canadian are apt to prefer the light fusee; the American always grasps his rifle; he despises what he calls the "shot-gun." We give these estimates on the authority of a trader of long experience, and a foreigner by birth. "I consider one American," said he, "equal to three Canadians in point of sagacity, aptness at resources, self-dependence, and fearlessness of spirit. In fact, no one can cope with him as a stark tramper of the wilderness."<sup>29</sup>

It must be noted that Irving's adverse judgement on the "Creole and Canadian" is not entirely a matter of race or national origin. The hero of Captain Bonneville, who is an intrepid frontiersman equal or superior to the Kentuckians, is of French descent. Bonneville, however, comes from a family which emigrated directly from France to the United States. It might be thence inferred that the alleged inferiority of the French Canadians is related to their association with the collapse of the French empire in the New World: the voyageurs are supposedly the vestiges of a defeated race and of a departed imperial glory, whereas Bonneville, as the

descendant of comparatively recent immigrants to the New World, is associated with the rising glory of the American republic. It must also be pointed out that Irving was simply echoing in good faith the sources he consulted for his histories, which represented the Canadians of the Astoria and Bonneville expeditions as good-natured, unambitious, inept drudges. In any case, he contributed to the development of a literary stereotype of a frontier character who was in various ways distinguished from all other white men involved in the opening of the American west.

Further contributions to the stereotype were made by Edgar Allan Poe in his unfinished novel of westward exploration, "The Journal of Julius Rodman" (1840). Something of a literary hoax, "Julius Rodman" purported to be (according to the subtitle) "an account of the first passage across the Rocky Mountains of North America ever achieved by man," but was actually a distillation of details from several sources, including Captain Bonneville and the journals of Lewis and Clark.<sup>30</sup> The members of Poe's imaginary expedition include five boatmen from the Missouri village of Petite Côte, where "there are about a hundred inhabitants, mostly Creoles of Canadian descent."<sup>31</sup> The five recruits, says Poe's title character and narrator, are

. . . good boatmen, and excellent companions, as far as singing French songs went, and drinking, at which they were pre-eminent. . . . They were always in good humor, and always ready to work; but as hunters I did not think them worth much, and as fighting men I soon discovered they were not to be depended upon.<sup>32</sup>



Poe goes on, like Irving, to compare the Canadians unfavorably with six Kentuckian members of the expedition, who are tall, powerful, experienced hunters, and dead shots with the rifle. The Canadians are once again placed very low on the frontier hierarchy; Poe barely grants them precedence over the Negro slave Toby, the brutishly servile and indefatigably good-natured clown of the story. Poe does, however, make a distinction between the voyageurs and Pierre Junôt, one of the leaders of the party, who is also a "Creole of Canadian descent." Junôt's superiority to the Canadian voyageurs, and his relationship of virtual equality with the American narrator, suggest that the primary basis of Poe's distinction between individuals is not racial or national, but social and intellectual. Ultimately, however, the comparative brevity of the "Julius Rodman" fragment makes it difficult to offer more than tentative generalizations about the author's attitudes to the various characters.

A more detailed picture of the French Canadian on the prairie and of his relationship to other denizens of the region is given in The Oregon Trail (1847) by the eminent historian Francis Parkman. Unlike Irving, Parkman was not particularly interested in the nineteenth-century westward movement. His "Boston Brahmin" sensibilities inclined him to recoil from the easy familiarity and rude inquisitiveness of the frontier democrats in the wagon trains, who were "for the most part . . . the rudest and most ignorant of the frontier

population."<sup>33</sup> The historian's main purpose in going to the prairies was not to have dealings with white Americans at all, but to do field research in the Indian character. By 1846 (the year of Parkman's expedition), the plains Indians constituted almost the last remnants of North American aborigines still living in conditions comparable to those of the early days of European exploration and settlement in the New World. Parkman, at this time contemplating his vast historical epic France and England in North America, hoped to apply by analogy and inference his observations of the plains Indians to an imaginative recreation of the virtually vanished Iroquois and Hurons of New France. Unavoidably, however, he had considerable contact with the white inhabitants of the prairies, and particularly with the many French Canadians who served as attendants and guides to emigrant trains and to hunting or exploring parties. His own group was accompanied for most of its expedition by two individuals of French descent, a muleteer named Deslauriers, and a hunter and guide named Henry Chatillon.

In spite of his aristocratic background, his devotion to scholarly pursuits, and his distaste for certain frontier types, Parkman had a life-long enthusiasm for the hearty outdoor life of strenuous activity. Several years after the Oregon Trail expedition, he expressed his admiration for the resourceful and energetic wilderness pioneer in a tribute to Alexander Henry in his first published history, The Conspiracy

of Pontiac (1851). On the Oregon Trail he found another representative of the virtues and ideals which he associated with the frontier. Henry Chatillon, unlike Alexander Henry, was illiterate and uninterested in economic success; but he more than compensated for these deficiencies by his intuitive honesty and by a kind of native intelligence displayed in his hunting and tracking and riding skills. Parkman's tribute to Chatillon presents an extremely idealized picture of a "natural nobleman":

His age was about thirty; he was six feet high, and very powerfully and gracefully moulded. The prairies had been his school; he could neither read nor write, but he had a natural refinement and delicacy of mind, such as is rare even in women. His manly face was a mirror of uprightness, simplicity, and kindness of heart; he had, moreover, a keen perception of character, and a tact that would preserve him from flagrant error in any society. Henry had not the restless energy of an Anglo-American. He was content to take things as he found them; and his chief fault arose from an excess of easy generosity, not conducive to thriving in the world. . . . His bravery was as much celebrated in the mountains as his skill in hunting. . . . He was a proof of what unaided nature will sometimes do. I have never, in the city or in the wilderness, met a better man than my true-hearted friend, Henry Chatillon.<sup>34</sup>

Chatillon is not, however, described as a "French Canadian" or with the careless indifference of Irving or Poe as a "Creole or Canadian." He is explicitly identified as a Franco-American, a native citizen of the United States, "born in a little French town near St. Louis." He is contrasted, furthermore, to the muleteer Deslauriers, who is

. . . a Canadian, with all the characteristics of the true Jean Baptiste. Neither fatigue, exposure, nor hard labor could ever impair his cheerfulness and gayety, or

his politeness to his bourgeois; and when night came, he would sit down by the fire, smoke his pipe, and tell stories with the utmost contentment.<sup>35</sup>

In the course of the narrative, Deslauriers is represented as considerably less capable than the Franco-American. Like Irving's voyageurs, he is cheerful and obedient, capable of following orders, but a comparatively inferior representative of the frontier spirit.

It is worth mentioning in passing that as eminent a commentator on The Oregon Trail as Henry Nash Smith carelessly ignores Parkman's emphatic distinction between these two characters and refers to Chatillon as a "French Canadian."<sup>36</sup> Yet Parkman makes a point of calling attention to the hunter's American birth, and of comparing him favorably with his Canadian understrapper. He thus relates his characters of French descent not to a racial or social hierarchy, but to an implicit distinction between the United States and Canada. In spite of his aristocratic inclinations, Parkman obviously believes in certain abstract ideals related to the American concept of democracy. By implication, the free air of the republic is more capable of producing a superior breed of human being than Canada, with its long tradition of colonial dependence. In The Oregon Trail, these ideas are given only tentative and perhaps barely intentional expression; but later, in France and England in North America, they are to be considered in much greater detail.

Notes to Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup>Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 336.
- <sup>2</sup>March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition, ed. Kenneth Roberts (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1947), p. 346.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 557.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 364.
- <sup>5</sup>Hugh Henry Brackenridge, The Death of General Montgomery in the Storming of the City of Quebec (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1777), p. 15.
- <sup>6</sup>J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More "Letters from an American Farmer," ed. H.L. Bourdin, R.H. Gabriel, and S.T. Williams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 172.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 174.
- <sup>8</sup>Joseph Stansbury, "To Cordelia," Canadian Poetry in English, ed. Bliss Carman, Lorne Pierce, and V.B. Rhodenizer (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1922), p. 8.
- <sup>9</sup>William S. Bartlet, The Frontier Missionary: A Memoir of the Life of Jacob Bailey, A.M. (Boston: Ide and Dutton, 1853), p. 154.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 216.
- <sup>11</sup>Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckewelder, ed. Paul A.W. Wallace (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), p. 304.
- <sup>12</sup>Ann Eliza [Schuyler] Bleecker, The History of Maria Kittle, in a Letter to Miss Ten Eyck (Hartford: Elisha Babcock, 1797), p. 56.
- <sup>13</sup>[John Cousens Ogden], A Tour Through Upper and Lower Canada (Litchfield, Conn.: [n.p.], 1799), pp. 15, 35.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 18, 22.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 88.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-07.

<sup>18</sup>[William Jenks], Memoir of the Northern Kingdom ([Boston: n.p., 1808]), p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>[Jacob Bigelow], The Wars of the Gulls: an Historical Romance (New York: The Dramatic Repository, 1812), pp. 4-5.

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Sansom, Sketches of Lower Canada (New York: Kirk & Mercein, 1817), p. 54.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-37.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-38.

<sup>24</sup>Philip Stansbury, A Pedestrian Tour of 2,300 Miles in North America (New York: J.D. Myers & W. Smith, 1822), pp. 159-60.

<sup>25</sup>Moses Guest, Poems on Several Occasions. To Which are Annexed Extracts from a Journal (Cincinnati: Looker & Reynolds, 1823), p. 141.

<sup>26</sup>[Theodore Dwight], The Northern Traveller, new ed. (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1831), p. 214.

<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of the popularity of Awful Disclosures, see Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes: the Story of Best Sellers in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 245-46. For the authorship question, see Ralph Thompson, "The Maria Monk Affair," The Colophon, Part Seventeen (1934), No. 6.

<sup>28</sup>Washington Irving, Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains, 1836 ed. unabridged with an introduction by W.H. Goetzmann (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1961), I, 187.

<sup>29</sup>Irving, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A. in the Rocky Mountains and the Far West, ed. E.W. Todd (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. 19.

<sup>30</sup>For demonstrations of Poe's indebtedness to these sources, see H. Arlin Turner, "A Note on Poe's 'Julius Rodman,'" University of Texas Studies in English, 10 (July, 1930), 147-51, and P.P. Crawford, "Lewis and Clark's 'Expedition' as a source for Poe's 'Julius Rodman,'" University of Texas Studies in English, 12 (July, 1932), 158-70.

<sup>31</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, "The Journal of Julius Rodman," Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe (1902; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), IV, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Parkman, The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life (Boston: Little, Brown, 1894), p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West in Symbol and Myth (1950; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 51.

## III

## COOPER AND THE HISTORICAL ROMANCE

## 1.

The adverse picture of Canada and Canadians in the literature of the early republic was particularly evident in the historical romances of the period. As has been seen, Canada figured in the American historical romance at least as early as 1797, when Mrs. Bleecker sent her imaginary heroine into northern captivity in The History of Maria Kittle. The colorful and violent chronicle of warfare and adventure in the northern forest constituted an inevitable theme for American romancers, and although these writers were mainly interested in exploiting the strong nationalistic feelings associated with the early history of their own territory, they very early discovered that their history was inseparable from that of the New World as a whole. In fact and in legend, the French and Indian wars had irrevocably welded together the two main regions of North America, and had made it virtually impossible to consider in detail the past of one region without referring to the past of the other. This discovery was definitively expressed in the works of the chief innovator and practitioner of the historical romance in America, James Fenimore Cooper.

In spite of the ostensible vastness of his fictional canvas, which usually conveys an impression of the virtually infinite expanse of the North American wilderness, Cooper was



basically a regional writer of comparatively narrow geographical and historical interests. Almost all his important novels, including three of the four Leatherstocking tales and the Littlepage trilogy, are concerned with a relatively limited section of his native New York state. Furthermore, Cooper never traveled widely in North America. His farthest expedition westward was a trip to Michigan to research background material for The Oak Openings (1848); the setting of The Prairie (1827) was created entirely from his reading and imagination; and of Canada he knew practically nothing at all. Although he visited Niagara Falls in 1809, he apparently did not cross the river. For the necessary historical information relating to the French and Indian wars, he relied on his reading. His conception of the French in eighteenth-century Canada was derived from incidental information in such works as Carver's Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America (1778) and Trumbull's History of the United States (1810), and his notions of the northern Indians (as has been noted previously) were based on the ethnological reports of John Heckewelder. His ignorance--or indifference--concerning the British provinces as they existed in his own time is reflected in his cryptic and contemptuous reference in The Pioneers (1823) to "that polar region of royal sunshine."<sup>1</sup> Regarding the social and political organization of eighteenth-century Canada and the French settlers of the period he was almost completely indifferent. Throughout his

novels he insisted on referring to New France anachronistically as "The Canadas," a term belonging properly to Cooper's own lifetime but not to the earlier period about which he was usually writing, for it did not come into use until 1791, when the British administration divided the former French colony into an upper and lower province.

Yet the image of Canada in Cooper's novels of the French and Indian wars has a suggestiveness which is more impressive than that of detailed and factual accounts of the country. In The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841), the mysterious region to the north has an oppressive power over the imaginations of Cooper's British American characters. The action of these novels never moves north beyond the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, which form an ominous natural barrier between New France and the English colonies (the Thousand Islands scenes of parts of The Pathfinder probably constitute Cooper's most northerly setting), but there are frequent references to the remote northern fastnesses of the "Frenchers" and their Indian allies. Leatherstocking in particular frequently evokes an image of the northern country as the stronghold of barbarism and evil, the source of a dark and primitive principle in direct antithesis to the illuminating cultural forces which are arising in the colonies to the south. This image is repeatedly associated with the "Mingos" or "Maquas," the Indians of Canada, who are the special object of Leatherstocking's hatred

and contempt.<sup>2</sup>

The Indians of Canada in Cooper's novels are not the semi-Christianized tools of the Jesuits which the eighteenth-century captivity narratives frequently described. Rather, they constitute the negative term in a dualistic moral conception of the primitive world. Cooper's obvious belief in the ultimate superiority of the white European-derived civilization over the primitive Indian way of life did not prevent him from making moral distinctions within his representations of the respective races. But paradoxically, he tended to state the moral relativity of civilization and primitivism in fairly simplified and virtually absolute terms. Thus, he demonstrates his belief that there are both good and bad qualities in primitivism by creating almost incredibly good and irredeemably bad Indians. Cooper derived his notions about Indians mainly from Heckewelder, who became convinced (possibly through a misunderstanding of Delaware oral traditions) that the Delaware were the epitome of Indian benevolence, while the Iroquois and several related tribes were unregenerate savages.<sup>3</sup> Cooper not only followed Heckewelder in this polarization of the Indian character, but with a few unimportant qualifications he associated the good Indians with colonial America and the evil "Mingoes" with New France. Magua in The Last of the Mohicans is from Canada, as are Arrowhead in The Pathfinder and the Iroquois war party in The Deerslayer who besiege the fortress on Lake Otsego.

Similarly, the French of Canada in Cooper's novels are opposed to the British Americans from the southern colonies. There is a certain dramatic effectiveness related to the image of Canada as the stronghold of ominous evil in the description of the anonymous phalanxes of ghostly white-clad troops who have descended from the north to besiege Fort William Henry in The Last of the Mohicans. But Cooper did not know the French character very well, and in his representations of individuals (which he wisely kept to a minimum) he relied on what appears to be a stereotype from comic folk tradition. Captain Sanglier in The Pathfinder is a wily and unctious villain, with a heavy accent clumsily produced in phonetics ("'Monsieur le Pathfindair,' he said, with a friendly smile, '. . . une balle from your honorable hand be sartain deat'. You kill my best warrior on some island"),<sup>4</sup> and with a cynical fondness for inciting the "Mingoes" to murder:

In short, he was an adventurer whom circumstances had thrown into a situation where the callous qualities of men of his class might readily show themselves. . . . As his name was unavoidably connected with many of the excesses committed by his parties, he was generally considered, in the American provinces, a wretch who delighted in bloodshed and who found his greatest happiness in tormenting the helpless and innocent. . . .<sup>5</sup>

There is considerably more substance, on the other hand, to Cooper's most detailed picture of a Frenchman from Canada, that of the Marquis de Montcalm in The Last of the Mohicans.

The Marquis of Montcalm was, at the period of which we write, in the flower of his age, and, it may be added,

in the zenith of his fortune. But, even in that enviable situation, he was affable, and distinguished as much for his attention to the forms of courtesy as for that chivalrous courage which, only two short years afterward, induced him to throw away his life on the plains of Abraham.<sup>6</sup>

The author subsequently condemns Montcalm for his failure to prevent the massacre at Fort William Henry, and describes him as "a man who was great in all the minor attributes of character, but who was found wanting when it became necessary to prove how much principle is superior to policy."<sup>7</sup> But in spite of this ultimately negative judgement, the brief scenes of the French general magnanimously conferring with his defeated enemies, and drifting incognito through his army encampment in the early morning (rather like Shakespeare's Henry V), make him one of Cooper's more interesting minor characters. The allusions to his "courtesy" and "chivalrous courage," furthermore, when compared with the slighting reference to "the callous qualities of men of [Sanglier's] class," reflect an admiration for the idea of aristocracy which the class-conscious American author obviously felt, even as he claimed to reject it in its European forms.

Cooper's success with exploiting the events and scenery of the French and Indian wars inevitably inspired a number of imitators, many of whom were more interested in creating a direct and detailed picture of early Canada than he had been. But these imitators and successors, in spite of the ostensible concern for historical and geographical fact which they some-

times displayed, most often merely succeeded in demonstrating the triteness and narrowness of their ideas, without endowing their images of North America with any suggestion of metaphysical and moral profundity, as Cooper had done. Unlike Cooper, they were not usually interested in considering in any detail the significance of the wilderness, or the possible virtues of primitivism as compared with civilization. Essentially, they saw the events of the French and Indian wars and the people and places of early Canada in terms of a narrow range of prejudices involving the three basic subjects of social class, nationality (often confused with certain racial presuppositions), and religion.

All three of these subjects are of central concern in one of the earliest historical romances to appear in the wake of Cooper's tremendous success. The Rivals of Acadia (1827), by Mrs. Harriet Vaughn Cheney, deals with the seventeenth-century feud between d'Aulnay and La Tour. The author is particularly interested in the religious controversy involved in the episode, and while the historical La Tour (as John Winthrop's Journal indicates) was suspected of only pretending to be a Protestant to ensure the support of Massachusetts Bay, Mrs. Cheney represents the defenders of Fort St. John as enlightened spokesmen for the faith which will eventually dominate the New World and serve as a bulwark against the decadence of Roman Catholic Europe. Her rebellious Acadians are, in short, prefigurations of Americans, with a firm

devotion to Protestantism and political independence. Mrs. Cheney also exalts a kind of middle-class democracy in the exploits of her heroine, Lucie [sic] de Courcy, who rises from obscure origins to a position of confidence and virtual equality with Madame La Tour. But the fact that the author raises her heroine to this level instead of suggesting that class distinctions are irrelevant to individual worth suggests that like Cooper she is unable to avoid a certain deference to the European ideal of aristocracy. She is also apparently unable to rid herself of a predisposition against the French nationality. The villain of her story is a cruel and vicious hypocrite, like Cooper's Sanglier. Her heroine is matched romantically not with a French hero, but with a British American conveniently introduced into the Acadian setting as an envoy from Massachusetts Bay; and at the end of the novel the author reveals that Lucie herself is half English.

The same sort of predispositions against the French of Canada are more explicitly dramatized by another female successor to Cooper. Delia Salter Bacon was the author of the novella "Castine" (published in her Tales of the Puritans, 1831), involving a young Puritan girl who is kidnapped by Indians at the outbreak of war between the French and English in 1702 and carried into the northern wilderness to be sold into the household of the wicked Baron Castine. Not all the French characters in the story turn out to be as unregenerately

evil as Castine or his murderous henchman, Hertel de Rouville. Castine's daughter befriends the New England captive, and his son eventually helps her to escape. But the baron's daughter is a pathetic figure who voluntarily remains immured in her father's stronghold because of her conviction that her strong Roman Catholic faith will eventually bring about her father's conversion to right and justice. The New England heroine falls in love with the baron's son, and it appears temporarily that the author is contemplating a mixed marriage between French Catholic and English Protestant. At the last moment, however, young Castine reveals to his bride that his mother was English and he was secretly raised a Protestant.

The Eagle of the Mohawks (1841) and its sequel The Scout (1844) by the New York author J.L.E.W. Shecut, also focus on the religious and national conflicts. The first of these works is set in the seventeenth century and is a reversal of the traditional captivity narrative plot, for it involves a French-Canadian girl who is kidnapped from Montreal and carried by Indians into the New England wilderness. When the Dutch-American hero of the story undertakes to restore her to her home, he discovers to his surprise that her countrymen are a reasonably decent and kindly people. Their Catholicism, however, is intolerable to him, as it obviously is to the author; the French-Canadian girl's conversion to Protestantism is an essential prerequisite to her becoming the hero's wife. But in a startling concluding development (a development which



suggests that the author's objections to the match are racial as well as religious), the hero rejects the Canadienne in favor of a Dutch-American girl whom he left behind in New York. In The Scout, which is a rather tiresome series of conversations tied together with a thin story of a colonial American military expedition to Canada, Shecut sets forth explicitly some of his racial and religious beliefs, and French Catholic Canada is predictably represented in a rather unfavorable light.

The expression of anti-French sentiments descends to extremely simplistic terms in a few precursors of the dime novel obviously aimed at much the same audience who read with credulity the Awful Disclosures and Lorette. In Lucelle or the Young Iroquois! (1845) by Osgood Bradbury, the image of French Canada is presented explicitly in racial terms. The French-Canadian heroine "sometimes dreamed of having a British officer of high rank and wealth for her husband, in case she could not obtain a French one";<sup>8</sup> but in the end she not only fails to attract a French or English husband, but she is united with an Iroquois brave, in a daring consummation of the miscegenation theme which Cooper could only resolve in The Last of the Mohicans by killing off the potential transgressors of the racial barrier. But the marriage of Lucelle and the Indian is presumably acceptable since, in the eyes of the author and perhaps of large portions of his audience, a lower class French Canadian is socially and racially almost

indistinguishable from an Indian.

The emphasis is vehemently and crudely on religion rather than race or nationality in Benjamin Barker's Cecelia, or The White Nun of the Wilderness (1845) and Justin Jones's Jessie Manton, or the Novice of Sacre-Coeur (1848), which are so violent in their religious diatribes and so clumsy in their writing style that they are hardly referable even on the basis of historical interest to the level of Awful Disclosures. By contrast with these specimens, there is considerable literary value in James McSherry's Père Jean or The Jesuit Missionary (1847). Written by a Roman Catholic Maryland author, Père Jean is (according to the preface) based on the real-life exploits of Father Jogues, and is quite possibly the only American pro-Catholic, pro-French Canadian novel in the Cooper tradition. McSherry takes Cooper as his model, but reverses the latter's various racial and moral equations. The title character is accompanied on his mission by a French-Canadian scout named Pierre, known as l'Espion hardi, an obvious avatar of Leatherstocking. Pierre is in turn followed by a faithful Christian Huron, an exact opposite to the satanic Hurons which Cooper depicted. Père Jean is a fairly simplistic attempt to refute Cooper's statements about Canada and its inhabitants by adapting Cooper's own characters and situations to a series of contradictory propositions. But in spite of its lack of originality and its frequent didacticism, Père Jean is one of the better early nineteenth-

century American historical romances about Canada.

As previously indicated, Cooper and his successors were interested in relating Canada to certain propositions about society, as well as about religion and nationality or race. Cooper's ambivalent admiration for the French aristocracy was shared by Harriet Vaughn Cheney, but not by Delia Salter Bacon, who makes her French aristocrats the villains of "Castine." Most authors of this period, however, seemed to have been inclined to follow Cooper and attempt to present a fairly sympathetic picture of the upper class leaders of Canada under the French regime. The eminent poet John Greenleaf Whittier, for instance, tried to make a kind of tragic hero out of Charles de la Tour, in a narrative poem entitled "St. John" (1841). In this hypothetical character sketch, Whittier dramatizes the Acadian proprietor's boldness and devotion to his conception of the truth; but there is also an implied condemnation of the impetuosity and passion associated with excessive religious zeal. La Tour, resolutely setting forth to seek a new fortune after his fortress has been laid waste and his wife murdered, might be taken for a type of the indomitable American pioneer, if it were not for the fact that his desire for revenge presages nothing but further destruction and death:

O, the loveliest of heavens  
Hung tenderly o'er him,  
There were waves in the sunshine,  
And green isles before him:  
But a pale hand was beckoning  
The Huguenot on;

And in blackness and ashes  
Behind was St. John!<sup>9</sup>

A similar but considerably less poetically skilful picture of the Canadian French aristocrat as tragic hero was attempted by the popular poetaster Alfred B. Street, in his long, jingling narrative poem Frontenac (1849). As he appears in the early part of the poem, the seventeenth-century governor of New France is a grand figure who brings some of the best qualities of European culture and sophistication to the barbarous North American wilderness. But subsequently he is involved in an improbable plot of miscegenation and retribution, when a fatal attachment to an Indian woman ends in his witnessing the murder and suicide of his half-breed daughter and Indian concubine.

The Count Frontenac of Alfred B. Street, the La Tour of Whittier and Mrs. Cheney, and preeminently Cooper's Montcalm, all indicate that some nineteenth-century American authors, in spite of a professed devotion to democratic ideals, tended to defer to a traditional literary attribution of superior qualities to the aristocratic European. But their aristocrats, significantly, are all seriously flawed, so that the way is left clear for the implied or explicit preference over them of the democratic British American hero. Thus Canada and its French inhabitants, in the early nineteenth-century historical romance, was in general a remote retreat of rather sinister "foreignness" and of a seemingly irredeemable barbarism

which made the country far inferior to the American colonies.

2.

By 1850, historical romancers who were interested in writing about Canada could choose from two extensive and sharply distinct periods: the century and a half of warfare between France and England, and the almost one hundred years of British rule since the fall of Quebec. The first period, with its elements of epic conflict and ultimate triumph for the English-speaking people was a perennially favorite literary subject throughout the nineteenth century; but the second period yielded less promising possibilities. Warfare, the staple ingredient of the historical romance, was an almost incidental feature of post-Conquest Canadian history. There were the Montgomery-Arnold expedition of 1775 and several border clashes in 1812-14 and again in 1838; but apart from these episodes, there was very little to interest an American novelist. There was no protracted conflict with Indians, no large scale westward movement until fairly late in the century, no revolution--nothing but a rather tame chronicle of settlement and agricultural development.

Nevertheless, a few authors tried to adapt recent Canadian history to the fiction of adventure. In the 1850's, three American fiction writers turned their attention to the Upper Canada rebellion of 1837--or more precisely, to the belated attempts of irregular bands of armed Americans to support the rebellion with forays across the border in 1838.

The exploits of the "hunters' lodges"--as the interventionists called themselves when they pretended, for the benefit of U.S. Marshalls stationed at the border, that they were bent on hunting expeditions--were the subject of Jedediah Hunt's An Adventure on a Frozen Lake (1853), George S. Raymond's The Empress of the Isles (1853), and P. Hamilton Myers' The Prisoner of the Border (1858). Of these three works, only the last is of any consequence. A literate and fast-paced narrative, The Prisoner of the Border is particularly remarkable for its level-headed and objective consideration of a fairly recent conflict which had aroused intense partisan feelings.

John Lesperance (1838-91) turned to the Montgomery-Arnold expedition with The Bastonnais: Tale of the American Invasion of Canada in 1775-76 (1877). It is perhaps stretching a point to relate this novel to the literature of the United States, since the author's literary career was pursued entirely in Canada, and the one edition of The Bastonnais was published in Toronto. But Lesperance was born and raised in Missouri, served with the Confederate army, and emigrated to Montreal at the close of the Civil War. Although he wrote in English, he was of Franco-American descent, and was partly educated in France.<sup>10</sup> With this background, he was uniquely qualified to write about the 1775 invasion, for he had national or racial affinities with the American, British Canadian, and French Canadian participants. The Bastonnais

employs the simplistic characters and overblown rhetoric typical of nineteenth-century popular adventure fiction:

"Too late, too late!" exclaims a bereaved lover at one point, "She is gone, never to return. Farewell to all my dreams of happiness, to all my hopes and aspirations. . . . Oh fate, oh fate!"<sup>11</sup> But like Myers' Prisoner of the Border, it is a remarkably balanced and impartial consideration of a controversial historical episode.

In contrast to these reasonably literate fictions, James McCarroll's Ridgeway: An Historical Romance of the Fenian Invasion of Canada (1868) is an almost hysterical effusion of the author's political and social prejudices. This effort hardly deserves to be called a novel, since almost half the book is devoted to an expository polemic against the British, and much of the narrative is taken up with dialogue in the same vein. Even the actual "invasion" is not dramatized, but is described in an epilogue entitled "authentic report of the invasion of Canada and the Battle of Ridgeway."

An author named James Shrimpton tried to make fictional use of the chronicle of Canadian settlement in The Black Phantom: or Women's Endurance (1867), which involves Loyalist homesteaders in the Bay of Quinté region of Upper Canada. But Shrimpton runs up against exactly the same problem which (as Henry Nash Smith has described in Virgin Land) vexed the fiction-writing chroniclers of the agricultural settlement

in the American middle west.<sup>12</sup> Anecdotes of plowing and barn-raising may have minor historical interest, but they cannot sustain an extended fictional narrative. Shrimpton, like his colleagues who dealt with the agricultural west, finally has recourse to contrived melodramatic incident borrowed from the Cooper tradition of adventure fiction.

The Cooper tradition, related specifically to earlier stages of Canadian history, was revived briefly and sporadically during the 1860's and 70's. Charles W. Hall wrote Twice-Taken (1867), a well researched and exciting narrative concerning the two British sieges of Louisbourg fortress in the eighteenth century. In addition, early Canada was the setting for several "dime novels." The romance of the northern forest proved to be quite popular with readers of this genre (although not so popular as tales of the "wild west"), but the strong nationalistic inclinations of both writers and readers were reflected in a preference for specifically American settings such as Pennsylvania and New York. The definitive history and bibliography, Albert Johannsen's The House of Beadle and Adams and its Dime and Nickel Novels (1950) conveniently specifies the settings of the hundreds of works listed, and less than twenty are described as set in Canada. Of these works, very few are extensively involved with the distinctive elements of the Canadian setting. Edward S. Ellis's The Forest Spy (1861) is nominally set in Canada during the war of 1812, but the



country is very vaguely characterized as a land of forests, Indians, and "Tories." N. William Busted's King Barnaby: or The Maidens of the Forest (1861) is more specific in its descriptions of Halifax and Quebec in the late eighteenth century, but the focus of attention is on the Bostonian romantic hero and on a family of European French emigrés which he guides through the forest during an Indian uprising.

Two dime novelists, Ann Stephens and C. Dunning Clark, made a minor specialty of writing about early Canada, both producing trilogies based on historical and legendary events in New France before the conquest. Ann Stephens exploited the legend of Count Frontenac's half-breed child in Ahmo's Plot (1863), Mahaska (1863), and The Indian Queen (1864). Clark presented a Gothicized chronicle of urban French Canada, reminiscent of Awful Disclosures but with an emphasis on political intrigue rather than religious controversy, in The Silent Slayer; or The Maid of Montreal (1869), Despard the Spy, or The Fall of Montreal (1869), and Graybeard the Sorcerer, or the Recluse of Mount Royale (1874).

Thus throughout most of the nineteenth century, a rather simplified and derogatory conception of Canada persisted in the American imagination. In spite of the fact that in the latter half of the century, British North America had a large English-speaking population which was as devoted to democratic ideals and to material progress as its southern neighbor, many American writers continued to represent the country

as a politically reactionary British colony, or as an enclave of French-speaking Roman Catholic peasants, or as the primitive wilderness scene of Indian warfare or of decadent French imperialism. There had been a few contradictions of these views, by loyalist writers at the time of the Revolution, for instance, or by sympathetic and culturally sophisticated travelers, but these dissenters were few and their works obscure. But by 1850 there was one particularly prominent counter-influence at work. This counter-influence was not, however, concerned with correcting the distortions of the historical romance or the prejudices of travel narratives. It involved, rather, a very idealized conception of one particular episode in early French-Canadian history.

Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup>James Fenimore Cooper, The Pioneers (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 29. Cooper's journeys to Niagara and Michigan are outlined in The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. James F. Beard (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960-68), I, 10-14 and V, 219-20. Some of his researches for his novels of the French and Indian wars are described in Thomas Philbrick, "The Sources of Cooper's Knowledge of Fort William Henry," American Literature, 36 (May, 1964), 209-14.

<sup>2</sup>The frequency of Cooper's references to Canada in the Leatherstocking tales, and the sinister connotations which often characterize these references are illustrated by S.B. Liljegren, The Canadian Border in the Novels of J.F. Cooper, Upsala Canadian Studies, No. 7 (Upsala: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1968). The main subject of this monograph, however, is Cooper's representation of the northern New York frontier region.

<sup>3</sup>Cooper's indebtedness to Heckewelder is clearly evident from a brief perusal of Heckewelder's Account of the History . . . of the Indian Tribes Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and New York (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, [1819]), and is indirectly acknowledged in the author's preface to the 1850 edition of the Leatherstocking tales. There is a detailed discussion of the subject by Paul A.W. Wallace, "Cooper's Indians," JFC: A Re-Appraisal, ed. Mary Cunningham (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1954), pp. 55-78.

<sup>4</sup>Cooper, The Pathfinder (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 384.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>6</sup>Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 180.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>8</sup>[Osgood Bradbury], Lucelle, or The Young Iroquois! A Tale of the Indian Wars (Boston: Henry L. Williams, 1845), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup>John Greenleaf Whittier, Poetical Works, Household ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1857), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>See Norah Story, The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 453.

<sup>11</sup>John Lesperance, The Bastonnais: Tale of the American Invasion of Canada in 1775-76 (Toronto: Belford Brothers, 1877), p. 335.

<sup>12</sup>See Virgin Land, p. 211ff.

## IV

## THE ACADIAN TRAGEDY: LONGFELLOW AND OTHERS

## 1.

In 1837, the distinguished historian George Bancroft described in the second volume of his History of the United States the 1755 expulsion of the French-speaking inhabitants of Acadia. Bancroft's whole history is strongly anti-British, having as a pervasive theme the justification of the American political system and of American independence. Hence the events of the Seven Years War are treated primarily as a prologue to the American Revolution, and great emphasis is placed on the cruel and arbitrary actions of the English government and army, not only towards the French, but towards the American colonial governments and militia forces. Obviously, the Acadian episode is of particular value to Bancroft's anti-British thesis; and he tells the story with a tone of indignation, with strong emphasis on the suffering of the exiles. Before the expulsion, says Bancroft, the Acadians lived in idyllic pastoral simplicity, in a kind of Golden Age of peace and contentment:

No tax-gatherer counted their folds, no magistrate dwelt in their hamlets. . . . The pastures were covered with herds and flocks; . . . the meadows . . . were covered with grasses, or fields of wheat. . . . With the spinning wheel and the loom, their women made, of flax from their own fields, of fleeces from their own flocks, coarse but sufficient clothing. . . . Happy in their neutrality, the Acadians formed, as it were, one great family.<sup>1</sup>

Then suddenly and without reason (so Bancroft suggests) this idyllic existence was violently disrupted. Conveniently

suppressing the fact that the expulsion involved the connivance of the New England administrators and was carried out by colonial militia, Bancroft excoriates the British "lords of trade, more merciless than the savages and the wilderness in winter," who "wished very much that every one of the Acadians should be driven out."<sup>2</sup> Most of his narrative involves similar extravagant rhetoric and categorical denunciations of the British motives and methods. Families were separated, says Bancroft, the refugees were subjected to indignities at the hands of the soldiers, and later, in the English colonies, the Acadian exiles "were cast ashore without resources."

A beautiful and fertile tract of country was reduced to a solitude. There was none left round the ashes of the cottages of the Acadians but the faithful watchdog, vainly seeking the hands that fed him.<sup>3</sup>

As this fervent peroration indicates, Bancroft's version of the Acadian expulsion is not an historical narrative in the modern sense of a recreation of facts and an analysis of cause and effect. It is a highly charged effusion of emotion, in which virtually all facts are subordinated to the central theme of British cruelty. Bancroft not only ignores the British motives and the participation of the American colonies in the expulsion; he also temporarily suspends the perennial American suspicion of Roman Catholicism, a suspicion which he clearly expresses elsewhere in his history, in his brief summations of early French activity in the New World.

A similar emotional and nationalistic response to the Acadian expulsion is represented in a novel by a Rhode Island author named Mrs. Catherine Williams. The Neutral French: or The Exiles of Nova Scotia (1841) follows the Acadian exiles to Massachusetts, and takes a central group of characters on through the American Revolution and down as far as the eve of the French Revolution. In a long introduction, the author expands her historical context in the other direction by summarizing the conflict in North America between the English and French from the time of the earliest explorations and settlements. Using this vast historical context Mrs. Williams makes the Acadian expulsion, as Bancroft did, a particularly heinous crime in a long chronicle of British injustice against the settlers of North America.

In the course of the novel, the Acadians are seen from two points of view. In the introduction and early chapters, the author follows the suggestion of her acknowledged source, Thomas Chandler Haliburton's History of Nova Scotia (1829), and represents them as living in "a state of simplicity and social happiness"<sup>4</sup> which is disrupted by the tyrannical agents of the British crown. The pathos of their situation is underscored by gruesome descriptions of the murder of children and the persecution of helpless old men. Set in contrast to this picture of passive endurance and suffering is the defiant self-possession of the two main characters, Pauline St. Pierre and her sister Josephine. Separated from

her family and forcibly expelled from her native province, Pauline settles in Boston, where her career follows an archetypal American pattern of economic and social success.

Josephine becomes involved in the events of the American Revolution, and in a climactic scene devastatingly reduces the British General Howe to confusion in political argument.

As this summary suggests, The Neutral French is essentially a tract celebrating the rise of the American republic. The Acadians are used mainly to illustrate the tyranny of the British, and in the process of serving this function they are virtually transformed into Americans. The transformation is made particularly evident not only in the heroine's ready acceptance of American political and economic ideals, but also in her religious conversion. Unlike Bancroft, Mrs. Williams obviously cannot bear to think of her Acadians as adherents of Roman Catholicism, so she represents them as continually expressing religious doubts; eventually everyone of any significance in the novel--including the parish priest--is converted to Protestantism.

Bancroft's brief lament for the Acadians and Mrs. Williams' shrill defense of the republic represent significant developments in the American imaginative conception of Canada. Heretofore, this conception has been rather incidental and unfavorable; the northern country and its French-speaking inhabitants have been remote and rather distasteful shadows on the fringes of the American consciousness. But the story



of the Acadians represents the possibility of a more sympathetic attitude. Neither Bancroft nor Mrs. Williams gave significant literary embodiment to this material, however. The most impressive expression of the Acadian theme--perhaps not large in the tradition which produced Moby-Dick and The Scarlet Letter, but undeniably worth serious attention--is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Evangeline (1847).

## 2.

It is a noteworthy fact of American literary history that Evangeline--or rather, a transmuted version of the same story--was almost written by the author of The Scarlet Letter. In 1838, the Reverend Horace Conolly of Salem narrated to Nathaniel Hawthorne a legend which he had heard from a French-Canadian woman living in Boston concerning an Acadian girl who is separated from her betrothed by the expulsion, and after years of wandering finds him lying on his deathbed. Although this anecdote, with its irony and pathos, is not unlike some of Hawthorne's tales, the author decided that it was "not in his vein."<sup>5</sup> Eventually he included a brief narrative of "The Acadian Exiles," dealing with the expulsion and the arrival of a group of the exiles at Boston, in Grandfather's Chair (1841), a history of New England for children.

In the absence of any further authorial comments on the subject, it is difficult to speculate as to why Hawthorne found the story of the wandering Acadian girl uncongenial. His handling of the children's version suggests that the

connection with New England history was the aspect of the story which most interested him. As for the wanderer's tale, he may have felt that it involved too passive an experience, for his usual inclination was towards plots involving the deliberate commission of sin and the consequent burden of guilt. There are obvious exceptions to this generalization, but if it was the character's passivity to which Hawthorne objected, he rejected the story for precisely the same reason that Longfellow enthusiastically took it up. When the Reverend Conolly, a mutual friend of the poet and the romancer, told the story once again in the presence of both writers, Longfellow is reported to have remarked "It is the best illustration of faithfulness and the constancy of woman that I have ever heard of or read."<sup>6</sup> As this comment suggests, Longfellow was ostensibly even less interested than Hawthorne in the historical and geographical background of the Acadian expulsion. His original conception of Evangeline involved a prominent central figure who would be the personification of a particular virtue. The virtue extolled in the finished poem, however, is not "faithfulness and constancy," but the more general quality of patience. The word "patience" occurs repeatedly throughout the poem, and the impassive figure of Evangeline wandering over the American continent becomes a symbol of the serene and single-minded acceptance of circumstances over which the individual has no control.

But with all the emphasis on the central story of

Evangeline, Longfellow does not neglect the historical and geographical background of the poem. Like Mrs. Williams (whose novel, incidentally, he had not read when he wrote his poem),<sup>7</sup> he consulted Haliburton's History of Nova Scotia, where he found descriptions of the landscape and early settlements of the province, as well as an account of the expulsion. His preparation for writing the poem did not, however, include a visit to Nova Scotia, even though the trip from Boston to Halifax could be made with relative convenience by packet boat, and it was his frequent custom to visit and scrutinize the American and European regions relevant to his other writing and teaching.<sup>8</sup> Presumably, he wanted to avoid any irrelevant or inconsistent details which an examination of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia might intrude on his idyllic image of eighteenth-century Acadia. In any case, he relied entirely on his reading and imagination, with the result that the literal truth of his picture of Acadia has been called into question.

Longfellow had never been to Nova Scotia, and it has been said that [the] opening line . . . is the most untruthful of the whole poem. For the great salt marshes washed by the sixty-foot tides of the Bay of Fundy, dotted with a few willow trees (the earlier growth having been destroyed by forest fires) had in 1755 little to suggest either "the forest primeval" or "the murmuring pines."<sup>9</sup>

But this objection overlooks the fact that the "forest primeval" in the Prologue is explicitly differentiated from the village of Grand Pré, where Part I of the poem is set. In the opening lines of Part I, the scenery around Grand Pré is

presented, accurately enough, as "vast meadows," "fields of flax, and orchards and cornfields/Spreading afar and unfenced o'er the plain." In the distant background, "away to the northward," are "the forests old" (Evangeline, p. 13).<sup>10</sup>

Longfellow is here presenting a familiar feature of the North American scene: it is the same feature, in effect, that so forcefully struck the men of Arnold's army when they stumbled out of the forest onto the neatly cultivated fields of the St. Lawrence Valley.

The image of an agricultural oasis on the edge of a forest wilderness is, of course, a fundamental and pervasive expression of the New World experience. Its literary manifestations include (to mention a few prominent examples) William Bradford's account of Plymouth Plantation, St. John de Crèvecoeur's picture of the "situation" of the American farmer, and de Tocqueville's admiring description of the rude but energetic attempts at cultivation to be suddenly discovered in the midst of the forest of northern New York.<sup>11</sup> By the 1840's, however, this image was being supplanted in the American mind by the new image of the western frontier, and the notion of the agricultural oasis in the forest was becoming a nostalgic ideal. This is how Acadia appears in Evangeline: as an epitome of the youth of the American continent, as a kind of "golden age" of moral innocence and social perfection.

This conception of Acadia is by no means original with

Longfellow. In Haliburton's History of Nova Scotia he found the following description, based on an imaginative account by the eighteenth-century French encyclopedist, Abbé Raynal:

Hunting and fishing, which had formerly been the delight of the Colony, and might have still supplied it with subsistence, had no further attraction for a simple and quiet people, and gave way to agriculture, which had been established in the marshes and low lands, by repelling with dikes the sea and rivers which covered these plains. These grounds yielded fifty for one at first, and afterwards fifteen or twenty for one at least; wheat and oats succeeded best in them, but they likewise produced rye, barley and maize. . . . At the same time these immense meadows were covered with numerous flocks. They computed as many as sixty thousand head of horned cattle; and most families had several horses. . . . Their habitations, which were constructed of wood, were extremely convenient, and furnished as neatly as substantial farmers' houses in Europe. They reared a great deal of poultry of all kinds, which made a variety in their food, at once wholesome and plentiful. . . .

Real misery was wholly unknown, and benevolence anticipated the demands of poverty. Every misfortune was relieved as it were before it could be felt, without ostentation on the one hand, and without meanness on the other. It was, in short, a society of brethren; every individual of which was equally ready to give, and to receive, what he thought the common right of mankind.<sup>12</sup>

Catherine Williams, as has been mentioned, also followed Haliburton; and Bancroft's brief description of Acadia before the expulsion reflects a probable debt to either Haliburton or Raynal. But in both Bancroft and Williams, the image of Acadia as a prelapsarian paradise is subordinated to the vehement statement of anti-English and pro-republican ideals; and in The Neutral French, the pastoral idyll is severely qualified by the author's anti-Roman Catholicism. Longfellow, by contrast, is not interested in condemning English actions

almost a hundred years in the past. His description of the actual expulsion is comparatively brief, with only a slight and unemphatic condemnation of the officers and soldiers who carried out the order. Nor has he any particular objections to Roman Catholicism. His account of the Acadians and their sad fate is directed towards other purposes.

An important indication of the thematic direction of Longfellow's poem is provided in a generalized description of evening in the village of Grand Pré:

There in the tranquil evenings of summer when  
 brightly the sunset  
 Lighted the village street, and gilded the vanes  
 on the chimneys,  
 Matrons and maidens sat in snow-white caps and in  
 kirtles  
 Scarlet and blue and green, with distaffs spinning  
 the golden  
 Flax for the gossiping looms, whose noisy shuttles  
 within doors  
 Mingled their sound with the whir of the wheels and  
 the songs of the maidens.  
 Solemnly down the street came the parish priest, and  
 the children  
 Paused in their play to kiss the hand he extended to  
 bless them.  
 Reverend walked he among them; and up rose matrons  
 and maidens,  
 Hailing his slow approach with words of affectionate  
 welcome.  
 Then came the labourers home from the field, and  
 serenely the sun sank  
 Down to his rest, and twilight prevailed. Anon from  
 the belfry  
 Softly the Angelus sounded, and over the roofs of the  
 village  
 Columns of pale-blue smoke, like clouds of incense  
 ascending,  
 Rose from a hundred hearths, the homes of peace and  
 contentment.  
 Thus dwelt together in love these simple Acadian farmers--  
 Dwelt in the love of God and of man. Alike were they  
 free from

Fear, that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the  
 vice of republics.  
 Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to  
 their windows;  
 But their dwellings were open as day and the hearts  
 of the owners;  
 There the richest was poor, and the poorest lived in  
 abundance. (Evangeline, pp. 13-14)

Longfellow, like Haliburton, associates the happiness of the Acadians with their economic success as an agricultural community. They have achieved the ideal of prosperity and contentment such as Crèvecoeur attributed to his American farmer. Longfellow associates this ideal not merely with the distinctive New World situation, however, but with the continuance of certain Old World traditions. In the quoted passage and throughout Part I of the poem the European costumes, language, and religious beliefs of the Acadians are repeatedly emphasized: the "matrons and maidens" dress as their ancestors have done for centuries; the parish priest is the central figure of the community, and the hours of religious observance mark the hours of the day. Furthermore, the religious imagery of the description of evening--particularly the references to the soft sounds of the Angelus and the smoke "like clouds of incense ascending"--give an almost hypnotically sensuous quality to the Acadians' Roman Catholicism, and show how far the poet is from expressing the petty objections of an American Protestant.

In subsequent cantos, the villagers are represented as following their accustomed Old World amusements, telling the

folk tales and singing the songs brought over from Normandy.<sup>13</sup> Longfellow's Acadians have the best of both worlds, for they have the economic prosperity of America and the spiritual refinement of Europe, and yet have escaped the political decadence of Europe and the ungoverned spirit of competition which Longfellow suggests is one of the major drawbacks of North American civilization: ". . . Alike were they free from/Fear that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the vice of republics." It will be recalled that the eighteenth-century traveler John Cousens Ogden similarly saw in Lower Canada an ideal amalgamation of America and Europe; but unlike Ogden's rigidly hierarchical society, Longfellow's Acadia is communistic:

Every house was an inn, where all were welcomed and  
feasted;  
For with this simple people, who lived like brothers  
together,  
All things were held in common, and what one had was  
another's. (p. 24)<sup>14</sup>

The strength and durability of this society is corroborated by descriptive detail and related metaphor: the houses are "Strongly built . . . with frames of oak and of hemlock" (p. 13), and Evangeline's father is "Hearty and hale, . . . an oak that is covered with snowflakes" (p. 14). Similarly, Evangeline is associated with the potential fruitfulness of apple trees (p. 16); the hair of the old notary public is compared to a field of maize (p. 21); and throughout Part I the Acadians are associated by juxtaposition of descriptive



detail with the permanence and infinite productiveness of nature.

Ultimately, however, the association is ironic. Evangeline's father soon dies; and significantly, Evangeline herself eventually dies unmarried and barren. For Acadia represents the nostalgic ideal of a golden age that no longer exists; the central event of the poem is the expulsion of the simple and innocent people from their agricultural paradise, and the long second part of the poem is devoted to the wanderings of Evangeline in search of her lost love.

Part II also relates the loss of Acadia to a large mythological context involving the whole North American continent. Forced to move south into the regions which are to become the United States, the exiles yearn to regain their lost happiness. Father Felician, the parish priest of Grand Pré, consoles Evangeline by holding before her the vision of a "new Eden" where she will be reunited with her lost Gabriel:

. . . not far away to the southward  
 On the banks of the Têche are the towns of St. Maur  
 and St. Martin.  
 There the long-wandering bride shall be given again  
 to the bridegroom,  
 There the long-absent pastor regain his flock and  
 his sheepfold.  
 Beautiful is the land, with its prairies and forests  
 of fruit trees;  
 Under the feet a garden of flowers, and the bluest  
 of heavens  
 Bending above, and resting its dome on the walls of  
 the forest.  
 They who dwell there have named it the Eden of Louisiana.  
 (pp. 39-40)

In Louisiana, Evangeline and the priest find Gabriel's father

living in circumstances of prosperity and pastoral contentment which seem to be a duplication of the old life in Acadia. But the "new Eden" is imperfect, because Gabriel is not there; "moody and restless grown," he has moved on toward the western frontier, whither Evangeline decides to follow him.

The American west, with its connotations of vast historical migrations involving cruel hardships and disappointment, provides the appropriate setting for the part of the poem devoted to Evangeline's search. The image of the "great American desert," reflecting Evangeline's desolation and prefiguring the futility of her search, is introduced early in Part II:

Fair was she and young: but, alas! before her  
 extended,  
 Dreary and vast and silent, the desert of life,  
 with its pathway  
 Marked by the graves of those who had sorrowed and  
 suffered before her,  
 Passions long extinguished, and hopes long dead, and  
 abandoned,  
 As the emigrant's way o'er the Western desert is  
 marked by  
 Campfires long consumed, and bones that bleach in  
 the sunshine. (p. 34)

And in Louisiana Evangeline stands at the edge of the farm of Gabriel's father, where

the calm and the magical moonlight  
 Seemed to inundate her soul with indefinable longings,  
 As through the garden gate, and beneath the brown  
 shade of the oak trees,  
 Passed she along the path to the edge of the measureless  
 prairie.  
 Silent it lay, with a silvery haze upon it, and  
 fireflies  
 Gleamed and floated away in mingled and infinite  
 numbers. (p. 45)

Concomitant with the geographical background of the prairie with its infinite vistas is an historical panorama which includes the American Revolution and the spread of urban civilization in the United States:

Thus did the long sad years glide on, and in seasons  
 and places  
 Divers and distant far was seen the wandering maiden;  
 Now in the Tents of Grace of the Meek Moravian missions,  
 Now in the noisy camps and the battlefields of the army.  
 Now in secluded hamlets, in towns and populous cities,  
 Like a phantom she came, and passed away unremembered.  
 (p. 51)

Appropriately, Evangeline's quest comes to an end in one of the "populous cities," the ultimate development of the historical and geographical movements depicted in the poem. The nostalgic ideal of an innocent, prelapsarian past has been replaced in the American imagination by a prospective ideal of an urbanized industrial Utopia; the static image of primitive simplicity and perfection has given way to a dynamic and complex image of progress toward a goal which continually recedes into the infinite possibilities of the future. Superficially, the city to which Evangeline gravitates--Philadelphia--is reminiscent of Acadia:

Something at least there was in the friendly streets  
 of the city,  
 Something that spoke to her heart, and made her no  
 longer a stranger,  
 And her ear was pleased with the Thee and Thou of  
 the Quakers,  
 For it recalled the past, the old Acadian country,  
 Where all men were equal, and all were brothers  
 and sisters. (p. 52)

But its inadequacy as a substitute for the lost pastoral

paradise is underscored by the onslaught of a "pestilence" (possibly Longfellow has in mind the yellow fever epidemic of 1793) which serves as a dramatic reminder of the hardships and setbacks involved in the process of development towards the prospective ideal of social perfection. In terms of Evangeline's quest, the epidemic also serves as an emphatic seal to the loss of her idyllic Acadian youth and the love associated with it: for she finds Gabriel lying in a hospital at the point of death.

The pathos of Evangeline's situation is somewhat mitigated by a final reference to the heroine's "patience" and by the introduction of a rather conventional Christian consolation, but the larger implications of the story are emphasized by a return, in the concluding lines, to the "forest primeval" and by the evocation of a desolate image of the depopulated or transformed Acadian settlements of Nova Scotia:

Still stands the forest primeval; but under the shade  
of its branches  
Dwells another race, with other customs and language.  
Only along the shore of the mournful and misty Atlantic  
Linger a few Acadian peasants, whose fathers from exile  
Wandered back to their native land to die in its bosom.  
In the fisherman's cot the wheel and the loom are still  
busy;  
Maidens still wear their Norman caps and their  
kirtles of homespun.  
And by the evening fire repeat Evangeline's story,  
While from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced,  
neighbouring ocean  
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail  
of the forest. (p. 56)

Longfellow envisaged Evangeline primarily as a story of

the sufferings and virtues of a single individual; but the repeated emphasis on setting in the poem, and on the connection between the setting and the development of North American history, results in a large mythological conception in which Acadia becomes an image of a lost and lamented golden age. The myth is clearly marred by over-sentimentalization, by Longfellow's inorganic method of composition (i.e., his incorporation of details for their intrinsic interest rather than for their relevance to either the story of Evangeline or the story of the expulsion), and perhaps by his rather dim awareness of the implications of his material. Nevertheless, this image of Acadia and the Acadians constitutes an important development in the American literary conception of Canada.

Notes to Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup>George Bancroft, History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent (1885; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967), II, 426.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 434.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 433.

<sup>4</sup>Catherine Williams, The Neutral French; or The Exiles of Nova Scotia (Providence: The Author, 1841), I, 54.

<sup>5</sup>Manning Hawthorne and H.W.L. Dana, The Origin and Development of Longfellow's "Evangeline" (Portland, Me.: The Anthoensen Press, 1947), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup>For accounts of Longfellow's research methods, see Newton Arvin, Longfellow: His Life and Work (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), passim.

<sup>9</sup>Hawthorne and Dana, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>All quotations are from the unlineated edition of Evangeline (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962).

<sup>11</sup>See Alexis de Tocqueville, Journey to America, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 128-29.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Chandler Haliburton, An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova-Scotia (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1829), I, 170-72.

<sup>13</sup>The old world antecedents of Longfellow's Acadians are less directly revealed in the fact that the poet based his description of them partly on his observations of European peasants and on descriptions adapted from Scandinavian saga. See Hawthorne and Dana, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup>Longfellow is not entirely consistent on this point, however; cf. the following: "Somewhat apart from the village, and nearer the Basin of Minas, /Benedict Bellefontaine, the wealthiest farmer in Grand Pré/Dwelt on his goodly acres."  
(p. 14)

## V

## "A YANKEE IN CANADA" AND OTHER TRAVELERS

## 1.

While Cooper, Irving, Longfellow and others were incorporating their notions of Canada and Canadians into a romantic, retrospective image of the North American frontier, some of their countrymen were developing a more prosaic and contemporary view of the northern provinces. Nineteenth-century Americans were indefatigable travelers and irrepres- sible writers of travel narratives; and although Canada did not exert as great an appeal to tourists as Europe, it was by no means overlooked.<sup>1</sup> In the 1830's and 40's, several works were published dealing partly or entirely with tours to Quebec and Montreal via Lake Champlain, and to the more recently settled Upper Canada (or as it was known after 1841, Canada West) via Niagara and Lake Ontario. Some of these works, like the previously mentioned Northern Traveller of Theodore Dwight, were merely guidebooks; some, like Nathaniel Parker Willis's elaborately illustrated two-volume Canadian Scenery (1842), were part guidebook and part personal memoir; and there were a few semi-fictional narratives such as Jesse Walker's Queenston and Fort Niagara (both 1845), and William Tappan Thompson's Major Jones's Sketches of Travel . . . from Georgia to Canada (1848).

With minor variations relating to the author's specific purpose or to the particular section of the provinces he has

seen, these works express substantially similar attitudes towards Canada. There is a general enthusiasm for the scenery, and for the picturesqueness of the older settlements. The traditional antipathy to Roman Catholicism is often a dominant feature of works dealing with French Canada, as in the rather biased guidebook Picture of Quebec (1830), by George Bourne, the author of Lorette. But the favorite targets of American literary visitors to either or both linguistic regions are the customs and institutions relating to British settlement and British imperialism. O.L. Holley, in The Picturesque Tourist (1844), for instance, complains of the citizens of Toronto:

The prejudice against the Americans, or Yankees, is easily perceived and easily accounted for, as most of the inhabitants are exceedingly loyal, have never visited "The States," and look upon their neighbours as a set of lawless republicans or disorganizers. . . .<sup>2</sup>

In Queenston and Fort Niagara, Jesse Walker sets out to demonstrate the superiority of the republican over the colonial system of government. In these two fictional excursions, both subtitled "a tale of the Niagara frontier," an old sea captain and his twelve-year-old nephew ramble over the Niagara peninsula and discuss in Socratic dialogue the historical associations of the region. In Queenston, the two tourists climb to the top of Brock's monument to admire the view:

On the east was to be seen the well cultivated fields of the western part of New York, and to the west the eye



fell upon the domain of the British king. A striking difference was to be observed between these portions of the two countries. On the west there was less improvement than on the east, though the soil was equally fertile.

"This difference may be owing," said the Captain, "to the different form of government and the different institutions existing in the two countries."

"How," said Harry, "does the government have any effect on the cultivation of the fields?"

"Because," said the captain, "men are not satisfied with the cultivation of the fields alone. They do that as a means of subsistence, but the most enterprising have some other purpose in view as the chief object to be accomplished. In the United States the highest offices are open to all, while in Canada their governors and many other officers are appointed by the government of a distant country, separated from them by thousands of miles of ocean. And though a man may never expect or hope to obtain any high station, yet he prefers to live in a country where he is not excluded from it by custom, or by the organization of government."<sup>3</sup>

This simplified comparison hardly does justice to the constitutional and political complexities of either country, and especially misrepresents the situation in the united province of Canada, which by 1845 was well along in the evolution towards self-government. But this misrepresentation involves more than mere ignorance of social or political fact. Many nineteenth-century Americans were anxious to demonstrate the validity of their revolution-based political system in the face of external criticism and internal conflicts over such questions as slavery and states' rights. If Canada were able to achieve by peaceful means a greater degree of prosperity, freedom, and unity than the United States had achieved by revolution, the whole American system would be seriously

discredited. But the observable evidence suggested that the northern provinces were in these respects inferior to the republic; and American literary observers were quick to point out this inferiority.

The retarded economic and political situation of the provinces as compared to the republic is one of the main themes of Major Jones's Sketches of Travel. A vehement advocate of slavery, states' rights and the ideals of Jeffersonian democracy, Thompson takes his plantation owner persona on a critical tour of the northern states, and finally to Niagara, Montreal, and Quebec. North of the Mason-Dixon line, Major Jones finds that Jefferson's ideal of a well-ordered society is being dangerously threatened by the abolitionist movement; but his faith in the ultimate solidity of the republic is restored by his glimpse of conditions in the British province.

In the first of his two chapters on Canada, Thompson's narrator assures his readers of his objectivity and reliability:

If I was travelin like Mr. Dickens or Captain Marryatt, or any of them English travellers, jest to make a book for a people who is so blinded with prejudice that they can't see any thing but faults, it wouldn't make no difference whether I know'd much about the things I described or not; all I'd have to do would jest be to go ahead and find all the fault I could with everybody, and with every thing I heard of or seed sot down in the gide-books; and the further I cum from the truth, so I went on the black side of it, the better I would please. But I ain't a writin for no sich people, and I'm not gwine to find fault with what I don't know nothin about, jest for the sake of fault-findin.<sup>4</sup>

It is soon clear, however, that Thompson is only concerned,

like Jesse Walker, with using the superficial features of Canadian society in a running demonstration of the superiority of American customs and institutions. As Major Jones sets out from Niagara to Montreal, he expresses the same opinion about the two sides of the river as Walker's Captain:

None of these towns along here on the Canady side ain't no great shakes, and all of 'em makes a monstrous bad contrast with the smart bisness-lookin towns on the American side, showin plain enuff that our institutions is best calculated to promote the prosperity of the people.<sup>5</sup>

In Montreal, Major Jones visits "the Parlyment House, whar the Canady people make sich laws as ther masters over the water don't care about troublin themselves with." And also in Montreal, he takes note of the ubiquitous signs of British militarism. "Sogers [soldiers]," says the major, are the "strikin feater of Canady--and one can't help but wonder what upon yeath England can want of territory what takes sich a terrible lot of money and sogers to keep it."<sup>6</sup> Thompson, like so many of his countrymen, is suspicious of the Roman Catholic French-speaking Canadians; but his objections to British imperialism take precedence over his religious prejudices. In Quebec City, Major Jones meditates on the monument to Wolfe and Montcalm; subsequently he imaginatively conceives the French Canadians as an oppressed and liberty-loving race and the victory of Wolfe as an "injustice" which the British government will never satisfactorily redress:

It was a hard piece of bisness, that contest, in which France lost her General and her cause; and though the

English may try till dooms-day to make the French Canadians forgit the injustice they have suffered, by givin their Catholic church all sorts of privileges, and by bildin monuments, like they have in the Palace Gardin with Wolfe's name on one side and Montcalm's on the other, tryin to make the honors of that day easy between 'em,--they never can make loyal, contented subjects out of 'em as long as Cape Diamond stands where it does.<sup>7</sup>

Thompson's Canada is thus plagued by irreconcilable racial conflicts, by rampant and irrational British militarism, and by retarded economic development stemming from the illiberal political system. Canada, in short, is a negative alternative to the U.S.--just as in the historical perspective of the Cooper-inspired romancers, New France was often the negative alternative to the British American colonies. In this reflexive view of Canada, it is not surprising that only the most superficial features of the society are involved, or that the French Canadians are rendered as stereotypes whose attitudes and beliefs are dependent upon the interests of the American commentator. It is somewhat surprising, however, that Thompson neglects one of the most predominant observable features of the northern provinces: the ominous proximity of the vast northern forest. To Cooper and his successors, and to Longfellow, the contrast between the settlements and the wilderness was the central physical fact of the New World setting, a fact which was particularly evident in the sparsely settled northern regions of the continent. In the works of many of the early nineteenth-century literary tourists, however, the Canadian wilderness is virtually

ignored. This neglect is possibly a reflection of the importance which these tourists place on the social comparison between Canada and the United States. Canada's geographical situation, on the southern fringe of an almost incomprehensibly vast and barely habitable wilderness, is the most important physical distinction between that country and the United States with its immense stretches of arable land; but Thompson and similar writers wish to emphasize the physical similarities between the two regions, in order to demonstrate that Canada's inferiority is entirely a matter of political and social factors.

The lack of interest in the northern wilderness might also reflect a more general feature of the American national character, a feature which Alexis de Tocqueville claimed to have discovered in his travels:

In Europe people talk a great deal of the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight: the American people views its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature.<sup>8</sup>

And of course, the literary tourist's neglect of the wilderness may merely be a reflection of his confinement to the comparatively populous tourist routes, where his attention is almost continually directed to the signs of civilization. In any event, the only acknowledgement of the northern frontier in these books seems to be quite perfunctory and generalized.

Thompson, for instance, has only this conventionally worded meditation:

All together, Quebec is a curious and interestin place. It looks like it belonged to another continent and to another age of the world; and when one looks upon its power and its buty, and remembers that it stands on the boundry of civilization, close to the edge of the wild unexplored wilderness that extends northward to the regions of everlastin freeze-to-death, he is apt to exclaim with the poet--"Time's noble empire is the last."<sup>9</sup>

The same indifference to the Canadian wilds is evident in the travel account of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., who visited Montreal, Quebec, Montmorency and the Saguenay region in the summer of 1853. Except for his youthful voyage to California, Dana was not widely traveled. In 1853 his first visit to Europe was still three years in the future; most of his early manhood had been spent looking after a busy law practice and working strenuously in the cause of Emancipation. As his association with the Emancipation movement suggests, his political beliefs were considerably more liberal than Thompson's. He was not, however, committed to the egalitarian form of democracy traditionally associated with Andrew Jackson and the western frontier. On the contrary, he was firmly attached to the semi-aristocratic principles of the "Boston brahmin" society in which he lived most of his life. Accordingly, the impression of a British militaristic oligarchy in Quebec did not trouble him as it had troubled Thompson; nor was he inclined to exalt American progress and enterprise over the ostensible economic backwardness of Canada. On the

whole, the brief (approximately eight thousand word) account of his Canadian visit which he committed to his journal presents a very favorable view of Canada.

As in Thompson's experience, one of the first features of Canada which attracts Dana's attention is the ubiquitous presence of the British army. But his reaction to the spectacle of soldiers on parade is quite unlike Thompson's:

[Montreal, Aug. 17] The 26th Reg., Lt. Col. Hemphill, is here. Saw them parade at 11 o'clock. Excellent discipline. Col. Hemphill has the most elegant military air I ever saw in a commanding officer, with a noble voice. (p. 572)<sup>10</sup>

His first reaction to the other prominent feature (i.e., Roman Catholicism) of Canada is superficially similar to that of most nineteenth-century American travelers. He acknowledges the inspirational effect of such structures as Notre Dame Cathedral in Montreal:

It is huge, & to my unaccustomed eye, gigantic. There is a very impressive air of devotion about these open churches . . . with people always about engaged in prayer or other acts of worship. (pp. 572-73)

But he is suspicious of the Roman Catholic ritual:

[Aug. 18] Before br[eakfast] walked to the R.C. Cathedral & attended mass. . . . All was Chaunted, & there was the constant dingling of bells, & putting off & on of caps, ducking up & down, taking snuff--, robing & unrobing wh. encumbers & belittles the Roman service so much. (p. 573)

Nevertheless, he is impressed by the Catholic church as a powerful and efficient institution staffed by a culturally superior class of individuals, just as for similar reasons he admires the British army and colonial administration. With

an unmistakable consciousness of his social position, Dana restricts his contacts in Canada almost entirely to such representatives of the administrative and ecclesiastical aristocracy as Lord Elgin (the British governor-general), the Roman Catholic archbishop of Quebec, and members of the officers' mess at the Citadel. Occasionally, he remembers to play the role of American democrat among British aristocrats: "It is a great advantage," he writes of his dinner with Lord Elgin, "to be an American among people of rank. If you are only polite & not obtrusive & act naturally, you may do as you please" (p. 580). But elsewhere he confides quite frankly, "I cannot but record the pleasure I receive from the voices of educated Englishmen of good society" (p. 589). He does not entirely ignore the French Canadians, but his attitude toward them is extremely condescending. On a brief walk in the countryside near Quebec City, he talks to a number of farmers and villagers, and reports:

I am delighted with the manners of the French Canadians of the middle and lower class,--the rural population. There is a native & indestructible politeness and grace about them which charms me. . . . I believe them to be a moral, religious, honest & kind people. (pp. 590-91)

Yet the Boston Brahmin who dines with Lord Elgin and who passes among the habitants like a European nobleman among peasants is also the man who wrote in Two Years Before the Mast:

We must come down from our heights, and leave our straight paths for the byways and low places of life, if we would learn truths by strong contrasts; and in hovels,



in forecastles, and among our own outcasts in foreign lands, see what has been wrought among our fellow-creatures by accident, hardship, or vice.<sup>11</sup>

He is also the same social reformer and humanitarian who strenuously campaigned against the wretched working conditions of American seamen and Hawaiian laborers in California, and who donated his legal services in repeated attacks on the Fugitive Slave Law. But if Dana was the enemy of oppression and tyranny, he was also a firm believer in the importance of social order. In Two Years Before the Mast he denounces the incompetence and cruelty of merchant marine officers--but he also emphasizes the illegality of mutiny. His opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law involved challenging the law in court --but not the open defiance of it. He would almost certainly have disagreed with Henry Thoreau's argument in "Civil Disobedience" that the individual has a right and duty to disobey unjust laws, for Dana placed the stabilizing power of law and government above all considerations. In Canada, the main feature of society which attracts his attention is the semblance of stability: refined, aristocratic administrators running the province's affairs with evident efficiency, well-trained troops maintaining a display of martial readiness, a powerful church exercising spiritual discipline over cheerful and subservient habitants, and no outward appearance of social injustice to disturb a moral sensibility which apparently could be affected by only the most obvious evil. His basic attitude to Canada is reminiscent of the attitude of John

Cousens Ogden, the American clergyman who in 1799 was so well pleased with the hierarchical social structure of Lower Canada. Dana is not quite like Ogden, however, for Ogden's ultimate purpose was to illustrate the superiority of the colonial system over republicanism, whereas Dana makes almost no explicit comparison (beyond the reference to his "democratic" table manners) between the two systems. In the same way, he differs from such defenders of republicanism as William Tappan Thompson, who come to Canada with a store of prejudices against the colonial system. On the whole, Dana implicitly acknowledges the theoretical validity and practical efficiency of both the Canadian and American social structures.

With no emphatic opinions or comparative judgements underlying it, Dana's account of Canada is mainly valuable for its objective report of certain observable features of the country. His choice of features, as has been suggested, reflects the narrowness of his political and social attitudes; but within the obvious limitations of these attitudes, his perceptive and comprehensive descriptions have a definite historical interest. Some of these descriptions, furthermore, involve quite respectable prose work which commendably reflects Dana's writing ability, considering the fact that the journal was merely a personal memorandum not intended for publication. Primarily, he avoids the pseudo-poetic clichés which other writers frequently rely on when rendering the

picturesque or spectacular features of Canadian scenery. With a good eye for detail, he is able to introduce a concreteness to his pictures which make for a vivid recreation of nineteenth-century Canada. This quality is evident, for instance, in his first impressions of Quebec:

I was surprised to find so many villages along the banks of the river, & such an appearance of populousness & cultivation as far as we cd. see into the interior. At length, a line of shipping along the left bank, large wood-yard, & vessels at anchor in the stream, denoted the approach to Quebec. In a few minutes, the gallant lofty citadel, with its batteries, & royal flag, burst upon us, & snuggling at its feet the town, glittering with its tin roofs, in the morning sun. As we drew nearer, red coats on guard, officers & men in undress, denoted the mental and physical power which possesses & controls this inert material might. On the bank about half-way up, a monument marks the spot where Montgomery fell in his desperate attempt. A little lower than the citadel, stands the Terrace, & lower & still lower, at the water's edge, under the hill & looking like the mop-board to the wall of a room stands the trading town, the soldiers on guard & the visitors walking along the ramparts looking down at the chimney tops of the tallest houses as from a dizzy height. How strange! How different from everything American is Quebec! The winding narrow gateway, thro' which our omnibus toiled up to the upper town, attainable by horses only by means of long deflections & circuits of the path, and hard struggles of the beast. For the first time in my life I entered a walled-town--literally a walled town, into or out of which no one can go save thro' a guarded gate-way. (p. 574)

To William Tappan Thompson and others, the signs of "populousness and cultivation" would be contemptuously dismissed by comparison with the United States, and the sentinels on the walls and heights would be taken as symbols of malevolent British militarism. Dana, however, merely reports what he sees, with no comment other than the wide-eyed exclamations

of the inexperienced tourist, or brief and tentative reflections on the "inert material might" of the fortified city.

As a partial but reliable reflection of what a nineteenth-century American saw and experienced on the most popular tourist route in Canada, Dana's travel notes have indisputable value. In the context of the history of imaginative literature, however, they are considerably less important than the almost exactly contemporary travel narrative of Henry Thoreau.

2.

"A Yankee in Canada" (published partially, 1853, and entirely, 1866)<sup>12</sup> can justifiably be placed among Henry Thoreau's significant minor works. It is at least as important to an understanding of his artistic and intellectual development as its companion travel essays, The Maine Woods and "Cape Cod" (portions of which were published in periodicals in the 1850's and which appeared in book form after the author's death). The man who prided himself on having "traveled a good deal in Concord" and yet who was fascinated by travel books and by visions of remote corners of the world was bound to be strongly affected by the one foreign journey of his life, even if this journey was only a ten-day railway and steamship excursion to Montreal, Quebec and Montmorency. As Sherman Paul has observed, "Thoreau's trip to Canada . . . was the equivalent, for one who made much of little, of a tour to Europe."<sup>13</sup> Yet with the exception of Paul's detailed

and perceptive discussion, "A Yankee in Canada" has received very little serious critical attention. Thoreau's modern biographer H.S. Canby seems to have set the course of subsequent judgement when he dismissed the work as "relatively simple . . . factual and direct, but useful and suggestive."<sup>14</sup> Modern denigrators of the work, it is true, are following the author's own lead. "I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story," Thoreau wrote his friend Harrison Blake in 1853; "it concerns me but little, and probably is not worth the time I took to tell it." But this comment is clearly an expression of annoyance rather than a considered critical judgement, for Thoreau had been concerned enough with his "Canada story" to withhold the last three chapters from Putnam's rather than submit to the editorial censorship of certain allegedly "pantheistic" statements.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, almost all the internal and external evidence indicates that the imaginative experience involved in the excursion to Canada concerned him a great deal. In the fall of 1850, when he took the train from Boston to Montreal, Thoreau was in the early stages of thinking and research for an ambitious history (which he did not live to complete) of the North American Indian and the early arrival and settlement of Europeans in the New World. After his return from Canada, he set to work accumulating a mass of material relating to the geographical and historical background of the northern country. And for at least two years afterward, he continued

to make random notes in his journal relating to his foreign excursion.<sup>16</sup> The statements to Blake, including his further comment that "I had no other design whatever in my mind, but simply to report what I saw," thus have to be placed in the context of a creative mind that was virtually incapable of casual or superficial effort. It is true that "A Yankee in Canada," The Maine Woods, and "Cape Cod" represent Thoreau's attempt to break into the lucrative market of the quarterly magazines by catering to the current popularity of travel narratives. But it is also true that these books represent part of his attempt to comprehend in literary terms the complex theme of the meaning of the New World experience.

Thoreau's conception of the American continent is not rigidly nationalistic like William Tappan Thompson's, nor inadequately concerned with the wilderness fact, like Thompson's and Dana's. For Thoreau, the New World is the symbol of certain spiritual ideals as well as an agglomeration of geographical and historical facts. The vast and apparently infinite potential of the North American forest and the western frontier offers a unique opportunity to pursue moral and social perfection, while the pattern for some of the virtues which must be cultivated in the pursuit of this ideal can be found in the study of the early history of the continent, and in the direct experience of frontier life. In his three late travel books, Thoreau describes both his historical studies and his quest for related experience. In

The Maine Woods, he goes deep into the northern forest, into the pre-Columbian world of the Indian and the primeval world of nature; in "Cape Cod," he takes the search to the Atlantic shore of the continent, where English-speaking settlement in America began; and in "A Yankee in Canada" he goes to the region of early French colonization, on the edge of a wilderness even more remote and forbidding than the woods of Maine. Each of these expeditions involves the search for a kind of "representative man." Of course, Thoreau is not so naive as to expect to find Rousseau's noble red man in the Maine Woods, or a seventeenth-century explorer on Cape Cod, or a coureur de bois in Canada. But he hopes to find in these frontiers certain individuals whose lives might convey intimations of a simpler and purer life which can provide imaginative contrast (in the words of Walden) to "the restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century."<sup>17</sup> In Maine, his quest ends with the discovery of Joe Polis, the Penobscot Indian guide whose simplicity of character and affinity with nature have not been entirely obscured by his contact with the white man's civilization. On Cape Cod, he finds the Wellfleet Oysterman, who in spite of his comical piety and contempt for his "young" wife and daughter is an admirable representative of the American colonial period. In Canada, however, Thoreau is not so successful. Although he meets and talks with many inhabitants of the northern province, he does not find any individual who appears to be an adequate representative of the great age

of northern exploration and adventure.

But if Thoreau was disappointed with nineteenth-century Canada, it is partly because his expectations associated with the country were unusually high. Perhaps he did not literally expect to find a world of coureurs de bois and voyageurs, but the great northern wilderness of Canada seems to have stirred him to particularly extravagant flights of poetic fancy. In a meditation on reading in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849), he thinks of the literature of early North American exploration:

We naturally remembered Alexander Henry's Adventures here, as a sort of classic among books of American travel. It contains scenery and rough sketching of men and incidents enough to inspire poets for many years, and to my fancy is as full of sounding names as any page of history,-- Lake Winnipeg, Hudson's Bay, Ottawa, and portages innumerable; Chippeways, Gens de Terres, Les Pilleurs, The Weepers; with reminiscences of Hearne's journey, and the like; an immense and shaggy and sincere country, summer and winter, adorned with chains of lakes and rivers, covered with snows, with hemlocks, and fir-trees. There is a naturalness, an unpretending and cold life in this traveller, as in a Canadian winter, what life was preserved through low temperatures and frontier dangers by furs within a stout heart.<sup>18</sup>

The object of Thoreau's northern excursion was the settled region of Canada East, not the solitudes of Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay; but the repeated meditations on the wilderness in "A Yankee in Canada" suggest that Thoreau's expectations of the northern province involved elements which were at least analogous to the imaginative ideals represented by Henry's great northwest.

Thoreau's early writing contains another important



intimation of what he might have expected to find in Canada. In his journal for July 14, 1845, while he was living in a hut on the shore of Walden Pond, he wrote: "Who should come to my lodge just now but a true Homeric boor, one of those Paphlagonian men? Alek Therien he called himself; a Canadian now, a woodchopper, a post-maker. . . ." <sup>19</sup> The woodchopper is the one "representative man" in all Thoreau's writings who receives the highest praise. "A more simple and natural man it would be hard to find," Thoreau concluded in Walden. The admiration for Therien is by no means unqualified, for at times the author "did not know whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child." <sup>20</sup> But on the whole, Thoreau was inclined to see the woodchopper's ignorance as a primitive naturalness. As he appears in Walden, he is the epitome of native intelligence and virtue, a man who lacks and has no need for literary culture beyond a vague familiarity with the names of poets and a few fragments of poetry, and who is able to experience a direct and unaffected response to nature.

Surprisingly, in his lengthy consideration of French-Canadian manners and customs in "A Yankee in Canada" Thoreau makes not the least indication that he is acquainted with an individual who might serve as a pattern for the race. Nor, conversely, in Walden or in the various journal entries concerning Therien written after 1850 does he suggest how the woodchopper compares with his countrymen in their native

element. But it is difficult to believe that Thoreau would not think of Therien during his visit to Canada. And if, as the tone of "A Yankee in Canada" repeatedly suggests, he found the French Canadians disappointing, it may have been partly because his experience with Therien had given him an exaggerated notion of their virtues.

It is misleading, however, to suggest that Thoreau was totally unhappy with nineteenth-century Canada and its inhabitants. "A Yankee in Canada" reflects, rather, a constant ambivalence of attitude, expressed in repeated qualifications, exceptions, and frank contradictions. Perhaps nowhere else in Thoreau's writing is the Transcendentalist penchant for dialectical tension more evident. Throughout the narrative, his fascination with the great northern wilderness is modified by his criticism of Canadian society; his admiration for the great age of New France is opposed to his annoyance with modern Canada East; his approval of some of England's achievements in the New World is opposed to his dislike of British imperialism; and there are many other conflicting attitudes in his observations of specific features of the cities and countryside. Perhaps the most important conflict is that involved in the pervasive comparison between Canada and the United States. Unlike such biased commentators as Thompson, Thoreau struggles to be fair and open-minded about Canadian society; but he cannot look at it uncritically, as Dana does, and finally, his dialectical tensions are resolved in a

general conclusion which involves some of the highest praise that Thoreau expresses anywhere for his native country.

This conclusion is prefigured in the almost contemptuously ironic tone of the opening sentence. "I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much; what I got by going to Canada was a cold" (p. 3).<sup>21</sup> In spite of the brevity and geographical limitations of his trip, he actually saw a great deal more than most American visitors, for unlike Thompson and Dana (for instance), he made a particular point of cultivating the acquaintance of a wide representation of the inhabitants. He was far more conscious than other tourists of the physical situation of Canada, on the edge of the wilderness; but the expectations aroused by this situation led to what was probably his first disappointment in the country. Instead of approaching something analogous to Alexander Henry's great northwest, he found himself on the train and boat to Montreal "being whirled toward some foreign vortex" (p. 8); and shortly afterward he was in Montreal, in a setting that appeared completely divorced from the world of gens de terre and coureurs de bois.

Like other American visitors to Montreal and Quebec, Thoreau is unfavorably impressed by the ubiquitous manifestations of Roman Catholicism. The first tourist attraction he visits is Notre Dame Cathedral, which strikes him as a large "cave" of ambiguous value: "I saw that it was of great size and signified something" (p. 12). The Roman Catholic ritual

appears to him to reduce its devotees to the level of brutes:

Presently came in a troop of Canadians, in their homespun, . . . and one and all kneeled down in the aisle before the high altar to their devotions, somewhat awkwardly, as cattle prepare to lie down. . . . (pp. 12-13)

And the ecclesiastics are grotesque living symbols of a morbid solemnity:

We also met some Sisters of Charity, dressed in black, with Shaker-shaped black bonnets and crosses, and cadaverous faces, who looked as if they had almost cried their eyes out, their complexions parboiled with scalding tears; insulting the daylight by their presence, having taken an oath not to smile. (p. 15)

But he is not totally unsympathetic to Roman Catholicism. In one of the few comparisons between French Canada and New England which presents his native region in the less favorable position, he declares:

It is true, these Roman Catholics, priests and all, impress me as a people who have fallen far behind the significance of their symbols. It is as if an ox had strayed into a church and were trying to bethink himself. Nevertheless, they are capable of reverence; but we Yankees are a people in whom this sentiment has nearly died out, and in this respect we cannot bethink ourselves even as oxen. (p. 13)

The second prominent feature of Montreal which attracts his attention elicits his unqualified antipathy. Unlike William Tappan Thompson, however, he attacks British militarism not with the righteous indignation of the convinced republican, but with the ironic scorn of the man of common sense and good will:

The soldier here, as everywhere in Canada, appeared to be put forward, and by his best foot. They were in the proportion of the soldiers to the laborers in an African anthill. The inhabitants evidently rely on them in a

great measure for music and entertainment. (p. 16)

Like Roman Catholicism, militarism in Thoreau's view reduces men to the level of brutes, but does not inspire even such a superficial virtue as the appearance of reverence. In a more serious passage, Thoreau describes the soldiers on parade, comparing them incidentally to the congregation which he observed in Notre Dame:

In a large graveled square or parade ground, called the Champ de Mars, we saw a large body of soldiers being drilled. . . . But they did not appear to notice us any more than the devotees in the church. . . . It was one of the most interesting sights which I saw in Canada. The problem appeared to be how to smooth down all individual protuberances or idiosyncrasies, and make a thousand men move as one man, animated by one central will; and there was some approach to success. . . . They made on me the impression, not of many individuals, but of one vast centipede of a man, good for all sorts of pulling down. . . . (pp. 16-17)

In Quebec City, his distaste for Canada is aggravated further by the anachronistic walls and battlements. The fortifications provoke thoughts of the diminutive, straitened, and rather fantastic world of medieval Europe--not as it is understood by history, but as it is represented in the tradition of romance, the tradition of "Skip of the Tip-Toe-Hop, a Romance of the Middle Ages" which he ridicules in the chapter on "Reading" in Walden.<sup>22</sup> Passing through the Prescott gate, which is ominously "defended by cannon, with a guard-house over it, a sentinel at his post," Thoreau comments:

I rubbed my eyes to be sure that I was in the Nineteenth Century, and was not entering one of those portals which

sometimes adorn the frontispieces of new editions of old blackletter volumes. I thought it would be a good place to read Froissart's Chronicles. It was such a reminiscence of the Middle Ages as Scott's novels. Men apparently dwelt there for security! Peace be unto them! As if the inhabitants of New York were to go over to Castle William to live! (p. 23)

Yet Thoreau is not entirely discouraged by the unexpected incongruities of urban Canada East. After a hurried day of viewing some of the more prominent features of Quebec City, he sets out on a walking tour to the Falls of Montmorency and Ste. Anne de Beaupré. In the countryside, where all trace of British imperialism vanishes, he is much more aware of the proximity of the sub-arctic frontier:

We had only to go a quarter of a mile from the road, to the top of the bank, to find ourselves on the verge of the uninhabited, and for the most part, unexplored wilderness stretching towards Hudson's Bay. (p. 42)

And in farmhouses and villages by the way, he is able to meet and talk with a class of habitants whose way of life ought to be closer to the early period of French settlement in North America, and who might display some of the simplicity and intuitive virtue of his friend Therien.

The great St. Lawrence River which borders the road, the vast wilderness beyond, and the exotic place names, all contribute to an imaginative recreation of the heroic age of New France. Near Ste. Anne, Thoreau crosses La Rivière au Chien,

. . . which brought to my mind the life of the Canadian voyageur and coureur de bois, a more western and wilder Arcadia, methinks, than the world has ever seen; for the Greeks, with all their wood and river gods, were not so qualified to name the natural features of a country as the ancestors of these French Canadians; and if any

people had a right to substitute their own for the Indian names, it was they. They have preceded the pioneer on our frontiers and named the prairie for us. (p. 56)

But at the same time, he is aware of an influence which runs counter to the exuberant pioneering spirit represented by the coureur de bois, and which is as evident in rural Canada East as it was in Montreal and Quebec. On the road to Ste. Anne he sees so many wayside crosses and shrines that he "could not look at an honest weathercock . . . without mistrusting that there was some covert reference in it to St. Peter" (p. 46). And on the walk back from Ste. Anne, he notices place names with associations quite different from those of La Rivière au Chien, associations which bring him back to the circumscribed world of the middle ages:

To a traveler from the Old World, Canada East may appear like a new country, and its inhabitants like colonists, but to me, coming from New England and being a very green traveler withal . . . it appeared as old as Normandy itself, and realized much that I had heard of Europe and the Middle Ages. Even the names of humble Canadian villages affected me as if they had been those of the renowned cities of antiquity. . . . St. Fereol or Ste. Anne . . . Bélange or St. Hyacinthe! As soon as you leave the States, these saintly names begin. . . . I began to dream of Provence and the Troubadours, and of places and things which have no existence on the earth. They veiled the Indian and the primitive forest, and the woods toward Hudson's Bay were only as the forests of France and Germany. (pp. 56-57)

In a similar way, his encounters with the farmers and villagers are disappointing. The habitants are self-centered and narrow-minded, uninterested in anything beyond their immediate environment, and seem to Thoreau to be more closely related to the medieval European peasant than to the pioneers

of New France. In accordance with his pervasive interest in the habitation as the epitome or symbol of a culture, he calls attention to the Canadians' circumscribed and introspective lives by describing their unusually constructed farmhouses, which he compares with their New England counterparts. The comparison inspires some exceptionally high, unqualified praise for his "fellow townsmen":

These Canadian houses have no front door, properly speaking. Every part is for the use of the occupant exclusively, and no part has reference to the traveller or to travel. Every New England house, on the contrary, has a front and principal door opening to the great world, though it may be on the cold side, for it stands on the highway of nations, and the road which runs by it comes from the Old World and goes to the far West; but the Canadian's door opens into his back yard and farm alone, and the road which runs behind his house leads only from the church of one saint to that of another. (p. 59)

The respective situations of Canada and the United States in the nineteenth century lead him to reconsider their historical backgrounds. Superficially, the world of the voyageur, the coureur de bois, and the Jesuit missionary was romantic and exciting; but in the long run, the settled and practical life of the American colonist was more conducive to the creation of an enduring and significant society in the New World:

The impression made on me was that the French Canadians were even sharing the fate of the Indians, or at least gradually disappearing in what is called the Saxon current.

The English did not come to America from a mere love of adventure, nor to truck with or convert the savages, nor to hold offices under the crown, as the French to a great extent did, but to live in earnest and



with freedom. . . . In no part of the Seventeenth Century could the French be said to have a foothold in Canada; they held only by the fur of the wild animals which they were exterminating. . . . The New England youth, on the other hand, were never coureurs de bois nor voyageurs, but backwoodsmen and sailors rather. Of all nations the English undoubtedly have proved hitherto that they had the most business there. (pp. 66-67)

And yet, the imaginative appeal of the French Canadian past is irresistible. In the continuation of the above passage, Thoreau reverts to his admiration for the early French explorers:

. . . I am not sure but I have most sympathy with that spirit of adventure which distinguished the French and Spaniards of those days, and made them especially the explorers of the American continent,--which so early carried the former to the Great Lakes and the Mississippi on the north, and the latter to the same river on the south. It was long before our frontiers reached their settlements in the West. So far as inland discovery was concerned, the adventurous spirit of the English was that of sailors who land but for day, and the enterprise the enterprise of traders. (pp. 67-68)

Yet in spite of his fascination with the early days of New France and his preference for the earnest and free life of New England, Thoreau finds certain admirable qualities in nineteenth-century French Canada. In comparison to some of his ancestors, the modern habitant is perhaps a rather dull individual; in comparison to the New Englander, he is narrow-minded and provincial; but considered sympathetically in the context of his own peculiar society he can provide certain lessons for the American observer. There is even a certain poetry to his life, although it is not the epic of the voyageur, but rather the lyric of "Provence and the Troubadours." The names of saints and ancient European cities

may "veil" the Indian and the forest, and make the Canadian wilderness seem like the forests of France and Germany, but they have an undeniably evocative beauty of their own: "I could not at once bring myself to believe that the inhabitants who pronounced daily those beautiful, and to me, significant names led as prosaic lives as we of New England" (p. 57). Concomitantly, although the Old World manners of the habitants suggest the servility of a feudal age, they also invoke a more courteous and leisurely way of life than that of the nineteenth-century United States. Noting the universal salutation of the French Canadians, "bon jour, at the same time touching the hat," Thoreau wryly remarks "It would, indeed, be a serious bore to touch your hat several times a day. A Yankee has not leisure for it" (p. 47). Similarly, he observes that if the habitants are lacking in the progressive spirit of the American frontiersman, they are not so devoted to the material wealth which is too commonly the object of progress in the United States. Invoking the railroad, the symbol of irresponsible industrialism in Walden, Thoreau observes of the farmers and villagers of Montmorency County:

It was evident that they had not advanced since the settlement of the country, that they were quite behind the age, and fairly represented their ancestors in Normandy a thousand years ago. Even in respect to the common arts of life, they are not so far advanced as a frontier town in the West three years old. They have no money invested in railroad stock, and probably never will have. If they have got a French phrase for a railroad, it is as much as you can expect of them. They

are very far from a revolution, have no quarrel with Church or State, but their vice and their virtue is content. (p. 64)

As the ambivalent tone of this paragraph suggests, Thoreau considers the habitant's easy-going existence to be preferable in many ways to the New Englander's life of quiet desperation: "If the Canadian wants energy, perchance he possesses those virtues, social and others, which the Yankee lacks, in which case he cannot be regarded as a poor man" (p. 68). But at the same time, it is possible to be too lacking in energy; in his introverted concern with family, farm, and church, the Canadian may eventually share the fate of the Indian or disappear in the "Saxon current."

Having made his discovery of rural French Canada and reassessed his historical conception of North America in the light of this experience, Thoreau returns to Quebec. Once again, the main object of his attention is British militarism; and in the last two chapters of "A Yankee in Canada" he continues his critical and satirical attack on this archaic phenomenon.

To Thoreau, the stones of the city walls and the citadel in Quebec are the symbols of an unthinking reliance on force as the mainstay of a decadent and anachronistic regime.

Huge stone structures of all kinds, both in their erection and by their influence when erected, rather oppress than liberate the mind. They are tombs for the souls of men, as frequently for their bodies also. (p. 78)

Richard Henry Dana saw the fortifications of Quebec as the

awe-inspiring manifestation of "inert material might"; but Thoreau sees them as absurd vestiges of the least valuable traditions transplanted from the Old World to the New. The extreme of absurdity is the spectacle of a benumbed British sentinel stalking the heights of Cape Diamond in the midst of a freezing Canadian winter night:

What a natural or unnatural fool must that soldier be--to say nothing of his government--who, when quicksilver is freezing and blood is ceasing to be quick, will stand to have his face frozen, watching the walls of Quebec, though, so far as they are concerned, both honest and dishonest men all the world over have been in their beds nearly half a century. . . . I shall never again wake up in a colder night than usual, but I shall think how rapidly the sentinels are relieving one another on the walls of Quebec, . . . as if apprehensive that some hostile Wolfe may even then be scaling the Heights of Abraham, or some persevering Arnold about to issue from the wilderness; some Malay or Japanese, perchance, coming round by the northwest coast, have chosen that moment to assault the citadel! (pp. 79-80)

In the countryside, during his walks to Ste. Anne and Montmorency, he can forget about this ludicrous aspect of Canada and concentrate on studying the habitant in his native element, on his farm on the edge of the wilderness, where he appears as a lethargic but not unattractive figure. In the cities, however, and especially in the heavily garrisoned Quebec, the French Canadian appears particularly contemptible for submitting so docilely to military rule. His submission to the church can be partially excused by reference to the aesthetic appeal of Roman Catholic symbolism; but his tolerance of a militaristic government is an inexcusable reflection of his servility. "They are a nation of peasants," Thoreau

remarks abruptly; ". . . How could a peaceably, freethinking man live neighbour to the Forty-ninth regiment?" (p. 82).

Once again, the author's countrymen come in for some comparative praise: "A New-Englander would naturally be a bad citizen, probably a rebel, there--certainly if he were already a rebel at home" (p. 82). And in a final summary of the differences between the two countries, he condemns the militaristic government of Canada in terms which recall his assertion of the sanctity of the individual in "Civil Disobedience":

Give me a country where it is the most natural thing in in the world for a government that does not understand you to let you alone. . . . What makes the United States government, on the whole, more tolerable--I mean for us lucky white men--is the fact that there is so much less of government with us. Here [i.e., in the U.S.] it is only once a month or a year that a man needs remember that institution: and those who go to Congress can play the game of Kilkenny cats there without fatal consequences to those who stay at home, their term is so short; but in Canada you are reminded of the government every day. It parades itself before you. It is not content to be the servant, but will be the master; and every day it goes out to the Plains of Abraham or to the Champ de Mars and exhibits itself and toots. (pp. 83-84)

Paradoxically, considering its position on the edge of a virtually limitless wilderness, Canada East persistently strikes Thoreau as oppressively narrow and confined. Everywhere he turns there are visible or invisible walls and fences, surrounding the city which bristles with cannons and soldiers, defining the ridiculously narrow farms with their backward-facing houses, isolating in their convents or in their gloomy taciturnity the "shuffling priests" and "Sisters

of Charity gone into mourning for their deceased relative" (p. 84). For relief from this oppressive atmosphere, Thoreau turns to the contemplation of the wilderness. But unexpectedly, he finds that the Canadian wilds can have an effect on the imagination quite different from that of the Concord Woods. In the closing chapter of "A Yankee in Canada" he describes his reaction to the view from Cape Diamond, where he discovers that the immense wilderness stretching north to Hudson Bay does not evoke a sense of man's affinity with nature, but rather reveals the fact of man's diminutiveness, and leads ultimately to thoughts of annihilation:

. . . The citadel under my feet, and all historical associations, were swept away . . . by an influence from the wilds and from Nature, . . . an influence which, like the Great River itself, flowed from the Arctic fastnesses and Western forests with irresistible tide over all. (p. 89)

As on Mount Ktaadn in the Maine Woods where he felt himself in the grip of "vast Titanic, inhuman Nature,"<sup>23</sup> Thoreau is overwhelmed by the incomprehensible vastness of the North American wilds, and is reminded of the human necessity of building a home in this environment. As he declares in Walden, the animal instinct in man is drawn to the Wild, but there are higher laws which require the cultivation of the divine spirit, both in the individual and in society. Canada, set precariously on the edge of an all-engulfing wilderness where the need to cultivate the higher laws ought to be particularly great, is a petty church- and military-dominated

society clinging stubbornly to anachronistic customs and institutions and steadfastly refusing to acknowledge the requisites of its geographical and historical situation. With evident relief, Thoreau turns back to the relative liberty of his own country.

Notes to Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup>Some idea of the relative popularity of Canada as a subject for nineteenth-century American travelers with literary inclinations may be had from Harold F. Smith's American Travellers Abroad: A Bibliography of Accounts Published Before 1900 (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>O.L. Holley, The Picturesque Tourist (New York: J. Disturnell, 1844), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup>Jesse Walker, Queenston: A Tale of the Niagara Frontier (Buffalo: Steele's Press, 1845), pp. 110-11.

<sup>4</sup>[William Tappan Thompson], Major Jones's Sketches of Travel: Comprising the Scenes, Incidents and Adventures, in his Tour from Georgia to Canada (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1848), p. 180.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>8</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage, 1958), II, 78.

<sup>9</sup>[Thompson], p. 184.

<sup>10</sup>All quotations from Dana's journal refer to vol. 2 of The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., ed. Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup>Two Years Before the Mast (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), p. 239.

<sup>12</sup>The first three chapters appeared in Putnam's Monthly Magazine, Jan.-March, 1853, under the title "An Excursion to Canada." The complete five-part work, with its ultimate title, was included in the posthumous volume Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers (1866). In the 1893 Riverside edition of The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, it was included in the volume entitled Excursions.

<sup>13</sup>Sherman Paul, The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 370.

<sup>14</sup>H.S. Canby, Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939),



pp. 369-70. Edmund G. Berry, in "Thoreau in Canada," Dalhousie Review, 23 (April, 1943), 68-74, virtually repeats Canby's wording in a superficial summary and appreciation of "A Yankee," which he describes as "a simple piece of narrative writing, direct and matter-of-fact." Max Cosman, attempting a psychological approach in an essay entitled "A Yankee in Canada," Canadian Historical Review, 25 (March, 1944), 33-37, suggests that Thoreau went to Canada primarily to recover from the double shock of the deaths of his sister Helen in 1849 and Margaret Fuller Ossoli in 1850, and that his rather negative reaction to the northern country might have had something to do with his morbid state of mind. Walter Harding, in A Thoreau Handbook (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 57, dismisses even Canby's tentative approval, and pronounces the book (without offering any illustrations in support of his comments) as "one of Thoreau's least inspired 'Excursions'. . . . Even the sentence structure and vocabulary of the essay are atypical, staccato, pedestrian journalese." John A. Christie, in Thoreau as World Traveler (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), attributes some potential significance to "A Yankee," but he concludes his brief discussion with the unsupported declaration that the work lacks "the immediacy of Thoreau's keen observation and involvement that gave vitality to his later accounts of Maine and Cape Cod" (p. 100).

<sup>15</sup>A summary of the controversy with Putnam's, and the relevant correspondence, is in The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode (New York: New York University Press, 1958), pp. 293-94. The letter to Blake is in the same volume, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup>The Journal version of the 1850 excursion, consisting of some eighty-five pages, is missing; presumably Thoreau used it as a rough draft. Lawrence Willson has made an admirably thorough study of the manuscript fair copy of "A Yankee" (now in the Huntington Library) and of the large amount of background material on Canada which Thoreau accumulated after returning to Concord. Willson's documentation of Thoreau's reading notes and compilations of bibliographies demonstrates conclusively that Canada occupied his intellect and imagination quite intensively for at least five or six years after the excursion. See Lawrence Willson, "Thoreau's Canadian Notebook," Huntington Library Quarterly, 22 (May, 1959), 179-200; and "Thoreau and the French in Canada," Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, 29 (July-Sept., 1959), 281-97.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Thoreau, Walden, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 363.

<sup>18</sup>A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 230.

<sup>19</sup>The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, (1906; rpt; New York: Dover, 1962), I, 365.

<sup>20</sup>Walden, pp. 160, 164.

<sup>21</sup>All quotations from "A Yankee in Canada" refer to Excursions and Poems, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968).

<sup>22</sup>Walden, p. 117.

<sup>23</sup>The Maine Woods, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 71.

## VI

## THE NORTHERN FRONTIER

In his excursion to Canada, Thoreau followed the well-worn route of the "fashionable tour" (as one contemporary guide-book called the trip through Canada East), but his exceptional imaginative powers were able to conjure up from this brief, circumscribed journey an immense historical and geographical vision which ultimately encompassed the infinite arctic vistas of British North America as seen in the context of the entire New World. Many of his contemporaries, as has been noted, were not interested in contemplating any more of Canada than the narrow populated fringe along the eastern United States border which could be conveniently (and often adversely) compared with their own country. There were others, however, who were drawn like Thoreau towards the vast northern regions beyond the settlements. By mid-century, it was becoming increasingly easier to experience these regions directly. The district of Canada West (formerly the province of Upper Canada, and in 1867 to become the province of Ontario) was rapidly opening to exploration, settlement, and tourism, while certain remote outposts on the northern Atlantic coast were attracting the particularly hardy and adventurous breed of traveler. One result of this interest in the expanding Canadian frontier was a small but noteworthy succession of novels and travel narratives by various minor American authors, dealing with the northern wilderness.

As historians of American culture have long recognized, two opposing concepts of the wilderness developed almost simultaneously in the American imagination. On the one hand, there is the negative idea (which de Tocqueville found particularly noticeable) of the wilderness as something to be feared and destroyed, an idea stemming from Puritanism and ultimately from attitudes as old as western civilization. On the other hand, there is the concept of nature as a place of spiritual rejuvenation and of refuge from the evils of society, a tradition deriving particularly from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticism, but traceable back at least as far as the pastoral mythology of the ancient Greeks. Nineteenth-century American notions of the Canadian frontier, as expressed in certain minor works of mid-century, involve both these traditions, sometimes running in conflict with each other, and sometimes complicated by political and social beliefs.

A conflict of attitudes towards the Canadian wilderness is evident in a novel by Owen Duffy, published in 1854, entitled Walter Warren, or the Adventurer of the Northern Wilds. Most of this novel is set in and around the frontier village of Hamilton "in that part of the American continent now known as Canada West, formerly Upper Canada," whither young Walter's father has immigrated (like a latter-day Leatherstocking or Daniel Boone) "in his desire to get as far as possible from the prying curiosity of his neighbours."<sup>1</sup>

The basic conflict in Walter Warren derives from the familiar Cooper-inspired contrast between forest and settlements. The Canadians who befriend Walter after his father is murdered by Indians are rough musket-toting Indian-hating backwoodsmen, indistinguishable from their American counterparts of literary and folk tradition. The town of Hamilton, on the other hand, where the orphaned Walter is taken by an evangelical preacher, is an enclave of iniquity and hypocrisy. After suffering the preacher's tyrannical abuse and subsequently falling prey to sensual temptations in the Irish slum of "Corktown," Walter follows the example of his father (and of Boone and Leatherstocking), and escapes to a more remote frontier, in this case the region northwest of Lake Superior. But the author of Walter Warren, whether in deference to conventional formulas of popular fiction or because of a basic conflict in his own beliefs, does not finally uphold the exaltation of the wilderness. At the end of the story, the hero is reunited with his long-lost wealthy uncle, thereby gaining the means to return to civilization and enter a social stratum where he will presumably not encounter the problems which drove him into the wilderness.

The formulaic plot and setting of Walter Warren are essentially similar to a number of nineteenth-century American novels dealing with the western frontier of the United States.<sup>2</sup> The author has chosen the Canadian setting because "Canada" would automatically suggest "wilderness" to the

popular imagination, and perhaps because he was trying to satisfy the appetite for superficial novelty of a rapidly growing American reading public. In any case, the people and places of Canada West in this novel are little more than northerly versions of familiar American literary and folk conventions.

A similar approach to Canada is evident in another novel of mid-century, The Renegade: A Tale of Real Life (1855) by John B. Coppinger. This work, however, is a more ambitious attempt to articulate some of the ideas and attitudes towards the wilderness which were current in the United States at the time of writing, and to dramatize and justify the retreat to the wilderness and the subsequent return to civilization. Set mostly in the forest wilderness north of Lake Ontario, the novel concerns two young Americans who have come to Canada to test certain ideals and beliefs associated with nature and the primitive life. Frank Bramley believes that the retreat to nature is valuable only insofar as it affords the opportunity for contemplation in solitude and tranquility, so that one can return to civilization with increased self-understanding and renewed religious sensibilities. His friend Dick Wood, on the other hand, has come to Canada to get away from the "selfishness and ingratitude of man" and to study the Indians, whom he takes to represent human beings "as they were created . . . in their primitive simplicity."<sup>3</sup> To settle their disagreement about the respective value of

primitive and civilized societies, the two Americans join a nomadic tribe of Indians who are just about to set off into the wilderness. The rest of the novel is a compound of didactic colloquy, crude allegory, and fantasy, wherein the wanderers meet on a "prairie" near Lake Muskoka a band of mounted Indians apparently misplaced from the western plains, and eventually pursue their researches to the remote retreat of an articulate Indian prophetess north of Lake Superior. The prophetess expounds the moral which is illustrated in the career of the title character, an Indian who is the personification of Wood's misogyny carried to its logical conclusion. No individual or race is innately good or evil; but protracted solitude and resentment against mankind will eventually pervert the moral nature. With the sermon of the prophetess and the object lesson of the renegade fresh in his memory, Dick Wood returns to the United States, determined to follow the more optimistic philosophy of his friend.

In The Renegade, as in Walter Warren, Canada West is not primarily a political and social entity. It is, in effect (with due regard for the dangers of comparing widely diverse literary accomplishments) an immense Walden Pond, a temporary retreat from and testing ground for the values of American society. In nineteenth-century American literature, the withdrawal to the primitive environment is almost always temporary. The real or fictional traveler eventually acknowledges, as Thoreau acknowledged on the summit of Mount Ktaadn

and on the ramparts of Quebec, that there is some sort of incompatibility between the civilized sensibility and absolute wildness. Even the most unreflective and casual nature-seeker recognizes this incompatibility, by revealing (as Alexander Henry did much earlier) his ultimate dependence on the economic and moral values of modern society.

This conflict between civilization and primitivism is clearly illustrated in Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British American Provinces (1856), by Charles Lanman. The author (who identifies himself in the preface as a friend and associate of Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant) included in his peregrinations Canada East and New Brunswick, and the portions of his book dealing with these regions mostly involve an enthusiastic celebration of the great outdoors. "I hate cities," he says rather testily; "I have not visited Canada for the purpose of examining its cities, but solely with a view of hunting up some new scenery and having a little sport in the way of salmon fishing."<sup>4</sup> Like Alexander Henry and Francis Parkman, Lanman is obviously a devotee of what Theodore Roosevelt was eventually to label "the strenuous life." But like Henry and Parkman, Lanman is not able to suppress completely his belief in certain values associated with civilization. His admiration for the enterprise of great North American capitalists is particularly notable, and recalls Washington Irving's idealization of John Jacob Astor. Of William Price,



the Saguenay "lumber king," he declares: ". . . did I not know the fact to be otherwise, I should set him down . . . as a Yankee."<sup>5</sup>

There are also nineteenth-century American authors completely devoted to the concepts of civilization and progress who regard the remote outposts of British North America with the same attitude of invidious condescension as some of their compatriots regard the more settled regions. In A Trip to Newfoundland (1855) a journalist named John Mullaly describes the laying of the transatlantic cable from Newfoundland to Cape Breton Island, and takes the opportunity to point out the contrast between American progress (as symbolized by the technological advance of the telegraph) and the retarded state of society in the provinces. The people of Halifax are lazy and unambitious; the inhabitants of Newfoundland are far behind the age. "The day may not be far distant," observes the author, "that will see Newfoundland bound in closer connection with our republic than can be accomplished by the electric telegraph."<sup>6</sup>

Mullaly's attitude to the inhabitants of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland recalls Thoreau's attitude to the Indians and the French Canadians, for both authors assume that the primitive people will eventually be absorbed into the "Saxon current." But Mullaly obviously does not have Thoreau's sympathy for primitive people, and he is certainly unwilling to acknowledge (as Thoreau does) that their way of life might

have certain unique virtues which can provide valuable lessons for the civilized observer.

A more positive and sympathetic attitude toward the North Atlantic region and its inhabitants is evident in the writings of Robert Traill Spence Lowell (1816-91). The brother of James Russell Lowell and grandfather of the twentieth-century poet, Lowell served as Episcopal missionary from 1843 to 1847 in the fishing village of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland. This experience inspired some poetry, a short story, and a novel, The New Priest in Conception Bay (1858). Although the poetry is undistinguished, it is perhaps remarkable for its prefiguration of some of the less attractive affectations of Walt Whitman. Lowell attempts to imitate by means of apostrophes and unusual verse forms the rough and violent features of the Atlantic landscape. The opening stanza of "Newfoundland" (written 1847) exclaims:

O rugged land!  
 Land of the rock moss!  
 Land whose drear barrens it is woe to cross!  
 Thou rough thing from God's hand!  
 O Stormy land!  
 Land where the tempests roar!  
 Land where the unbroken waves rave mad upon the shore:  
 Thine outwalls scarce withstand!<sup>7</sup>

But The New Priest in Conception Bay is a more subtle and detailed attempt to present both the landscape and the society of Newfoundland. The novel begins with a prefatory chapter which unites terrain and inhabitants in a comprehensive picture of primeval starkness and elemental struggle:

Up go the surges on the coast of Newfoundland, and down again, into the sea. The huge island, in which the scene of our story lies, stands, with its sheer, beetling cliffs, out of the ocean, a monstrous mass of rock and gravel, almost without soil, like a strange thing from the bottom of the great deep, lifted up, suddenly, into sunshine and storm, but belonging to the watery darkness out of which it has been reared. The eye, accustomed to richer and softer scenes, finds something of a strange and almost startling beauty in its bold, hard outlines, cut out on every side, against the sky.

. . . . .  
 In March or April almost all the men go out in fleets to meet the ice that floats down from the northern regions, and to kill the seals that come down on it. In early summer a third part or a half of all the people go, by families, in their schooners, to the coast of Labrador, and spend the summer, fishing there; and in the winter, half of them are living in the woods, . . . to have their fuel near them. At home or abroad, during the season, the men are on the water for seals or cod. The women sow, and plant, and tend the little garden, and dry the fish: in short, they do the land-work; and are the better for it.<sup>8</sup>

Lowell particularly succeeds in presenting a sympathetic and convincing picture of the Newfoundland fishermen and villagers with their naive piety and their uncritical acceptance of the stern natural conditions of their lives. Some of the characters--particularly the garrulous Skipper George with his intuitive moralizing and dogged acceptance of Christian principles--are perhaps too heavily idealized. But Lowell qualifies some of their virtues by pointing out that their simplicity of character can occasionally be united with abysmal ignorance, and by introducing a comic "Yankee" named Elnathan Bangs (an avatar of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's Sam Slick--or perhaps of James Russell Lowell's Hosea Bigelow) who calls attention to the Newfoundlanders' alleged lack of

initiative and energy.

The Newfoundland fishermen and their struggle with nature are not, however, the central focus of The New Priest. The plot involves the violent quarrels between the Anglo-Newfoundland Protestants and the Catholics of Irish descent which periodically shook the island in the nineteenth century. This theme was perhaps not an unwise choice for Lowell, who as a missionary would have detailed first-hand knowledge of the island's religious controversies, while his experience of the fishermen's professional lives would necessarily be limited. Certainly the detachable episode "Skipper George's Story," which concerns a tragedy in the fishing fleet, suggests that an extended sea narrative in Lowell's hands might have been intolerably sentimental and didactic. It is worth mentioning, on the other hand, that Lowell also wrote a very compelling and dramatic short story about the Newfoundland seamen, a story which suggests that he might have been capable of something far more impressive than the doctrinal controversies of The New Priest. "A Raft That No Man Made" (published in the Atlantic Monthly, March, 1862) tells the suspenseful story of a Newfoundland seal hunter cast away on an ice floe, whose harrowing experience leads to a resolution to forsake his cruel and violent occupation. The hunter's discovery in a barren world of ice and sea that the moral principle of the universe is love rather than the survival of the fittest unmistakably reflects the

author's debt to "The Ancient Mariner," and indicates that Lowell was capable of successfully amalgamating and exploiting his literary background, his observations of the Newfoundland inhabitants, and his direct experience of their environment. In The New Priest, however, he chose to focus more exclusively on matter related to his clerical pursuits, and the results are far from satisfying. Utterly incapable of religious objectivity, he depicts his Catholics as devils, weaklings, or fools, while his Protestants are mostly paragons of virtue and patience. An even more serious flaw in the novel is the central love story involving two "genteel" characters obviously derived from the tradition of domestic sentimental fiction. In addition, the plot of the novel is carried along almost entirely by melodramatic contrivances such as kidnapping, mysterious apparitions, and midnight rendezvous. Nevertheless, in spite of the conventional characters and events which dominate the foreground, The New Priest (as one of Lowell's very few modern commentators has declared) "should have honorable mention . . . as a distinguished study of character and environment in a time when one could count the first-rate productions of American fiction on his two hands."<sup>9</sup>

There is some faint praise for Lowell's work in the fact that it is not as bad as a similar novel by Mrs. Mary L. Savage, entitled Miramichi (1865), which involves the efforts of a New England missionary to bring the "light" of Methodism

to the backwoods of New Brunswick. The rustic prospective proselytes are brainless and swinish drunkards and roisterers; the only admirable villagers in the Miramichi valley are the socially superior Landsdowne family (who are originally from the United States) and the ubiquitous comic "Yankee," an individual named Micah Mummeychog who has immigrated to the New Brunswick backwoods for no apparent reason except to provide the author with the means of making satirical comments on the provincials. The plot is mainly a series of arguments in which the author upholds Methodism against Calvinism, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism. Prayer and repentance rather than predestination are seen as the way to salvation. In the end, however, the unregenerate New Brunswickers are made to see the light by the intervention of a catastrophic forest fire which the Methodist preacher (in spite of his denial of predestination) has foreseen in a dream.

The author of Miramichi pretends an interest in the primitive New Brunswick settlers and in the forest-covered scenery of the province. But it is evident throughout the novel that she is equally antipathetic to the people and to the forest. Living so close to the wilderness, the New Brunswickers are no better than beasts, and their regeneration can only be accomplished when the wilderness has been virtually destroyed. Their salvation lies, in effect, in the ultimate conflagration of the primitive environment and the rearing up of an urban society similar to that of the New

England which the Methodist preacher repeatedly praises.

Miramichi is finally not a tribute to the wilderness and the primitive life at all, but is rather a defense of civilization and progress much like Mullaly's Trip to Newfoundland.

The preference for modern civilization and culture is also evident in a travel narrative by an American clergyman named Louis L. Noble, After Icebergs with a Painter: A Summer Voyage to Labrador and Around Newfoundland (1861).

Noble admires the rugged Labrador coast, and makes frequent allusions to the sublime in nature obviously based on his reading of English romantic poetry. But as his title suggests, his main interest is in the pictorial qualities of the region, and his involvement with the inhabitants does not go beyond a few tentative speculations as to their spiritual welfare. Like Richard Henry Dana at Quebec, he confines his social encounters to the local aristocracy: at St. John's, Newfoundland, he spends the evening with the Anglican bishop, "where the conversation was about Oxford, and Keble, English parsonages, and Christian art."<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Noble's work is a five-part account of a trip to Labrador by David A. Wasson (1823-87) entitled "Ice and Esquimaux," published serially in the Atlantic Monthly of 1864-65. Wasson has been described as a neglected genius of the Transcendentalist movement, "a corrective to Emerson and Thoreau,"<sup>11</sup> and if his writings do not entirely justify this praise, his intellectual intercourse with Emerson,

Thoreau, and others is certainly of historical interest. Particularly noteworthy is his ideological debate with Thoreau, which was stimulated by personal acquaintance while Wasson lived in Concord in the 1850's.

The basic terms of this debate are outlined in the first chapter of "Ice and Esquimaux," where Wasson describes the appeal which Labrador holds for him:

The mystic North reached forth the wand by which it had fascinated me so often, and renewed its spell. Who has not felt it? Thoreau wrote of "The Wild" as he alone could write; but only in the North do you find it,-- unless you make it, as he did, by your imagination. And even he could in this but partially succeed. Talk of finding it in a ten-acre swamp! Why, man, you are just from a cornfield, the echoes of your sister's piano are still in your ears, and you called for a letter as you came! Verdure and a mild heaven are above; clunking frogs and plants that keep company with man are beneath. But in the North Nature herself is wild. Of man she has never so much as heard. She has seen, perchance, a biped atomy creeping through her snows; but he is not Man, lording it in power of thought and performance; he is a muffled imbecility, that can do nothing but hug and hide its existence, lest some careless breath of hers should blow it out; his pin-head taper must be kept under a bushel, or cease to be even the covert pettiness it is. The wildness of the North is not scenic and pictorial merely, but goes to the very heart of things, immeasurable, immitigable, infinite; deaf and blind to all but itself and its own, it prevails, it is, and it is all.<sup>12</sup>

Wasson is presumably thinking of Walden in his allusion to the "ten-acre swamp." Perhaps he had not read The Maine Woods, which was just published in 1864 (although parts of it had appeared earlier in periodicals), and which might have more adequately satisfied his criteria for the retreat to the Wild. In any case, he is hardly being fair to Thoreau, who



deliberately chose Walden Pond rather than some more remote retreat because an important part of his purpose was to juxtapose and compare civilization and the Wild. To explore this comparison he would inevitably have to rely on his imagination, and most readers of Walden would argue that he more than "partially" succeeded. Indeed, it might be argued that Thoreau's imaginary wild is more clearly realized than Wasson's actual one. Wasson physically retreats to one of the most isolated and primitive regions on the continent, but he is unable to project himself imaginatively into this strange environment. There is a suggestion of irony in the fact that he was accompanied on his expedition not only by a painter, as Louis L. Noble was, but by a photographer as well. His view of Labrador, in spite of the implied promise of metaphysical explorations in the reference to the "immeasurable . . . infinite," is largely "scenic and pictorial."

His inability to probe beyond a superficial pictorial level is particularly evident in his contemplations of the inhabitants of Labrador. While on a bird-hunting expedition, he observes closely the physiognomy of his French-Canadian guide:

It was a strangely attractive, and yet strangely impenetrable, a rare out-door face, clean and firm as naked granite after a rain, healthful as balsam-fire, and so honestly weather-beaten that one could not help regarding it as a feature of natural scenery. All out-of-doors was implied in it, and it belonged as much to the horizon as to the nearest objects. The eye, with its unceasing, imperturbable search, never an instant relaxing its intentness, and never seeming to make an effort

any more than the sky in looking blue, asserted this relationship, for by the same glance it seemed to take in equally the farthest and the nearest; only over us in the boat it passed always as over vacant space. . . . I found it out of my power to relate myself to him as an individual. In most faces you study special character; but in him it was somewhat older and more primitive,-- somewhat which seemed to be rather existence itself than any special form of it. One felt in him that same world-old secret which haunts ancient woods, and would have asked him to utter it, were not its presence the only utterance it can have.<sup>13</sup>

This is ultimately only a verbose apology for his inability to infer the French Canadian's personality from his physical appearance. Thoreau was unable to get as close as he might have wished to the St. Lawrence Valley habitants and his friend Therien; but by frank and unaffected social encounter vividly reported in dialogue form, he at least made a movement towards understanding and exposition. Wasson, by contrast, stands at a distance, looks at the French Canadian as if he were no more than an object in the landscape, then resorts to the same kind of pretentious metaphysical generalities ("rather existence itself," "the world-old secret") as he earlier applied to Labrador as a whole. The same limitations are evident in his attempts to study the Eskimo. The aborigine of Labrador is an "original, pre-Adamite man," whom Wasson envisages as an enigmatic and rather inhuman figure, indistinguishable from the landscape, and hardly aware of the difference between himself and the objects around him.

In his contemplation of the Eskimo, Wasson reveals explicitly his belief in the superiority of civilization and

progress over the "pre-Adamite" world:

So long as man is merely responding to outward and physical circumstances, so long he is living by bread alone, and has no history. It is when he begins to respond to himself--to create necessities and supplies out of his own spirit--. . . to live by bread which grows not out of the soil, but out of the soul--it is then, then only, that history begins.<sup>14</sup>

And elsewhere he recognizes that he himself belongs irrevocably to the world of history and spiritual development. The third instalment of his narrative, entitled "Birds and Boys' Play" describes how he found himself one day bounding about on the rocky Labrador coast in search of birds, and was forcibly struck by the incongruity of his position. The idea of a civilized, cultured man chasing after a bird which he has neither the desire nor the physiological stamina to eat reduces his activity to the level of a childish game. It is a game which takes full possession of his senses while it lasts, but he recognizes that it belongs to a primitive part of himself, a part which conflicts with the cultural and intellectual values which are his true and proper pursuits.

Wasson might have been interested in a novel published just a few years after his own narrative, entitled Left on Labrador (1872) by the prolific dime novelist Charles A. Stephens. This novel explicitly transforms the northern excursion into "boy's play," when a group of American youths make a schooner excursion into the North Atlantic and encounter all sorts of fantastic adventures on the coast of Labrador. Stephens' effort, and perhaps Coppinger's The

Renegade, indicate that the far North is beginning to take on the same sort of mythical dimensions in the American imagination as the far West. But the North remains farther removed from the American experience than the West. For even in fantasy (as in Stephens' and Coppinger's novels) the North is a place of only temporary retreat: the real, important world is back in civilization, in American society. Wasson recognizes the inevitability of the return to civilization all through "Ice and Esquimaux." In every chapter there is a specific reminder of the Civil War, which invokes for Wasson a whole network of obligations and connections related to his identity as a civilized man and an American. Finally, like Thoreau, and like Coppinger's and Stephens' characters, he returns to the society to which he irrevocably belongs.

Thus most of the American writers of the mid-nineteenth century who turned their attention to the Canadian North were ultimately repelled by the remoteness and irreclaimable wildness of the region. By the end of the Civil War, Americans were particularly intent on looking ahead, toward the future growth of New World civilization, and had little desire to look toward a part of the continent where nature and man seemed virtually locked in an implacable stasis of primitive conflict, recalling the very earliest and most barbaric stages of the continent's history. But this revulsion against the primitive North did not imply a complete rejection of the Past. Canada as an arctic or sub-arctic wilderness

was an intimidating, even frightening prospect; but Canada as the scene of some of the earliest attempts of Europeans to transform wilderness into civilization was an important part of the progressive American concept of the New World. Historical romancers throughout the nineteenth century continued to explore this conception of Canada; but their treatment of it was frequently superficial and distorted. As the Civil War drew to a close, however, there appeared a very ambitious and literarily impressive attempt to relate the Canadian past to the American present and future. In 1865--the same year that "Ice and Esquimaux" was serialized in the Atlantic Monthly--Francis Parkman published the first volumes of his France and England in North America.

Notes to Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup>Owen Duffy, Walter Warren, or the Adventurer of the Northern Wilds (New York: Stringer & Townsend, [1854]), pp. 3, 5.

<sup>2</sup>See Henry Nash Smith's account of popular fiction using the westward retreat formula in Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1970), chapters 5-9.

<sup>3</sup>John B. Coppinger, The Renegade: A Tale of Real Life (New York: Sherman & Co., 1855), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Lanman, Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British American Provinces (Philadelphia: John W. Moore, 1856), I, 327, 265.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 275.

<sup>6</sup>John Mullaly, A Trip to Newfoundland: its Scenery and Fisheries; with an Account of the Laying of the Submarine Telegraph Cable (New York: T.W. Strong, 1855), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup>The Poems of Robert Lowell (Boston: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1864), p. 72.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Lowell, The New Priest in Conception Bay (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Harold Blodgett, "Robert Traill Spence Lowell," New England Quarterly, 16 (Dec., 1943), 578.

<sup>10</sup>Louis L. Noble, After Icebergs with a Painter: A Summer Voyage to Labrador and around Newfoundland (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1861), p. 74.

<sup>11</sup>Charles H. Foster, "A Study of David A. Wasson," Beyond Concord: Selected Writings of David Atwood Wasson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>David Wasson, "Ice and Esquimaux," The Atlantic Monthly, 14 (Dec., 1864), 728.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 15 (Feb., 1865), 204.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 15 (April, 1865), 438.

## VII

## PARKMAN: "FRANCE AND ENGLAND IN NORTH AMERICA"

"The early history of Canada," wrote Francis Parkman to a Canadian acquaintance in 1856, "is so full of dramatic incident and noble examples of devoted heroism, that it is a matter of wonder that American writers have, until lately, so little regarded it."<sup>1</sup> This history, as has been seen, figured occasionally in the works of various American novelists throughout the nineteenth century. Although Parkman had an eager interest in novels--in 1856 he wrote one of his own, Vassal Morton, an autobiographical melodrama set in New England and Europe--he felt that they failed to do justice to the size and complexity of the subject which was his primary interest. James Fenimore Cooper, whose Leatherstocking tales Parkman admired immensely, had conveyed something of the geographical and historical sweep of the so-called "French and Indian war"; but Cooper had only a peripheral and indirect interest in Canada, and in Parkman's view (as expressed in a critical essay on the novelist written in 1852) his primary achievement had been the realistic recreation of the forest and a few American frontier characters.<sup>2</sup> It was by means of the narrative history, a genre being developed with new distinction in the United States by such author-scholars as George Bancroft, John Lothrop Motley and William H. Prescott, that Parkman hoped to do full justice to his chosen subject. Bancroft had included a brief account of the French regime in

Canada in his History of the United States (1834-76), but Parkman had in mind a project which would tell the story of New France in exhaustive detail. The result was a seven-part series involving more than forty years of research, and published between 1865 and 1892, entitled France and England in North America.

Parkman's title implies an equal division of interest between the French and English colonies; but in fact the overwhelming emphasis, as is suggested by the author's working title "France in the New World" (given in his introduction to the first volume), is on New France. This disproportion recalls the attitude of Thoreau, who also contemplated an epic work on early North American history. "Of all nations," Thoreau wrote in "A Yankee in Canada," "the English undoubtedly have proved hitherto that they had the most business [in North America]. . . . Yet I am not sure but I have most sympathy with that spirit of adventure which distinguished the French."<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that Parkman was familiar with Thoreau's writing, least of all with the obscure "Yankee in Canada," but Thoreau's comment is a noteworthy prefiguration of Parkman's basic response to Canadian history. Throughout France and England in North America the inevitability of English hegemony in the New World is repeatedly stated in expository passages, while the dramatic focus is almost continually on the great heroes and adventurous exploits of French-Canadian history.



Parkman accounted for the English triumph by reference to a very simple set of concepts. The basic formative principle of North American civilization, he declared, was the conflict between

Liberty and absolutism, New England and New France. The one was the offspring of a triumphant government; the other, of an oppressed and fugitive people; the one, an unflinching champion of the Roman Catholic reaction; the other, a vanguard of the Reform. Each followed its natural laws of growth, and each came to its natural result. (Pioneers of France, I, xcvi)<sup>4</sup>

Modern historians have complained that "Parkman was more concerned with telling a story than with understanding the underlying reasons" for the fall of New France,<sup>5</sup> and the statements from the Introduction to his first volume tend to justify this complaint. Instead of giving some intimation of the immensely complex social, political, and economic factors involved in the prevalence of New England over New France, he offers very simplified and conventional theories. The reduction of political systems to simple antithetical principles, the identification of Roman Catholicism with political reaction, the determinism inherent in the assumption that events follow "natural laws" and in the organic metaphor which implies that societies follow a teleological development comparable to that associated with plants: these are all common nineteenth-century American ideas about history in general and the history of the New World in particular.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Parkman's commitment to these ideas remains substantially unmodified throughout the whole extent of his study of early

Canada.

In this deterministic conception of New World history, the emergence of the United States as an independent country became the ultimate "natural result" of the conflict between France and England in North America. Although his historical series ends with the fall of Canada in 1761, Parkman emphasizes in his concluding volumes the rise of a spirit of independence and a sense of national unity in the British American colonies, and suggests that the collapse of New France removed the main barrier to American independence. Freed from the menace of northern invasion, the colonies were able to concentrate on their own domestic interests, and these interests seemed to be increasingly incompatible with British imperialism. And yet, although he saw the emergence of the United States as the inevitable climax to early North American history, Parkman was by no means an uncritical believer in contemporary American society. To his close friend the Abbé Casgrain, professor of history at Laval University, he thus outlined his political beliefs:

I have always declared openly my detestation of the unchecked rule of the masses, that is to say of universal suffrage, and the corruption which is sure to follow in every large and heterogeneous community. I have also always declared a very cordial dislike of Puritanism. I recognize some most respectable and valuable qualities in the settlers of New England, but do not think them or their system to be praised without great qualifications. . . . Nor am I at all an enthusiast for the nineteenth century, many of the tendencies of which I deplore, while admiring much that it has accomplished. It is too democratic and too much given to the pursuit of material interests at the expense of intellectual and moral

greatness. . . .<sup>7</sup>

And in the final paragraph of one of the last segments of his history, he declares:

The string of discordant communities along the Atlantic coast has grown to a mighty people, joined in a union which the earthquake of civil war served only to compact and consolidate. . . . [The United States] has tamed the savage continent, peopled the solitude, gathered wealth untold, waxed potent, imposing, redoubtable; and now it remains for her to prove, if she can, that the rule of the masses is consistent with the highest growth of the individual; that democracy can give the world a civilization as mature and pregnant, ideas as energetic and vitalizing, and types of manhood as lofty and strong, as any of the systems which it boasts to supplant. (Montcalm and Wolfe, II, 413-14)

Thus the story of France and England in North America involves more than a bare conflict, with a foregone conclusion, between "liberty" and "absolutism." The rise of British America is a triumphant drama, qualified by grave character defects on the part of the protagonist. And conversely, the fall of New France is a tragedy, involving failure and defeat in spite of certain unmistakable virtues.

It is the tragedy of New France which mainly interests Parkman, and which provides the main unifying principle for the series as a whole. In the later volumes, particularly those dealing with the eighteenth-century wars, the attention shifts more and more to the British American colonies, as the author prepares for the inevitable conclusion of the story. But through all the volumes, the main emphasis is on the decline of the French American empire. It was an empire, Parkman insists, more impressive in certain ways than any the

world had ever seen, and built by individuals of unmistakable intellectual and moral superiority; but almost from the beginning, it was plagued by severe internal and external difficulties. "The story of New France opens with a tragedy," he announces in an ominous prefatory note to the first part, Pioneers of France in the New World (1865). The sixteenth-century Spanish massacre of Huguenot settlers is the first of a succession of bleak anecdotes from early French North American history which provide an ominous counterpoint to the chronicle of exploration and settlement: Champlain's provocation of the Iroquois who eventually brought Canada near to ruin, the wretched failure of the first Acadian colony, the French defeat in the first armed conflict with the English in the New World, and as a climactic prefiguration of ultimate disaster, the temporary loss of Quebec to England in 1629. The second part of the series, The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century (1867), continues in the same vein, with the story of the tragically futile mission to the Hurons. In The Discovery of the Great West (1869; revised in 1878 as La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West) the emphasis is less on the ultimate significance of French westward exploration than on the frustration and disaster that marked the career of the ill-fated Robert Cavelier de la Salle. The Old Regime in Canada (1874) and Count Frontenac and New France Under Louis XIV (1877) describe the internal corruption and strife which contributed to the downfall of the French

colonial empire. Count Frontenac also focuses on the rivalry with New England, which even in the seventeenth century was beginning to surpass New France in wealth and power. This rivalry, repeatedly flaring into open war, is followed to its catastrophe in one of the longest and most ambitious segments of the series, Montcalm and Wolfe (1888). And finally, in the only part written out of chronological order, Parkman goes back to consider certain crucial events of the rivalry during the early eighteenth century in A Half-Century of Conflict (1892).

The ambivalent qualities of New France and its heroes which made them both magnificent and doomed to defeat are related particularly to one motif running all through France and England in North America. Thoreau, it will be recalled, was struck by the vestiges of medievalism in the society of Canada East. These vestiges he contrasted to the great age of French exploration and adventure, which seemed to him more modern than nineteenth-century Canada, in the sense that the explorers and coureurs de bois were comparable to the modern pioneers of the western United States. Parkman, who was more familiar than Thoreau with the details of Canadian history, understood that medievalism had been pervasive in New France from the beginning. As a retrospective and regressive influence, it worked against the "natural" progress of the New World civilization and contributed to the downfall of the French empire in North America. But at the same time (as

Thoreau also had recognized), it had an undeniable aesthetic appeal. This dualistic attitude towards medievalism is evident in Parkman's description of Samuel de Champlain:

A true hero, after the chivalrous medieval type, his character was dashed largely with the spirit of romance. Though earnest, sagacious, and penetrating, he leaned to the marvelous; and the faith which was the life of his hard career was somewhat prone to overstep the bounds of reason and invade the domain of fancy. (Pioneers, II, 61)

Similarly, although the devotion to archaic ideals and beliefs led in the long run to social decadence and collapse, such devotion could contribute in a localized or temporary way to the cause of progress and civilization. This is the case with the Jesuit missionaries in Canada, who were "thoroughly and vehemently reactive" in their devotion to "the medieval type of Christianity with all its attendant superstitions";

Yet, on the whole, the labors of the missionaries tended greatly to the benefit of the Indians. Reclaimed . . . from their wandering life, settled in habits of peaceful industry, and reduced to a passive and childlike obedience, they would have gained more than enough to compensate them for the loss of their ferocious and miserable independence. (Jesuits, II, 257)

The medieval spirit of religious zeal could also occasionally inspire enterprises of extraordinary boldness and resolution which produced far-reaching and durable results. In 1660, a small band of adventurers ultimately known to Canadian tradition as "the heroes of the Long Sault," led by a young nobleman named Adam Daulac (or Dollard), devoted themselves to a suicidal expedition against the Iroquois, an expedition which virtually saved the little colony from

extinction. Daulac, says Parkman, "was a knight of the early crusades among the forests and savages of the New World" (Old Regime, I, 129). Equally remarkable were the religious zealots who defied the Iroquois to create in the wilderness a medical mission which evolved into one of the most unusual cities in North America. "In many of its aspects," Parkman comments, "this enterprise of Montreal belonged to the time of the first crusades" (Jesuits, II, 23).

Ultimately, Parkman is unable to make any conclusive judgement on the medieval impulse which inspired the founders of Montreal, the Jesuit martyrs, and the heroes of the Long Sault. The New England historian's Unitarian upbringing and his personal agnosticism are unsympathetic to the mystical enthusiasm of the early Canadian Roman Catholic missions; yet some of the achievements of the church in New France make an irresistible appeal to his imagination. Parkman explicitly reveals his ambivalent feelings in his comment on the founding of Montreal:

What shall we say of these adventurers of Montreal, of these who bestowed their wealth, and far more, of these who sacrificed their peace and risked their lives, on an enterprise at once so romantic and so devout? Surrounded as they were with illusions, false lights, and false shadows,--breathing an atmosphere of miracle,--compassed about with angels and devils,--urged with stimulants most powerful, though unreal,--their minds drugged, as it were, to preternatural excitement,--it is very difficult to judge of them. High merit, without doubt, there was in some of their number; but one may beg to be spared the attempt to measure or define it. To estimate a virtue involved in conditions so anomalous demands, perhaps, a judgement more than human. (Jesuits, II, 22-23)

The medievalism of New France also had an important secular manifestation, about which Parkman is equally inconclusive. The feudal system established in Canada in the seventeenth century and consolidated under Louis XIV and his governor Frontenac tended to promote the centralization of power at the expense of individualism and freedom. Yet, as Parkman particularly demonstrates in The Old Regime in Canada, such a system was not inappropriate to a wilderness colony constantly threatened by Indians and by unfriendly colonies to the south. The ancient traditions which bound the settlers to seigneur and king were of inestimable value as a general source of social stability, and could be put to advantage during the frequent military crises which beset the colony, when an armed force could be quickly raised by indisputable order from the central government at Quebec. This situation, as Parkman frequently points out in later volumes, differed strikingly from that in the more libertarian American colonies, where attempts to raise troops were always accompanied by wrangling and dissension. In the long run, however, Canadian feudalism failed to create a durable and stable society. The aristocratic colonial administrators in France were bent on establishing in North America a miniature reflection of the mother country; but such a rigid and artificial social structure proved to be completely inappropriate to the New World situation. The Canadian settlers rejected the title of peasant and insisted on reserving to themselves the neutral



appellation habitant. They refused to take up the backwoods farms arranged in European fashion around the manoir, but defied authorities to homestead on the more valuable land fronting the St. Lawrence River, even though the latter arrangement rendered communal defense against Indian attacks very difficult. In extreme instances--which became all too common as the population of the colony grew--they rejected the feudal society altogether and took to the woods, becoming coureurs de bois engaged in the outlawed independent fur trade.

With even more fatal consequences for the feudal society of Canada, many colonial aristocrats also responded to the appeal of the wilderness and preferred a life of bushranging or exploring or guerilla warfare to the sedentary role of seigneur or administrator. The famous Baron Saint-Castin, for instance, directed a huge illegal fur trade operation from his stronghold in the woods of what ultimately became the state of Maine. Even the governors themselves, notably the irrepressible Frontenac, were prone to neglect administrative duties in order to engage in clandestine fur trade operations, or to lead hit-and-run raids against the Mohawks or the English, or to engage in exploration of the western frontier. The result, says Parkman in A Half-Century of Conflict, was that

Canada was divided between two opposing influences. On the one side were the monarchy and the hierarchy, with their principles of order, subordination, and obedience.

. . . On the other side was the spirit of liberty, or licence, which was in the very air of this wilderness continent, reinforced in the chiefs of the colony by a spirit of adventure inherited from the Middle Ages, and by a spirit of trade born of present opportunities; for every official in Canada hoped to make a profit, if not a fortune, out of beaver-skins. Kindred impulses, in ruder forms, possessed the humbler colonists, drove them into the forest, and made them hardy woodsmen and skilful bush-fighters, though turbulent and lawless members of civilized society. (Half-Century, I, 347)

As in his portrayal of the medieval religious zeal which inspired the Huron missions and the founding of Montreal, Parkman does not offer a conclusive moral judgement on either Canadian feudalism or its libertarian reaction. He disapproves of the lawlessness of the coureurs de bois, but his own fondness for the strenuous life in the wilderness inclines him to view their way of life sympathetically:

Though not a very valuable member of society, and though a thorn in the side of princes and rulers, the coureur de bois had his uses, at least from an artistic point of view; and his strange figure, sometimes brutally savage, but oftener marked with the lines of a dare-devil courage, and a reckless thoughtless gayety, will always be joined to the memories of that grand world of woods which the nineteenth century is fast civilizing out of existence. (Old Regime, II, 113)

Conversely, he finds much to deplore in the tyranny and corruption of the landowners and colonial administrators of New France. But at the same time, he cannot refrain from admiring their efforts to create a regulated and stable society, even though their achievements were eventually swept away in the collapse of the entire colony.

Parkman's sympathy with the feudal system of New France is notably evident in his version of the famous Acadian war

between d'Aulnay and La Tour. This episode of French North American history, as has been seen, attracted the attention of other nineteenth-century American writers, including the poet Whittier. Its appeal lay, no doubt, in the fact that La Tour, as a bourgeois and ostensible Protestant who rebelled against the French government and against the aristocratic Roman Catholic d'Aulnay, seemed to prefigure the revolutionary spirit of the United States. This is the interpretation followed by one of Parkman's most devoted literary disciples, the Ohio-born historical romancer Mary Catherwood (1847-1902), in The Lady of Fort St. John (1892). But in this instance Mary Catherwood departed from her literary mentor, for Parkman comes down firmly on the side of d'Aulnay. Although he admits candidly that "throughout this affair one is perplexed by the French official papers, whose entanglements and contradictions in regard to the Acadian rivals are past unravelling" (Old Regime, I, 28), Parkman proceeds to impugn La Tour as a dissembler and opportunist, and to praise his rival as a sincere and loyal devotee to the cause of French colonialism.

He [d'Aulnay] seems to have been a favorable example of his class; loyal to his faith and his king, tempering pride with courtesy, and generally true to his cherished ideal of the gentilhomme français. In his qualities, as in his birth, he was far above his rival, and his death was the ruin of the only French colony in Acadia that deserved the name. (Old Regime, I, 49)

In view of the fact that Parkman admits the impossibility of conclusively judging the respective claims of the Acadian rivals, his preference for d'Aulnay might be interpreted as

the class-conscious bias of a Boston "brahmin." It is very difficult, however, to erect such inclinations of the historian into a thoroughly consistent system. In general, his basic attitude to most of the protagonists of French-Canadian history is scrupulously objective. If he has a slight preference for the aristocratic hero, he is always careful to support his preference with convincing evidence or reasonable inference. With one notable exception (to be considered presently), there are in France and England in North America no "larger-than-life" aristocratic protagonists on the Shakespearean pattern. His representation of Frontenac, for instance, studiously avoids the exaggerations and legends which attracted the attention of such mass-circulation writers as Alfred B. Street (Frontenac, 1850) and dime novelist Ann Stephens (Ahmo's Plot, 1863). Even at the conclusion of Count Frontenac and New France Under Louis XIV, where a historian might justifiably indulge in speculative generalizations, Parkman offers no judgement of Frontenac. Instead, he presents a seventeenth-century eulogy of the governor, side-by-side with a refutation of the eulogy by one of Frontenac's enemies. Finally, Parkman remarks succinctly, "His own acts and words best paint his character, and it is needless to enlarge on it" (Count Frontenac, pp. 458-59).

Conversely, there are no "natural noblemen" in France and England in North America comparable to the Franco-American guide of Parkman's youthful work The Oregon Trail. Parkman

avoids, furthermore, the recurrent tendency among his contemporary countrymen to idealize the Acadians who were expelled by the British in 1755. Instead, he emphasizes the extreme ignorance of the peasants, the nefarious influence of intriguing priests, and the nerve-fraying effect of an interminable guerilla war which exasperated the British administrators of Acadia and finally provoked them to sudden and violent reaction (Montcalm and Wolfe, chapter 8). Unlike the simplification of Bancroft, Parkman's version thus disperses the guilt, in an extremely vexed historical question, among all parties involved.

There is one segment of France and England in North America, however, in which the author's objectivity gives way to a very personal point of view. The central character of La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West is compared to other prominent figures in the history of Canada, and singled out for unusual distinction:

The enthusiasm of the disinterested and chivalrous Champlain was not the enthusiasm of La Salle; nor had he any part in the self-devoted zeal of the early Jesuit explorers. He belonged not to the age of the knight-errant and the saint, but to the modern world of practical study and practical action. (La Salle, pp. 430-31)

It is understandable that the story of French exploration of Illinois and the Mississippi should be of particular interest to a United States historian, and that Parkman should be personally attracted to the early history of a region which he knew well from his youthful experiences on the Oregon

Trail. But it is not so immediately obvious why he should center his story of these explorations on the biography of Robert Cavelier de la Salle, who was only one of many notable French adventurers who contributed to the opening of the great west. Certainly La Salle was a very colorful figure, and his eventual discovery of the mouth of the Mississippi is an indisputably crucial event in North American history. Bancroft represented La Salle as the central character in his brief account of French westward exploration in The History of the United States. But as Parkman frequently indicates, achievements at least as important as La Salle's Mississippi explorations are associated with such names as Joliette and Marquette, Daniel Du Lhut, La Verendrye and his sons, and Henri de Tonti. La Salle, furthermore, was almost ludicrously unfortunate in most of his attempts to find the mouth of the great river. After two expeditions which were plagued by Indian attacks, mutiny of his men, mysterious disappearance of supply ships, and withdrawal of the support of the colonial administration, he made a final attempt by sailing through the Gulf of Mexico, a voyage which ended finally in shipwreck hundreds of miles from his goal, at the site of Galveston, Texas. Yet Parkman insists on presenting La Salle as a tragic hero whose resolution and self-reliance elevate him from his pseudo-medieval environment and identify him with the nineteenth century.

It seems evident that Parkman's exaltation of La Salle

stems from the historian's tendency to identify himself personally with the explorer. In general characteristics, La Salle appears to be a man very much like Parkman himself: aloof, scholarly, of distinguished family, fond of the wilderness and of adventure--and, perhaps most significant of all, prone to periodical mental imbalance. Although Parkman was usually extremely conscientious in his handling of primary source materials, he seems in his study of La Salle to have suppressed and even distorted certain evidence in order to make his subject answer to a preconceived tragic image. Neglecting the accounts of La Salle written by the explorer's rivals and associates, Parkman rather naively takes La Salle's own account of himself at face value, and reports (in a paraphrase of La Salle's own words) that "this solitary being, hiding his shyness under a cold reserve, could rouse no enthusiasm in his followers" (La Salle, p. 340). In addition, "Parkman . . . considerably improved the literary quality . . . of La Salle's letters in the translations he made of them from French documentary sources,"<sup>8</sup> in order to prove that La Salle "was no rude son of toil, but a man of thought, trained amid arts and letters" (La Salle, p. 198).

But if Parkman became imaginatively involved with the character of La Salle to the point of distorting historical evidence, the instance is exceptional. As a historian, Parkman was conscientious and thorough, and even more objective than might be expected of a scholar who lived in an age which

valued moral didacticism more highly than scientific detachment. But inevitably, in common with virtually every author who ever lived, he put into his writing many of the common assumptions of his historical period and nationality and social class, as well as many aspects of his unique personality and experience. His belief in progress, civilization, and the republican form of government, as has been shown, is made explicit in the introduction to his opening volume. But, on the other hand, his qualifications of these beliefs are demonstrated in virtually every chapter of France and England in North America. His interest in the French-Canadian aristocracy and the feudal system is repeatedly made evident. But his ability to sympathize with more primitive individuals and more libertarian ways of life is equally clear.

Perhaps, finally, the most prominent bias in his image of early Canada is a very natural tendency to neglect people, places and experiences of which he had little direct knowledge, while over-emphasizing certain features of French-Canadian history which evoked personal associations for him or which were of particular relevance to the United States. The many military campaigns around Lakes George and Champlain, for instance, are always described in great detail, with particular emphasis on the exhausting progress of the armies through a wilderness which the author knew intimately. But one of the boldest and most extraordinary expeditions in the history of Canada, the French overland march to James Bay and



the attack on the English trading posts there in 1686 (Count Frontenac, chapter 7) is told very briefly--presumably because Parkman had no knowledge of the region involved. Similarly, the explorations of La Verendrye in the "Oregon Trail" country are described at great length; but his equally significant fur-trading expeditions north of Lake Superior and to the site of modern Winnipeg are passed over fairly quickly (Half-Century, chapter 16).

But these few illustrations of some principles of emphasis in Parkman's histories might also be related to the fact that he saw the rise and fall of New France as essentially a prologue to the emergence of the United States. His indifference to nineteenth-century Canada as a social and political entity, evident from the cryptic references in his letters and journals, has been developed by at least one commentator into an accusation of excessive romanticization of the Canadian past. "He assumed," says Canadian historian George M. Wrong, "something which a deeper knowledge of the present in Canada would have shown him to be not quite true, that the dominion of the French in America had vanished and was only a memory."<sup>9</sup> But this is clearly a twentieth-century judgement. Parkman, like Thoreau before him, and like most nineteenth-century Americans, believed that the French and the Indians were doomed to disappear in "the Saxon current." He also probably believed--if he gave the matter any thought at all--that Canada would eventually be absorbed into the

American union. The remarkable feature of France and England in North America is the fact that within this intellectual context of historical inevitability it portrays the tragic fall of a supposedly doomed nation with great sympathy and narrative power.

Notes to Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup>The Letters of Francis Parkman, ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), I, 119.

<sup>2</sup>"The Works of James Fenimore Cooper," Francis Parkman: Representative Selections, ed. Wilbur L. Schramm (New York: American Book Company, 1938), pp. 202-17.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Thoreau, "A Yankee in Canada," Excursions and Poems, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press), p. 67.

<sup>4</sup>All quotations from France and England in North America refer to the Frontenac Edition of Francis Parkman's Works, 16 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915).

<sup>5</sup>William R. Taylor, "Francis Parkman," Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians, ed. Marcus Cunliffe and Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 4. Taylor cites a few specific historians who have expressed this view in various ways.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed discussion of the intellectual background of the American "romantic" historians, see David Levin, History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), especially chapter two, "Nature, Progress, and Moral Judgment."

<sup>7</sup>The Letters of Francis Parkman, II, 82.

<sup>8</sup>William R. Taylor, "Francis Parkman," p. 34.

<sup>9</sup>George M. Wrong, "Francis Parkman," Canadian Historical Review, 4 (Dec., 1923), 289-303.

## VIII

## THE SUCCESSORS OF PARKMAN: HOWELLS AND OTHERS

## 1.

Although Parkman's histories had considerable popular and critical success in the United States and Canada, and provided a strong impetus to both French- and English-Canadian scholars in the study of their country's past, they did not inspire historians in the nineteenth-century United States to pursue similar intensive researches into the subject of New France. Those historians who specialized in North American studies continued to devote their attention to the origin and development of their own country, and Parkman's suggestion that the collapse of New France led directly to American independence was apparently considered too much of an oversimplification to warrant further study of early Canada. There was, furthermore, some feeling after the seven segments of France and England in North America had appeared that Parkman had exhausted the subject entirely. In any case, by 1893--just one year after the publication of A Half-Century of Conflict--American historiography was impelled in a new direction, both ideologically and geographically, with the western frontier hypothesis of Frederick Jackson Turner, and with the advent of the new "social science" approach to history, of which Turner was a leading exponent. Parkman, unlike other so-called "romantic" historians such as Bancroft

and Prescott, continued to be read and admired for both his scholarly accuracy and narrative power; but there was a growing popular and academic tendency to associate him with the authors which he himself placed among his primary influences, the historical novelists Cooper and Scott.<sup>1</sup>

But in spite of his affinities with writers of fiction, Parkman's influence on the late nineteenth-century American historical romance seems to have been minimal. Comparatively few authors of the post-civil war period looked back to a subject which had been thoroughly exploited by Cooper and his imitators, and those few often preferred a simpler and less scholarly approach to the material than Parkman's example provided. Edward P. Tenney (1835-1916) cites Parkman among other sources in Constance of Acadia (1886), which retells the story of Madame de la Tour and her defense of Fort St. John. Tenney echoes Parkman's analogy between New France and medieval Europe, but rejects the historian's aristocratic bias, to make his heroine and her followers prefigure the democratic spirit of the American revolution. William H.H. Murray (1840-1904) ignores Parkman completely and goes back to Cooper for two quaint and stilted imitations of the Leatherstocking tales, Mamelons (1888) and Ungava (1890), which involve a racially conscious Homeric hero "The Trapper" and various doomed tribes of Indians and Eskimos in northern Quebec and Labrador. John R. Musick (1848-1901) was the author of a series of novelizations of North American history,

adapted from various sources, probably including Parkman.

Braddock: A Story of the French and Indian Wars and Sustained Honor: A Story of the War of 1812 (both 1893) are undistinguished recitals of the prominent facts of their respective historical periods, as seen through the eyes of two young American protagonists. James K. Hosmer (1833-1927) wrote How Thankful was Bewitched: A Story of Cotton Mather's Day (1894), which deals with New England Puritans carried captive to Canada. Hosmer was a distinguished scholar of New England history (he edited John Winthrop's Journal in 1908), and probably constructed his story from his study of primary sources. On a more "popular" level, and probably derived from histories of North America considerably less reliable and scholarly than Parkman's, are Joseph A. Altsheler's A Soldier of Manhattan and his Adventures at Ticonderoga and Quebec (1887), and The Boy Officers of 1812 (1898), by E.T. Tomlinson.

Parkman's only disciple of any consequence in the field of the historical romance was Mary Catherwood, who in the last decade of the century drew on France and England in North America for background information to produce a series of novels set in Canada. Parkman was impressed enough with the first of these works, The Romance of Dollard (1889), to write a preface for it, in which he suggested that the author had surpassed Cooper, at least in her direct and comprehensive treatment of the Canadian theme:

The author is a pioneer in what may be called a new departure in American fiction. Fenimore Cooper, in his fresh and manly way, sometimes touches Canadian subjects and introduces us to French soldiers and bush-rangers; but he knew Canada only from the outside, having no means of making its acquaintance from within, and it is only from within that its quality as romance can be appreciated. The hard and practical features of English colonization seem to frown down every excursion of fancy as pitilessly as puritanism itself did in its day. A feudal society, on the other hand, with its contrasted lights and shadows, its rivalries and passions, is the natural theme of romance; and when to lord and vassal is joined a dominant hierarchy with its patient martyrs and its spiritual despots, side by side with savage chiefs and warriors jostling the representatives of the most gorgeous civilization of modern times,--the whole strange scene set in an environment of primeval forests,--the spectacle is as striking as it is unique.<sup>2</sup>

This description of the romance of Canadian feudalism seems, however, to refer more to Parkman's own concrete and vivid treatment of the subject than to the fiction of Mary Catherwood. Except for a few descriptive and narrative passages obviously adapted from Parkman, The Romance of Dollard hardly deals with Canadian feudalism at all. The author's concern is with love and marriage and female virtue and fidelity: experiences and qualities which throughout the nineteenth century were staple ingredients of the so-called "domestic sentimentalist" school of fiction. As a literary pioneer, Mary Catherwood directed her main efforts toward the militant feminism of the late nineteenth century, which she represents through a series of aggressive and independent heroines. In The Romance of Dollard she provides the leader of the Long Sault expedition with an imaginary wife who zealously follows her husband to martyrdom; in The Story of Tonty (1890) she

provides La Salle's lieutenant with a resourceful young female companion; in The Lady of Fort St. John (1891) she depicts in imaginative detail the legendary Amazonian qualities of Madame de la Tour; and in The Chase of St. Castin and Other Stories (1894) she follows the careers of various historical and mythical heroines of New France.

Ironically, Parkman was a devoted anti-feminist, as he revealed in an article denouncing female suffrage ("The Woman Question," published in the North American Review, 1879), and in his novel Vassal Morton, whose hero finally prefers the meekly submissive heroine over a more aggressive "liberated" femme fatale. The historian either consciously or unconsciously closed his eyes to Mary Catherwood's feminism, in his gratification at finding at least one novelist who deals with the romance of Canadian feudalism in a manner roughly comparable to his own conception of the subject.

An earlier and slighter fictional adaptation of Parkman is "Le Coureur de Bois," a short story published in Scribner's for May, 1876. Taking as an epigraph a quotation about the coureurs de bois from The Old Regime in Canada, the author tells how a young French-Canadian girl is lured from her home by a trapper, whom she follows into the northern wilderness. Instead of celebrating the strenuous life in the forest, however, the story involves a conflict between two opposing ways of life: the "feminine" virtues of domesticity and marital fidelity are contrasted to the masculine inclination toward



independence and licentiousness. Finally, after a crisis in which the two lovers narrowly escape a freezing death in the wilderness, the hero is won over--like innumerable heroes of the "domestic sentimentalist" tradition--to the virtues of home and fireside.

This story would probably have struck Parkman as a perversion of his ideas about the "manly" life--although he presumably would have approved of the Canadian setting and characters. The author of "Le Coureur de Bois" was Ohio-born Annie Howells Fréchette, who settled in Ottawa with her Canadian husband and pursued a part-time career writing stories and articles for the American and Canadian quarterlies. That Parkman's very masculine image of Canada should appeal to the "domestic sentimentalists" is a notable irony of literary history; and the situation is made even more incongruous by the fact that this author was the younger sister of the chief exponent of realism in late nineteenth-century American literature, William Dean Howells. The vagaries of literary affinities are further demonstrated in the fact that Howells and other devotees of the realist movement ultimately provided the most significant direct literary sequel to Parkman's histories.

Parkman knew Howells and liked the young westerner personally, but found his literary tastes decidedly uncongenial, as he confided in a letter to a friend in 1890:

I regard [Walter Scott] as an educational force of the

first value, in all the qualities of the man and the gentleman; and if, as Mr. Howells tells us, his influence is undemocratic, then so much the worse for democracy. For my part I would rather my son should take lessons from Guy Mannering than from The Rise of Silas Lapham.<sup>3</sup>

The author of Silas Lapham was not, however, conversely antipathetic to France and England in North America. Younger historians turned away from Parkman towards new subjects and ideologies, and only one or two minor writers of fiction showed interest in the romance of Canadian feudalism; but Howells and a few "realist" colleagues discovered in Parkman's histories several important suggestions for their continuing attempt to analyze and define North American civilization.

## 2.

Howells was only one of several notable American author-travelers of the post-civil war period who expressed an interest in Canada. This interest can, of course, be related to the general prosperity of the age and the revitalization of American tourism, as well as to Parkman's influence. In The Innocents Abroad (1869) Mark Twain concluded from the hordes of Americans rushing to get passage on the trans-Atlantic steamers that "everybody was going to Europe";<sup>4</sup> but as always throughout the nineteenth century, a significant segment of the traveling population--including, eventually, Mark Twain himself--were making the more economical tour of the northern provinces. In the closing months of the war, one of Mark Twain's literary predecessors, "Artemus Ward" (Charles F. Browne) reported that he was "travellin among the

crowned heads of Canady," and went on through several paragraphs in Artemus Ward: His Travels to poke clumsy fun at the usual subjects of interest to Americans, such as the colonial status of Canada ("Altho' this is a monikal form of Gov'ment, I am onable to perceive much moniky. I tried to git a piece in Toronto, but failed to succeed"), and the fortifications of Quebec ("Quebec is full of stone walls, and arches, and citadels, and things. It is said no foe could get into Quebec, and I guess they couldn't. And I don't see what they'd want to get in there for.").<sup>5</sup> In 1874, Mark Twain's friend and one-time collaborator Charles Dudley Warner published a little book entitled Baddeck, describing a brief visit to a remote settlement on northern Cape Breton Island. The insular, Gaelic-speaking population and the various signs of economic and political retardation led him to pronounce the whole nation "a foggy land . . . which is neither a republic nor a monarchy, but merely a languid expectation of something undefined."<sup>6</sup> And in 1880, Mark Twain devoted two brief pages of his notebook to light-hearted observations on his visit to Montreal, Quebec, and Montmorency:

Drove halfway to the Falls of Montmorency, then came back and bought a photograph. The wind down on the low ground was mighty cold. The photograph is very satisfactory.<sup>7</sup>

A more serious attempt to convey impressions of Canada is the essay "French Canada" by E.L. Godkin (1831-1902), the influential owner and editor of the Nation, who visited Quebec City and environs in the summer of 1868. An erudite social

critic and historian, Godkin was a friend and intellectual associate of both Howells and Parkman, and almost certainly must have read the two volumes of France and England in North America which had appeared by 1868.

In spite of the suggestion of his title, Godkin divides his attention fairly equally between the two linguistic communities of Quebec province. The English Canadians he finds objectionable for their lack of cultural independence:

One has hardly set foot in the country when one is struck by the well-known colonial tendency to out-Herod Herod. They [the English Canadians] are considerably more English, in all things in which resemblance to the English is possible, than the English themselves. ("French Canada," 128).<sup>8</sup>

This deliberate imitation of foreign customs, Godkin insists, inevitably impedes the natural development of the country:

One cannot remain very long in Canada without having the idea very strongly presented to one that even a slight political connection between a colony and "the mother country" is a curse to the colony. As long as they are bound together, even by the light silken tie of allegiance, really healthy political and social life seems to be impossible for the latter. A people whose manners are not the natural result of its own character and culture, but a laborious copy of those of another people, differently situated and in a different stage of development, of course suffers much both morally and mentally, no matter what amount of political freedom it may enjoy. (128)

The main ambition of the English-Canadian businessman, Godkin continues, is to make a fortune and retire to England, while large segments of the laboring classes aspire to immigrate to the United States. The movement southward "has even reached the French, to whom the United States has been hitherto a

land as far off as when the Indians came down from the St. Lawrence to harry the New England heretics" (129).

In contrast to his rather contemptuous view of the English, Godkin's attitude to the French Canadians is quite sympathetic. Claiming to have "a respectable knowledge of French," he implies that he has conversed with various representatives of the population in Quebec City and the villages of the lower St. Lawrence. A lack of fluency in the language, he remarks in passing, "makes Thoreau's account of his Canadian trip as nearly worthless as anything emanating from so close an observer could well be" (129). But Thoreau, for all his difficulty with the language, met and conversed with a fairly representative cross-section of habitants in their familiar home environment. Godkin, like Richard Henry Dana, limits his contacts to a slightly higher social level. Indeed, the only Canadian he specifically mentions talking to is a wealthy lawyer and landowner. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to generalize about the French Canadians, whom he finds superior to their European counterparts:

Priest-ridden and seigneur-ridden though he has been, the free air of the wilderness has given the Canadian a dignity and self-respect in which the French peasant, in spite of the Revolution, is still wanting. (147)

"The French Canadians," he goes on to report, "instead of declining before the Anglo-Saxons, gain on them rapidly, and bid fair before many years to have the lower province almost entirely to themselves" (147). In spite of this population

growth, however, Godkin assumes with Thoreau and Parkman that the French Canadians will eventually disappear in the "Saxon current":

[They] will probably preserve their language and manners intact till the whole country is annexed to the United States. Both will probably then disappear rapidly before the terrible solvent of American ideas and institutions. With them will disappear the last relic of old France, and probably, outside of the Tyrol, the purest and simplest, most prosperous and most pious Catholic community on the globe. (148)

As these concluding remarks reveal, Godkin views the fate of modern French Canada with an ambivalence comparable to that in Parkman's retrospective view of New France. The "terrible solvent" of American democracy will eventually engulf the whole continent, in that irresistible historical process which decrees a constant development towards social perfection. But in this process, something of value will regrettably be lost.

The unfortunate aspects of a possible American annexation of Canada was one concern of another brief travel essay originally written for the Nation. Henry James, just at the beginning of his brilliant and influential literary career, visited Quebec City and Montmorency in 1871. After describing various features of the city and neighboring countryside as seen by a hypothetical "sentimental tourist," he concluded

I suppose no patriotic American can look at all these things, however idly, without reflecting on the ultimate possibility of their becoming absorbed into his own huge state. Whenever, sooner or later, the change is wrought, the sentimental tourist will keenly feel that a long stride has been taken, rough-shod, from the past to the

present. The largest appetite in modern civilization will have swallowed the largest morsel. What the change may bring of comfort or of grief to the Canadians themselves, will be for them to say; but, in the breast of this sentimental tourist of ours, it will produce little but regret. The foreign elements of eastern Canada, at least, are extremely interesting; and it is of good profit to us Americans to have near us, and of easy access, an ample something which is not our expansive selves. Here we find a hundred mementoes of an older civilization than our own, of different manners, of social forces once mighty, and still glowing with a sort of autumnal warmth. ("Quebec," pp. 362-63)<sup>9</sup>

Four years before his visit to Quebec, James wrote for the Nation a review of The Jesuits in North America, in which he indicated his general agreement with Parkman about the history of France in the New World. The French, James observed, wasted their time ranging the wilderness and trying to convert morally unregenerate savages, while in the American colonies "prolific Dutch farmers and Puritan divines were building up the state of New York and the commonwealth of Massachusetts." Nevertheless, the "faith, patience, and courage" of such zealots as the Jesuit missionaries "form a very interesting chapter in the history of the human mind."<sup>10</sup> But in spite of James's agreement with Parkman, and in spite of his declared interest in Quebec as a reminder of "social forces once mighty," it is with the eye of the artist rather than the moralist or social historian that he views the Canadian city. The essay on Quebec is mainly a series of picturesque tableaux which call attention to the quaintness of the city and surrounding countryside, rather than to the vestiges of the powerful and glorious French colonial empire.

As James approaches the city, he sees through the misty window of the railway carriage "a huge monotony of most unstoried wilderness"; then suddenly, as Quebec comes into view, "the Old World rises in the midst of the New in the manner of a change of scene on the stage" (p. 351). In the city, he takes note of the "foreign architecture," the "foreign pinks, greens, and yellows plastering the house-fronts," and "all the pleasant crookedness, and narrowness, and duskiness, the quaint economised spaces" (p. 352). After thus cataloguing various details at close view, he imaginatively draws back and contemplates the city

. . . perched on its mountain of rock, washed by a river as free and ample as an ocean-gulf, sweeping from its embattled crest the villages, the forests, the blue undulations of the imperial province of which it is warden. (p. 355)

Quebec appears to James, as it appeared to Thoreau, a diminutive and fictive world set down in incongruous juxtaposition to the vast North American wilderness. And where Thoreau was reminded of Froissart's Chronicles, of Scott's medieval romances, and of Provence and the troubadours, James also thinks of certain literary antecedents. In "the little residential streets . . . some of the houses have the staleness of complexion which Balzac loved to describe." Strolling through these streets, James encounters "little old Frenchmen who look as if they had stepped out of Balzac" (pp. 357-58). Subsequently, he finds that the appearance of modest prosperity, domestic comfort, and naive piety remind him of another



literary analogue: "It is, perhaps, not Longfellow's 'Evangeline' for chapter and verse, but it is a tolerable prose transcript" (p. 359).

Besides relating Quebec to literature, James inevitably considers the city in the light of his experience of Europe. Like Thoreau, he vaguely disapproves of the attempt to create the facade of Old World civilization in the New World wilderness, and he represents Quebec as a deliberate deception: "The place, after all, is of the soil on which it stands; yet it appeals to you so cunningly with its little stock of transatlantic wares that you overlook its flaws and lapses, and swallow it whole" (p. 351). In the countryside near Quebec, he finds the reminiscence of Europe rather appealing:

The rows of poplars, the heavy stone cottages, seamed and cracked with time in many cases, and daubed in coarse bright hues, the little bourgeois villas, rising middle-aged at the end of short vistas, the sunburnt women in the fields, the old men in woollen stockings and red nightcaps, the long-kirtled curé nodding to doffed hats, the more or less bovine stare which greets you from cottage-doors, are all so many touches of a local color reflected from over the sea. (p. 360)

And in the village of Château-Richer he is so forcibly reminded of rural France that he finds himself looking for the "elderly manor which might have baptised it." "But of course," he adds, "in such pictorial efforts as this Quebec breaks down; one must not ask too much of it" (pp. 361-62).

On the whole, James's impressions of French Canada are rather inconclusive. He finds "a palpable atmosphere, a rare physiognomy" which he vaguely recognizes as unique, but which

he is able to define only tentatively, by reference to literature and to his experience of Europe. Quebec presents a vestigial image of the mighty social forces which formed the main theme of Parkman's New World epic, as well as a distorted reflection of the Old World to which James was so devoted. But in this incongruous juxtaposition he can find no formal unity, no distinct identity. The city and surrounding countryside constitute a curious and mildly interesting anomaly which, as James rather perfunctorily asserts, will probably be eventually absorbed into the main current of North American life, with the regrettable loss of a picturesque tourist attraction.

## 3.

In contrast to James's brief and rather superficial impressions of Canada, William Dean Howells' personal and literary involvement with the country was fairly extensive. He made his first visit to the northern provinces in July, 1860, as a side-trip to the famous first visit to New England described in Literary Friends and Acquaintance (1900). His impressions of Niagara Falls, Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec were included in two series of travel letters, "Glimpses of Summer Travel" and "En Passant," published in 1860 in the Cincinnati Gazette and the Ohio State Journal respectively. Much of the material gathered for these articles, supplemented by further notes from another trip made in 1870, was incorporated into his first two fictional efforts, Their Wedding

Journey (1872), and A Chance Acquaintance (1873). He used his recollections of northern travel for fiction on two further occasions, in The Quality of Mercy (1892), which includes a brief but significant Canadian episode, and in the considerably less important sentimental novella, "A Pair of Patient Lovers" (1901), the opening chapters of which involve American tourists on the St. Lawrence. Finally, he visited his sister Annie at her Ottawa home in 1906, and recorded his observations on the Canadian capital in "The Editor's Easy Chair" column of Harper's Monthly for January, 1907.<sup>11</sup>

Between the time of his first visit to Canada and the writing of Their Wedding Journey, Howells encountered the histories of Parkman. In the context of the best known features of Howells' critical theories, his admiration for Parkman appears anomalous, for there would seem to be very little common ground between the exotic and spectacular romance of Canadian feudalism and the "ordinary traits of American life"<sup>12</sup> which the younger writer aspired to record. Indeed, in Criticism and Fiction (1892), Howells insisted that novelists should confine themselves to "the things that they have observed and known" and avoid any dependence on "the things that some other artist or writer has done."<sup>13</sup> Even in the light of the reasonable assumption that Howells was not urging writers to avoid reading altogether, this statement might be interpreted as a rejection of historical literature, which of necessity is at two or more removes from direct

experience. But as is well known, it was the extravagant historical romance rather than historical writing in general that aroused Howells' antipathy and prompted many of the sweeping generalizations and over-simplifications of his critical essays. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, the American reading public was rapidly forsaking the realistic literature which Howells had fondly hoped would provide the means of conveying culture to "the common, average man, who always 'has the standard of the arts in his power'," and was turning to the cheap thrills of the "swash-buckler swashing on his buckler."<sup>14</sup> In the more optimistic and enthusiastic early years of his writing career, when realism appeared to be the irresistible literary wave of the future, Howells unhesitatingly looked in all directions--to history, to romantic poetry, even to the superior class of historical romance of which Hawthorne's work was the pre-eminent example--for formal and ideological inspiration.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1860's and 70's, Howells was particularly receptive to the influence of Parkman, for his interest in the "ordinary traits of American life" tended to expand outward to the comprehensive historical theme of the development of civilization in the New World. Inevitably, Howells thought of New World history primarily in terms of the development of his own country, and his early reactions to Parkman included an expression of regret that the historian had not taken his subject matter from "the tougher and knottier fibres of our

own annals."<sup>16</sup> Howells readily granted the intrinsic interest of the story of the French in America, and agreed with Parkman that this story involved "an attempt so grand and generous that its most comical and most ruinous consequences are never less than heroic."<sup>17</sup> But subsequently he began to see, as Parkman had seen, that the early history of Canada formed an inextricable part of the political and social background of the United States. Howells realized further that the colorful panorama of warfare and adventure in the northern wilderness had a vital relevance to the supposedly commonplace chronicle of modern American life which was to be the main subject of his own writing. The exploration of this relevance forms an important part of Their Wedding Journey.

In presenting the chronicle of commonplace events in the wedding journey of Basil and Isabel March, Howells attempted what was perhaps the purest and most thorough application of his theories of literary realism.

As in literature the true artist will shun the use even of real events if they are of an improbable character, so the sincere observer of man will not desire to look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness. To me, at any rate, he is at such times very precious; and I never perceive him to be so much a man and a brother as when I feel the pressure of his vast, natural unafflicted dulness. (TWJ, p. 55)<sup>18</sup>

This "dulness," which was by no means a pejorative term for Howells, was in his view the most characteristic feature of life in the nineteenth-century United States. Stories of

war and heroism and mass suffering were outside the ordinary course of real life. Or, as he suggested later in Criticism and Fiction, such stories belonged to the decadent, undemocratic Old World. Even after the Chicago Haymarket affair of 1886, which opened his eyes to the fact that severe injustice could exist in his own country, Howells could still say that

. . . in a land where journeymen carpenters and plumbers strike for four dollars a day the sum of hunger and cold is comparatively small, and the wrong from class to class has been almost inappreciable.

("Though all this," he added in a terse reflection on recent events, "is changing for the worse.")<sup>19</sup>

Thus the early chapters of Their Wedding Journey are devoted to a discursive and leisurely account of travel in the modern United States, with all its minor inconveniences and occasional delights: the Marches resignedly accepting the rudeness of railway and hotel employees, suffering the terrible heat wave of 1870 in New York City, indulging themselves with the extravagant splendor of a stateroom on a Hudson River steamboat. Occasionally, the author calls indirect attention to what might be considered a more serious or even tragic aspect of life. As the Marches proceed on their journey, they catch brief glimpses of urban slums, with "rows of ashbarrels, in which the decrepit children and mothers of the streets were clawing for bits of coal" (TWJ, p. 17); they witness the temporary misery of a victim of heat prostration on a New York street; and they discuss with

momentary solemnity the enigmatic cataclysm of a small boat rammed and sunk in the night on the Hudson River. But this background of extraordinary or exceptional circumstances does not seriously disturb the orderly and leisured progression of Howells' two characters along the commonplace course of their unremarkable journey, which in its placid routine of domestic detail interrupted by only brief inconvenience or by the impersonal spectacle of misfortune might be considered Howells' metaphor for the course of middle-class life in the late nineteenth-century United States.<sup>20</sup>

At Niagara Falls, a new thematic element is introduced into the story of the Marches' travels. Here, at what is perhaps the most famous geographical phenomenon in North America and is certainly the most famous border point between the United States and Canada, Basil March reflects on the historical associations evoked by the natural setting:

[Niagara's] beauty is relieved against an historical background as gloomy as the lightest-hearted tourist could desire. The abominable savages, revering the cataract as a kind of august devil, and leading a life of demoniacal misery and wickedness, whom the first Jesuits found here two hundred years ago; the ferocious Iroquois bloodily driving out these squalid devil-worshippers; the French planting the fort that yet guards the mouth of the river, and therewith the seeds of war that fruited afterwards in murderous strifes throughout the whole Niagara country; the struggle for the military posts on the river, during the wars of France and England; the awful scene in the conspiracy of Pontiac, where a detachment of English troops was driven by the Indians over the precipice near the great whirlpool; the sorrow and havoc visited upon the American settlements in the Revolution by the savages who prepared their attacks in the shadow of Fort Niagara; the battles of Chippewa and of Lundy's Lane that mixed the roar of their cannon with

that of the fall; the savage forays with tomahawk and scalping-knife, and the blazing villages on either shore in the War of 1812; these are the memories of the place, the links in a chain of tragical interest scarcely broken before our time since the white man first beheld the mist-veiled face of Niagara. (pp. 88-89).

As Howells goes on to state, this meditation has been partly inspired by his reading of Parkman. "Those precious books," he says of the four historical volumes which Parkman had published by 1870, ". . . make our meagre past wear something of the rich romance of old European days, and illumine its savage solitude with the splendor of medieval chivalry, and the glory of medieval martyrdom" (p. 89). Howells' basic literary ideal is the celebration of the common man in modern America, but he does not reject the epic and romance traditions of Europe, with their emphasis on the preeminent hero and on extraordinary incident. Indeed, he is grateful to Parkman for having shown that North America has a historical tradition comparable to the epic and romance mythology of Europe. But the important point about this tradition as it concerns America is the fact that it belongs to the past. The Indians have vanished, or appear to be dwindling to the point of extinction; French military power has disappeared from the continent; and in place of the savage war parties along the border in 1812, peaceable American tourists come to view the natural and artificial vestiges of an earlier era.

The most extensive and significant vestige of the past is, of course, Canadian society. Unlike Parkman, who took no



interest in nineteenth-century Canada beyond the opportunities the country offered for on-the-spot research, Howells is curious to explore the country with its large French population and its British colonial connections, to see how it has fared in its pursuit of a political and social development distinct from that of the United States and more closely tied to the past and to Europe.

In line with his realist inclination to define experience in terms of the commonplace and routine elements of everyday life, Howells forms his conception of modern Canada from encounters with service people or anonymous bystanders and from the various landmarks which happen to come within his observation. In general, he claims to find a more amiable and leisurely manner in the Canadian people as compared to the Americans. The porter on the St. Lawrence boat

. . . was so civil that he did not snub the meekest and most vexatious of the passengers, and Basil mutely blessed his servile soul. Few white Americans, he said to himself, would behave so decently in his place; and he could not conceive of the American steamboat clerk who would use the politeness towards a waiting crowd that the Canadian purser showed when they all wedged themselves in about his window to receive their state-room keys. (p. 107)

At Kingston, Howells travelers feel "a sense of English solidity" in the pervasive stonework of the buildings, and observe "a healthful bloom of the Old World" on the faces of the citizens, "so that one must wonder if the line between the Dominion and the United States did not also sharply separate good digestion and dyspepsia" (pp. 110-11).

But these casual observations reflect little more than the fact that the English-Canadian population of 1870 included a large element of comparatively recent British immigrants, and that the highly industrialized and commercialized economy of the United States with its inevitable bureaucracy and impersonality had not yet evolved in Canada. Howells does not discover the essential foreignness of the country until he takes his fictional travelers to Montreal.

The feeling of foreign travel for which our tourists had striven throughout their journey, and which they had known in some degree at Kingston and all the way down the river, was intensified from the first moment in Montreal. . . . At breakfast the next morning they could hardly tell on what country they had fallen. The waiters had but a thin varnish of English speech upon their native French, and they spoke their own tongue with each other; but most of the meats were cooked to the English taste, and the whole was a poor imitation of an American hotel. During their stay the same commingling of usages and races bewildered them; the shops were English and the clerks were commonly French; the carriage-drivers were often Irish, and up and down the streets with their pious old-fashioned names, tinkled American horse-cars.  
(p. 121)

Gradually, the chaotic heterogeneity of Montreal resolves into a series of related patterns. Like other American travelers, Howells notes the rather awkward zeal with which urban English Canadians try to imitate British manners and customs, and he also notes the clearly observable distinctions between the two linguistic groups in Canada:

Our friends . . . knew [the other American tourists] at a glance from the native populations, who are also easily distinguishable from each other. The French Canadians are nearly always of a peasant-like commonness, or where they rise above this, have a bourgeois commonness of face and manner; and the English Canadians are to be known

from the many English sojourners by the effort to look much more English than the latter. (p. 124)

In spite of the large French-speaking population, the most prominent feature of Montreal from the American tourist's perspective is the ubiquitous evidence of the political and cultural attachment to England. "At dinner [the Marches] spent the intervals of the courses . . . in wondering if the Canadians did not make it a matter of conscientious loyalty to out-English the English even in the matter of pale-ale and sherry, and in rotundity of person and freshness of face, just as they emulated them in the cut of their clothes and whiskers" (p. 134). This attachment is not, however, always unfavorable in its results:

The Irishmen who drove the public carriages were as civil as our own Boston hackmen, and behaved as respectfully under the shadow of England here, as they would have done under it in Ireland. The problem which vexes us seems to have been solved pleasantly enough in Canada. It is because the Celt cannot brook equality; and where he has not an established and recognized caste above him, longs to trample on those about him; and if he cannot be lowest, will at least be highest? (p. 135)

On the basis of these random observations of public life in Montreal, Howells offers a general summary of the political and social status of Canada, a summary which reveals his devotion to the ideal of North American independence from Europe. After making his comment on the Irish cabmen of Montreal, he continues:

Our friends did not suffer this or any other advantage of the colonial relation to divert them from the opinion to which their observation was gradually bringing them, that its overweening loyalty placed a great country like

Canada in a very silly attitude, the attitude of an overgrown, unmanly boy, clinging to the maternal skirts, and though spoilt and wilful, without any character of his own. The constant reference of local hopes to that remote centre beyond seas, the test of success by the criterions of a necessarily different civilization, the social and intellectual dependence implied by traits that meet the most hurried glance in the Dominion, give an effect of meanness to the whole fabric. Doubtless it is a life of comfort, of peace, of irresponsibility they live there, but it lacks the grandeur which no sum of material prosperity can give; it is ignoble, like all voluntarily subordinate things. Somehow, one feels that it has no basis in the New World, and that till it is shaken loose from England it cannot have. (p. 135)

Unlike Henry James, however, Howells does not assume that American annexation of Canada is inevitable. There is good hope, he feels, for Canada to find a distinctive national identity independent of both England and the United States:

It would be a pity . . . if [Canada] should be parted from the parent country merely to be joined to an unsympathetic half-brother like ourselves; and nothing, fortunately, seems to be further from the Canadian mind. There are some experiments no longer possible to us which could still be tried there to the advantage of civilization, and we were better two great nations side by side than a union of discordant traditions and ideas. (p. 135)

Political independence, Howells recalls, is by no means a magical guarantee of social perfection. The United States continues to be plagued by a profusion of difficulties partly or wholly derived from its status as a democratic republic.

But none the less does the American traveller, swelling with forgetfulness of the shabby despots who govern New York, and the swindling railroad kings whose word is law to the whole land, feel like saying to the hulking giant beyond St. Lawrence and the Lakes, "Sever the apron strings of allegiance, and try to be yourself, whatever you are." (pp. 135-36)

As Howells' travelers proceed down the St. Lawrence, they

find themselves moving away from the incongruities of modern Canada towards an unambiguous vestige of the colonial empire and romantic historical era which Parkman wrote about. "Come out," says Basil March to his wife from the deck of the steamboat as it approaches Quebec, "--come out into the seventeenth century" (p. 141). Even in the routine sightseer's round of a place which has degenerated from a great imperial capital to a "show city" (p. 145), the American tourists are able to evoke the splendid chronicle of discovery and adventure through the buildings and monuments associated with Cartier, Champlain, the Jesuits, Wolfe and Montcalm. But even as Howells' travelers immerse themselves in the relics of French imperial history and of the epic conflict between France and England, they find themselves again trying vainly to reconcile an incongruity in their surroundings. Quebec, much more than Montreal, is a French city; but the presence of the French race in this outpost of the northern wilderness seems somehow contradictory:

The Frenchmen, who expected to find there the climate of their native land, and ripen her wines in as kindly a sun, have perpetuated the image of home in so many things, that it goes to the heart with a painful emotion to find the sad, oblique light of the North upon them.

.....  
 Quebec, in fact, is but a pantomimic reproduction of France; it is as if two centuries in a new land, amidst the primeval silences of nature and the long hush of the Northern winters, had stilled the tongues of the lively folk and made them taciturn as we of a graver race. They have kept the ancestral vivacity of manner; the elegance of the shrug is intact; the talking hands take part in dialogue; the agitated person will have its share of expression. But the loud and eager tone is wanting, and

their dumb show mystifies the beholder almost as much as the Southern architecture under the slanting Northern sun. It is not America; if it is not France, what is it? (pp. 155, 158)

Ultimately, Quebec, like Canada as a whole, eludes Howells' attempts at final definition. Repeatedly throughout Their Wedding Journey his descriptions of the people and places become involved in ostensible contradictions and enigmas, which end in statements of uncertainty (" . . . try to be yourself, whatever you are"), or in questions (" . . . if it is not France, what is it?").

Howells makes better literary use of Canada in A Chance Acquaintance, his second work of fiction and the beginning of a series of novels involving emotional conflict and domestic crisis (a series climaxed by his first important achievement, the "divorce novel" A Modern Instance, 1882). A Chance Acquaintance is set entirely in the Quebec City and Saguenay regions; but instead of getting involved in the subtle and elusive question of the northern country's distinctive identity, he uses the Canadian scene as a backdrop for a slight but subtle tale of American tourists in a fleeting situation of infatuation and disillusionment. In depicting the brief romantic interlude involving young and inexperienced Kitty Ellison of Eriecreek and the rather world-weary and snobbish Miles Arbuton of Boston, Howells deals with a theme which is prominent throughout his work, the cultural conflict between New England and the western American frontier. If it were not for the care which Howells devotes to the minute

details of individual character, his two lovers would be almost allegorical representations of their respective regions: Kitty, the daughter of a militant abolitionist, has been brought up in an atmosphere of "fierce democracy"; Arbuton, educated in New England and Europe, is unreflectively aristocratic, "an exclusive by training and by instinct" (pp. 39-40).<sup>21</sup>

The contrast between these two Americans and the regional viewpoints they represent is mainly developed in terms of their respective responses to Canada. To Kitty, who has seen very little of the world beyond Eriecreek, the province of Quebec appears simultaneously as a foreign country and an epitome of what she has read and thought about North America as a whole. On the boat trip up the Saguenay, she is impressed by "the sad great river of the awful north," whose ominous and desolate grandeur evokes visions of the whole continent as it must have been before the coming of the Europeans. The first feeble attempts of the white man to gain a foothold on the continent are subsequently evoked by the towns and villages, like Tadoussac, "where early in the sixteenth century the French traders fixed their first post, and where still the oldest church north of Florida is standing" (p. 16). These geographical and historical associations appear to Kitty, fresh from her reading of Parkman and the guidebooks, part of a common heritage of both Canada and the United States, a heritage which is worthy of comparison to the more venerable

traditions and the more famous scenery of the Old World.

Subsequently, in her encounters with the inhabitants of the St. Lawrence and Saguenay regions, and in her observations of the exotic costumes and architecture of Quebec City, Kitty discovers further connections, and some distinctions, with her own country. A voluble calèche driver at Ha-Ha Bay suggests by his manner and conversation that the Canadians are devoted to the same ideals of individualism and material success as their southern neighbors; but on the other hand, the view from Kitty's window in Quebec City of silent nuns in a convent garden suggests an image of tranquility and order which seems utterly distinct from the bustling frontier spirit of her own native region.

Miles Arbuton, by contrast, is generally disdainful of the scenery and civilization in Quebec province. "I should like to see an American landscape that put one in mind of anything," he tells Kitty when she praises Quebec City and the surrounding countryside (p. 21). Like Kitty, Arbuton sees the Quebec and Saguenay regions as representative of North America as a whole, but unlike her, he refuses to acknowledge that the New World has either scenery or historical associations to compare with those of the Old. "The great drawback to this sort of thing in America," he complains to Kitty as their boat moves down the Saguenay, "is that there is no human interest about the scenery, fine as it is" (p. 43). And even when Kitty repeats to him the legend she has learned from Parkman



of the party of French explorers who "left their comrades at Tadoussac, and came up the Saguenay three hundred years ago, and never were seen or heard of again," (he) persists in his preference for "famous rivers abroad" (p. 43). He acknowledges the magnificence of Cape Eternity with only grudging admiration; "Mr. Arbuton," the narrator confides slyly, had "an objection to the exaggerations of nature on this continent, and secretly thought them in bad taste" (p. 44). As for the "local color" of the settlements and the inhabitants, Arbuton is bored and embarrassed by the interest which his companions show in them, and endures the encounter with the talkative calèche driver in strained silence. The more Arbuton sees of Canada, the more his hostility to the scenery increases; and although he extends his stay at Quebec in order to see more of the charmingly naive girl from Eriecreek, there is little doubt about the ultimate outcome of the flirtation. Kitty's enthusiastic response to Canada reveals her to be more cosmopolitan than the closed-minded Bostonian whose travels have only served to confirm a rigidly narrow set of prejudices.

The Quality of Mercy (1892) presents quite a different image of Canada, reflecting the development of Howells' ideas and techniques in the later part of his career. Written immediately after A Hazard of New Fortunes, The Quality of Mercy reveals the author's increasing revulsion against the evils of modern capitalism and his adoption of a kind of semi-Christian socialism based on intelligence and the golden

rule. In A Hazard of New Fortunes, he attempted a panoramic view of modern urban America, with a story involving two great American cities and many individuals of widely diversified backgrounds and social classes. In The Quality of Mercy he narrows the focus considerably, to tell the pathetic story of J.M. Northwick, an aging businessman who impulsively flees to Canada rather than face the personal and public consequences after he has been exposed as an embezzler of his company's funds. Most of the novel is devoted to revealing the effect of Northwick's action on his family and fellow citizens of the village of Hatboro. A brief opening episode portrays directly Northwick's weakness and lack of intelligence, then his personality and motivation are seen through the distorted perspective of his hysterical family, his vindictive enemies, and his skeptical friends, who gradually begin to recognize the falseness of the absconder's facade of respectability. But when the accumulated effect of these responses begin to make Northwick appear as a selfish and stupid villain, Howells abruptly shifts the narrative from Hatboro to Canada, to follow Northwick in his aimless flight from responsibility.

With a vague notion of investing in a gold mine to regain the money he has lost, Northwick sets out northward from Quebec City in mid-winter, towards Chicoutimi in the Saguenay region. In the long, silent sleighride along the banks of the St. Lawrence and Saguenay rivers, he finds himself obsessively preoccupied with thoughts of his past life

and present situation. The finality of his break with the past is emphasized by the strangeness of his surroundings and his growing feeling of isolation and loneliness. In Hatboro, his identity and social position were perpetually acknowledged by the obsequious respect of his servants and the villagers. To the French-Canadian sleigh drivers and innkeepers, however, he is only the object of mild curiosity and vague hostility; an anonymous American whose unexpected arrival out of the tourist season and whose mysterious northern journey suggest that he is a fugitive from the law in his own country.

As Northwick advances further into the sparsely populated snow-covered northern wilderness, he begins to feel disoriented, to lose his sense of purpose and identity:

At first his mind worked clearly but disobediently; then he began to be aware of a dimness in its record of purposes and motives. At times he could not tell where he was going, or why. He reverted with difficulty to the fact that he had wished to get as far as possible, not only beyond pursuit, but beyond the temptation to return voluntarily and give himself up. He knew, in those days before the treaty, that he was safe from extradition; but he feared that if a detective approached he would yield to him, and go back, especially as he could not always keep before himself the reasons for not going back.

. . . . .  
As his carriage slipped lightly over [the snow], Northwick had a fantastic sense of his own minuteness and remoteness. He thought of the photograph of a lunar landscape that he had once seen greatly magnified, and of a fly that happened to traverse the expanse of plaster-like white between the ranges of extinct volcanoes.<sup>22</sup>

Gradually, he begins to recognize that his identity consists of the multifarious relationships of his life in Hatboro.

Outside of those relationships, he is a cipher, as empty and desolate as the snow-covered Canadian landscape which is absorbing and virtually annihilating him.

But Northwick keeps on with his aimless northward flight; and just when he has been almost completely overwhelmed by the feelings of lost identity and lost purpose, he encounters a final bitter irony which adds absurdity to the pathos of his situation. At the remote outpost of Ha-Ha Bay he is taken in hand by a talkative English-speaking settler named Oiseau. "Bird," as he calls himself--recognizable as the calèche driver who appears in A Chance Acquaintance--assumes correctly that Northwick is an American defaulter, and tries to entice his visitor into a questionable mining speculation. Northwick has fled as far as possible from his proper environment, retreated into a wilderness whose lonely barrenness has taken him almost to the edge of insanity, and has come face to face at last with--himself, or at least his alter ego, another schemer whose outward show of charity and mercy do not conceal his selfish dreams of personal aggrandisement. "What would you do?" the parish priest asks Oiseau, when the latter speaks in Northwick's hearing of the great fortune he will make from his gold mine.

"What I do?" Bird struck the table with his fist.  
"Leave HaHa Bay to-morrow morning!"

"And where would you go?"

"Go? To Quebec, to London, to Paris, to Rome, to the devil! Keep going!"<sup>23</sup>

Northwick is too oppressed by misery and homesickness to

see in Oiseau's words the reflection of his own situation, but Howells has left little doubt of the fallacy inherent in the pursuit of material wealth. The selfish search for money and power is a pointless journey to nowhere--like Northwick's winter journey into the barren North--which ends at last in confrontation with the ugly, mocking Self.

The image of Canada in The Quality of Mercy involves a fairly subtle and symbolic conception of the northern landscape and its inhabitants, a conception which seems far removed from the straightforward realism of Their Wedding Journey or the tentatively allegorical cultural confrontations of A Chance Acquaintance. But in all three novels there is a consistency of attitude stemming from Howells' general inclination to use Canada as a means of assessing the moral quality of life in the modern United States. Howells is obviously intrigued by the fact that Canada is both like and unlike his own country. The wild northern landscape evokes visions of the struggle with the wilderness which engaged the pioneers of all regions of the continent; but as in the writings of Thoreau and other American travelers, the wildness of Canada seems unbearably intense, inimical, and ultimately destructive to the civilized sensibility. The people of Canada, both French- and English-speaking, seem at times to be virtually indistinguishable from Americans, and at times to be distinctively and enigmatically foreign. Accordingly, Howells' American in Canada is simultaneously the typical "American

abroad" who measures his own country's achievements or failures against those of the foreign environment, and the civilized North American confronted by the primitivism which is one of the most pervasive and important features of the New World landscape. Basil March in Their Wedding Journey, Kitty Ellison in A Chance Acquaintance, and J.M. Northwick in The Quality of Mercy, all discover in Canada a new perspective on their native country, by encounter with the social customs and institutions which are both different from and similar to their own, and by proximity to the northern wilderness. Basil March concludes (much as Thoreau concluded), that Canada, unlike the United States, has failed to develop a distinctive identity appropriate to its unique geographical and historical situation. Kitty Ellison finds in Canada both a fascinating evocation of Europe and a link with pioneering past of the New World. And J.M. Northwick discovers a bizarre reflection of the social and personal weaknesses which have brought about his own tragedy.

Notes to Chapter 8

<sup>1</sup>Information concerning Parkman's popularity, influence, and position in American historiography is available in a wide selection of sources. Samuel Eliot Morison, The Parkman Reader (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), pp. 523-24, cites nineteenth- and twentieth-century sales figures on Parkman's work. Mason Wade's biography Francis Parkman: Heroic Historian (New York: Viking, 1942), discusses (in chapters 14-15) Parkman's reception in Canada. Wilbur L. Schramm, in his Introduction to Francis Parkman: Representative Selections, p. cix, describes Parkman's position "between the older group of American moral historians . . . and the new hybrid history of the social scientists." See also Allan Nevins, "Prescott, Motley, Parkman," American Writers on American Literature, ed. John Macy (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931), pp. 226-42; William R. Taylor, "Francis Parkman," Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians, pp. 1-38.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Parkman, Preface, The Romance of Dollard by Mary Catherwood (New York: Century, 1889), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>The Letters of Francis Parkman, II, 240.

<sup>4</sup>[Samuel L. Clemens], The Innocents Abroad (1869; rpt. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), I, 55.

<sup>5</sup>[Charles F. Browne], Artemus Ward: His Travels (New York: Carleton; London: S. Low, 1865), pp. 41, 44.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Dudley Warner, Baddeck, and That Sort of Thing (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1874), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup>Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), p. 160.

<sup>8</sup>All quotations from Godkin's article refer to "French Canada," The Nation, 7 (Aug. 13-20, 1868), 128-29, 146-48.

<sup>9</sup>All quotations from James's article refer to Henry James, "Quebec," Portraits of Places (1884; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 351-63.

<sup>10</sup>Henry James, "Francis Parkman: The Jesuits in North America," Literary Reviews and Essays on American, English and French Literature, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Twayne 1957), p. 222.

<sup>11</sup>William M. Gibson and George Arms's exhaustive Bibliography of William Dean Howells (New York: New York Public Library, 1948), also mentions a pamphlet entitled Tributes to

Canada, possibly published in Boston in 1916, but no copies of this pamphlet have been found.

William M. Gibson describes the relationship between the 1860 travel articles and Howells' first two novels in "Material and Form in Howells' First Novels," American Literature, 19 (May, 1947), 158-66, and reports that much of the journalistic material is reproduced verbatim in the fiction. The same conclusion is illustrated in detail in John K. Reeves' Introduction to Their Wedding Journey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

<sup>12</sup>Howells, Their Wedding Journey, ed. Reeves, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Howells, Criticism and Fiction, ed. Clara M. Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Howells' faith in the common reader is expressed in Criticism and Fiction, p. 13. His attack on "swashbucklers" is in "The New Historical Romances," The North American Review, 171 (Dec., 1900), 936.

<sup>15</sup>Howells' early debt to all kinds of romantic literature is discussed fully by Olov W. Fryckstedt, In Quest of America: A Study of Howells' Early Development as a Novelist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). Howells' later anti-romantic attitudes, and his consequent proclivity for aggressively dogmatic (and sometimes inconsistent) critical dicta, is described by Everett Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1954).

<sup>16</sup>Howells, rev. of The Discovery of the Great West, by Francis Parkman, Atlantic Monthly, 25 (Jan., 1870), 122.

<sup>17</sup>Howells, "Mr. Parkman's Histories," Atlantic Monthly, 34 (Nov., 1874), 610.

<sup>18</sup>All quotations from Their Wedding Journey refer to the edition previously cited.

<sup>19</sup>Criticism and Fiction, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup>Jerome Klinkowitz has suggested that in Their Wedding Journey Howells is satirizing American middle-class complacency and insensitivity to social problems ("Ethic and Aesthetic: The Basil and Isabel March Stories of William Dean Howells," Modern Fiction Studies, 16 [Autumn, 1970], 303-22). It seems more likely, however, that Their Wedding Journey is intended to show the relatively serene and fortunate condition of the typical American, as opposed to certain



atypical situations in the country.

<sup>21</sup>All quotations from this novel refer to W.D. Howells, A Chance Acquaintance, ed. Jonathan Thomas, David J. Nordloh, and Ronald Gottesman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

<sup>22</sup>Howells, The Quality of Mercy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), pp. 234-35; 237-38.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 251-52.

## IX

## FARNHAM, BURROUGHS, THE REGIONAL REALISTS

## 1.

The image of Canada in Howells' The Quality of Mercy involves the restatement of a familiar theme in the American imaginative contemplation of Canada. The vast stretches of barren whiteness which engulf J.M. Northwick and make him yearn for his home in Hatboro are like "the influence from the wilds and from nature" which almost overwhelmed Thoreau on the ramparts of Quebec, and prompted him to see Concord as the imperfect but necessary assertion of the higher laws of the human spirit against the savagery of the wilderness. This conflict between civilization and primitivism, as has been seen repeatedly, underlies much of what Americans thought and wrote about Canada. Thoreau, Howells, Parkman, virtually all reflective Americans from the time of the earliest expressions of an emerging distinctive culture, were simultaneously attracted and repelled by the wildness of the New World, and they simultaneously accepted and deplored the advance of civilization. As the nineteenth century drew to a close other American writers, devoted like Howells to the comprehensiveness and fidelity to observable detail of realism, turned their attention northward. Their literary responses reflect their ambivalent feelings toward the wilderness and their intense interest in the human beings who deliberately chose

to inhabit it.

Among these literary explorers of Canada was another disciple of Parkman, a New York journalist and essayist named Charles Haight Farnham (1841-1929). Although his literary output was small and perhaps unimportant by comparison to the achievements of his greatest contemporaries, Farnham deserves something better than the almost total obscurity in which he now rests. He is ignored by all but the most exhaustive encyclopedias of American literature, and even the essential facts of his life are difficult to establish. He was born in Connecticut, "the son of Thomas Jefferson and Eliza W.F. Farnham, both authors and travellers."<sup>1</sup> In 1885, Farnham became associated with the aging Francis Parkman as a companion and secretary, and after the historian's death he was named by the Parkman family as official biographer. A Life of Francis Parkman (1901) was his primary contribution to literature. His only other published work consists of about a dozen articles written for Harper's, the Century, and the New York Times in the 1880's. But these articles are quite distinguished and praiseworthy treatments of the subject of Canada.

Like Howells, Farnham was interested in the subject which Parkman had largely ignored, the modern remnant of the French empire in North America. But in contrast to the random and superficial tourist's notes of Their Wedding Journey, Farnham's articles constitute a detailed and intimate study

of French-Canadian life and character. Ultimately, Farnham perhaps came closer to his subject--at least in terms of quantity of detail--than any American of the nineteenth century. He spoke French fluently, was an ardent canoeist and woodsman (a better woodsman perhaps than Parkman, whose various physical and psychological ailments often interfered with his expeditions into the New England and Canadian wilderness), and was prepared to devote a great deal of time and effort to the exploration of French Canada. Thus he not only made the standard excursions to the two major cities of Quebec province ("The Gibraltar of America," The Century, Oct. 1882; "Quebec," Harper's, Feb. 1888; "Montreal," Harper's, June, 1889); he went beyond the usual American tourist's routine to spend "A Winter in Canada" (Harper's, Feb. 1884), and made strenuous canoe expeditions along both the north shore of the St. Lawrence ("Labrador," Harper's, Sept.-Oct. 1885) and the south shore ("The Lower St. Lawrence," Harper's, Nov. 1888). His patient and tolerant interest in people resulted in sympathetic portraits of the French-Canadian settlers ("The Canadian Habitant," Harper's, Aug. 1883), of the modern counterparts of the coureurs de bois ("Canadian Voyageurs on the Saguenay," Harper's, March 1888), and of the remnants of Indian tribes in the wilderness once dominated by the Huron and Iroquois ("The Montagnais," Harper's, Aug. 1888).

"Canada," says Farnham, "with an arctic winter and the greater part of its soil almost sterile, seems designed by

nature to be the Norway of America, a land of forests."<sup>2</sup> Throughout his narratives of travel in the North, he emphasizes the cold, barren hostility of the Canadian landscape: the Saguenay region in winter is "an expanse of cold white death,"<sup>3</sup> and the vast wilderness lying just beyond the ramparts of Quebec City is "a penetration of desolation into the very heart of man."<sup>4</sup> Like other sensitive observers of nature, such as Parkman and Thoreau, Farnham is capable of a positive response to the spectacle of wildness:

The surroundings of Quebec have become familiar to me with years of observation, and still I always look abroad with pleasure from the Citadel or the Terrace, at the great St. Lawrence Valley, walled in with mountains, cloven by a vast arm of the sea, and still watched over by primeval forests.<sup>5</sup>

And like Thoreau, he is inclined to use ecclesiastical or religious imagery in his descriptions of the wilderness, which suggests a sort of romantic pantheism: "Nowhere has nature spoken to me more directly, both in the majestic storm service and in the unutterable peace of this vast and rugged temple."<sup>6</sup> But ultimately, he echoes Thoreau in his belief in the importance of civilization as a counteraction to the oppressive and destructive force of wildness. "In looking across this immense flood," says Farnham as he tells of his canoe cruises in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, ". . . I am glad to be ashore among a people living close together for shelter and warmth under an arctic winter."<sup>7</sup>

Thus in Farnham's essays, as in "A Yankee in Canada,"

the inhabitants and the habitations of the North constitute with nature an equally important subject of study. In the remote outposts of "Labrador" (Farnham applies the name loosely to the north shore of the St. Lawrence, including that part of the region belonging to Quebec province), he finds an exotically varied population of outcasts and devotees of the wilderness, including an Irishman who has lived in New York, a French-Canadian monarchist priest, a European French emigré, and an Italian jeweller. In the less distant region of the Saguenay, he observes the modern descendants of the coureurs de bois, who are mostly tame and conventional loggers and boatmen. But to get a close and familiar view of the "typical" French Canadian--i.e., a presumed representative in economic and professional status of the majority of the Quebec population--Farnham visits (again, as Thoreau did) the farm-houses of the St. Lawrence Valley.

Inevitably, Farnham is especially interested in the Canadian attitude to the United States, and he reports the suspicion and hostility with which the habitants regard the country to the south. In a household where he has found lodging,

One of the sons had passed two years working in a brick-yard at Haverstraw, and like many of his countrymen, he had returned with some heretical admiration of our more progressive civilization. Emigration to the United States is energetically opposed by church and state, so in praising the wonders of New York I became an emissary of the devil, which increased the interest of my position.<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to describe the habitants' devotion to religious charms and rituals, their subservience to the parish priests, and their tendency to subordinate individual personality to the customs of the community: "The whole parish dresses as one man and one woman; you feel the extraordinary unity of Canadian life in this external monotony of the people."<sup>9</sup> In this atmosphere of conformity, superstition, and a continuous cycle of cruel physical labor, "there is not even the beginning of intellectual life."<sup>10</sup>

Canada is our twin brother in chronology and geography; and yet no other contiguous land differs more widely. You can scarcely believe yourself in this age when you pass from our luxurious, elaborate, and practical existence to the poor, primitive and poetic life of Canada.<sup>11</sup>

But as the conjunction of "primitive" and "poetic" suggests, Farnham is by no means completely negative in his criticism of French Canada.

This civilization has many attractive features. . . . [It] rests on the labor of the hand alone, unaided by mechanical powers; and its narrow, slow, economical, but self-supporting life thus acquires something of the dignity of manhood. It is a very human civilization, as distinguished from a mechanical and commercial one. Here you come in direct contact with human needs and human efforts. This phase of life, where man stands out as in the old hand-to-hand encounter, is a strange contrast to our existence, where man seems to retire behind his engines and improvements.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, however, Farnham is unable to grant that the theoretical dignity of the primitive life is more valuable than the intellectual and cultural advantages of a civilization based on belief in material progress:

The Canadian is an excellent pioneer up to a certain

point; no one surpasses him in enduring hardships, labor, want; he lives and increases where others will not remain. But when he has cleared a few acres and won half a living he feels satisfied, and generally fails to carry his civilization to the higher plane of comfort, cleanliness, and taste.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Farnham arrives at the familiar conflict between primitivism and progress which repeatedly characterizes the nineteenth-century American's conception of Canada. Like many of his countrymen (including his mentor Parkman), he is caught between the polar attractions of his own technically advanced culture and a life of ostensible simplicity close to nature, and his rational mind can only range back and forth between them. Similarly, he is both attracted and repelled by the vast northern wilderness, which appeals to some vital aspiration in man's spiritual being, while at the same time threatening to oppress or destroy the puny human constitution.

A similar ambivalence towards Canada is evident in a long essay by a contemporary of Farnham, John Burroughs (1837-1921). Burroughs was a devotee of Emerson and Thoreau, a friend and biographer of Walt Whitman, and in later years became an active supporter of Theodore Roosevelt in both his conservationist policies and his advocacy of the "strenuous life." As these literary affinities might suggest, there were strong regionalist and nationalist inclinations in Burroughs' nature writings; almost all his works are based on observations and experiences in the Catskills and Adirondacks of his native New York state. In 1877, however, he set out



on a walking and steamship tour of Quebec province, the literary result of which was "The Halcyon in Canada," first published in Scribner's Monthly (Feb., 1878), and subsequently collected in Locusts and Wild Honey (1879).

Burroughs expresses interest in both the magnificent natural scenery and the incongruous civilization of Quebec province. Like Thoreau, he is fascinated by the St. Lawrence, which is "a chain of Homeric sublimities from beginning to end."<sup>14</sup> And Quebec City, he reports, "presents the anomaly of a medieval European city in the midst of the American landscape."<sup>15</sup> But the standard tourist attractions, although he dutifully makes the round of them, are not the main object of Burroughs' visit to Canada. He is not interested in mere "scenery hunting"<sup>16</sup> or in contemplating the incongruities of Canadian society. He departs from the usual tourist routes, and embarks on a rigorous walking tour along the unfinished road north of Quebec City toward the Saguenay region, to have "a long, silent look into the face of the wilderness."<sup>17</sup>

But in spite of Burroughs' professed devotion to the wilderness, there is a conflict of tone and idea running all through "The Halcyon in Canada," which suggests that he is intimidated by the vastness and primitive savagery of the North. On the one hand, the essay is an example of a popular type of informal article (such as Scribner's, Harper's, and other American magazines published with increasing frequency in the late nineteenth century), celebrating the leisurely

outdoor recreations of fishing and bird watching. But on the other hand, there are repeated allusions to the sense of loneliness and desolation which haunts the traveler in this wilderness. In The Maine Woods, Thoreau described how he "most fully realized" a sense of "primeval, untamed, and forever untamable Nature," while passing through a huge tract of burnt land near Mount Katahdin.<sup>18</sup> In very similar terms, Burroughs describes la grande brûlure, the devastated site of a huge forest fire in the Saguenay region. "For three hours we rode through this valley and shadow of death."<sup>19</sup> Although he professes to feel the "presence and magnetism" of the "spirit of the forest-bound lakes,"<sup>20</sup> Burroughs obviously feels somewhat out of place in this vast wilderness so unlike his native region. The ubiquitous spruce trees, the Laurentian boulders, and particularly the sterility of the soil all suggest an implacable hostility to man. "The soil seemed as if made up of decayed and pulverized rock, and doubtless contained very little vegetable matter. It is so barren that it will never repay clearing and cultivating."<sup>21</sup> Like most of his countrymen, Burroughs thinks of the wilderness in terms of its subordination to the gradual spread of civilization; and in this context northern Canada presents a disturbing image of unyielding and barbarous wildness, where civilization will never penetrate except in the rude settlements of habitant loggers and trappers.

## 2.

The exotic and primitive qualities of Canada and its inhabitants, which caught the attention of Farnham and Burroughs, also appealed to certain late nineteenth-century writers of fiction, especially those involved in the "local color" or "regional realist" movement. But most of the consequent fictional representations, although they purported to reveal the actualities of Canadian life, seldom rose above the mixture of sentimentality, condescension, and racial suspicion which pervaded the nineteenth-century American view of Canada.

The regional realist "Octave Thanet," (i.e., Alice French [1850-1934]), for instance, was the author of a story entitled "The Ogre of Ha Ha Bay," first published in the Atlantic Monthly for October, 1885, and later collected with several stories about her native American middle west in Knitters in the Sun (1887). "The Ogre of Ha Ha Bay" pretends to challenge certain preconceptions of Canada by recording the "education" of a pair of American tourists who have obviously formed their notions of French Canada from Evangeline. Gradually, the tourists discover the true conditions of life in the Saguenay region: the poverty, the continual labor for a bare subsistence in a harsh climate, and above all, the petty rivalry and jealousy which characterizes relationships in a small and closely knit community. The repulsive aspects of French-Canadian life are centered in an old man, the "ogre," who is

a pariah to his neighbors because of his selfish and tyrannical behavior. Finally, however, the story is resolved in a happy ending involving the reformation of the ogre and the general imposition of an idyllic peace and tranquility comparable to that in Longfellow's Acadia.

A slightly different, but again ultimately sentimental, view of French Canada is involved in the work of Rowland E. Robinson (1833-1900). Robinson was the author of several collections of dialect tales and sketches mostly published in the 1890's but set before the Civil War, about the northern backwoods of his native Vermont where "Yankees" and "Canucks" mingle with easy amiability. The two nationalities are virtually personified in two recurrent characters, Sam Lovell, a shrewd but generous Vermonter, and his "Canuck" companion Antoine Bisette. Antoine is an almost classic stereotype, with his constant cheerfulness, his singing, and his stock of tall tales about his native country. But he is also devious and untrustworthy, as Robinson illustrates in Uncle Lisha's Outing (1897), when Sam tries to help a fugitive slave to cross the Canada border and Antoine plots to turn him in for the reward. Perhaps more seriously, Antoine lacks the American's respect for the wilderness: he wantonly kills animals without purpose, while the Vermonter is an outspoken conservationist who insists that hunting and trapping must always be aligned with legitimate human need. Interestingly, however (and perhaps without the author's complete awareness

of the implications), Antoine's moral shortcomings seem to have something to do with his exile from his native country. Throughout the Sam Lovell stories, Canada is a vague and idyllic region of freedom and natural innocence. This conception of the country is related not only to the fact that it is the goal of fugitive slaves; Robinson evokes a sort of golden age existence in the dialect reminiscences of Antoine. "Bah gosh, seh," the Canadian tells Sam in Uncle Lishá's Outing,

Ah'll re'mbler dat leetly boy in Canada wid hees fader an' mudder, young folks dat dance all naght . . . an' de summer las' mos' all de year an' de winter ant never too long 'cause Ah'll happy every day.<sup>22</sup>

French Canada as a kind of Arcadia is the basic image propogated by Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933). Van Dyke, a Presbyterian minister now primarily remembered for such Christmas sentiment as "The Story of the Other Wise Man," wrote many short stories and sketches based on his observations during regular fishing and camping expeditions to Quebec and New Brunswick. These efforts were published in various periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and collected under such titles as Little Rivers (1895), The Ruling Passion (1901), and The Unknown Quantity (1912). Van Dyke's representation of the French Canadians follows recognizable stereotypes, emphasizing their joviality, their love of music and dancing, their indifference to progress and material success, and their preference for rural or wilderness

living over civilization. The conventionalized characters and situations comprise a very sentimental picture of French Canada; but occasionally Van Dyke suggests that he is aware of more serious thematic possibilities in his material. "A Brave Heart" suggests that the backwoods life of the habitant may be a cruel and primitive existence, rather than a pastoral idyll--although in the end sentiment and domesticity win out, even over the mutilated body of a gigantic woodsman who is almost killed in a brutal and meaningless quarrel. And in "The Keeper of the Light," Van Dyke depicts the clash between the party of progress and the party of reaction when the nineteenth century begins to penetrate to a tiny and remote settlement in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. But again the conflict is resolved by a sentimental happy ending, with the opponents of progress converted, and its exponents vindicated. "All over the world," the author editorializes so as to leave no doubt about his own attitude to the conflict, "for the last hundred years, people have been kicking against the sharpness of the pricks that drove them forward out of the old life, the wild life, the free life grown dear to them because it was so easy."<sup>23</sup>

The ultimate preference for the progressive urban life of the United States is a feature of a genial and mildly entertaining novel, Border Canucks, Our Friendly Relations (1890), by a Detroit author named George C. Rankin. Rankin acknowledges the immense cultural and technological changes

taking place in North America in the late nineteenth century by striving to evoke the unique social patterns of a region before these patterns pass completely out of living memory. Border Canucks deals with "the French settlement on either bank of the Detroit River twenty-five or thirty years ago," where

. . . the contaminating influence of modern methods and pending social peculiarities have largely robbed the present generation of descendants of a noble race, in the districts referred to, of that charm, and easy, self-possessed grace of manner which, by comparison, made of an illiterate peasant a dignified courtier in the days gone by.<sup>24</sup>

As a unifying device for his rather episodic novel, Rankin tells the story of Jack Rathbone, who is caught between the opposing attractions of two worlds. His father, a wealthy Detroit fur merchant, draws him toward the world of American commerce and industrial progress, while his French-Canadian mother introduces him to the simpler and more carefree world of the habitant. In a series of illustrative anecdotes and episodes, the French Canadians are revealed to be indefatigably cheerful, fond of drinking and gambling, inclined to raise large families, and content to extract no more than a bare subsistence from their farms. Rankin depicts the exuberant gaiety of their lives with obvious affection; but his ultimate sympathies, as his hero's final choice makes clear, are with the more progressive society of the United States.

Some interesting variations on a similar theme are developed in The Lady of the Flag-flowers (1899), the one

novel of a now largely forgotten American poetess named Florence Wilkinson Evans. As Van Dyke did in "The Keeper of the Light," this author takes as her theme the conflict between the old, wild, and free life and the modern world of progress and civilization. She draws the conflict explicitly along nationalistic and racial lines, by dealing with the tragedy of a young half-French, half-Indian girl from northern Quebec, who is enticed and finally destroyed by urban civilization in the United States. In the course of the novel the author is careful to establish the complexity and moral relativity involved in the contrast between the two ways of life. The northern wilderness which her heroine leaves behind is not a sylvan ideal, but a half-savage world of brutalizing poverty and superstition, in which, however, the Indian and half-breed natives have developed a simple code of honor and fidelity. Conversely, the United States is not an inferno of decadence and immorality, but a society of diverse individuals struggling to assimilate rapid cultural and technological changes and to resist the tide of crime and political corruption which is the inevitable by-product of an age of swift national expansion.

But if the northern forests of Canada and the cities of the United States do not constitute absolute moral concepts, they do represent irreconcilable ways of life. The young American hero of The Lady of the Flag-flowers, Pierce Willoughby, spends a summer vacation in the Quebec wilderness,



and dreams of living there permanently, "where, like Tolstoi, he could live simply, and labor alike with his hands and his head."<sup>25</sup> But he returns to his own country to pursue his career in journalism and politics, for he cannot revert to the primitive life any more than his nation can reverse its progressive development towards urbanization and industrialism. The Canadian half-breed girl, on the other hand, does remove to the United States, where she readily picks up the language and superficial patterns of behavior, and eventually achieves remarkable success as a stage actress. But ultimately, her simple and naive personality is antipathetic to life in sophisticated society; and her success--leading finally to her murder--is only the working out of an irresistible and fortuitous chain of circumstance in which she is a passive object.

Published a year before Sister Carrie, Florence Evans' novel has interesting similarities to Dreiser's, in its portrayal of a young and innocent girl whirled along by forces over which she has only partial control, towards a goal of questionable value. The main weaknesses of The Lady of the Elag-flowers are the many melodramatic plot contrivances--usually far more outrageous than the worst of Dreiser's--and a very awkward prose style. At best, it offers some suggestions as to what the realist-naturalist literary tradition might do with "Canadian" material.

## 3.

As always throughout the history of American imaginative involvement with Canada, Quebec province and its French-speaking inhabitants claim the largest share of attention. A few "local color" authors discovered other parts of the country, but their literary reactions added few significant complications to the American literary image of Canada. Henry Van Dyke wrote, in addition to stories about the Quebec habitants, essays about his fishing experiences on the Restigouche river in the border region between New Brunswick and the Gaspé peninsula. Another visitor to the Restigouche region was Robert Grant (1852-1940), a distinguished New York lawyer, a friend of Edith Wharton, and the author of several realistic novels dealing with various American social and political topics. In 1888, Grant published his second novel, Jack in the Bush, a slight but literate boy's book depicting the virtues of masculine camaraderie and sportsmanship. Grant's fictional group of red-blooded all-American boys eagerly pursue the manly life in the Canadian woods, but are righteously indignant with the backwardness of the Canadian people they encounter. The villain of the story, Pete Labouisse, is a silent half-French, half-Indian squatter, who ignores the rules of sportsmanship and shoots sitting ducks and spears salmon at night. By implication, his villainous and unsportsmanlike character is related to his racial inferiority; at least the American boys are not surprised by his

behavior. They are surprised, however, by the English Canadians they encounter. They are intrigued (as their creator obviously was) to learn that the Restigouche region is populated by the descendants of United Empire Loyalists, and that many of the inhabitants carry such respectable old New England names as Patterson and Coffin. One of their guides, George Coffin, is explicitly described as having "much of the Yankee in his build and manner."<sup>26</sup> To the boys' disgust, however, George and his helpers have never even heard of the fourth of July. As woodsmen, they are equal to the best of Americans; but politically, they are benighted Canadians who have not had the advantages of American democracy.

The Restigouche region and its inhabitants are given more serious consideration in a novel by the eminent Philadelphia physician and prolific author, S. Weir Mitchell (1829-1914). When All the Woods Are Green (1894) is one of a series of "conversation" novels by Mitchell (the others include Characteristics [1892] and Dr. North and his Friends [1900]) in which various characters discuss moral and metaphysical topics, and occasionally become involved in slight situations which serve to illustrate or complement the discussions. Like Henry Van Dyke, who included an essay on The Compleat Angler in The Ruling Passion, Mitchell had perhaps been reading Isaac Walton, for the imaginary conversations of When All the Woods Are Green often take place in the languid

atmosphere of fishing excursions, and the subject discussed is often the spiritual value of fishing. More generally, the novel is about life in the wilderness and the influence of nature on the human personality. Mitchell accepts the common assumptions about the re-creational value of a temporary withdrawal to the wilderness: like Thoreau, he has discovered that going to the woods is a valuable process of simplification, whereby the individual can divest himself of all the trivia and impedimenta heaped upon him by civilization.

In the woods [Mitchell editorializes], away from men and their struggles and ambitions, with the absence of need to be this or that, as duty, work, or social claims demand, we lose the resultant state of tension, of being on guard. It is readily possible to notice this effect in the rapid erasure from the faces of the constantly strained, intellectual workman of the lines of care which mark the features of those on whom, in one or another position, the world relies to carry its burdens.<sup>27</sup>

But in spite of this tribute to the salutary effects of life in the woods, Mitchell comes to the ultimate conclusion that civilization and progress provide a more appropriate situation for humanity than primitivism and wildness. The native Canadian population, Mitchell's tourists agree, present certain admirable qualities in which the urbanized American is possibly deficient; but there is some ambiguity about the value of these qualities:

"Yes," said Lyndsay, "these Gaspé men are most interesting. They are clever, competent, and inherently kindly, really good fellows; but their trouble is, and it does not trouble them, that they have no persistent energy. I confess that, being myself, at least while here, without energy, I like its absence."

"Isn't it a vast relief, after all the endless restlessness of our people," said Anne, "to fall among folks who are contented, and home loving, and uncomplicated?"

"I certainly think so," said Carington. "and what a surprise it is to meet the stray descendants of loyalists hereabouts. . . . Some of the best of the Canadians are descendants of those people; but, for the most part, those who settled in certain quarters of Lower Canada are down again to the level of mere laborers and fishermen."<sup>28</sup>

Mitchell illustrates the disadvantages of a life of unrelieved primitivism with the story of the Colketts, a shiftless middle-aged couple who have never lived anywhere but in Canadian backwoods settlements. Brutishly uncivilized in their manners and speech, the Colketts are dishonest, suspicious, and selfish, completely lacking in those qualities of self-reliance and "persistent energy" which (according to Mitchell) characterize the American backwoodsman, who is more likely to have derived some benefit from the advanced urban culture of the United States. The latter contention is illustrated in the person of Dorothy Maybrook, a Quaker woman who has migrated from Pennsylvania to the backwoods settlement on the Restigouche. Although uneducated and rustic in habits, Dorothy is in most respects a complete antithesis to the Colketts. Her self-reliance is illustrated in the fact that her small backwoods farm prospers, while the Colketts, with a similar portion of land and virtually identical opportunities, are unable even to sustain themselves. Furthermore, she is almost instinctively charitable, and persists in

offering to help the indigent Colketts, even when they display boorish ungratefulness. And finally, unlike the Canadians, she is intellectually curious: hearing about Shakespeare from the American tourists, she eagerly reads the play about "Mrs. Macbeth."

There are familiar political implications in the contrast between the Colketts and Dorothy Maybrook. Mitchell, like many American writers, implies that the supposedly freer and more progressive society of the United States produces a superior breed of human being than the northern country with its colonial heritage and its slower rate of development. But Mitchell is not so interested in demonstrating the advantages of American democracy as in expounding his theories on the influence of environment on personality. For many years, he was engaged in an intermittent controversy on this subject with another eminent American novelist and physician, Oliver Wendell Holmes. In 1861, Holmes sent Mitchell a copy of his novel Elsie Venner, which argues by means of an incredible Gothic plot that personality can be formed almost entirely by hereditary factors. In the 1880's, Mitchell was engaged in certain biological experiments which may have reminded him of Holmes's novel; and while there is no conclusive evidence that When All the Woods Are Green is intended as a "refutation" of Elsie Venner, Mitchell's strong emphasis on the theme of environment suggests that he probably had the controversy with Holmes in mind.<sup>29</sup>

Although Mitchell's novel has a definite intrinsic interest as a competent narrative by a talented minor author, it suggests that by the late nineteenth century the American literary image of Canada was degenerating into triteness and redundancy. The appealing but intimidating forest wilderness, the reactionary political structure, the unsophisticated and unambitious inhabitants, and the superiority of American initiative and enterprise: all these aspects of Canadian-American relations were introduced again and again, and were illustrated by very conventionalized settings, characters, and incidents. Some sort of new impulse or new perspective was obviously needed, if the American literary image of Canada was not to degenerate into a repetitive recital of platitudes. In the latter part of the century, one important American writer revealed in his own eccentric and inimitable fashion that there might be more to Canada than the familiar stereotypes and conventionalities. Walt Whitman's writings on Canada are obscure and unpolished, and had no direct influence on his contemporary countrymen; but they represent an important indication of the imaginative possibilities which the country offered to the creative mind.

Notes to Chapter 9

- <sup>1</sup>Wilbur R. Jacobs, Letters of Francis Parkman, II, 190 (n.).
- <sup>2</sup>Charles Haight Farnham, "The Canadian Habitant," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 67 (Aug., 1883), 381.
- <sup>3</sup>Farnham, "Canadian Voyageurs on the Saguenay," Harper's, 76 (March, 1888), 549.
- <sup>4</sup>Farnham, "Quebec," Harper's, 76 (Feb., 1888), 357.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>Farnham, "Labrador," Harper's, 71 (Oct., 1885), 651.
- <sup>7</sup>Farnham, "A Winter in Canada," Harper's, 68 (Feb., 1884), 394.
- <sup>8</sup>"The Canadian Habitant," 378.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., 379.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., 384.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., 387.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 384.
- <sup>13</sup>"Canadian Voyageurs on the Saguenay," 541.
- <sup>14</sup>John Burroughs, "The Halcyon in Canada," Locusts and Wild Honey (1879; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), p. 208.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 209.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 240.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 227-28.
- <sup>18</sup>Thoreau, The Maine Woods, Walden ed. (1906; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1968), p. 77.
- <sup>19</sup>Burroughs, "The Halcyon in Canada," p. 219.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 228.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 217.



<sup>22</sup>Rowland E. Robinson, Uncle Lisha's Outing (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897), p. 29.

<sup>23</sup>Henry Van Dyke, "The Keeper of the Light," The Ruling Passion: Tales of Nature and Human Nature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 262.

<sup>24</sup>George C. Rankin, Border Canucks: Our Friendly Relations (Detroit: G.C. Rankin, 1890), pp. 250-51.

<sup>25</sup>Florence Wilkinson Evans, The Lady of the Flag-flowers (Chicago: Herbert S. Stone, 1899), p. 55.

<sup>26</sup>Robert Grant, Jack in the Bush; or A Summer on a Salmon River (Boston: Jordon, Marsh & Co., 1888), p. 25.

<sup>27</sup>S. Weir Mitchell, When All the Woods Are Green (1894; rpt. New York: Century, 1905), p. 334.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>29</sup>Mitchell's debate with Holmes is briefly traced by Ernest Earnest, in his biography S. Weir Mitchell: Novelist and Physician (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), passim.

## X

## WHITMAN AND THE NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER

## 1.

In the summer of 1880, Walt Whitman visited Canada at the invitation of Dr. Richard M. Bucke, a psychiatrist and clergyman of London, Ontario. In company with Dr. Bucke (who, from this visit and other experiences wrote the first full-length biography of the poet), Whitman made a few rambling excursions in southwestern Ontario, then took the standard tour by railroad and lake steamer to Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, and the Saguenay region. The poet reported his brief impressions of travel in two articles published in the London Advertiser, "Summer Days in Canada" (June 22, 1880), and "Letter From Walt Whitman" (Aug. 26, 1880). These two articles, with a few digressions omitted and some other minor changes, were included in Whitman's collection of autobiographical notes, Specimen Days (1882). In addition, Whitman kept a completely different and somewhat longer account of his Canadian travels in a diary, and made various fragmentary notes which he may have intended to work up into poems or essays. The diary and notes were edited by William Sloane Kennedy and published in 1904 as Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada.

In various parts of Leaves of Grass, Whitman refers with orthographic eccentricity to "Kanada" and "Kanadians." One

of the catalogues in "Song of Myself," for instance, envisages the poet "at home on Kanadian snow-shoes"; and "Our Old Feuillage" refers vaguely to "Kanada, the snows," along with other features of the American continent. These references are obviously intended as evocations of a poetic or mythological image, a part of Whitman's infinitely optimistic vision of the New World, in the context of which any "facts" about nineteenth-century Canada are virtually irrelevant. Significantly, Whitman's notes and essay fragments about the actual Canada which he finally visited in 1880 do not contradict this poetic image. The distinctive feature of his comments on Canada is the consistent enthusiasm about the natural and social phenomena of the North. Whitman does not have ambivalent feelings about the northern wilderness, nor does he have any reservations about the various ambiguities and contradictions involved in the bicultural society. Indeed, he seems to deliberately distort or suppress certain observable aspects of the country--or more precisely, he seems to look at the country from a highly subjective point of view --in order to create an image of Canada which accords with his unified and optimistic vision of America.

Throughout Whitman's Canada writings one of his favorite words, "amplitude," occurs again and again: the country as a whole has "its own charms and amplitudes" (SD, 345);<sup>1</sup> even the summer air in Canada has an "amplitude and heavenly perfection" (Diary, p. 2); and the Thousand Islands region of

the St. Lawrence has "an amplitude and primal naturalness" (Diary, p. 23). In conjunction with these suggestions of limitless natural vistas, Whitman repeatedly uses such sensuously oriented words as "voluptuous," "delicious," "glorious," "refulgent," and "magnificent" to indicate the primeval beauty and purity of the Canadian scenery. In southwestern Ontario the "verdure" is superior to anything he has ever seen; and there is "a mellow, rich, delicate, almost flavored air" (Diary, p. 2). The Thousand Islands are "the most beautiful extensive region of lakes and islands one can probably see on earth" (Diary, p. 24).

"Land of pure air!" Whitman exclaims at one point in the Diary. "Land of unnumbered lakes! Land of the islets and the woods!" (Diary, p. 25). In addition to such effusions over the climate and scenery, he makes occasional passing reference to people he has observed on his travels. But these references are impersonal, objective, and frequently hyperbolic, like the descriptions of nature. A group of school children in the Ontario town of Sarnia are "healthier, handsomer, more intelligent or decorous" than any he has ever seen (Diary, p. 9); from the shore of the St. Clair river he reports the "handsome, inspiring sight" of boat-racing crews out practising (Diary, p. 3); in the farmland around London he watches "groups of tan-faced men going from work" (Diary, p. 14). And later, in Quebec, he uses stage imagery to describe the French Canadians:

The inhabitants peculiar to our eyes; many marked characters, looks, by-plays, costumes, etc., that would make the fortune of actors who could reproduce them. (Diary, p. 32)

Unlike such observers as Howells or Farnham, who have the realist's concern for the close and careful depiction of observable detail, Whitman seems deliberately to stand back from the spectacle of Canada, to present its various features in very brief and generalized descriptions, then move on quickly to a comprehensive summation of the country, a summation related to his conception of North America as a whole. Thus very early in the first article originally written for the London Advertiser, he offers his remarks on the Canadian population:

From what I already see, I should say the young native population of Canada was growing up, forming a hardy, democratic, intelligent, radically sound, and just as American, good-natured and individualistic race, as the average range of best specimens among us. (SD, 240).

And shortly afterward, he relates this image to an explicit and radically simple political prophecy:

It seems to me a certainty of time, sooner or later, that Canada shall form two or three grand States, equal and independent, with the rest of the American Union. The St. Lawrence and lakes are not for a frontier line, but a grand interior or mid-channel. (SD, 241).

To other American writers, such as Howells and Henry James and E.L. Godkin, the possibility of American annexation of Canada is not an entirely pleasant or desirable prospect, because it would involve the disappearance of certain unique and valuable social traditions. Whitman, however, does not

suggest that the distinctive elements of Canada would disappear with the fulfilment of his vision of a pan-continental United States. On the contrary, some of these elements are an integral part of the vision. Observing along the St. Lawrence the seemingly endless rows of narrow farms and neat farmhouses (the same farmhouses which Thoreau represented as symbols of Canada's parochialism), Whitman merges a vision of Arcadia with a prophecy of an infinitely evolving North American Utopia:

I see, or imagine I see in the future, a race of two million farm-families, ten million people--every farm running down to the water, or at least in sight of it--the best air and drink and sky and scenery of the globe, the sure foundation-nutriments of heroic men and women.  
(Diary, p. 42)

Although Whitman speaks explicitly about annexation, his reactions to Canada cannot be judged in simple political terms. His Canada notes are essentially an emotional and aesthetic reaction to the sense of vast and virtually limitless space which the northern country seems to offer to the imaginative observer. Even his most prosaic jottings, such as a recital of statistics, emphasize this aspect of Canada: "Total Dominion, 3,500,000 square miles. . . . Area equal to the whole of Europe. Population, 1880, four to five millions" (Diary, p. 42). Other literary Americans, such as Thoreau and Howells and James, comment on the vastness of the Canadian wilderness, but what usually strikes them is its ominous solidity, its oppressiveness, which crowd the puny human

communities up against the rivers and lakes and ocean. Whitman's Canada, on the other hand, opens out endlessly to the north and west, offering yet another frontier for his heroic North Americans in their pursuit of the perfect democratic society.

2.

Whitman, like Thoreau, is able to create an imaginative conception of the Canadian frontier while following the well-worn tourist routes of eastern Canada. But while Thoreau evoked visions of the impenetrable forest stretching north to Hudson Bay, Whitman's exuberant and prophetic tones constantly bring to mind the vast and open vistas of the West. And just as Thoreau had his less imaginative successors who traveled to Labrador in search of the "Wild," so in the last two decades of the century several literary Americans headed for the Canadian northwest in search of a new frontier.

One of the first American books to celebrate the Canadian west was a work with the evocative title Daylight Land (1888). The author, W.H.H. Murray (who has been previously mentioned as the author of two historical romances in imitation of James Fenimore Cooper), originally achieved brief literary fame with Adventures in the Wilderness (1869), a semi-comic work of travel information and personal narrative which initiated a rush of amateur campers and hunters to the Adirondack region of New York.<sup>2</sup> Daylight Land apparently represents an attempt to inspire a similar degree of interest

among Americans in the Canadian west, by describing a trip on the new Canadian Pacific railway from Toronto to Vancouver. As literature, the book is almost without value. It is probably modeled on Mark Twain's The Innocents Abroad, for its thin narrative involves a group of jovial American tourists who spend most of their time telling jokes and tall tales. But buried within the interminable digressions and stale humor is an image of Canada which is a virtual sequel to the vision which Whitman conceived while following the well-worn routes of the eastern tourist regions. In Ontario and Quebec Whitman found "room enough for the summer recreation of all North America,"<sup>3</sup> and had envisaged a nation of "ten million farm families," constantly growing and expanding into the infinite vistas of the future. Murray makes more specific but no less extravagant prophecies about the Canadian west: Port Arthur, at the head of Lake Superior, will eventually be "one of the largest cities on the continent"; "a million of American wheat farmers" will eventually occupy the Canadian prairies; the northwest wilderness "from Calgary . . . to the great Mackenzie basin" will provide an inexhaustible source of game for American sportsmen; and British Columbia will yield "a lumber supply for the whole world for centuries to come."<sup>4</sup>

As these references suggest, Murray assumes (like Whitman) that political and social differences between the two countries will eventually be rendered irrelevant as their



respective populations merge in a gradual process of northward and westward expansion. As an interesting corollary to this assumption, however, Murray repeatedly implies that the expansion into Canada will be partly the consequence of the gradual decline of the United States. Americans will move into the Canadian northwest because their own agricultural regions and wilderness frontiers are shrinking. "As the soil to the south [says one of Murray's characters] under our silly system of agriculture becomes exhausted . . . the wheat growers must and will move northward."<sup>5</sup>

In his two final chapters on British Columbia, Murray laments the destruction of the giant fir trees in and around the new city of Vancouver, and hints that the wanton destruction of natural resources which has taken place in the United States may be repeated in Canada until there is no wilderness left in North America at all. But the prevailing tone of Daylight Land is optimistic. The author laments "that life must forever feed its growth on death, and human progress advance only over the ruins of the perfect,"<sup>6</sup> and he acknowledges that nature has been grievously ravaged in his own country; but he is confident that North America is large enough and rich enough in natural resources to support a virtually limitless expansion of civilization.

The same kind of optimism is evident in "Comments on Canada" (1890), a long essay by Charles Dudley Warner, who also rode the Canadian Pacific from eastern Canada to Vancou-

ver. Warner, who so contemptuously dismissed the slow and backward civilization of Cape Breton in Baddeck (1874), was delighted with the bustling energy and "free independent spirit" of the Canadian west.<sup>7</sup> He did not, however, conclude that western Canadian society is merely the northern extension of its American counterpart. "One can mark already with tolerable distinctness a Canadian type which is neither English nor American." There is in the western regions of the new Dominion "a distinct feeling of nationality, and it is increasing."<sup>8</sup> In Warner's view, Canada's westward expansion is an admirable reflection of the earlier experience of the United States, and an indication of the younger country's ultimate ability to exist in a state of independence and equality with its southern neighbor.

Inevitably, the Canadian west attracted the attention of the literary disciples of Theodore Roosevelt. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, many leading American magazines regularly presented feature articles about "roughing it" in the northern prairies and mountains by young and athletic journalists who sought like their "rough rider" idol to achieve a well-balanced life of intellectual and physical activities. Roosevelt himself does not seem to have had much interest in Canada: in all his many volumes of essays dealing with hunting and camping, there is no mention of expeditions across the northern border; and as for Canadian society and political institutions, his essay on "The Monroe

Doctrine" (originally published in the Bachelor of Arts, 1896), clearly indicates that he regarded the "colony" with contempt. Some of his followers, however, were not so ill disposed towards Canada; and especially as they grew increasingly conscious of their own rapidly shrinking frontiers, they looked eagerly northward to the vast unpopulated spaces which seemed to offer limitless opportunities for the pursuit of the "strenuous life."

Typical of such writing is a collection of articles by the New York journalist Julian Ralph (1853-1903), originally published in Harper's, and collected under the title On Canada's Frontier (1892). Ralph, accompanied by Frederic Remington (who illustrated the book), proceeded partly by rail and partly on horseback across the prairies and through the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver. Remington, a would-be novelist and essayist as well as an artist, also wrote about Canada in Men with the Bark On (1900), a collection of articles about life on the Canadian and American frontiers. Another author belonging to this tradition is Caspar Whitney, a personal friend and Harvard classmate of Roosevelt, who wrote about hunting in Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories in On Snow-Shoes to the Barren Grounds (1896). All these authors see the Canadian northwest as the last great undeveloped frontier in America. Like Roosevelt, they are concerned with the problems of administering and settling wilderness areas, and with the conservation of wildlife and

natural resources. Ralph has some criticism of the Canadian treatment of the Indians ("the policy of the Canadian government has been to make treaties with the dangerous tribes and to let the peaceful ones starve"),<sup>9</sup> and Whitney expresses fear that the musk-oxen of the Northwest Territories may shortly be hunted to extinction. But like most Americans of their time, they accept as inevitable the processes of civilization and progress. On the whole, they tend to express gratification that they have lived early enough to experience frontier life in North America, rather than regret that the frontier is disappearing.

A more sensitive reaction to the Canadian northwest is expressed in a neglected but literarily distinguished personal narrative by the eminent realist of the American middle west, Hamlin Garland. The Trail of the Gold Seekers (1899) tells of Garland's unsuccessful attempt to join the Klondike gold rush by means of the notoriously difficult overland route through British Columbia. Beginning at the town of Ashcroft, Garland proceeded on horseback through the immense and sparsely settled wilderness, finally reaching Atlin Lake in the northwest corner of the province. After investigating a small gold strike in the latter region, he abandoned his ambitions to reach the Klondike, and proceeded to Wrangell in the Alaskan panhandle, where he took steamship passage down the coast to Seattle.

Early in his narrative, Garland explains why he undertook

this arduous test of physical endurance and skill:

I believed that I was about to see and take part in a most picturesque and impressive movement across the wilderness. I believed it to be the last great march of the kind which could ever come in America, so rapidly were the wild places being settled up. I wished, therefore, to take part in this tramp of the goldseekers, to be one of them, and record their deeds. I wished to return to the wilderness also, to forget books and theories of art and social problems, and come again face to face with the great free spaces of woods and skies and streams. I was not a goldseeker, but a nature hunter, and I was eager to enter this, the wildest region yet remaining in North America.<sup>10</sup>

Garland was hardly interested at all in northwestern Canada as part of a distinctive political and social entity. Most of the towns and even much of the landscape in British Columbia reminded him of his own "middle border" country or of other parts of the United States. The town of Ashcroft "resembled an ordinary cow-town in the Western States"; the terrain around Ashcroft "seemed dry as ashes, and the hills which rose near resembled those of Montana or Colorado."

Later in the trip, "we camped at night just outside the little village called Clinton, which was not unlike a town in Vermont." Again, the village of Soda Creek is "not unlike a small Missouri River town"; and a side-trip through the old Cariboo mining district "called up in my mind visions of the hot sands, and the sun-lit buttes and valleys of Arizona and Montana. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

As these constantly recurring allusions suggest, The Trail of the Gold Seekers is a prolonged nostalgic lament, not only for the passing of the "wild places" of North

America, but for the passing of the pioneer era in the history of the United States.

I shall not soon forget the shining vistas through which we rode, . . . nor the meadows which possessed all the allurements and mystery which the word "savanna" has always had for me. It was like going back to the prairies of Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, as they were sixty years ago. . . .<sup>12</sup>

In direct contrast to Whitman's enthusiastic vision of Canada as a virtually infinite frontier for future American progress and settlement, Garland's northwest serves mainly as a reminder that an older and simpler way of life, together with the frontier which produced it, has almost vanished from his own country.

Notes to Chapter 10

<sup>1</sup>All quotations from Whitman's Canadian writings refer to Specimen Days, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1963), or to Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada, with Extracts from Other of his Diaries and Literary Note-books, ed. William Sloane Kennedy (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1904).

<sup>2</sup>A detailed and well documented outline of Murray's life and literary career is provided by Warder H. Cadbury in his introduction to a recent reprint of Adventures in the Wilderness (Syracuse: The Adirondack Museum/Syracuse University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Walt Whitman's Diary in Canada, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup>W.H.H. Murray, Daylight Land (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1888), pp. 95, 147, 140, 312.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Dudley Warner, Studies in the South and West, with Comments on Canada (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), p. 437.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 453, 455.

<sup>9</sup>Julian Ralph, On Canada's Frontier (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Hamlin Garland, The Trail of the Gold Seekers: A Record of Travel in Prose and Verse (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 13, 22, 27, 34.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60.

## XI

## CONCLUSION: THE KLONDIKE AND AFTER

Hamlin Garland's goldseeker, making his way towards the northwestern verge of the American continent to take part in the last great frontier migration, represents the culmination of a literary and historical tradition and an intimation of developments to come. Throughout the nineteenth century, and earlier, Canada has been an image of remote and primitive wildness in the American imagination. It has also represented certain social and political alternatives to the United States, and at various times the latter aspects of the northern country have been given considerable prominence. But by the end of the nineteenth century the wilderness frontier is clearly the dominant American notion of Canada: Hamlin Garland's fascination with the seemingly endless forests and plains of northern British Columbia is echoed in the works of many other writers who seek to evoke the simple and primitive experience associated with the early American past.

This effusion of "wilderness nostalgia" is particularly evident in the literature of the Klondike. Most of the writers who wrote about the Klondike, like most of the participants in the gold rush, were natives of the United States; and their novels, personal reminiscences, and poems evoke the setting and experiences in terms recalling the American "wild



west" of literature and folklore, or the earlier pioneer days of Leatherstocking and Daniel Boone. In this context, the distinctive national features of Canada are ignored, or commemorated only in stereotyped allusions to "Mounties," French-Canadian woodsmen, and Canadian government bureaucracy which forced the latter-day pioneers to submit to inconvenient customs inspections and otherwise hedged in the great frontier experience. It was very easy for American writers to forget or minimize the fact that the Klondike was part of Canada, for the Canadian northwest was geographically contiguous with and almost indistinguishable from a vast wilderness region which actually was part of the United States. "Alaska" and "the Klondike" were generally thought of and referred to interchangeably.<sup>1</sup>

National distinctions are almost irrelevant in the fiction of the best known literary chronicler of the northern gold rush, Jack London. There are, it is true, certain Canadian "local color" elements in London's fiction. In The Call of the Wild (1903) the dog Buck is temporarily owned by two mackinaw-clad patois-speaking French Canadians, and London dwells briefly on the uniquely Canadian paradox of the conscientious devotion of these two descendants of old France to the task of carrying her Britannic majesty's mails. And the short story "To the Man on Trail" (included in The Son of the Wolf, 1900) features a dedicated Mountie resolutely setting forth on the "long trail" in the midst of a blizzard

to pursue a fugitive from justice.

London was much more familiar with Canada than these stereotyped images in his Klondike fiction might suggest. In 1894, he "rode the rods" from California to New England, and made the return trip on the Canadian Pacific, from Montreal to Vancouver. This year as a vagabond he described in the semi-fictional The Road (1907), much of which is concerned with his adventures dodging the Canadian police and begging handouts at French-Canadian farmhouses and in the back streets of Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. But The Road was written while London was very much under the influence of socialist doctrine, and one of its main arguments is that traditional distinctions such as national boundaries are less important in the modern world than the distinction between rich and poor. Hence The Road deliberately emphasizes the similarities between Canada and the United States. The narrative ranges with erratic discursiveness from Ohio to Manitoba, from San Francisco to Montreal, to demonstrate that everywhere in North America the poor and underprivileged are relegated to a cruel "underground" existence on the edge of starvation and despair.

In a similar way, London's Klondike fiction is dominated by the naturalistic doctrines which he derived from his eclectic reading of Herbert Spencer, Nietzsche, and others. Instead of distinguishing between Canada and the United States, London establishes a basic contrast between the "Northland"

and the "Southland." The "Northland" of his short stories and novels is almost always identifiable as the region which he actually saw when he went to the Klondike in 1897, between the seaport at Dyea, Alaska and Dawson City in that part of the Canadian Northwest Territory later to become the Yukon. Occasionally, as in "The White Silence" (The Son of the Wolf), and in the stories about Indians and Eskimos in Children of the Frost (1902), he evokes a more remote and semi-mythological region of perpetual ice and snow. This image of the North, although based on geographical regions and experiences similar to those in The Trail of the Gold Seekers, differs strikingly from Garland's. Instead of looking back nostalgically to an earlier frontier period in United States history, London evokes a primitive or primeval epoch suggesting the very earliest stages in human history, when men who were hardly differentiated from beasts began to assert their control over their environment and over each other by brute strength and cunning. Paradoxically, this image of the remote past is also an image of the future. As people move into the harsh and violent arctic environment, the more highly developed races will drive out those less advanced and less amenable to change. This is the theme of such stories as "The Son of the Wolf" and "An Odyssey of the North" (both in The Son of the Wolf), which deal with the effect on Indian and Eskimo culture of the advent of white men. And as "In a Far Country" (The Son of the Wolf) and "To Build a Fire"

(Lost Face, 1910) effectively demonstrate, the physically weak and unadaptable even among the "superior" race will degenerate and die in this environment.

London's "Northland" is thus a grim vision of the primitive struggle for existence. The vision is not entirely pessimistic, for it does not imply that the movement northward is an implacable process of historical inevitability. In The Call of the Wild London traces the career of a dog who is virtually transformed into a wolf in what appears to be a deterministic process, when he is carried against his will from his native "Southland" into the north; but in White Fang (1906), London argues that the process can be reversed, in the story of a wolf from the Klondike region who is taken to California and transformed by love into a domestic pet. The same process is applied to human experience in Burning Daylight (1910), the story of an exuberant frontier character from the Klondike who eventually settles down to a quiet and civilized life as a rancher in California.

As these latter works suggest, there is ultimately an implicit nationalistic theme in London's fiction. In opposition to his dramatic exaltation of the "Northland" and of the supermen and super dogs who triumph in the struggle for survival, he asserts a belief in civilized society (or more specifically, civilized American society) where the weak and the strong can exist together under a political and social system based on justice and benevolence.

American nationalism is a much more prominent aspect of the fiction of Rex Beach (1877-1949). Beach did not insist on an emphatic distinction between the Northland and the South; much of his fiction is concerned with the theme of bringing the social structures of American civilization to the northern frontier. Having participated in the gold rush to Nome, Alaska, rather than in the Klondike stampede, he often uses the Alaskan setting with pointed reference to the fact that it is distinctively American. His best known work, The Spoilers (1908), is a dramatization of the fight against corrupt politicians and businessmen in Alaska by means of the popular "big stick" philosophy of direct action propogated by Theodore Roosevelt. This militant form of American democracy spreads into Canada in Beach's one novel of the Klondike gold rush, The Winds of Chance (1918), which depicts the energetic advent of American commercial and political initiative into the Canadian Northwest Territory.

Another novel-writing disciple of Theodore Roosevelt was Michigan-born Stewart Edward White (1873-1946). White did not join the gold rush to the northwest, but made a series of camping trips to northern Ontario, the main literary results of which were a book of essays, The Forest (1903), and a novel, The Silent Places (1904). The theme of The Silent Places, presented through a rather melodramatic plot, is the familiar conflict between primitivism and progress. In the forest wilderness southwest of James Bay, two agents of the Hudson's

Bay Company pursue an Indian trapper who has reneged on his annual debt to the trading post. White depicts with sympathy and insight the Ojibway and Cree natives of the Ontario wilderness, and condemns the disruption which the white mercantile society has introduced into their ancient way of life; but ultimately, like most other disciples of Roosevelt, he acknowledges the inevitable ascendancy of white civilization. "We regret," wrote White in The Blazed Trail (1902), a novel set on the northwestern Michigan-Ontario frontier, "the passing of the Indian, the buffalo, the great pine forests, for they are of the picturesque; but we live gladly on the product of the farms that have taken their places."<sup>2</sup> The essays in The Forest are more directly concerned with the picturesque elements in the northern frontier, and with the expression of regret for their presumably inevitable passing. Here, White pays tribute to the Indians, French Canadians, and Anglo-Canadian settlers in the region of the north shore of Lake Huron. The friendly and nostalgic mood of The Forest recalls The Trail of the Gold Seekers; like Garland in British Columbia, White finds in northern Ontario a vestigial reflection of the great pioneer era of the United States.

White's The Forest is also in the tradition of Henry Van Dyke's fishing essays and S. Weir Mitchell's leisurely romance of the outdoor life, When All the Woods Are Green. The idyllic picture of Canada as a sportsman's and nature-hunter's paradise can be found repeatedly in early twentieth-

century American literature, in the pages of the Outlook magazine, for instance (where The Forest originally appeared), or in the monthly periodical Forest and Stream. Among notable literary memoirs of outdoor recreation in Canada might be mentioned a work by Mark Twain's friend and literary executor Albert Bigelow Paine, The Tent Dwellers (1908), a semi-comic and nostalgic account of the adventures and misadventures of two American tourists on a fishing expedition in the Nova Scotia backwoods. A later and more significant example of this genre, which introduces certain ironic variations on the back-to-nature theme, is Sinclair Lewis's novel Mantrap (1926).

In Mantrap, two New York businessmen withdraw to the northern wilds of Manitoba for a secluded vacation of camping and fishing. Before they set out, one of the tourists subjectively envisages the expedition:

The Long Trail. A dim path among enormous spruces. Overhead, gold-green light slipping through the branches. Lost Lakes, reflecting as ebony the silver of birch groves. The iron night, and in the vast silence more brilliant stars. Grim wordless Indians, tall and hawk-nosed, following for league on league the trail of a wounded moose. A log cabin, and at the door a lovely Indian princess. A trapper bearing a pack of furs--luxuriant ermine and cross-fox and beaver.<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent reality, as the exaggerated diction of this vision ironically prefigures, involves discomfort and inconvenience, squabbling between the two tourists, lazy and stupid Indian guides, and at the end of the "long trail" the northern village of Mantrap Landing, which turns out to be

another American "Main Street," complete with the economic bitterness of the capitalist competitive system, and all the petty social rivalries of small-town American society. The thematic development of Mantrap recalls Howells' The Quality of Mercy, which similarly involved a flight into the northern wilderness, ending in an ironic encounter with conditions similar to those from which the protagonist was fleeing. But significantly, almost all the people in Mantrap Landing are citizens of the United States, and Lewis makes it clear that they have absorbed their pettiness and competitiveness from their urban American background. The possibility that Canada, still an ostensibly undeveloped and unspoiled country, might be able to produce a morally superior breed of individual, is set forth in the person of the one Canadian in the story, an amiable and guileless trader from New Brunswick, who embodies such virtues as honesty and self-reliance which the Americans lack. This idealization of Canada and Canadians is obviously a reversal of such nineteenth-century representations as Mitchell's When All the Woods Are Green, which assert the superiority of the United States over Canada. Obviously, the nineteenth-century belief in progress and civilization is giving way in some quarters to skepticism about the achievements of American society. And in Lewis's case, this skepticism is accompanied by a rather naive idealization of Canadians as a new breed of intrepid and virtuous pioneers contrasting to the urbanized and decadent Americans.



Mantrap is in many ways a weak novel, for Lewis does not seem to be able to decide whether the object of his satire is American society or merely "the childish hurts and squabbles by which we poison life."<sup>4</sup> And his attitudes to the setting and characters seem to vary somewhat erratically from cynicism to sympathy. But his novel represents an interesting, if diffuse, imaginative response to Canada by one twentieth-century American author of prominent critical and popular reputation.

The most predominant image of Canada in twentieth-century American literature (at least in quantitative terms) seems to belong to a considerably lower level of achievement. The modern imaginative urge to go "back to nature" has been expressed in a prolific tradition of popular fiction, involving itinerant adventurers (usually American), Mounties, trappers, and Indians, in melodramatic situations in the "frozen north." The extent of this tradition is extremely difficult to measure, since it comprises ephemeral "pulp" and juvenile works, as well as a great many hardly more durable romantic adventure novels ostensibly addressed to adults. Almost any reference work dealing with popular literature--the Fiction Index, for instance, or A.T. Dickinson's American Historical Fiction (1971)--includes large numbers of titles in this category. An investigation of the scope and significance of the twentieth-century "frozen north" romance is probably the potential subject of a fairly substantial book.

Perhaps this tradition can be adequately epitomized by one of its earliest and most successful practitioners, the Michigan-born novelist James Oliver Curwood (1878-1927). Between 1910 and 1922, Curwood published about fifteen novels of adventure set in what he called "God's country," the forest wilderness covering the northern portions of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta provinces, and the southern fringes of the Northwest Territories. Curwood reportedly made regular hunting and exploring expeditions into this wilderness, but his fiction does not convey the impression of geographical or historical verisimilitude. His plots are extremely sentimental and melodramatic, usually involving violent conflict between itinerant adventurers and outlaws (The Danger Trail, 1910), or "Mounties" on the trail of fugitives (Philip Steele of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, 1911), and demure but resourceful heroines who fight at the side of the Mountie or adventurer (God's Country--and the Woman, 1915). As Curwood reveals in his autobiography, Son of the Forests (1930), most of his plots are adapted from earlier literary sources. Two of his favorite authors were Victor Hugo, whose escape-and-pursuit motif from Les Miserables he uses repeatedly, and Jack London, whose success Curwood candidly admits he set out to emulate simply by repeating some of London's formulas of plot and setting.<sup>5</sup> The exploitation of these derivative formulas was apparently economically successful, for after publishing The Valley of

Silent Men (1920), a "Mountie" murder mystery, Curwood was "able to say truthfully that [he] was the best-paid novelist in America."<sup>6</sup>

After publishing two more romances of "God's country"--The Flaming Forest (1921) and The Country Beyond (1922)--Curwood branched out into a slightly more sophisticated variation on the Canadian theme with a series of historical romances about early Canada under the French regime. His first two efforts in this direction, The Black Hunter (1926) and its sequel The Plains of Abraham (1928) involve well-researched and detailed representations of New France during the two or three decades before the fall of Quebec, but the central plots feature the familiar steel-jawed hero and demure heroine in a series of rather implausible adventures.

Curwood's novels of New France, like his romances of the northern forest, are part of a quantitatively large tradition in twentieth-century American popular literature. The bibliography of Joseph-Delphis Gauthier's Le Canada français et le roman américain lists almost one hundred American historical romances published between 1900 and 1948, dealing with Canada under the French regime. Subsequent lists, such as Jack Van Derhoof's Bibliography of Novels Related to American Frontier and Colonial History (1971), indicate that the production of romances about old Canada continues unabated. Again, this profusion of material probably deserves serious study, in the history of modern American popular taste, as well as in the

history of literature. But this brief concluding survey will consider only the one work of widely acknowledged literary reputation, Willa Cather's Shadows on the Rock (1931).

Willa Cather's picture of seventeenth-Century Canada, like that of many other historical romancers, is heavy with local color and historical information; but the author is interested in something more than merely exploiting this material for its intrinsic interest. Essentially, Shadows on the Rock, like her earlier O Pioneers! (1913) and My Antonia (1918), is concerned with the adjustment of European immigrants to the New World. The Quebec apothecary Euclide Auclair typifies the resolute and forward-looking immigrant who is determined to accept the new and often harsh conditions of life in America, instead of continually pining for the fleshpots of the Old World. His antithesis is found, on one level, in Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier, who in twelve years as Bishop of Quebec has spent only five years in Canada, and obviously looks upon the New World only as a convenient means of enhancing his position in the Old. On another level, Auclair is contrasted to the deformed workman Blinker, who is horrified by the North American forest and who carries a terrible burden of guilt from his past experiences as a royal torturer in France. Both Saint-Vallier and Blinker thus retain links with the Old World which prevent them from functioning properly in the New. But Willa Cather does not suggest that the immigrant must cut himself off from the past

altogether. On the contrary, she acknowledges that he often brings with him certain very valuable traditions, not the least of which are his religious forms and rituals, which, if they occasionally lead him into excesses of emotion or action, also provide a sense of cultural refinement which counteracts the primitive and brutalizing influence of the wilderness.

"When an adventurer carries his gods with him into a remote and savage country," she editorializes in one chapter, "the colony he founds will, from the beginning, have graces, traditions, riches of the mind and spirit."<sup>7</sup>

Apart from Willa Cather, very few twentieth-century American writers of preeminent reputation have devoted much attention to Canada. It is a noteworthy fact that the two novelists frequently acknowledged as the most significant and influential in modern American literature--Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner--both had Canadian experiences in their early years, but neither seems to have been significantly impressed by the country. Faulkner took RAF flight training at Toronto during the first world war, but the only direct literary result of this experience was the early short story "Landing in Luck" (first published in the Mississippian, 1919, and collected in Early Prose and Poetry, ed. Carvel Collins, 1962). There is an allusion in the story to "Borden," which is presumably Camp Borden, the military base near Toronto, but the setting is otherwise so generalized that it might be England rather than Canada. Later in his

career, when Faulkner decided to introduce a Canadian element into his fiction, he created a network of images and ideas more closely related to the traditional semi-mythological conception of the frozen north, instead of drawing on his Toronto experiences. In Absalom, Absalom! (1936) the narrator-interlocutor Shreve McCannon is from Edmonton, Alberta, which presumably conjures up visions of sub-arctic cold and snow in complete antithesis to the refulgent and semi-tropical "summer of wistaria" of Quentin Compson's native Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. In the cooperative attempt to recreate the story of Thomas Sutpen, Shreve's remoteness from the settings and experiences enables him to see Sutpen with an objectivity--and, frequently, an irony--of which the emotionally involved Quentin is incapable.

Although Hemingway's Canadian experience was more extensive than Faulkner's, he made even less literary use of this experience. In March, 1920, he went to work for the Toronto Daily Star and its companion periodical the Star Weekly, and remained in Toronto until December, 1921, subsequently embarking for Europe as a foreign correspondent for the two papers. During his stay of nearly two years in Toronto, he seems to have been assigned mainly to the "American beat," turning out stories and feature articles on such topics as Chicago gangsters, rum-running across the border, and (more interestingly) Canadian evaders of military service who took refuge in the United States in the early years of the war.

He also did a few "outdoorsman" articles of a very conventional type, such as "The Best Rainbow Trout Fishing in the World is at the Canadian Soo" (Star Weekly, Aug. 28, 1920). His one detailed attempt to compare the two countries was a very hackneyed and superficial feature published in the Star Weekly for Oct. 9, 1920: "The average Yank divides Canadians into two classes--wild and tame. Wild Canucks wear Mackinaw blanket pants and are closely pursued by Mounted Police. Tame ones wear spats, small moustaches, and M.C.'s"; and so on, in much the same vein, for several paragraphs. The most important point that emerges from an examination of Hemingway's Canadian journalism is the fact that very little intimation of his later fictional interests appears until he begins to send dispatches from Europe. In the trivial features and routine news stories written in Toronto, there is nothing identifiable as the direct source of later stories or novels; but very shortly after his arrival in Europe, he was writing of incidents in the evacuation of Thrace which were later to be incorporated into In Our Time.<sup>8</sup>

There are various possible reasons why Canada failed to stimulate Hemingway's fiction-writing imagination. The Toronto police courts, slums, racetracks, and newsrooms to which his observation was mostly confined were probably indistinguishable in outward appearance from their counterparts in most cities of the United States. Even the trout-fishing region of the "Canadian Soo" must have been virtually identical with

the upper peninsula of Michigan with which he had been familiar since his boyhood. But perhaps more important, Hemingway took the Toronto job mainly because it offered the prospect of a European posting, and he was clearly anxious to join the new generation of expatriate writers; so the orientation period in Toronto was a barely tolerable preliminary to be impatiently endured.

Forty years after Hemingway's Toronto sojourn, another major American author took a more leisurely look at the city, along with other parts of Canada. But Edmund Wilson's O Canada (1966) is not about Canadian society, or even about "Canadian culture" as the sub-title claims. Rather, it is a collection of articles originally published in the New Yorker on a few representative works of English- and French-Canadian literature. Wilson's approach to his subject, however, is mainly historical and sociological; and in the course of placing his Canadian writers in their national context, he has a few comments about his own experiences and thoughts of Canada.

Wilson's Canadian experiences were almost entirely confined to Toronto and Montreal, although he tries to convey a more comprehensive impression of the country by reporting the results of his limited historical and geographical researches. In his youth, he explains early in the book, he was inclined to think of Canada, like many other Americans, "as an inconceivably limitless extension of the wilderness--the 'North



Woods'--of upstate New York."<sup>9</sup> In contrast to this stereotyped image, he reports his discovery of Canadian cities and of a number of Canadian writers. He claims to find some intimation of a distinctive national identity in Toronto, "of which it is customary to say that it is getting to be indistinguishable from our similar cities in the Middle West but which I felt to have its own rhythm and accent."<sup>10</sup> In trying to define this "rhythm and accent," however, the best Wilson can do is talk briefly about the high quality of restaurants, museums, and art galleries. In Montreal, he is able (like his nineteenth-century predecessors) to find more readily a superficial appearance of foreignness, but in his chapters on French Canada he relies very heavily on his reading rather than his experience, and eventually strays into a long, rambling summary of the Quebec independence movement, gleaned entirely from books on the subject. At no time in the collection of essays does he attempt to explore, or even mention, any possible principles of unity (or disunity) or points of comparison relative to the fact that Montreal and Toronto are parts of a single political entity. On the whole, O Canada conveys the impression of being the result of a not entirely congenial (perhaps even distasteful) "assignment." Wilson obviously finds little in Canada to interest him, and so makes rather non-committal or politely approving comments on the country and its culture.

Of course Wilson, Hemingway, and Faulkner do not consti-

tute an epitome of twentieth-century American literature. No doubt a detailed study of the modern American image of Canada would reveal a much more complex picture. But in general, it appears that modern American writers who look at the Canadian past, or the northern wilderness, or the mildly exotic anomaly of Quebec province, find much the same phenomena as their nineteenth-century predecessors did; and those who look at modern Canadian cities merely find an uninteresting reflection of their own society. On the whole, it appears that Canada has not provided a stimulus to twentieth-century American writers comparable to that reflected in the works of Longfellow, Thoreau, Parkman, and Howells. Or it may be more accurate to say that twentieth-century writers have merely continued to express the basic attitudes and ideas originally defined by Longfellow, Thoreau, Parkman, and Howells.

Inevitably, the American image of Canada will continue to grow and change as the two countries grow and change, but certain basic features in this image will undoubtedly remain constant. The American literary image of Canada, like the political and social relationships between the two countries, has always involved--and will undoubtedly continue to involve--a basic paradox. To Americans, Canada is familiar yet foreign; a part of and apart from their own experience. When they look to Canada they see, as through the distortion of a warped mirror, a grotesque reflection of themselves--of their past, their present, their future. And they also see a

strange alternative to themselves: another America, as it might have been, or as it might possibly become.

Notes to Chapter 11

<sup>1</sup>There is a comprehensive bibliographical and critical survey of the literature of the Klondike in an unpublished master's thesis by William Keith Hubbard, "The Klondike Gold Rush in Literature, 1896-1930" (Diss. Western Ontario, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>Stewart Edward White, The Blazed Trail (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Sinclair Lewis, Mantrap (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>James Oliver Curwood, Son of the Forests (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1930), pp. 223-24.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>7</sup>Willa Cather, Shadows on the Rock (1931; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup>See "A Silent, Ghastly Procession," and "Refugees from Thrace," By-Line: Ernest Hemingway (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), pp. 51-52, 56-60.

<sup>9</sup>Edmund Wilson, O Canada (New York: Noonday Press, 1966), p. 37.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

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