

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

Rebel Angels & Beautiful Losers in John Richardson's "The Monk Knight of St. John"

Michael Hurley

VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED as lurid, sensational, grotesque, and bizarre, John Richardson's complex and intriguing novel *The Monk Knight of St. John. A Tale of The Crusades* (1850) was the *Beautiful Losers* of its day. Response to the work evokes comparison with the reception of novels like Cohen's, Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*, Symons' *Place d'Armes*, Davies' *The Rebel Angels*, or Engel's *Bear* (at the end of which, we recall, the female narrator who has just reclaimed her body and her sexuality enthusiastically praises Richardson and *Wacousta*). Modern commentary on the black sheep of Richardson's *oeuvre* is still divided. It seems to me that a reappraisal is required, one that sets the novel within a literary context rather than one established exclusively by the particular social or sexual reality inhabited by the critic.

"The St. Simonist objective of equal rights for women," which Richardson unlike many of his contemporaries (male, certainly) subscribed to, is germane to our reading of Richardson's most censured text.¹ Though by no means overcoming the stereotypical literary view of women, *The Monk Knight* vehemently protests the subordinate position of women in the repressive, male-dominated society of the West: "As it is, what are women? Slaves, literally the slaves of men, and regarded principally because they are necessary to their own selfish ends," protests one character. The double standard of a sexist culture is satirized, and the narrator recommends "more liberality on the part of him who arrogantly, but falsely, deems himself the first of creation. . . ."² The novel's early readers may have taken offence at such views and how they are woven into a chillingly prophetic vision of an insectoid consumer society devouring its own citizens and growing "arrogant by the humiliating sale of the most petty articles necessary to human existence" (79).

Writing in 1952, Desmond Pacey indignantly attacks both book and author. "Every kind of sexual aberration is displayed," he protests, without "the clinical seriousness . . . which might make it palatable" and "which makes one suspect that Richardson's brain was affected when he wrote the book."³ Far from con-

vinced of the virulence of Richardson's writing or of any prurient interest, Richardson's biographer David Beasley exonerates the author and lavishly praises the controversial text.

It dealt with sexual love in a frank manner that, as Richardson must have known, was sacrilegious in his Victorian age. It was not pornographic; on the contrary, it was revolutionary . . . Under the guise of Gothic romance, [it] represented a sexual emancipation that . . . could only be accepted after the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960's.⁴

There is, indeed, much in this strange work which is deliberately grotesque and provocative. Richardson's imagination here is at its most garish but, as critics aver with regard to *Wacousta*, that imagination is by no means undisciplined. One tentative step in the direction of a reappraisal may be taken by citing Frye's distinction between the pornographic and the erotic in *The Secular Scripture*: "The fact that sex and violence emerge whenever they get a chance does mean that sexuality and violence are central to romance." Romance, in particular, he informs both us and "the guardians of taste and learning,"

is, we say, "sensational": it likes violent stimulus, and the sources of that stimulus soon become clear to the shuddering censor. The central element of romance is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to sexual union. Hence romance appears to be designed mainly to encourage irregular or excessive sexual activity . . . Most denunciations of popular romance . . . assume that the pornographic and the erotic are the same thing: this overlooks the important principle that it is the function of pornography to stun and numb the reader, and the function of erotic writing to wake him up.⁵

A *tour de force* of Gothic and Romantic Macabre, when placed beside other works in this genre, *The Monk Knight* can be seen adhering to certain established conventions and flourishing similar shock tactics. Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, a study of Romantic literature under one of its characteristic aspects, that of erotic sensibility, affords a context within which to view Richardson's work. Written around the same time as *Wuthering Heights*, *The Monk Knight* reveals a similar

Romantic tendency to invent and delight in monsters, the *exaltation du moi*, which has been said to be the secret of the whole Romantic revolt against classical models and restraints; the love of violence in speech and action, the preference for the hideous in character and the abnormal in situation — of all these there are abundant examples in *Wuthering Heights*.⁶

MANY ELEMENTS IN *The Monk Knight* recall Richardson's other fiction, in particular *Wacousta*. Mirror and twin themes again branch out into various *doppelgänger* formulas, giving rise to an eerie sense of reduplication.

There are sacred pledges between friends, psychological metamorphoses, a descent into a cruel night world and the familiar Romantic motif of the demon-lover and vampirism. A Beddoes-like melodramatic tendency shows itself in the creation not of individual but of romantic and stylized characters which expand into psychological archetypes.⁷ Dennis Duffy calls our attention to another lament for “a lost emotional and sexual paradise”; “even when he penned a pornographic romance about the Crusades,” remarks Duffy, “he displayed an almost Spenserian power to describe erotic, violent encounters within carefully evoked settings that complement the actions and freeze them into a series of tableaux.”⁸ As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, there is also a collision of diametrically opposed cultures. Set, like Scott’s *The Talisman*, in the eleventh century in the time of the Crusades, the borderlands of Jerusalem separate the antagonistic world of European and Turk, the forces of Christ and the Cross and Mohammed and the Crescent. West and East are fused in a number of doubles and love triangles. The paradigmatic triangle is composed of the dark-skinned Moor, the Monk Knight Abdallah, Alfred the French Baron de Boiscourt and his beautiful wife Ernestina, the Baroness. These larger-than-life figures merge into one another; they belong to the realm of dream (a recurrent word in the last section of the romance) and of myth or legend.

Indeed, we are presented with a story-within-a-story. Wandering the French countryside in 1837, the narrator searches for “an old chateau, connected with which was some wild traditionary tale” (3). He passes the night in the bedroom of the first Baron de Boiscourt perusing a strange manuscript found, not in a copper cylinder, but in a tin case secreted in the leg of the three life-sized statues in the room. The old parchment from the eleventh century tells the history of the three people whose likenesses are to be found in the statutes beside the bed, that “group of three figures — tall as life, beautifully carved, in high relief, and, with clasped hands, grouped round a figure of Cupid, bearing a torch in his right hand” (5). The first words of the scroll offer advice to the reader: “Whoever may condemn, while reading these pages, knows not his own heart. . . . What I have done I repent not of. Be wise also, and make no evil where none exists” (8).

The story of the “mystic triunion” (136) therein related is indebted to Rousseau’s *The Confessions* and represents a further development of other such love triangles in Richardson. Beasley even goes so far as to argue that the Baron represents “an idealization of Shelley” while the Monk Knight is “an idealization of the dark and noble warrior about which Byron wrote and with whom he later became identified.”⁹ As in all romance, the unwieldy plot involving disguise, mystery, surprise, and violence defies easy summary. At the risk of oversimplification and of rending the intricate web of complex interrelationships, some attempt at conveying the basic patterns informing *The Monk Knight* can be made. As in *Wacousta*, there is a central *doppelgänger* relationship. The Baron and the Monk Knight are doubles-by-division. The former is a young and impetuous French

nobleman; light-hearted and animated, he is a jovial man and even his horse "looks as if a dancing Bacchus were in his veins" (52). "That cold, stern monk" (78) of Herculean build, on the other hand, is older than his companion, calmer and intellectual. He has taken vows of chastity and is engaged in "constant and unflinching war against the flesh" (44). Again, opposition is true friendship; just as Sir Reginald Morton's wild spirit is soothed by the bland amenity of Colonel de Haldimar's manners in *Wacousta*, the Baron's instinctual nature is moderated by the sober Monk's sense of strict duty and religious dedication. At opposite poles of sensuality and asceticism, respectively, they balance each other in an extreme way, and indeed, blend into one another.

Regarding his friend "as something more than human" (40), the Baron declares that "my soul yearns to you, as though you were the first-born of my mother's womb" (9). Out of his love for his "brother," the Baron gets the Monk to promise to wed his beloved wife who has remained in France, should he fall in battle; he overcomes the inhibitions of the chaste Christian ascetic by inflaming his imagination with the glowing ideal of a "superhuman loveliness" (10) as embodied in the "chastely voluptuous" (57) Lady Ernestina. The Baron's imagination also envisions an ideal in which "soul entwines with soul in mystic bonds." His self-sacrificing nature is clarified in the narrator's allusion to the author of *The Confessions* and *The Social Contract*:

What Rousseau has been since, his noble countryman, de Boiscourt, then was: but more frank, more ardent, more generous, more liberal and self-immolating where the happiness of those he loved required the more than human sacrifice of self. And yet, with him it was no sacrifice to have abstained from the tri-union of hearts it had become [his] chief duty . . . to promote. (41)

When it appears that the Baron has, indeed, perished in the battle to preserve Jerusalem from the Moslems, the Monk Knight decides to journey to France to wed the Baroness. But even before the trip has begun, it is apparent that he has become another of Richardson's "altered" characters. The pious Christian monk who was wont "to impose the most severe self-denial upon his feelings" (21) renounces the monastic life of prudence and propriety. He has undergone a "wondrous change" (89) in the arms of the beautiful "Pagan" Zuleima, "an unblessed heretic and unbeliever." (Zuleima's name conjures up that of Zuletta in *The Confessions* and Zuleika in Byron's "The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale," the latter work also featuring a character called Abdallah.) Revelling for the first time in "all the wildness of reciprocated passion" (97), Mars succumbs to Venus in a Rousseauistic swoon:

What God-created charms! . . . It was the triumph of nature over art — of truth over falsehood — of a hallowed and divine sentiment, over the cold and abstract conventionalisms of a world which, childlike, forges its own chains, fetters its own limbs, and glories in the display of its own bondage. (21)

The Houri-like Zuleima is one of the wives of Saladin, the Moslem chieftain who is a mirror-reflection of the Baron. She is a catalyst in effecting his transformation from a woman-hating Christian renunciate into a passionate lover and "a renegade from the purity of the Church" (127). Again, opposites run into one another: just as the Baron is now regarded as a saint and a martyr, the Monk Knight seems to assume his friend's impassioned nature. Freed from the mind-forg'd manacles of conventional Christianity, the Monk Knight "rejoiced that God has blessed him by emancipating his mind from bondage" (130). Zuleima and the Monk Knight resemble one another: both are Moors and orphans, the latter as a child compelled by his Christian captors to forsake the Moslem faith. His Moslem identity as "Abdallah," long repressed, is once again in the ascendant.

Abdallah's fiery spirit can no more be contained within orthodox Christian bounds than that of MacLennan's titanic Jerome Martell, another "oddly pure sensualist" involved in an analogous love triangle who also had been orphaned and brought up by Christians.¹⁰ It is as if Leonard Cohen's Saint Catherine were to shed her Christian identity and become the Mohawk "Kateri" again, a metamorphosis that does, indeed, occur in the mind of the composite figure around which the last section of *Beautiful Losers* revolves. Denying the body and torturing the flesh for the sake of salvation gives way in Abdallah to a recognition — conveyed in similarly heightened language to that in Cohen — of sexual energy as itself a sacrament.

ZULEIMA AND THE MONK KNIGHT are complementary personalities. Yet their relationship can no longer be constituted on a sexual basis, each finding in the other the spiritual brother or sister that each has fervently longed for. As the Baroness later states to Zuleima, "'you are a part of himself'" (166). That forbidden incestuous flavour to their love so dear to Romantics like Byron and Shelley also adds spice to the "mother and son" relationship between Zuleima and Rudolph. The latter, the page of the Baron and now the close friend and more-than-brother of the Monk, is "a beautiful and blooming boy, fair as the Narcissus of old" (9). As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, the Narcissus archetype structures these incredibly entangled interrelationships which make those in earlier works seem straightforward by comparison. Here, too, the dynamics of the "break-boundary process" (points of reversal where opposites merge, paradoxical inversions of identity) can be seen working themselves out in East-West terms: once across the line dividing Crusader from Musselman, Rudolph "must . . . transform [himself] from a Christian page into a Saracen'" (76) even as the once captive Zuleima was disguised as a Christian page in the Baron's camp. Once again, opposites coincide, and love triangles embody the interface of two worlds.

The eastern woman, in turn, mirrors the French woman whom the Monk Knight is to marry. Zuleima is inclined to “‘wish I were that woman of the West — she taking my likeness and I transformed to hers’” (104). When she and Ernestina finally meet, they respond to each other as sisters; their relationship does not possess the quasi-lesbian aspects characterizing that of Ernestina and her attendant Henrietta. Both Zuleima and Ernestina take the Baron and the Monk Knight as lovers at different times in the story, Zuleima asserting that it was the Baron “‘who first taught her the value of herself’” (74).

Zuleima is a female version of *Wacousta's* Narcissus-like Sir Reginald Morton/Wacousta. “‘I created to myself an image,’” she tells the Monk Knight, “‘a beau-ideal, which I invested with every attribute of excellence, and to which, had it been possible to endow it with vitality, I should have surrendered myself body and soul’” (105). “‘Reality could afford no such joy to her as did the ripe paintings of her own glowing imagination’” (81) until she encountered the Baron who “‘realized her soul’s identity.’” Her brief relationship with “‘the ideal Christian knight, whom I had invested with superhuman beauty’” (105), fulfills her “‘picture of intensely reciprocated passion’” (81), of a fusion of sensuality and spirituality.

Like the Byronic Morton/Wacousta, Zuleima is an impulsive idealist who champions the imagination and the rapture that passion can trigger. To do so is to defy “‘dogmatic authority’” and “‘the fiat of society and the church’” (81-2). Murder, rape, incest, “‘blasphemy, and foul slander, were the only crimes she admitted against God; all the others were of human invention’” (84). Her pupil, the Monk Knight, learns to redefine the lawful and the criminal; having reclaimed the body and its energies, he realizes that “‘Nature recoils not from the passion,’” the “‘desire . . . which, in fact, is a divine mystery without a name.’” “‘Gifted with great but unobtrusive strength of mind, scorning those prejudices which equally influenced the conquerors and the conquered, and had moistened the land with their mutual blood’” (106), Zuleima recalls Poe’s *Ligeia* who is similarly endowed with strong intellectual powers and an Eastern voluptuousness.

Zuleima celebrates sexual ecstasy which is “‘mutually shared’” (106); “‘mutual’” is a recurrent word in the text eliciting a whole series of associations. Zuleima glorifies Allah who

had bestowed upon them a part of His own
divinity — delegated to them the
incomprehensible power to create
themselves, and by means of such
transporting joy, as in His great wisdom,
he hallowed with the mystery of his own
all-glorious Godhead. (82)

That a female character in the fiction of the 1850’s should harbour such notions of “‘a dionysiac ontology’” — Dennis Lee’s phrase for a similar philosophy he identifies

in *Beautiful Losers* — violated that sense of propriety and decorum that distinguished a large portion of the Victorian readership.¹¹ It is not surprising that there was no review, no word of the scurrilous text or the perfervid imagination that gave birth to it in the various literary magazines of the day.

Zuleima's Allah, a God of Love for whom sexual passion is not a sin but a sacrament, a means of transcendence, stands in contrast to the perverted conception of God entertained by the sanctimonious and spiritually moribund Crusaders for Christ. "A Juggernaut, at whose bloody shrine whole hecatombs of human victims were to be sacrificed," He is worshipped in fear by those whose creed seems to enjoin the sacrifice of others rather than that "total sacrifice of self" (54) which characterizes the Rousseauistic Baron or that standing outside the self engendered by ecstasy. In Lee's terminology, a dionysiac ontology is opposed to "the ontology of savage fields"; the former envisions a world of original identity or unified being where "God is alive. Magic is afoot," and "sexual ecstasy and the dislocation of rationality give entry to it."¹²

In *The Monk Knight*, religion when abused becomes a horrible and ghastly perversion, a kind of death force. The narrator no less than Zuleima, whom he regards as an avatar of a future race of superhuman beings to be ushered in by the millennium, is aghast at "that creed which the armed masses of Christendom went forth to propagate with fire and sword." "Those Christian people, who were so anxious, like the churchmen of the present day, to teach what they do so indifferently practice" are distinguished by

Superstition, under the name of piety —
 fanaticism, under the garb of religion —
 fire, sword, pillage, hatred,
 uncharitableness, revolting lust,
 brutality — all the horrid passions that
 ever lowered man to the condition of the
 brute. . . . What a creed! What a conception
they must have had of the Deity who could
 thus have been propitiated. (31-3)

This is the God of established Christianity condemned in Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, MacLennan's *Each Man's Son* and *The Watch That Ends the Night*, Symons' *Place d'Armes*, Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Davies' *Fifth Business*, and in works by other Southern Ontario writers like Gibson and Reaney who protest the Calvinist-Methodist hatred of the body, the instincts, and the natural world.

Thus tutored by the pagan Zuleima and the dionysian Baron, the Monk Knight arrives in Auverge, France, on the wedding anniversary of the Baron and the Baroness. Disguised as an alleged friend of the Baron's, the Monk Gonzalles — "in Palestine we have passed as twins" (115) — he proclaims to Ernestina that

the Monk Knight is dead, that the Baron is alive and that “‘you will think this night, even in your husband’s arms, that Gonzales in the semblance of Abdallah will possess you’” (117). Discovering the “real” identity of the Monk Knight, she falls madly in love with this “‘superhuman’” being whom she identifies as the Baron’s “‘second self’” (112), and they marry. The Baron himself had encouraged her to see the Monk as “‘the god of her mind’s creation’” (118). As is the Baron for Zuleima, the “‘saint-like’” (111) Monk Knight with his “‘Christ-like countenance’” (136) — blasphemy of blasphemies! — is for the Baroness that “‘phantom, which imagination moulded into such life and strength, and beauty, that my sick soul languished for the embodiment’” (139). He is at once an erotic and a spiritual ideal.

“‘No longer the wife of a mortal’” (138), the Lady Ernestina lives with the Monk Knight as goddess and god or the prelapsarian Eve and Adam. For them, “‘passion is . . . not the gross sensuality which priests pronounce it to be, but a divine emanation from the God who created woman . . . the last and most perfect of his creatures’” (57). Woman, the body, passion and ecstasy are redeemed from the curse of the church. Here as in Blake, Byron, Shelley and many contemporary Canadian writers, “‘the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys’” and denies that “‘the nakedness of woman is the work of God’” and not the Devil.¹³ Ernestina’s is “‘not the cold hackneyed seemingness of the wanton’” and “‘not the dissembling virtue of the cold and prudent wife, which inspires disgust on the one hand, and on the other chills passion in its bud (121).’”

WHILE RICHARDSON’S “‘REBEL ANGELS’” may disregard convention in private, they possess a very Canadian reluctance to openly defy the laws of the land or to overthrow such venerable institutions as marriage. However critical of the church and its self-serving brand of Christianity, they still seek its blessings and prefer to live within a social framework. The major characters are socially conscious: at the head of society in Auverge, “‘they were not indifferent’” to its demands and felt “‘the necessity for sacrificing something to appearances, in a world made up of appearances and falsehood alone’” (163). Like Richardson’s Canadian characters, despite the pull of a sometimes fierce and romantic individualism, they accept the compromises of the world and their participation in it. When, through the sheer intensity of their all-absorbing love, the Monk Knight and Ernestina forego the claims of the social dimension of their identity in a world which is all relationship, they court a tragic fate.

In their “‘transcendant passion’” (138), the Baroness and the Monk Knight strive to merge into one another totally. “‘I would be a part of yourself, identified, infused into the holy father of my child’” exclaims Ernestina in a wicked pun,

“and because I cannot reach this keen acme of my happiness, that happiness is incomplete” (128). This romantic quest to abrogate the borders between themselves is an ambiguous, double-edged affair. Like Byron’s Lara who both soars above and sinks beneath the common man, Richardson’s saintly lovers ironically hook twice the darkness when they try to catch twice the romantic glory of love and passion. “The tumult of those heaven-bestowed raptures which blended them into one mystic identity” (131) is also beginning to consume them. “‘My love for you is destroying me!’” (128) wails the titanic Monk Knight. His lineaments as a Manfred or a Fatal Lover who destroys himself and the woman he loves to madness are disclosed in Ernestina’s description of him as “‘the more than man who is slowly killing me with his intensity’” (134), a very Cohenesque intensity.

Eventually, the Baron, who has died in battle, attempts to reclaim his wife. Though a bizarre situation, it is one that is repeated in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. In MacLennan’s novel, Jerome, who “had returned from the dead,” finds his sensuous and angelic wife married to the man whom he has asked to look after her when he is gone: his double, the once celibate George Stewart who at one point feels that Jerome “seemed to be inside me, *to be me* . . .” “‘I had hoped to make love to you’ he said simply, ‘and now you’re married to George.’”¹⁴ Like Jerome, the Baron has wished for death but is fated to live, just as Catherine and Ernestina are fated to die.

The Baron is rebuffed by his former friend and his former wife. Ernestina avers that her guiding principle is “‘constancy’” or “‘fidelity,’” familiar Richardsonian watchwords. Desperately in love with his better half, he proposes a *ménage à trois* or what he terms, appropriately enough, a “‘double marriage’” (154). The couple recoil in shock and dismiss him. With “‘the seal of our strong friendship . . . broken — the tie . . . snapped asunder’” (143), the relationship between the Monk Knight and the Baron now degenerates into that struggle-of-brothers conflict which is prominent throughout Richardson’s canon. Banished to the forest, the once noble Baron undergoes one of those “sudden and unaccountable changes in the human mind” (143) which also characterizes tragic figures like Wacousta and Gerald Grantham, the protagonist of *The Canadian Brothers*. Here is that fascination for a “‘hairspring balance at the very edge of breakdown’” that Lee notes again and again in Ondaatje’s writing.¹⁵

The Baron feels betrayed, robbed of his spiritual treasure. Separation from his spiritual likeness or feminine self is intolerable. As in *Wacousta* or Byron’s “Manfred,” it is the root of a crime of vengeance, wounded pride, and despair. The revengeful Baron succumbs to a cruel viciousness. Like a true Gothic tyrant, he imprisons the lovers in a labyrinthine underground cavern below the chateau. As in *Wacousta* and its sequel, we find descent imagery belonging to the night world of romance as described in Frye’s *The Secular Scripture*. These grotesque passages with their strong sado-masochistic colouring suggest the influence of Byron’s “The

Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale” and of Poe’s tales of horror, especially “Ligeia.” Intertextual echoes abound. A parallel scene later in the story involving a grisly live burial complicated by cannibalism is taken almost verbatim from one of the most famous of Gothic novels by an exemplar of the *Schauer-Romantik* or Chamber-of-Horrors School, Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*.¹⁶ Critics have commented on a similar use of a sense of brooding evil and of the details of physical horror to highlight an erotic theme in *Beautiful Losers* and poems like “Lovers” which typify the “decadent” aspects of Cohen’s romanticism.

In another sudden reversal “renewing the broken bond of love and friendship,” the Baron, the Baroness and the Monk Knight ascend out of “these subterranean tombs” (154), mysteriously reconciled to one another. The Baron and the Baroness remarry. The Monk Knight disappears, only to return again as the Monk Gonzales, having grown darker even as Wacousta grows taller. Since he has become Ernestina’s confessor, the expression of his overwhelming love no longer has a physical component. It is at this point when there is a synthesis of opposing attitudes or forces and the three figures are balanced within a larger, integrated psychological entity, that the life-size ebony carving is made that the narrator comes upon centuries later. An essential but elusive equilibrium is momentarily attained; the equally matched opposites are held together in a fruitful rather than a destructive tension. It is a unique moment in Richardson, but only a moment.

The Monk Knight’s and Ernestina’s excessive passion for identification, though reconstituted on a higher level, has become so intense that it tilts the balance and threatens to destroy them both. In one of the paradoxes of apocalyptic romanticism, the thirst for the infinite that is the source of their vitality also leads to death. Of course, for them at least, death holds no threat but only the assurance of a final complete merging, of “visions of future love and existence” (178) beyond the grave. “The utter surrender as it were, of the identity of each to the other” (163) has passed beyond all human bounds. As with *Wacousta*, Reaney’s Donnelly Trilogy, *The Watch That Ends the Night*, and novels by Ondaatje, Kroetsch, and Findley, readers are confronted not only with a paradoxical blurring of identity but also with the problematical status of that natural energy which is embodied in the reckless vitality and violence of disturbingly ambiguous figures. Again, the terms appropriate to Richardson are not those of good and evil but the more ambiguous ones of order and energy.

In this work *à la Beddoes*, in which the forces of life and death interpenetrate and are often surprisingly confused, sex no less than religious teaching is both an instrument of life and death. Lee stresses a similar point in *Beautiful Losers*: “Traditional asceticism and the cult of ecstatic sex are alike in the sinister appetites they release. . . . Opposites coincide.”¹⁷ Excess in love as in violence proves as dangerous and destructive as it does in *The Canadian Brothers* with the Canadian garrison officer Gerald Grantham and the American *femme fatale* Matilda Mont-

gomery. They ignore community and seek an intense awareness of self outside the bounds of quotidian reality; their fate suggests that whatever the egotistical assertion achieves, it is an ambiguous triumph. The drive to freedom is also a quest for death: "The raptures they tasted were not of earth. . . . Their depth and fulness had nothing human in them. They would have grown into each other if they could" (167). Abdallah and Ernestina embody the world of violent personal passions, of the exultant self. Like Gina Bixby and Jethroe Chone, Callaghan's criminal saints or saintly outlaws in *Close to the Sun Again*, the Monk Knight and the Baroness are lovers knowing only the law of their own love; the terrible excess of their passion, the terrible beauty in the excess, suggests a dual sense that human beings are both incredibly deprived and incredibly precious.

The further contortions and writhings of the plot of *The Monk Knight* are too complex to faithfully summarize here. Such are a few of the instances of overlapping identity. There seems to be no end to the text's "Chinese puzzle-box" scenes and characters which rival those in many Canadian postmodern works. As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, Richardson's intent seems to be to connect everyone with everyone else. Identity loses its significance as individuation. Defying closure, the entire dream-like cycle appears on the verge of beginning over again in the final chapters. The controversial nature of "such balancing monsters of love" (*Beautiful Losers*) as we find in Cohen, Davies, and Richardson's saints illustrates John Moss's contention in *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* that saintliness in our literature arises from some amazing sources, ones that are often considered strange or perverse.¹⁸

NOTES

- ¹ David Beasley, *The Canadian Don Quixote: The Life and Works of Major John Richardson, Canada's First Novelist* (Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 1977), 48.
- ² John Richardson, *The Monk Knight of St. John. A Tale of the Crusades* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850), 121. All future references are to this text and occur parenthetically in the text.
- ³ Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada*, rev. ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1967), 30-31.
- ⁴ Beasley, p. 161.
- ⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press), 23-26.
- ⁶ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Oxford, 1951), 59.
- ⁷ Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 65.
- ⁸ Dennis Duffy, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982), 51-53.
- ⁹ Frye, *Scripture*, 40.

- ¹⁰ Hugh MacLennan, *The Watch That Ends The Night* (New York: Signet, 1959), 14.
- ¹¹ Dennis Lee, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), 82.
- ¹² Lee, p. 82.
- ¹³ William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *Blake: Complete Works*, ed. Geoffrey Keyes (London: Oxford, 1966), 151-52.
- ¹⁴ *Watch*, 306; 341, 307.
- ¹⁵ Lee, 20.
- ¹⁶ Compare the cavern scene involving the Countess of Clermont and her lover to an analogous one in Maturin's *Melmoth The Wanderer*, a scene Devendra P. Varma notes in his *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 167.
- ¹⁷ Lee, p. 88.
- ¹⁸ Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 120-21. See "Forgive Us Our Saints" in John Moss, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977).

