

A Country Without a Soul

Rupert Brooke's Gothic Vision of Canada

If journeys are primarily either about the traveller or about the worlds the traveller encounters (Oerlemans 149), the North American travel journals Rupert Brooke published in 1913, at the age of twenty-five, are indisputably in the former category. Brooke did not follow the self-historicizing approach of many of today's travel writers, adopting instead an ironic distancing tone, yet his haunting gothic images of the Canadian landscape do reflect his somewhat tortured psyche.¹ Unique as Brooke's imagination and literary skills may have been, however, his vision of Canada was neither completely idiosyncratic nor without influence among his contemporaries, particularly those of his privileged social class. Brooke's travel journals, written at a time when ties between former colony and mother country remained strong, therefore deserve more attention than they have hitherto received from either his biographers or Canadian literary scholars and historians.

Brooke was conflicted by sexuality as well as domesticity, like many other upper-middle-class English men of his era (Tosh 189), and he was impelled to travel to North America by romantic entanglements that had resulted in a nervous collapse (Caesar 37-40; Delany ch. 8). His hope was presumably that a continent with wide-open spaces might serve as the rest cure that his trips to European recreation sites such as the Swiss Alps and Cannes no longer provided. To cover his expenses, Brooke contracted to submit travel articles to the prestigious *Westminster Gazette*, which, according to historian Stephen Koss, preferred to write the masses off as customers rather than write down to them (10). These articles reappeared posthumously in 1916 as *Letters from America*, in a volume that included an introduction by the highly respected

Henry James, who had published his own impressions of Quebec City and Niagara Falls.²

Brooke's printed descriptions of the outdoors advertisements of New York City and of a baseball game at Harvard University leave the impression that he was fascinated by the energy of the United States.³ Privately, however, he wrote that "[t]his is *not* a land for a civilized man. There are three things worth some praise; the architecture, the children's clothes, and the jokes. All else is flatulence and despair and a living Death" (qtd. in Keynes 469).⁴ Although he reported being warned by Americans that Canada was "a country without a soul,"⁵ in turning northward the sensitive young poet felt "heartened" that he was "in a sense, going home" (49). It would seem that, in a kind of reverse colonialism, he was hoping to find a younger and better Britain, but he was soon disappointed in that regard. English Canadians he found to be as materialistic as the Americans, but more repressed, making them exceedingly dull, though there was some solace to be found outside the major urban centres and particularly in the western provinces.

Brooke's challenge as a travel writer was to describe the tourist sites that were invariably associated with Canada—including Quebec City, Niagara Falls, and the Rocky Mountains—without tarnishing his reputation as a rising literary star by resorting to the clichéd images of his many predecessors. Because, in Brooke's opinion, Canada's landscapes had yet to be interpreted by a great artist or poet, they were not fully alive. His role as a travel writer was therefore to give birth to them, paradoxically, by conjuring up death-related images that humanized the physical environment in accordance with gothic conventions (sometimes referred to as Dark Romanticism) (McEvoy 20). As Coral Ann Howells and others have shown, this was an approach to the Canadian landscape that was much less original than Brooke apparently realized. Literary critic Cynthia Sugars writes that the "gothicization of Canada has a long history in Canadian cultural expression," with one feature of early Canadian literature positing the wilderness "as a Gothic landscape inhabited by savage creatures (animal and human) which posed a threat to the European adventurers" (410). Brooke's articles, nevertheless, offer little support for the thesis, associated most famously with Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, that writers in Canada felt a strong antipathy towards Nature.⁶ Viewing the landscape from the comfort of a railway car or steamship, Brooke could hardly experience the terrors associated with the wilderness gothic. Aside from reflecting a sense of malaise when describing large bodies of fresh water, as we shall see, Brooke's travel narrative conforms

more closely to the second feature of the gothic in Canada, as identified by Sugars, namely a perception that the country was “a terrifying *terra nullius* that was devoid of Gothic effects or ghosts” (410). Brooke’s highly imaginative gothic images clearly reflected his troubled psyche, but, on a more self-conscious level, he evidently felt that he was bestowing upon the uncultured young country the “soul” that it so lamentably still lacked.

Brooke’s first impression of Montreal was that it “consists of banks and churches” (50-1). The Scots, who dominated the British part of the city with its “rather narrow, rather gloomy streets,” “aggressively prosperous buildings,” and “air of dour prosperity,” spent their time in “laying up their riches in this world or the next” (51). One feature of the city that did interest the young English traveller was its cultural duality. He observed that even though “[t]he French and British in Canada seem to have behaved with quite extraordinary generosity and kindness towards each other, . . . it is not in human nature that two communities should live side by side, pretending they are one, without some irritation and mutual loss of strength” (52-53). In short, Brooke shared the romantic nationalist assumption that a strong nation had a “soul” based on common ancestry. He was perhaps also thinking of his own internal sexual conflicts (Caesar 15, 34) when he wrote that “Montreal and Eastern Canada suffer from that kind of ill-health which afflicts men who are cases of ‘double personality’—debility and spiritual paralysis” (53).

Brooke had a relatively high opinion of the national capital, however, for in his words Ottawa could be praised without resorting to “statistics of wealth and the growth of population; and this can be said of no other city in Canada except Quebec.” The fact that Ottawa was a city of civil servants and homely wooden houses, and that in the evening light the Parliament buildings “seem to have the majesty and calm of a natural crown of the river-headland,” clearly appealed to Brooke’s search for security and stability. But the face of commerce was still quite visible, even on Parliament Hill: “just to show that it is Canada, and not Utopia—the line of national buildings will always be broken by an expensive and superb hotel the Canadian Pacific Railway has been allowed to erect on the twin and neighbouring promontory to that of the Houses of Parliament” (55-56).

Brooke’s personal correspondence reveals that his travel narrative is misleading in suggesting that he visited Ottawa before doubling back to Quebec City.⁷ Ottawa appears in the same article as Montreal simply because neither city was considered interesting enough to warrant more detailed description. Quebec was quite a different story, however, for the old fortress

city appealed to Brooke's strong antimodernist sensibility. To mark the contrast with Montreal, the chapter on the provincial capital begins with the traveller's departing view of the former city, a view that recalls Blake's dark satanic mills. Mount Royal, "crouched, black and sullen," overlooks a harbour that is "filled with volumes of smoke, purple and black, wreathing and sidling eastwards" (61). Brooke added that this "inferno" and "mirk" suggested that either "diabolic invisible hands" were moulding the "pitchy and Tartarian gloom" into a city, or that the city was already "disintegrating into its proper fume and dusty chaos" (61). In short, the threat was not Nature or the wilderness in this case, as critics such as Howells and Faye Hammill have argued was characteristic of Canadian gothic imagery, but the urban and industrial.⁸

As his vessel approached Quebec the following morning, in sharp contrast, Brooke found that "[t]he air was full of gaiety and sunshine and the sense of singing birds, though actually, I think, there were only a few gulls crying" (63). With "the individuality and the pride of a city where great things have happened, and over which many years have passed," Quebec was as "refreshing and as definite after the other cities of this continent as an immortal among a crowd of stockbrokers" (64). As "an aesthete's aesthete" (Eksteins 123), Brooke idealized the innocence of youth and worshipped beauty. He, therefore, paid Quebec the ultimate compliment when he wrote that the city had "the radiance and repose of an immortal; but she wears her immortality youthfully" (64). Inspired by the Plains of Abraham, and reflecting his ongoing shift from Fabian pacifism to British imperialism, Brooke apparently saw no contradiction between his idealization of youthful innocence and his suggestion that if warfare were replaced by commerce, then patriotism would die and Quebec City would become "a forgotten ruin" (65-66).

British travel writers were not only generally enthusiastic about Quebec City, they were by this time inclined to take a positive view of what their predecessors had once found so reprehensible, namely the French-speaking *habitants'* apparent resistance to agricultural improvement (Moyle and O'ram 92-93; Little 15-19). As the central figure in the group of Cambridge friends whom Virginia Woolf named the Neo-Pagans by virtue of the fact that they went on hiking and camping expeditions, swam in the nude, and idealized the simple rural life (Delany xii), Brooke found the *habitants* to be "a jolly sight." In his words, "[t]hey are like children in their noisy content. They are poor and happy, Roman Catholics; they laugh a great deal; and they continually sing. They do not progress at all" (67). But his view of the priests

was another matter. Reflecting his Protestant prejudices, Brooke resorted to gothic imagery when he wrote that those on board the boat descending the St Lawrence to the Saguenay “diffused an atmosphere of black, of unpleasant melancholy. . . . Their eyes were small, shifty, and cruel, and would not meet the gaze” (67-68).⁹

Arriving at the mouth of the Saguenay as darkness was falling, Brooke felt shut in by “walls rising sheer from the water to the height of two thousand feet, going down sheer beneath it . . . to many times that depth” (68). As it ascended the lifeless river, whose waters were “inky and sinister” even in the daytime, the “homeless, irrelevant, tiny steamer seemed to hang between two abysses” (68-69). In fact, “[t]he whole scene seemed some Stygian imagination of Dante,” and, as he also made clear in a letter to one of his intimates, Brooke had the sense that “this region was the abode of devils” (69).¹⁰ In creating such a gothic image of the lower Saguenay, Brooke was moving well beyond the aesthetic construction of the sublime that in Britain had shifted from Burke’s overpowering force (self-annihilation) to Kant’s more comforting spirituality (self-exaltation). Like the picturesque, then, sublime imagery has been associated with British cultural imperialism (Gillespie 90-99, Ryan 267-70), but one might assume that gothic images depicting the landscape as distinctly alien reflected a post-colonial sensibility.¹¹ The fact remains, however, that Brooke was a self-confessed imperialist, and, as Sugars argues, the gothic tradition had been imported by early Canadian writers to provide “legitimizing substance to the settler-invader experience of occupation” (410). Only at the mouth of the river, in the historic village of Tadoussac and under a light blue, English-like sky, was Brooke able to shake off his sense of unease, at least temporarily. Plunging naked into the water, as he had done many times in England with his Neo-Pagan friends, he found that “[s]tray shreds of the St Lawrence were warm and cheerful,” but the black current of the Saguenay was “cold as death” and he retreated shivering to his hotel (68-71). As biographer William Laskowski notes, this was a negative baptism, “death without rebirth” (87).

Brooke felt more at ease in rural Ontario because its “weather-beaten farm-houses, rolling country, thickets of trees, little hills green and grey in the distance, decorous small fields, orchards, and, I swear, a hedge or two,” reminded him of England (75). Particularly important was the fact that “this country has seen the generations pass, and won something of that repose and security which countries acquire from the sight” (76). Here, in short, Brooke found traces of the pastoral myth that he was strongly drawn to,

and which Frye has defined as an idealization of childhood memory (88). Unfortunately, the picturesque Thousand Islands had been largely spoiled, Brooke lamented, by the fact that each island, "if big enough, has been bought by a rich man—generally an American—who has built a castle on it. So the whole isn't much more beautiful than Golder's Green" (76).¹²

Once his boat reached the Great Lakes, Brooke began to feel emotionally uneasy again. Henry James had complained that Lake Ontario offered "a sort of marine-effect missed," with "the blankness and vacancy of the sea," yet "without that vast essential swell which, amid the belting brine, so often saves the situation to the eye" (James 364-65). Brooke probed deeper than the aesthetic, however, observing that there was "something ominous and unnatural" about those large bodies of water. In his imagination, "[r]ivers are human," and even though the cruel and treacherous sea "has no soul," it was still "all right" because mankind had engaged it in an "age-long feud" (77). But "these monstrous lakes, which ape the ocean, are not proper to fresh water or salt. They have souls, perceptibly, and wicked ones" (78). Lake Ontario, "was a terrible dead-silver colour," with a surface that was "inexplicably sinister and dead, like the glint on glasses worn by a blind man" (78). As on the Saguenay, and in language that evoked Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (first published in 1899), the boat mysteriously "appeared to leave no wake." But it did leave a trail of black smoke "very close over the water, like an evil soul after death that cannot win dissolution" (77-78). Nature, in short, did not present a threat in the real sense, with crashing waves threatening to capsize the vessel, but in the highly imagined sense that again evoked the gothic.

This gothic sensibility shifted radically on reaching Toronto, "the soul of Canada," or what Brooke might have more consistently referred to as the "non-soul." Toronto, Brooke found to be simply boring: "a clean-shaven, pink-faced, respectably dressed, fairly energetic, unintellectual, passably sociable, well-to-do, public-school-and-varsity [sic] sort of city" (79). In short, it was "all right" (82), the depressing thing being "that it will always be what it is, only larger, and that no Canadian city can ever be anything better or different" (84). In a sense, then, the true Canadian wilderness—as defined by a cultural and spiritual emptiness—was to be found in the larger cities.

Despite its commercialism, however, Brooke was deeply moved by Niagara Falls, writing privately: "I'm so impressed by Niagara. I hoped not to be. But I horribly am. The colour of the water, the strength of it, and the clouds of spray—I'm afraid I'm a Victorian at heart, after all. Please don't breathe a word of it: I want to keep such shreds of reputation as I have left" (Keynes 491).¹³

Referring in particular to Niagara Falls, historian Elizabeth McKinsey claims that the American sublime had, indeed, become long passé by the turn of the century but Brooke rose to the challenge of surpassing literary predecessors such as Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope by resorting to gothic imagery.¹⁴ Ignoring the fact that major hydroelectric projects had subdued much of Niagara's wild energy and come to epitomize humanity's victory over nature (McGreevy 7-8, 106), Brooke described the river above the falls in exceptionally animated terms, using words such as "chattering," "leaping," "laughing," "springing," and "weaving." But these words only heightened the sense of fatalistic tragedy as the waters, "borne impetuously forward like a crowd of triumphant feasters, . . . seem to fling themselves on with some foreknowledge of their fate, in an ever wilder frenzy" (89). Finally, "[o]n the edge of disaster the river seems to gather herself, to pause, to lift a head noble in ruin," before taking the plunge "into the eternal thunder and white chaos below" (90).¹⁵

Despite referring to the river as female, Brooke may have had his own psychological collapse in mind. In any case, he described the rapids below the falls as masculine, for "[h]ere the inhuman life and strength are spontaneous, active, almost resolute; masculine vigour compared with the passive gigantic power, female, helpless and overwhelming, of the Falls. A place of fear" (94).¹⁶ Succumbing to a pessimistic fatalism, or what might be viewed as a gothic sense of doom, Brooke added that "[i]n such places, one is aware, with an almost insupportable and yet comforting certitude, that both men and nations are hurried onwards to their ruin or ending as inevitably as this dark flood" (95-96).¹⁷

Like the uncompromising anti-modernist that he was, Brooke shunned the railway for the leg of his journey between Sarnia and Port Arthur (today's Thunder Bay), noting that by boarding a boat in the afternoon and waking up at Sault Ste. Marie in the morning, "you have done with the rather colourless, unindividual expanses of Huron" (99). Sailing along the shoreline of Lake Superior with its picnickers and campers, "[t]he human race seemed a jolly bunch, and the world a fine, pleasant, open-air affair," but, once out of sight of land, Brooke's sense of unease returned (100). As the vessel slid through "a queer, pale mist," he wrote, "[w]e seemed to be ploughing aimlessly through the phantasmal sand-dunes of another world, faintly and by an accident apprehended" (100-1).¹⁸

Describing his trip on the night train from Port Arthur to Winnipeg, Brooke began with the romantic view from his lower berth of a "wild starlit

landscape" (101), but, according to Patricia Jasen, tourist interest in northern Ontario had faded after resource exploitation left "an atmosphere of desolation and emptiness" (103). Not surprisingly, then, Brooke soon turned to gloomier images. Thus, he wrote that "[f]or four hundred miles there is hardly a sign that humanity exists on the earth's face, only rocks and endless woods or scrubby pine, and the occasional strange gleam of water, and the night and the wind" (101). Areas where forest fires had passed through lent themselves to particularly gothic imagery, for the grey pine trunks "appear stricken by calamity, intolerably bare and lonely, gaunt, perpetually protesting, amazed and tragic creatures" (102).

Although editors Sandra Martin and Roger Hall obviously overlooked these passages in suggesting that after Brooke left Montreal there was "a shift to a state of contentment that became obvious in his writings" (19), he did become uncharacteristically cheerful once he reached Winnipeg. Sharing his contemporary British travelers' enthusiasm for the Canadian West (Moyles and Oworm 119-20), Brooke noted that its people were "more friendly, more hearty" than those of the eastern provinces. The architecture might be even more hideous than that of Montreal or Toronto, but it was "cheerily and windily so" (103). And even though one could find "poverty and destitution" in the Prairie city, at least it was "less dingy, less depressing" than Birmingham (103). Claiming to sense a community spirit in Winnipeg, perhaps a reflection of frontier optimism and energy, Brooke wrote that "one can't help finding a tiny hope" that it "may yet come to something," and "[t]hat cannot be said of Toronto" (104-5). Brooke's personal letters reveal that while in the West he was repeatedly asked about his political views, and this is reflected in much of his writing on Winnipeg and its surrounding area, with the discussion of tariffs, the naval bill, East European immigration, and the co-operative movement (Keynes 102-3).

But the highlight of Brooke's Manitoba sojourn was a side trip with "an old Rugbeian I found in Winnipeg" to the remote Lake George, eighty miles northeast of the city (Letter to A. F. Scholfield, Toronto, July-August 1913. In Keynes 491).¹⁹ Here, he was finally inspired by the soul's "indefinite room to expand," writing that "no one else is *thinking* of the lakes and hills you see before you. They have no tradition, no names even; they are only pools of water and lumps of earth, some day, perhaps, to be clothed with loves and memories and the comings and goings of men, but now dumbly waiting their Wordsworth or their Acropolis to give them individuality, and a soul" (117-18). William Laskowski observes of such passages that "[i]t is as if such

things cannot exist until artists, with their nominative capacity, conjure them up with the power of time and its experience” (89-90), but by participating in the longstanding tradition of configuring Canada as a *terra nullius*, Brooke was erasing the First Nations’ ties to the landscape.²⁰

Despite the fact that he packed Ben Jonson and Jane Austen “to keep me English” while in the Manitoba backwoods (111), Brooke was drawn to what he felt was a virgin landscape where “[t]he air is unbreathed, and the earth untrodden” (118). He even slipped briefly into the clichéd picturesque convention that he generally avoided: “All things share this childlike loveliness, the grey whispering reeds, the pure blue of the sky, the birches and thin fir-trees that make up these forests, even the brisk touch of the water as you dive” (118). In fact, it was the sensual experience of swimming in a Canadian lake, Brooke wrote, “and none of sight or hearing,” that impressed him most as a “token” of the country:

It is not languorous, like bathing in a warm Southern sea; nor grateful, like a river in a hot climate; nor strange, as the ocean always is; nor startling, like very cold water. But it touches the body continually with freshness, and it seems to be charged with a subtle and unexhausted energy. It is colourless, faintly stinging, hard and grey, like the rocks around, full of vitality, and sweet. It has the tint and sensation of a pale dawn before the sun is up. Such is the wild of Canada. (118)

To Brooke, diving into a fresh clear body of water was a baptism of sorts, a washing away of the guilt associated with sex, and a reinvigoration to face the world anew (Delany 207). As Conrad points out, however, and as the Saguenay example noted above illustrates, such freedom was also a flirtation with destruction, for “the swimmer has only his stroking limbs to keep him buoyant” (87).

Ambiguity towards Nature has been said to be “the mark of true gothicism” (Northey 22-23), but Brooke was more concerned about the despoliation of Nature than about its destructive powers, for he predicted that in the future the timber would be “cut down and made into paper,” the land “divided into town-lots and sold, and sub-divided and sold again, and boomed and resold,” with the parts not suitable for development “given in exchange for great sums of money to old ladies in the quieter parts of England” (118-19). In the towns would be built “churches, hotels, and a great many ugly sky-scrapers,” as well as “hovels for the poor, houses for the rich, none beautiful” (119). Even where there was no sign of such development, then, Brooke’s enjoyment of the natural environment was tainted by his forebodings of what he prophesized lay in store for it.

Abnormally wet weather spoiled Brooke's appreciation of the Prairie landscape en route to Calgary, for he observed that the "interminable, oblique, thin rain took the gold out of the wheat and the brown from the distant fields and bushes, and drabbed all the colours in the grass" (125). Seeing no inhabitants on that "Sabbath morn," he observed sardonically that it was not clear whether they were at work, in church, "or had shot themselves from depression induced by the weather" (123-4). Brooke clearly found it amusing that long-time residents "tell me they get very homesick if they go away for a time. Valleys and hills seem to them petty, fretful, unlovable. The magic of the plains has them in a thrall" (125).

Despite such condescending comments, however, Brooke genuinely admired the fact that in the Prairies, "among all the corruption, irresponsibility, and disastrous individualism," there were "some faint signs of the sense of community" (126). As a literary man, he was particularly impressed by the public libraries, writing that they improved as one moved west from Montreal, "which is unable to support one," until in Calgary "you find a very neat and carefully kept building, stocked with an immense variety of periodicals, and an admirable store of books, ranging from the classics to the most utterly modern literature. Few large English towns could show anything as good" (126). Despite his sophisticated urbane manner, Brooke was clearly enthralled with the romantic myth of the Old West, writing that "[f]or no great reward, but the love of the thing," the fearless members of the North-West Mounted Police had "imposed order and fairness upon half a continent" (129-30). But "[t]he tragedy of the West" was that the pioneer generation had now passed, and "what they lived and died to secure for their race is now the foundation for a gigantic national gambling of a most unprofitable and disastrous kind" (130). Thus, "where good men worked or perished is now a row of little shops, all devoted to the sale of town-lots in some distant spot that must infallibly become a great city in the next two years, and in the door-way of each lounges a thin-chested, much-spitting youth, with a flabby face, shifty eyes, and an inhuman mouth, who invites you continually, with the most raucous of American accents, to 'step inside and ex-amine our Praposition'" (131). In short, Brooke saw the Prairie Eden as being contaminated by the corrupting influence of capitalist greed, represented here not by a wealthy banker or developer but by a somewhat diabolical creature who might have emerged from an urban slum.

Brooke presumably felt relieved, then, to be boarding the train for the west coast. Although he had to compete with American tourists for a perch in the

open-sided observation car, he was deeply impressed by the Rockies, reporting that there was beauty there at last, “for the first time in Canada” (148). Indeed, they had a “kindlier” beauty than did the Alps because their rock was “of a browner colour,” but the advantage of the Alps was that “[t]here, you are always in sight of a civilisation which has nestled for ages at the foot of those high places” (148). The Rockies, in contrast, were “irrelevant to humanity. No recorded Hannibal has struggled across them; their shadow lies on no remembered literature” (148). Brooke ultimately found the Rockies to be disturbing because Nature “is there alone, scarcely a unity in the heaped confusion of these crags, almost without grandeur among the chaos of the earth” (148). Humanizing the landscape in a distinctively gothic vein, Brooke described pines that “drooped and sobbed,” rivers that “roared and plunged with aimless passion down the ravines,” and clouds that “trailed along the valleys, a long procession of shrouded, melancholy figures, seeming to pause, as with an indeterminate, tragic, vain gesture, before passing out of sight up some ravine” (150). In short, then, Brooke was again transferring his own rather gloomy sensibility to a country that he apparently felt was sorely in need of a soul.

Brooke’s mood was not always bleak, however, for at Lake Louise he found the picturesque scenery that every genteel English traveller longed for. It was not so much the glacier at the end of the lake, or the fact that the glacier climbed to “one of the highest and loveliest peaks in the Rockies,” that impressed Brooke (151). Rather, he rhapsodized over the view from his hotel window where the ever-changing lake “is Beauty herself, as nearly visible to mortal eyes as she may ever be” (151). The water “beyond the flowers” was an ever-changing green, sometimes “shot with blue, of a peacock tint” (151). When a breeze ruffled the surface, the lake became “milky emerald,” and when the sun caught it, it became “the opal distillation of all the buds of all the spring” (151-2). The image of the “shrouded, melancholy figures” viewed from the platform of the CPR caboose resurfaces, but now as “dark, processional pines, mounting to the sacred peaks, devout, kneeling, motionless, in an ecstasy of homely adoration, like the donors and their families in a Flemish picture” (152). Finally, if briefly, then, the jaded young traveller felt able to express a sense of contentment, though only by imagining the physical landscape as an antiquated European painting.

And, as his readers would by this point have anticipated, Brooke’s mood shifted again as he climbed one of the nearby mountains at sunset. Rather than adopting the monarch-of-all-I-survey perspective famously identified with male imperialism by Mary Louise Pratt (213), he contemplated the

“strangeness” that he had observed throughout his North American travels, namely that to love what was “an empty land” was “like embracing a wraith” (153). England’s soil was “heavy and fertile with the decaying stuff of past seasons and generations,” but in the Rocky Mountains “there is nothing lurking in the heart of the shadows, and no human mystery in the colours, and neither the same joy nor the kind of peace in dawn and sunset that older lands know” (154-5). Even where capitalist development was not a threat, as it was in Calgary, Brooke felt dissatisfied. The land might be “virginal,” every lake “new-born,” and the flowers “less conscious than English flowers,” but, he lamented, “one misses the dead” (156).

Despite his ignorance concerning the presence, history, and culture of First Nations people in what he described as an “empty land,” Brooke’s romantic anti-modernism predisposed him towards the myth of the “Noble Savage,” a myth that had long served those who were critical of European materialism, individualism, and corruption (Francis). In contrast to those he labelled as the “French and Scotch half-breeds” who “frequent the borders of civilisation” further east (136), Brooke depicted those Aboriginal peoples who he imagined as relatively “unspoiled” by European contact as children of Nature, though he did slip into the past tense when describing their virtues. Thus, he wrote, they might have a weakness for gambling and warfare, but they had once “enjoyed a ‘Nature-Worship,’ believed rather dimly in a presiding Power, and very definitely in certain ethical and moral rules.” He configured them as loyal, brave, and stoical, and claimed that they had also been monogamous, good parents to their children, and completely honest (138-39). In short, the Indigenous peoples had once embodied the very ideals that the young Neo-Pagans aspired to.

As for physical appearance, the traveller known as England’s “young Apollo” (Delany ix) wrote that the older men on the Stony reserve he visited had “superb” physiques, “their features shaped and lined by weather and experience into a Roman nobility that demands respect” (141). But these men represented the past, for “[c]ivilisation, disease, alcohol, and vice” had reduced the Stonys “to a few scattered communities and some stragglers, and a legend, the admiration of boyhood” (139). Criticizing the government’s efforts to assimilate the First Nations, Brooke asked: “Shall we preserve these few bands of them, untouched, to succeed us, ultimately, when the grasp of our ‘civilisation’ weakens, and our transient anarchy in these wilder lands recedes once more before the older anarchy of Nature? Or will they be entirely swallowed by that ugliness of shops and trousers with which we

enchain the earth, and become a memory and less than a memory?" (143). The colonialist implications of what Pratt refers to as the "anti-conquest" narrative, namely "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (7), becomes clear with Brooke's rather arrogant conclusion that "[t]hey are that already. The Indians have passed. They left no arts, no tradition, no buildings or roads or laws; only a story or two, and a few names, strange and beautiful" (143). As Owrap and Moyles point out, this was a commonly shared view among British travel writers of the day. The romantic young poet would have to cross the Pacific to the South Sea islands before discovering, at least in his own mind, the Rousseauesque paradise that he was searching for.

Brooke's *Westminster Gazette* articles did not include this paradise or even the west coast of Canada, but he was quite impressed with Vancouver where he spent several days, writing to his mother on September 8 that "[t]he country and harbour are rather beautiful with great violet mountains all around, snow-peaks in the distance" (Keynes 508). And, in the clear ocean waters off Victoria, Brooke observed that "[a] few gigantic stalks of glossy brown seaweed seemed to be shouldering their way shoreward through the calm. The opal light caught them, and passed, and breathed over the waters. There was great peace and beauty in the mountains and the sea" (Martin and Hall 141-42). Finally, as children played nearby on the beach, Brooke's conflicting thoughts turned to Canada: "I thought of her possibilities, and of her wealth and corruption and individualism and ugliness" (Martin and Hall 142).

Brooke was writing at a time of renewed imperialist interest in the former colonies, as reflected in the revival of British travel writing on Canada (Moyles and Owrap), and he identified as an imperialist, himself. Thus, he promoted Canada's contribution to the British navy and opposed eastern European immigration to the Prairies, yet his travel articles reflect a sense of alienation rather than a confident colonialism. By the time Brooke reached the west coast he had clearly had enough of the country without a "soul," and he was eager to set sail for San Francisco. Although informed by the *Westminster Gazette* that they never published more than six articles in a series, Brooke reported to his friend and agent that he was continuing to keep a journal in the hope that there might be a second series, or that the articles could be sold singly, but those on Vancouver and Victoria have survived only in hand-written fragments.²¹ Two years after leaving Canada, "the handsomest young man in England" (Hastings)—whose famous war

poems welcomed death as a purging of the sins of the flesh—would die in uniform from an infected mosquito bite and be buried on an obscure Greek island (Delany 210). The final irony was that he was lionized as a sacrifice for the preservation of a pastoral England that was succumbing to forces unleashed by the same war he had enlisted to fight in.

Laskowski's optimistic interpretation of *Letters from America* is that it records Brooke's "internal odyssey to 'health' as much as it documents the reactions of a young Cambridge Apostle to America in the years immediately preceding World War I" (83). But this assessment misses the travel narrative's bleak sense of fatalism, and the reason why, as Eksteins observes, the troubled young writer became "a symbol of the spiritual confusion and longing of his generation" (26). Conrad is closer to the mark than Laskowski when he refers to Brooke's adventure as his "renunciatory journey, traveling through civilization to bid it farewell" (88). Brooke's aim was not to renounce civilization, however, as much as it was to escape it temporarily in order to restore his mental health and assert his manliness. Thus, in a letter to the London actress who was one of his love interests, Brooke described in somewhat gothic terms how he had participated in the night time butchering of a deer at Lake George: "the black water of the lake, muddy with trampling at the edge, and streaked with blood, . . . the head gazing reproachfully at us from the ground, everybody using the most frightful language, and the rather ironical and very dispassionate stars above. Rather savage" (Keynes 496).²² Brooke's reference to the onlooking stars suggests that he saw his own role essentially as theatrical performance.²³ Reflective of his inner torments as the gothic convention may have been, it also enabled Brooke to endow what he perceived to be a young and rather unexotic country with the soul he felt it lacked, if only for the sake of making his articles more interesting. Rather than renouncing civilization, Brooke's travel narrative lamented what he perceived to be the cultural void, not only of the wilderness landscape but also of the principal cities of the New World, infected as they were by materialism and individualism. In short, the conservative young poet was ill at ease in the present and his journey across Canada offered little hope for the future; what he longed for was the irretrievable past with its comforting traditions, rituals, and hierarchies.²⁴

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NOTES

- 1 On the obsession with death in Brooke's poetry, see Caesar 17-18, 46-48. Spooner refers to "a modernist understanding of gothic as interior drama rather than dramatic spectacle" (39). For a more detailed discussion, see Northey 3-9.
- 2 Originally written in 1871, James' two articles appeared in a volume of his travel essays in 1883.
- 3 Thus, Peter Conrad mistakenly assumes that Brooke had a modernist sensibility, claiming that his travel journal "is the first modern imaginative appreciation of the country [United States] because it joyfully discerns in America not social accoutrement or complication of detail but irrelevance, irresponsibility, absence" (89).
- 4 Brooke to Cathleen Nesbitt, Noo [sic] York, Sunday [1 June 1913] (Keynes 469).
- 5 British travellers had much the same impression. See Moyles and Oworm 217-25.
- 6 For a persuasive critique of this thesis, see Glickman, esp. 45-58.
- 7 Brooke wrote from the Chateau Frontenac on 3 July, and Ottawa on 9 July (Keynes 479-80).
- 8 For contemporary comments made concerning the visual pollution caused by smoke in Montreal, with its impact on public health, see Kenny 62-65.
- 9 Other British travellers shared this view of the Catholic Church (Moyles and Oworm 96-100).
- 10 Brooke wrote to Cathleen Nesbitt, "My dear, it's not a river: it's a part of Hell, got loose. . . . It's like some ghastly dream of Dante's." Letter to Cathleen Nesbitt, Chateau Frontenac, Quebec, 3 July [1913] (Keynes 479-80).
- 11 According to William Hughes and Andrew Smith, "the Gothic is, and has always been, *post-colonial*" (1).
- 12 Golders Green had developed rapidly as a London suburb after a tube station was opened there in 1910 (n. pag.). "Golders Green." *Wikipedia*. Web. 5 Mar. 2013.
- 13 McKinsey's sole quote from Brooke that "Niagara means nothing" (274) is clearly misleading.
- 14 On various literary responses to Niagara Falls, see Jasen 31-35; and Revie ch. 2.
- 15 The normally restrained Henry James resorted to even more animated imagery (see 370, 374) though Revie (108) claims that it was meant to be satirical.
- 16 Karen Dubinsky has noted the common identification of Niagara Falls as female (see 42-45). On Brooke's Victorian attitude towards female sexuality, see Caesar 29-30.
- 17 Privately, Brooke wrote: "I sit and stare at the thing and have the purest Nineteenth Century grandiose thoughts, about the Destiny of Man, the Irresistibility of Fate, the Doom of Nations, the fact that Death awaits us all, and so forth. Wordsworth Redivivus. Oh dear! Oh dear!" Letter to Scholfield (Keynes 491). McGreevy rather surprisingly ignores Brooke's journal, but writes that "[t]he Niagara literature offers glimpses of nineteenth-century soul-searching and speculation that are symptomatic of a more general cultural turmoil" (11).
- 18 To the English literary critic Edmund Gosse, Brooke wrote: "I have a perpetual feeling that a lake ought not to be this size. A river and a little lake and an ocean are natural; but not these creatures. They are too big, and too smooth, and too sunny; like an American business man." Lake Superior, 27 July 1913 (Keynes 494).
- 19 On the growing belief that the debilitating influence of modern urban life required a "rest cure" in the wilderness, see Jasen ch. 5.
- 20 Note the parallel with Catharine Parr Traill's complaint in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836) that "[i]t is the most unpoetical of all lands, . . . there is no hoary ancient grandeur in

- these woods, no recollection of former deeds connected with the country" (qtd. in Zeller 4). This theme was, in turn, echoed in 1947 by the poet Earle Birney: "It's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted" (qtd. in Hammill 47). For other examples, see Sugars 416-17.
- 21 Letter to Edward Marsh, San Francisco, 1 Oct. [1913] (Keynes 513-14). The two fragments are published in Martin and Hall 139-43.
 - 22 Two days later, however, Brooke admitted to her that "I'm glad that I'm no 'sportsman.'" (Keynes 497).
 - 23 One is reminded of Frye's comment that "[t]ravellers visit Canada much as they would visit a zoo: even when their eyes momentarily focus on the natives they are still thinking primarily of how their own sensibility is going to react to what it sees" (Frye 69).
 - 24 It is therefore difficult to include Brooke with the young men whom Eksteins claims welcomed the war "as a pathway to the future, to progress, to revolution, to change" (133).

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