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The Literary Construction of Canada, the ‘Other America’, and Its Transatlantic Ties

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The essay offers a diachronic perspective on the construction of a distinct sense of a Canadian identity. Taking its departure from late twentieth-century analyses of cultural critics and sociologists (the Canadian N. Frye and the American S. M. Lipset), the essay juxtaposes the different political cultures and collective self-perceptions in the U.S. and in Canada. It relates them to the different history of colonization with the co-presence of the two Founding Nations in Canada and the arrival of other ethnic groups, thus precluding the ideal of a homogeneous country whilst the harsher climatic conditions restricted the individualism which became a salient feature of U.S.-American culture.

Following the late nineteenth-century debate between Continentalists and the advocates of a Canadian variant of British Imperialism Canada's participation in the Great War – in diachronic perspective – coincided with a number of autochthonous artistic endeavors (“Group of Seven”) and the appearance of literary histories stressing the distinctive quality of Canadian national culture. The essay underlines Hugh MacLennan's role as the first prominent fiction writer projecting self-confidence and the increasing anxiety concerning domination by the powerful southern neighbor, which fostered an emphasis on a separate national culture with Canada as a potential mediator between the U.S.A. and Europe. The essay finally considers the more recent metamorphosis of Canadian society through the dramatic shift in the countries of origin of newcomers, the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism with the recognition of diverse cultural patterns inside a liberal country in which diversity itself is variously regarded as the chief characteristic of its culture.

When the results of the American Presidential elections were heard in Europe in November 2004, a cartoonist did not miss the chance to express a sense of “division” on the American

continent. On the basis of the results he contrasted the contiguous states which had voted for George Bush with the states on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts plus those states in the north which had supported John Kerry. In his cartoon he juxtaposed “Jesusland” with “The United States of Canada” in recognition of the strength of fundamentalist and moral and /or moralistic elements in the American heartland and in the south subsumed under the term “Jesusland”. The “liberal” states on the Pacific and the Atlantic coasts were linked to the traditionally more liberal northern neighbor of the USA.

Twenty-three years previously Joel Garreau, an American journalist who worked for the *Washington Post*, had similarly ignored the border between the United States and Canada. In his book entitled *The Nine Nations of North America* he provocatively included almost all of Canada in several regions centered on (specific) US cities. (He merged “Atlantic Canada” into a region called *New England*, placed Southern Ontario in another region termed *The Foundry*, etc. Only Québec was granted a separate identity in this book.) While Garreau thus acknowledged the Francophone presence and its heritage in the neighboring country, his elimination of the border between Canada and the US in other parts of the continent anticipated later developments, which, in the eyes of some observers, the NAFTA-agreement seems to have partly implemented. The economic integration of the North American market has progressed to such an extent that today more than 85 per cent of Canada’s trade is with its NAFTA partners, the US and Mexico. And yet the ostensible integration of Canada into the large continental market has not eroded differences in political opinions and attitudes. This became particularly apparent in the controversy and dissent in the NATO partnership over Iraq and in the stand taken by the liberal Canadian government under Jean Chrétien on this issue. A closer look at the positions of the Canadian and the US administrations vis-à-vis the United Nations on such crucial policy issues shows that over the last decade Canada has much more often voted with European countries than with the United States. Canada is also definitely an advocate of multilateral action rather than unilateral decisions. Moreover, there can be no doubt that there is a high degree of consensus concerning the tasks and responsibilities of the state and the federal governments in Canada and in Europe. It is natural to inquire whether this pattern of behavior in the international arena and the resulting sympathies for European positions, which are reciprocated not only by the governments but also by the people at large in European countries, are primarily the result of the relative modest leverage of a country of thirty million inhabitants. One may ask oneself whether the limitations of the political, economic and military power of Canada, which exclude the possibility of the country claiming for itself the role of a model and yardstick, account for this high degree of consonance between Canada and Europe. The literary and cultural scholar reflecting on the reasons for this state of affairs is, of course, aware of the complexity of the issue when he attempts to trace this reality to its sources and when he examines the differences between the collective sense of identity of Canadians and US-Americans and their relationships with Europeans.

There can be no doubt that the strikingly different history of Canada, its bicultural heritage and the coexistence of the two founding nations are at the root of this contrast.

The mere fact of the co-presence of two distinct language groups would, however, not in itself explain the different directions taken and the distinct mentalities apparent in Canada and the United States. Here the insights of scholars in the fields of cultural history, social psychology and of imagology assist the researcher in the attempt to account for the self-image and sense of identity of Canadians.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Eric Hobsbawm’s and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* have raised the general awareness of the constructive nature of collective identities and have demonstrated the relatively recent origin of allegedly long traditions of national cultures. Social psychologists have pointed out the mechanisms

which regulate the perception of one's own group and its distinction from the outgroup and have supplied useful concepts like auto- and heterostereotype or ethnocentrism. These help us to describe the inevitable differentiation between collective identities and provide labels for what one allegedly shares with the members of one's own group, usually favorable character traits and attitudes, and the qualities of the *others*. Following in the wake of Hugo Dyserinck's pioneer essays, comparatists and other literary scholars such as F. K. Stanzel, Manfred Beller, Joep Leerssen, and Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, acting as *imagologists* have described the genesis and dissemination of more or less fixed concepts of national characters which appear in literary texts and literary discourse generally, and have provided analytical tools with which to describe the alleged differences or the elective affinities between national cultures.

That North American intellectuals themselves have been keenly aware of the differences between the United States and Canada, between the national cultures in these countries and of the ties between Canadian culture and Europe becomes apparent in the detailed diagnosis provided by two prominent scholars, one a Canadian, the other an American. The distinguished scholar, comparatist, and cultural critic Northrop Frye (who died in 1991) came to stress the distinction between the cultures of the two neighboring countries more and more in the course of his career.¹ Many essays and pronouncements reflect this inclination. His efforts correspond to the contemporaneous expressions of grave concern at the overwhelming influence of the powerful USA on Canada by spokesmen of the Canadian Left as well as of the Canadian Conservative Right.

Without adopting the extreme positions of these radical spokesmen of a Canadian nationalism, such as Robin Mathews (especially in *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution*, 1978) or George Grant (especially in *Lament for a Nation*, 1959, rev. ed. 1965), Frye tried to identify the differences between the two countries and traced them to their origins. Juxtaposing the strikingly diverse beginnings of the two countries he acknowledged the fact that the power south of the 49th parallel owed its existence to a revolution of the majority of the settlers against the mother country, while Canada had been the result of a marriage of convenience. It was based on the consent of politicians in British North America, who were eager to prevent its takeover by the Union, which had been victorious in the Civil War and was to purchase Alaska from Russia in these years. The agreement was arrived at by the descendants of Loyalists, who, almost three generations earlier, had left the new American republic, and by the Francophones in Quebec. The latter had felt inclined to trust the fortunes of their culture to the loyalists in British North America rather than to the offspring of the rebellious patriots in the USA. The Quebecois had been promised the preservation of their way of life in 1774, and in spite of various tensions and conflicts (such as the rebellion of 1837), they were confident that in British North America they could retain their collective identity more easily than in the larger and more powerful Anglophone country in the south.

These different points of departure shaped the future development of the two countries, a fact no cultural critic can ignore. In addition, Northrop Frye in his repeated attempts to account for the differences between the two cultures stressed the more extreme conditions with which the settlers had to cope in the north of the continent, highlighting the inhospitable environment hostile to human settlement. This forced the pioneers to cooperate in their constant struggle with adverse conditions. They established garrisons providing shelter and support. This fact necessarily limited the individualism which flourished south of the border in the United States where the 'frontier' in its progress allowed each individual to find an arena for their efforts. (Cf. de Tocqueville's probing analysis and insight into the dominant individualism in the United States.)

The classic statement of this thesis formulated by Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous lecture delivered in Chicago in 1893 on "The Significance of the Frontier in American

History” has an analogue in Northrop Frye’s concluding essay contributed to Carl Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada*, first published in 1965. Frequently cited, Frye’s description of the beginnings of Canada and the experience of the arrival in the country by the European settlers encapsulates a different national myth, a *grand récit* of Canadian national culture.

Canada began [...] as an obstacle, blocking the way to the treasures of the East, to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it. [...] But Canada has, for all practical purposes [and in contrast to the United States], no Atlantic seaboard. The traveler from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale [...] To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent. (Frye “Conclusion” 1965: 824)

The other North American authority who sharply distinguishes between the cultures of the two neighboring countries and thus indirectly defines the collective identity of Canadians and their closer transatlantic ties is the prominent American sociologist and political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset. In his comparative study entitled *Continental Divide: Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (1990) he contrasts the different attitudes, political cultures and value systems of the United States and Canada. This juxtaposition shaped by distinct historical factors is still true in a time in which the Canadian economy is even more closely linked to the American as a result of the NAFTA-treaty of 1993.

Among the many significant differences Lipset describes is the respect for elites in Canadian society, which contrasts with the populist tradition in US-American society, a phenomenon which Alexis de Tocqueville already described in his *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840). Opinion polls also show the fundamental scepticism of the American people towards government, their rejection of “big government” in the US while Canadians generally are inclined to grant a stronger role to the government, and to allow it to intervene and work for social justice through taxation and other fiscal measures. Canadians and Americans also hold dissimilar views as far as social legislation is concerned, with the Canadian model approaching that of the welfare state practiced in Europe. Canadians also grant and attribute responsibility to the government in the sphere of medical care and health.

Moreover the self-confident articulation of the American national ideology differs strongly from the continuous struggle in Canada over the definition of a collective identity; the late adoption of a new flag and a new anthem in Canada reflect this reality. No claims of an exceptional role for Canada have been made, which contrasts starkly with “American Exceptionalism”.

Particularly interesting is a comparative assessment of the role of religion in the two neighboring countries. Nobody can overlook the paradoxical fact that the strict separation of state and church in the Constitution of the United States has led to an incomparably stronger influence of religion in the United States than in Canada or Europe.² (This has been true of Quebec only since *la révolution tranquille*, when the church lost its dominant influence in the field of education.) Gallup polls and statistics confirm the significantly higher involvement of people with religious groups, which all support the “civic religion” in the US. The sense of mission which has been shown not only by the current administration in the United States continues the ideological tradition of the Puritan Pilgrim Fathers, which in the nineteenth century emerged in secularized fashion as political imperialism with the catchword of “manifest destiny”. Such an ideology has not been present in Canada and after World War I even any expression of support for British imperialism faded.

When we consider the history of settlements in the two immigrant societies in North America the differences are reflected in contrasted concepts and literary texts. Michel

Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur's *Letters From an American Farmer* (published in 1782) describes the metamorphosis of the various European immigrants into "new men", with the newcomers deliberately shedding their old customs, habits and attitudes, and embracing a new identity. Crèvecoeur's classic text was to provide a key concept when the waves of immigrants to the United States peaked at almost 1.3 million people entering the country in 1907. The concept of the "melting pot" as popularized by Israel Zangwill in his successful play of the following year, intended to set at ease the fears fueled by nativists in the host society about "unassimilable ethnics", did not work in the context of the Canadian Prairie provinces where the vast majority of new arrivals in the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century came from countries other than Great Britain (or France). The situation in Canada thus demanded a different concept, one which became popular in the years between the wars: the Canadian "mosaic". Though it is equally true that the advocates of a relatively homogeneous country and of British superiority did not hide their discomfort at the consequences of the propaganda intended to appeal to newcomers from central and eastern Europe. One need only think of the sarcastic statement by Stephen Leacock, whose natural sense of humor evaporated in the face of the strangers coming to take up their abode in the prairie provinces.

Poles, Hungarians, Bukowinians and any others [...] will come in to share the heritage which our fathers have won [...] Out of all these we are to make a kind of mixed race in which is to be the political wisdom of the British, the chivalry of the French, the gall of the Galician, the hungriness of the Hungarians and the dirtiness of the Doukobor. (Leacock, *Adresses Delivered Before the Canadian Club of Ottawa*, Ottawa 1910)

Yet, the presence of these immigrants also paved the way for the introduction of a much more ambitious concept, that of "multiculturalism" following the post-1971 liberalization of the immigration laws in Canada.

The struggle for a national culture in British North America began a full generation later than in the United States. It paralleled the political efforts to bring together the Maritime colonies and the heartland, with the two provinces Ontario and Quebec, in the Confederation of 1867. It is instructive to note that the optimism articulated by the politician D'Arcy McGee and the spokesmen of the *Canada First*-Movement inspired by him derived from and was explicitly related to the dramatic progress of national culture and literature in Germany and in the USA. Within a generation, Germany, regarded by French writers in the 17th and the early 18th centuries as a backward country, had quickly achieved the status of a "country of poets and thinkers" and had become a model for the young national literature of the United States. Less than fifty years earlier arrogant critics writing in British periodicals had failed to see any evidence of creative talent in America and had formulated a rhetorical question: "Who, in the four corners of the world, reads an American book?" (Sydney Smith, *Edinburgh Review* 33 1820). This query was positively answered by the successes of writers like Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper and later by poets like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who gained an international reputation. Canadian patriots referred to this fundamental change brought about in the two countries and national cultures which they wanted to imitate.

In this early era of Canadian optimism many a patriotic speech was delivered in which a positive national self-image was constructed, for instance, by Robert Grant Haliburton, the younger son of the Nova Scotia writer and humorist Thomas Chandler Haliburton. In his lecture on "The Men of the North and Their Place in History" delivered in Montreal in 1869 he combined aspects of the theory of climate and the racial theory. Haliburton argued that in Canada there were ideal preconditions for a great national future, among them the fact that the

origin of the settlers in Canada had been Northern Europe, and that these European pioneers and their descendants lived in a cold invigorating climate. The gene pool of Northern races and European peoples was thus made the basis for the future global importance of Canada.³ It is curious to note that Haliburton also suggested a new name for his country which should receive the name “Norland” instead of “Canada”, a name which in his view lacked euphony and lucidity as a term. With his pronouncements Haliburton belongs to the optimists who opposed those who had expressed their low opinion of and condescension towards Canadian society and its “leaders”.

There are obviously parallels between the statements of the members of the *Canada First*-Movement and later expressions of nationalism in Canada, and similar phenomena in other Anglophone colonies of the British Empire, for instance, in Australia. While originally closely modeled on the genres of literature practiced in the mother country and in Europe generally, the literary productions and the criticism accompanying them in other parts of the British Empire reflected recurrent nationalist waves and the attempts to adapt the literary forms to the different “latitudes” and locations. An obvious method to transform the imitations into “original”/“autochthonous” texts was the inclusion of references to the fauna, flora, and the landscapes and regions of the colonies.⁴ This, of course, also applies to Canada.

There the first stage in the attempt to produce an authentic and distinct literature was reached in the 1880s, when Charles G. D. Roberts and then other so-called “Confederation Poets” published their post-romantic nature poetry depicting the natural scene in the Maritimes. They successfully evoked the specific atmosphere of this region, or nostalgically recaptured moments long passed or moods inspired by them. Similarly, animal stories and some local color stories gradually gave a distinct profile to Canadian fictional prose in English.

Yet while these “Confederation” authors had begun to emerge from under the shadow of English Romantic poets like Wordsworth or Keats, and while a distinct and authentic note appeared in prose fiction, economists and political writers such as the historian and later freelance journalist Goldwin Smith provocatively disseminated ideas running counter to the (moderate) nationalism of these early Canadian authors. On account of the long border and the extensive trade across it, (instead of along the huge distances on the east-west axis inside Canada, which had only shortly before been overcome by the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885), Smith pleaded for the full integration of Canada in a continental power centered in the United States.

Meanwhile, of course, loyalty to the British Crown had given impetus to an imperialist movement in Canada, which prompted the participation of many Canadian soldiers in the Boer War, a fact which is documented in many memorials to that war in Canada. Yet the early years of the 20th century also saw in 1907 the publication of Samuel E. Moffett *The Americanization of Canada*, which was originally given the (working) title “The Emancipation of Canada”. This book argued for severing Canada’s close ties inside the British Empire in favor of the inevitable integration of Canada in a continental country. In the meantime, of course, several of the territories on the prairies had become provinces, (this was in 1905), with a population in which the so-called allophones were strongly represented, a factor, as hinted above, which was to be of great importance for the future self-image of Canadian society as a “mosaic” of ethnic groups.

The next phase in the emergence of a Canadian national consciousness was ushered in by the involvement of Canadian troops on the Western Front in World War I. The huge number of casualties there – about 60,000 young Canadians lost their lives on the battlefield, especially at Vimy Ridge and at Passchendaele, where costly attacks resulted in only limited gains – significantly strengthened the sense of collective identity. No fewer than 40 novels published in the ten years to 1925 mirrored the impact of this collective experience. Regular

commemorations and rituals were to follow, in which the recital of John McCrae's famous poem "In Flanders Fields" was an essential feature. The building of huge monuments such as the colossal structure at Vimy Ridge, which Jane Urquhart uses as a central element in her recent historical novel *The Stone Carvers*, demonstrates its ongoing significance also apparent in modern and contemporary novels by Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley, Jack Hodgins and other writers.⁵

Among its consequences were not only political initiatives which gave Canada under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King an independent role in the political arena, and by 1931 in the Statute of Westminster a new status, but also the foundation of several national periodicals with ambitious programs. In addition, several literary histories were composed in which, following some hesitation and the admission of mere imitation in literature [cf. surveys by Thomas Marquis (1914), Pelham Edgar (1916), and Roy P. Baker (1920)], Canadian nature poetry was described as "independent and original" (A. MacMechan). Lionel Stevenson (*Appraisals of Canadian Literature*, Toronto 1926), in particular, identified allegedly typical features of Canadian national literature which originated in the years following the political union of 1867, and stressed the prototypical theme of the confrontation between man and nature as reflected in Canadian literature. Similarly, Lorne Pierce in *An Outline of Canadian Literature, French and English*, 1927, struggled with the difficulty of also including Francophone literature within the national label, as well as with the self-imposed task "to recognize the genius of Canadian literature".⁶

Such efforts come as no surprise considering the wide-spread practice of European literary historians in the 19th century. One is reminded, for instance, of the arguments in G. G. Gervinus, *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen*, 1835ff., or in Henry Morley in his *Introduction to the History of English Literature*, 1864, where the idea is encapsulated in the phrase "In the literature of any people we perceive the one national character from first to last." Earlier, Thomas Carlyle had, in his unfinished *History of German Literature*, 1830, maintained: "A national literature is not only the noblest achievement of the nation but also the most characteristic, the truest emblem of the national spirit."

The inclination to discover and demonstrate the nature of an individual nation, especially in literary histories, is still apparent a century later in the comprehensive *Literary History of the US* (1948) under the general editorship of Robert Spiller to which scores of American academics contributed. He and the other contributors arrived at a consensus concerning the values, achievements and the nature of US-American culture, and gave special prominence to those texts which illustrated the allegedly typical features of its literature. The loss meanwhile, or absence of such a consensus is, however, reflected in the more recent comprehensive literary histories of the United States, initiated and published in the last two decades: Emory Elliott's one volume *Columbia Literary History of the United States* and the multi-volume *Cambridge Literary History of the United States*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch. There is a deliberate emphasis on diversity of opinions and the relative lack of homogeneity in the texts produced in the national territory, i. e. on American soil.

The continuity of the earlier habit of designing national literary histories until today is, however, demonstrated in the analysis of contemporary British literary histories provided by Ansgar Nünning in an essay on "The Englishness of English Literary Histories" (2001). He exemplifies such practices with tacit presuppositions, i. e., the continuity and the use of national stereotypes in literary historiography.

As far as Canada is concerned Carl Klinck provided the first really comprehensive literary history of Anglo-Canada in 1965, and then, in a revised edition, in 1976, i.e. almost two decades after Spiller's literary history. It was Northrop Frye's task and responsibility to suggest an experiential basis for Canadian literature which he does (as mentioned above) in his conclusion to the book. He finds common ground in the "garrison" mentality which was

the result of man being pitted against the elements in the inhospitable climate of Canada. Considering Margaret Atwood's role as a disciple of Northrop Frye in Toronto it is natural to trace his influence in her "thematic guide to Canadian literature" entitled *Survival*, which appeared in 1972, seven years after his conclusion had been published. Atwood argued that Canadian literature was typically shaped by man's precarious position in nature and she discovered in it multiple variations of the role of victim: Man and woman, but also animals appeared as victims, the "First Nations" figured as victims as well, and reluctant immigrants and paralyzed artists supported the alleged national preoccupation with precarious survivals and victimization. Atwood's thesis, which she herself modified in the 1980s and which has since been refuted by critics from various regions in Canada, exemplifies the literary construction of a collective identity, which, in her case, also embraced the francophone tradition.

The special physical conditions under which Canadian artists created and produced their works had, however, already been suggested as a formative factor half a century before in connection with the paintings of an autochthonous group of Canadian artists. Margaret Atwood's story "Death in Landscape", like several essays by her mentor Northrop Frye, directed attention to this early manifestation of a characteristic version of the Canadian response to the physical world in the works of landscape artists labelled "The Group of Seven". The members of this group, who were based on Toronto before and after 1920, left their studios for the rugged, inhospitable landscape, north of the relatively narrow strip of country densely populated in the south of Canada. In Algonquin Provincial Park or on the northern shores of Lake Superior they found inspiring objects and vistas which they put on their small and very large canvases (which are on show in the National Gallery in Ottawa, in provincial galleries in Toronto, Windsor, and elsewhere in the country). Abandoning the academic tradition, the members of this unique movement, F. H. Varley, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Lawren Harris, J. E. H. MacDonald, Frank H. Johnston, and Frank Carmichael, and their fellow painter Tom Thomson, who had already died in 1917, represented the landscape of the Canadian Shield in strong colors and with striking shapes. Some of them, like Lawren Harris, also developed their style towards abstraction and focused on geometrical forms. They all largely excluded human beings from the rough scenery they depicted. Quickly accepted as national artists they seemed to express the specific quality of life and culture in their country, though the vast majority of Canadians were already living in cities and were urbanised.

If one were inclined to dismiss the claims for this group as autochthonous Canadian painters as a national movement, a comparison with a group of US-American artists who introduced North American landscapes a century earlier seems appropriate. The painters of the "Hudson River School", which almost three generations before the "Group of Seven" dealt with and represented the sublime vistas and mountainous areas close to the Hudson River Valley, in various parts of the Alleghenies, and later in the Rocky Mountains, enjoyed the privilege of being the first to respond to and render the aura of the sublime landscapes of the New World.

These painters also came to share with the Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and others a pride in the "untouched beauty" and sublimity of their environment, and were ready to compare their subject matter favorably with the frequently sketched and depicted mountains and landscapes of Europe.

Similar to the painters of the "Hudson River School" the Canadian artists of the "Group of Seven" took pride in their subject matter so different from the domesticated regions of Europe, and they were delighted at the opportunity of putting on their canvases a "land unwritten, unpainted, unsung". Thus Canadian national culture seemed to sever its ties with the European tradition and put emphasis on the continental specificity of the New World.

Like their American predecessors almost a century before these Canadian painters were thus eager not only to grasp and convey their visual impressions arrived at in the open air, but it was also their intention to practice their skills in order to achieve authenticity, thereby demonstrating their autonomy and independence as a national group. It is only natural that critics like Northrop Frye should regard their art and their vision as being nourished by the same sources of experience as the poetry of the earlier Confederation Poets, but especially the nature poetry of E. J. Pratt, one of his mentors, whom Northrop Frye regarded as a true representative of Canadian national culture.

But it was only in the “novels of ideas” of Hugh MacLennan that the desire to construct and assert a Canadian national identity distinct from British or American models found full expression. In two still unpublished novels written and submitted to publishing houses in the 1930s MacLennan had composed fiction in the tradition of the “international novel” and had shown Canadian interest also in Central Europe. In “So All Their Praises” and in “A Man Should Rejoice” the young classics scholar dramatized the dilemmas of young males from countries on both sides of the Atlantic when confronting foreign milieus and struggling with the effects of the Great Depression and mass unemployment. In these novels MacLennan, who had temporarily embraced a Marxist ideology, exposed the evils of capitalism in American society in which injustice was rampant; but he also graphically depicted the threat to peace posed by extreme movements in Central Europe, where the progress and accession to power of the Nazis is vividly presented. MacLennan had paid several extended visits to Germany in the vacations during his studies as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford and had become intimately acquainted with the situation in Freiburg, where in the early 1930s he spent quite a few weeks with the Holtzmann family, the family of a retired school principal.

In “So All Their Praises” he fictionalized his observations on the political turmoil in Germany and the rise of the Nazis to power. In his second unpublished novel, “A Man Should Rejoice” (1934-37), he offered glimpses of the development of an ambitious project of radical social reformers in Austria, where meanwhile a fascist dictatorship was being established. The book delineated the tragic outcome of the confrontation between the Christian Social Government and the supporters of an ambitious housing project (the “Mozarthof”) run by a socialist cooperative in Lorbeerstein, a fictitious utopian Austrian village in Styria, where international Marxist dissidents had congregated. There the American protagonist and first-person-narrator, the young painter David Culver, after enjoying idyllic weeks in the harmonious community, “on an island in Middle Europe, in a village so small it was only a red dot on the map in a dictator’s office, a kernel of sanity and gentleness alive, still on a doomed continent” (Manuscript, first version, chapter 30, p. 451) loses his wife Anne (Lovelace) in the troubles of the Austrian Civil War in 1934. It is only in the environment of Nova Scotia, in the idyllic landscape of Cape Breton, that the protagonist of this novel, like one of the major figures in the preceding novel, can rest and recuperate after the tragedy he had endured.⁷

The bankruptcy of the American publishing house which had already accepted MacLennan’s first novel and his inability to find a publisher for the second, prompted his (re)turn to Canadian settings. In this he was encouraged by his wife who advised him to shift the environment depicted in his books to his native turf. As a result he composed during the next decade a national trilogy in which Canadian settings serve as the primary background for the search of individuals for identity and self-knowledge. Both these three works of fiction and a number of essays composed in those years reflect an optimism about the potential of his country and a degree of self-confidence which made MacLennan the leading voice of Canadian cultural nationalism from the 1940s to the early 1960s. His role as a spokesman and

representative writer of Canada was acknowledged by no fewer than five Governor General's Awards.

His optimism is first shown in *Barometer Rising* (1941) where its expression is entrusted to a young veteran returning to Halifax from the Western front in 1917. Neil Macrae articulates his creed in the face of adversity during a week in which Halifax suffered the worst accident in the biggest man-made explosion before a nuclear device was dropped on Japan in 1945. (The terrible explosion of the *Mont Blanc*, a ship carrying ammunition, in the Narrows flattened part of the city in December 1917 causing almost 2000 deaths and more than 9000 injured.)

Returning secretly to Halifax, Neil early in the novel visualizes the vast expanse of Canada and is affected by the grand cosmic sweep of his vision of his country, which may become the home of millions of mankind:

The sun had rolled on beyond Nova Scotia into the west. Now it was setting over Montréal and sending the shadow of the mountain deep into the valleys of Sherbrooke Street and Peel; [...] Now the prairies were endless plains of glittering, bluish snow over which the wind passed in a firm and continuous flux, packing the drifts down hard over the wheat seeds frozen into the alluvial earth. Now in the Rockies the peaks were gleaming obelisks in the mid-afternoon.

[...] these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question-mark, this future for himself, and for God knew how many millions of mankind! (MacLennan 1982 [1941]: 79)

Later he again focusses on the promise and future role of Canada, and, in contrast to his uncle Colonel Wain, who clings to a colonial perspective and is inclined to belittle the potential and the achievements of his fellow-Canadians, can anticipate a grand national future. Canada might become "the central arch which united the new order," but only "if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English" (MacLennan 1982 [1941]: 218) ready to take up this task.

There can be little doubt that through this conviction which shapes the chronicle of the great disaster which the Haligonians faced in the middle of terrible winter weather, Hugh MacLennan contributed to the national myth-making and helped to construct a positive collective Canadian self-image which appealed to a wide readership.

That American filmmakers and directors did not think along these lines is humorously mirrored in MacLennan's well-known essay "Boy Meets Girl in Winnipeg – and Who Cares?", in which he relates his own experience with a film director who, while interested in the plot and the events covered in *Barometer Rising*, found fault with the setting. He believed that it would not arouse sufficient interest, as it lacked the appeal of a metropolis and the associations accompanying places like Paris. Undeterred by such a response Hugh MacLennan continued the fictional exploration of the national issue by focusing on the emergence of a new Canada in his next novel entitled *Two Solitudes* (1945). Here he tried to show the potential resolution of the coexistence of the two founding nations in a fruitful union of their distinct cultures in the marriage of Paul Taillard and Heather Methuen. The strength of his fictional chronicle covering events from World War I through World War II lies in the portrayal of the tragedy of Athanase Taillard, arguably the book's most complex and most subtly imagined character. In rendering his life and tragedy MacLennan, who had only a limited familiarity with francophone society and its language, relied on literary sources like Ringuet's *Trente arpents* of 1938 for this illustration of the social fabric in rural Quebec and the depiction of the complex relationship between the francophones and the anglophones, at that time firmly in control of the economy in Montreal. Athanase Taillard's tragic failure as a

reformer in his struggle with conservative forces represented by the local priest was, no doubt, largely responsible for the success of the novel. However, the original idea to delineate the individual development of a young Canadian artist, Paul Athanase, i. e. Taillard's son with his second Irish wife Katherine, in a *Künstlerroman* was less persuasively conveyed. Still, within the context of this ambitious chronicle the fate of the writer Paul and his wife Heather and their union against the wishes of Heather's mother Janet, who has completely adopted the attitudes of the anglophone establishment in Montreal, holds out a promise for the national future. This is explicitly evoked in the concluding paragraphs of the book, in which a panoramic picture of the whole nation from the Maritimes to the heartlands and then the Prairie provinces to British Columbia is provided. In the final chapter 53 the voice of an authorial narrator dwells on the aesthetically appealing diverse vegetation and fauna of the vast country before the necessary preparations for another war take over and where a consolidation of a sense of collective identity will take place.

In the third novel of this thematic trilogy entitled *The Precipice* MacLennan approached the issue of the national identity from another angle, namely by contrasting Canadian culture with that of its southern neighbor. Using symbolic landscapes and individuals who encapsulate dominant ideologies and mentalities the author chose a love romance for his plot. This enabled him to bring out the virtues and strengths which the ostensible "losers" from the northern country can draw upon in contrast to the representatives of the more advanced and more aggressive, money-oriented society of the United States. This aspect gained prominence in MacLennan's later fiction and essays, as the influence of the United States grew stronger and stronger, and the ties with Britain became more tenuous. Feeling a growing unease at American control of Canadian resources and at the American influence on the Canadian lifestyle he gave expression to his concern and suggested an awareness of the need of anglophone and francophone Canadians to jointly resist Americanization. He had earlier in an essay "Where Is My Potted Palm?" called Canada "one of the most self-conscious nations in the world", and had claimed maturity for his country. By 1969, when he participated in an emergency symposium on "The Americanization of Canadian Universities" in Montreal, he was, however, conscious of the new imperial center south of the border, and expressed his views in a statement which echoed and adapted phrases from Robert Frost's well-known poem "Mending Wall". He advocated a 'good fence', a border, to protect the endangered Canadian national identity, especially in the field of culture.

In the meantime, of course, US-involvement in the Vietnam War, which alienated many Canadians, triggered another wave of Canadian nationalism, and Canadian writers dissociated themselves emphatically from the imperialism of their great neighbor, from its dubious military actions and political goals in South East Asia.

Meanwhile, of course, the establishment of the Canada Council in 1957, following that of the National Library of Canada in 1953, and subsequently the creation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (1977), and of other cultural institutions, had given a significant boost to the production of small presses and, indirectly, important encouragement to many writers. While internal tensions increased, especially the prolonged crisis in Quebec following *la revolution tranquille*, the Liberal Government of Pierre Trudeau ensured that Canada had an independent position in the dialogue with the countries of the Third World and an increasing reputation in a global perspective. While new challenges had to be met, intellectuals continued with the literary/cultural "construction" of Canada: Ronald Sutherland suggested a new branch of study, that of "Comparative Canadian Studies", and tried to demonstrate the similarity in the experiential basis and the existence of parallel traditions in the cultures of the two Founding Nations; these traditions are represented by the Puritan and the Jansenist heritage in Canada he argues in *Second Image*, 1971, and *The New Hero*, 1977.

Through the Official Languages Act of 1969 Trudeau's Liberal Government ensured the implementation of fundamental rights on the federal level in the country. At the same time the initiation of the policy of multiculturalism after 1971 (following the work of the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism) opened a new phase and introduced a new paradigm which became fully effective in 1985 and 1988 respectively. The Patriation of the Constitution Act, the British North America Act in 1982 completed the process of full emancipation from Britain but also seemed to give new urgency to the resolution of differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The adoption of *Loi 101* (1977), its restrictions on the use of languages other than French caused anxieties among anglophones and allophones in Quebec and in the anglophone provinces. The goal of resolving the problems concerning the sharing of power between the Federal Government and the provinces, especially Quebec, has not yet been achieved (cf. the failure of the Lake Meech Constitutional Agreement (1990) and of the Charlottetown Accord of 1992); on the other hand the rejection of the claim for sovereignty in the province of Quebec in a referendum there in 1995 has prevented a radical solution.

The power of centrifugal forces in Canada cannot be denied, and the desired realization of the clause in the Multiculturalism Act declaring it the policy of the Government of Canada to "preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada" (1988, clause 3(1)i) resembles the memorable problem of squaring the circle. The admission of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the east and the south of Asia (more than 1 million Canadians were born in China, there are almost as many immigrants from the Indian subcontinent) is a reality which has reshaped Canadian society and the urban landscapes of Toronto, Vancouver and even Montreal and has not made a solution any easier. Yet in the face of these difficulties the Canadian government has initiated and pushed forward its dialogue with 'First Nations peoples', which has, for instance, resulted in the foundation of Nunavut, whilst the Supreme Court has adjudicated claims by First Nations and has granted compensation and has settled controversial land issues. There is no doubt that in Canada the Federal Government's loss of sovereignty rights in a globalizing world and in a time of multinational companies and markets is particularly keenly felt as the tug-of-war between the provinces and the Federal Government continues. There are quite a few commentators who wonder whether the increasing ethnic and cultural diversification in Canada, which demographers and experts on migration can diagnose, will overtax the necessary power of cohesion. At the same time one realizes, however, that the country, in which the philosopher Charles Taylor has argued indefatigably for a "politics of recognition", can continue to keep a precarious balance between diverse collective demands. And surprisingly, the media can report a surplus in the federal budget, quite in contrast to the situation in the hegemonic power south of the 49th parallel and in spite of the fact that the Canadian approach to questions of social welfare and medical care resembles the for the tax-payer more expensive model practiced in Europe.

It is true that prominent authors like Robertson Davies (who died in 1995) and even ethnic writers (Neil Bissoondath) have expressed scepticism towards the concept of multiculturalism and its implementation. Moreover there are Canadian voices warning against a radical cultural pluralism, which can be heard from American scholars like David Hollinger which is then echoed by Canadian voices advocating a "restriction" of ethnic separatism. Yet at the same time Canadian society has, over the last two decades, produced a vibrant literature produced by new arrivals. "New" Canadians like Michael Ondaatje or Rohinton Mistry have won not only Governor Generals' Awards, even though in many of their texts they focus almost exclusively on their countries of origin and not on their adopted country of Canada, but also prizes granted outside their country. Admittedly, most of these new arrivals write and publish in the official languages of Canada through which they reach a wider audience and

public. There is no doubt, however, that a diversity of voices is being heard, and in a variation of Hugh MacLennan's programmatic title of his novel *Two Solitudes*, anthologies which represent this chorus of ethnic voices have appeared.⁸ In addition to the voices of immigrants from the Caribbean, Asia or Africa these anthologies also reflect the presence of European ethnic strains in Canadian literature – mainstream Canadian literature we might say – such as Jewish, German Mennonite, Icelandic, Italian, Polish and Ukrainian ethnic writers. While some of them are relatively recent arrivals, many are the children or grandchildren of immigrants who seem to have been encouraged to confront their heritage, possibly in return journeys to Europe, especially after the end of the Soviet Empire. It seems as if the option realized by writers like Michael Ondaatje or Rohinton Mistry to focus on their native lands and not to restrict themselves to the fictional analysis of processes of acculturation with its problems in their host country had liberated also authors of European stock – to move away from the prototypical Canadian question “Where is here?” to the question “What was there?” or “What is there?” (Staines 1995 and 1999: 44).

In *A Tale of Two Countries* (1984), his comparative study of American and Canadian writers, Stanley Fogel quipped that whereas post-modern Americans were cheerfully ready to debunk national myths, conservative Canadians still “pursued the phantom of identity”, collective identity that is. It is true, writers from colonial or post-colonial or “otherwise” marginalized countries have often seen it as their task to help construct a collective sense of identity and to establish and consolidate a distinct national culture, and literary historians have followed suite. It seems that in Canada this self-imposed task is no longer a priority or even on the agenda. As Jonathan Kerzer has put it in *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada* (1998), “a totalizing definition of nationhood” seems not any longer appropriate or necessary to Canadian authors. This is also apparent in the numerous recent encyclopedias of and companions to Canadian literature as well as in recent editions of histories of Canadian literature which stress the contributions of authors of diverse backgrounds.⁹

A European scholar who has read, e. g. Jane Urquhart's historical novel *The Stone Carvers* with its poignant evocation of the voices and experiences of German, Irish or Italian settlers and the lot they shared in the tragedy of the Great War and in the effort to commemorate their fates in its aftermath, or the numerous travel books of Canadians returning to sites of memory in Europe will note a significant shift in perspective and interest as well as recognize a truly cosmopolitan trend in Canadian literature. Acknowledging the closer proximity of the attitudes and approaches in the political and social spheres of Canadians to Europeans rather than to US-Americans, we may possibly see in the diverse literary culture of Canada the vague outlines of a cultural space which in (much) smaller compass may resemble the future cultural arena to be constructed in a wider European Union.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. esp. vol. 12 in the multi-volume edition of his writings currently published by the University of Toronto Press.

² Cf. Michael Zöllner, “Religion und Wettbewerb: Der amerikanische (Sonder-)weg”, sowie Klaus-M. Kodalle, “Zivilreligion in Amerika: Zwischen Rechtfertigung und Kritik”, both in Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, ed., *Transatlantische Differenzen/Transatlantic Differences*, Wien: Böhlau 2004, pp. 151-164, and 165-196 respectively.

³ Cf. Carl Berger's essay, “The True North: Strong and Free” in a book published in 1966.

⁴ Cf. the illustration of this phenomenon in a comparative essay by Horst Prießnitz, in *Poetica* 1987.

- ⁵ Cf. esp. Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business* (1970), Timothy Findley, *The Wars* (1977), Jack Hodgins, *Broken Ground* (1998).
- ⁶ He draws on the insights of Camille Roy, the author of an influential *Manuel d'histoire de la littérature Canadienne française*. On the development of these ideas, see esp. Edward D. Blodgett, *Five Part Invention*.
- ⁷ A close analysis of these unpublished texts – the manuscripts are in the Hugh MacLennan Library at McGill – incidentally do not furnish substantial evidence to show that MacLennan had visited the places in Central Europe he described – he may have used newspaper accounts and drawn on heterostereotypes of Austrians etc. familiar to North American writers, quotes in the text with kind permission of the curator of Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill University.
- ⁸ Linda Hutcheon's *Other Solitudes: Multicultural Fictions* and Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* are the best-known anthologies.
- ⁹ Cf. the recent encyclopedias and companions by E.-M. Kroeller and William H. New.

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