

OUTCAST NO LONGER

B. W. A. Sleigh's "The Outcast Prophet"

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SET IN THE WILDS of Canada and America, and densely populated by army officers, bandits, escaped slaves, plucky damsels, Yankee adventurers, *coureurs de bois*, howling banshees, demonic strangers and roving tribes of savages, both noble and otherwise, Arthur Sleigh's *The Outcast Prophet* (1847) belongs to that highly eventful mode of popular fiction known as the Romance of the Frontier. And, like the dime novel, costume melodrama, and the other genres of popular fiction, it can reveal to modern readers a good deal about the attitudes and concerns that have shaped our cultural history.

Burrows Willcocks Arthur Sleigh was born in Lower Canada in 1821. In 1846, having bought a lieutenancy in the 77th Foot Regiment of the British army, he was sent back to British North America. While stationed there, first in Halifax and several months later in Quebec, he wrote *The Outcast Prophet*, which was published in London the following year. By 1848 Sleigh had sold his commission and returned to England, where he purchased from an absentee landlord 100,000 acres in Prince Edward Island. In 1850 he took up residence on the island, and in Halifax, whose refinements he much preferred to the conditions in his own townships: he was a well-known figure in Prince Edward Island, becoming eventually a Justice of the Peace and a Lieutenant-Colonel in a local militia unit. His autobiographical account of the land and people he had come to know so well, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings; or, Travel, Life and Adventure in the British North American Provinces*, was published in London in 1853. After suffering numerous business failures and eventually bankruptcy, he died in Chelsea, England in 1869.¹

The settings of *The Outcast Prophet* alternate between "garrisons" which provide welcome but precarious shelter and wildernesses which recall those of Richardson's *Wacousta* in their threatening, haunted atmosphere. Sleigh's highly evocative narrative may serve as a paradigm of Canadian romance, displaying many of the themes, images, and attitudes that have come to characterize our literary tradition. Because copies of the book are, unfortunately, scarce, I offer as a preface to my discussion a detailed synopsis of the plot.²

The action begins in the winter of 1774 at Fort Ontario, an outpost of Empire "opposite the Thousand Isles . . . on the North Shore of the Lake" bearing that name. This land of "Paradisaical splendour" Sleigh calls "the Far West."³ Here, beneath a portrait of George III, Major Harding the fort commander, his "kind and affectionate" wife, his "dignified" dark-haired daughter Viola, and his light-hearted, fair-haired niece Honour are engaged in planning a Christmas party. Into the peaceful domestic scene burst the Major's "wild son" Reginald, and his inseparable Yankee companion Job Wisp, newly returned from adventures in the wilds. Reginald, "brave, cool and determined," is a worthy scion of the British race of Empire builders. But to his steadiness of character is added that quality of reckless imagination, that "unconquerable spirit of romance" which distinguishes the Waverley heroes and their numerous progeny. The quality is reinforced by his association with the devoted but undisciplined Wisp, his mentor and Good Companion in the forests. Born in New England, Wisp typifies the white man who embraces the wilderness as a vocation, the adventurer who hears an irresistible urgency and appeal in the call of the wild:

[Such] characters . . . are men of daring and fearless dispositions, who, in satisfying the unconquerable desire of visiting the scenes of the West, cast away the timidity of civilized life, and become in spirit and soul, as the Indian, ready and expecting adventures of an arduous and perilous nature.

The two frontiersmen soon forsake the warmth of the fort when they learn that a female servant is missing and feared abducted by Indians. Seeking her in a wilderness cabin where they hope she has merely sought refuge from a sudden snowstorm, they are themselves attacked, but manage to rout their savage assailants. As they are completing the task of scalping the fallen Indians (a custom pronounced by Wisp to be "good . . . it does no harm to the dead, and conveys a good moral to the living," the Major appears. He has been alerted to their danger, he claims, by the howl of the Harding banshee. It has for generations forewarned of deaths in the family, and was last heard by the Major when his older son was murdered by Indians. All return (but without the servant, who is not mentioned again) to the safety of the fort.

Some time later, the garrison welcomes Ranoka, who, like Wisp, is a white convert to savagism. He is "a mixture of the Indian and the gentleman" whose "conversation and manner [identify] one, who was not originally destined by education to the wild life he led." Ranoka carries a letter announcing the arrival of Bishop Desjardins and his beautiful niece Amie, who soon arrive. The same evening Amie and Reginald, apparently well-matched in the alacrity with which they act on their emotions, declare their love and determination to be always together. Meanwhile Viola harbours a secret and troubling affection for Ranoka. Christmas is celebrated with feasting, dancing, and singing.

BUT THE COMFORTABLE peace of the garrison community is again disrupted the following day, when they organize a shooting party and venture once more into the woods. During the night they are attacked by a band of Algonquins who abduct Amie. Though Ranoka and Reginald are able to find her by tracking the Indians to their camp, the two men are overpowered in the ensuing skirmish. Amie shows herself to be Reginald's equal in valour by killing an Indian who is about to murder her lover. But it is not until the opportune appearance of Job Wisp that the whites' survival is assured. The Indians are routed (though, perhaps in deference to the lady's presence, not scalped) and the party returns to the relative safety of the fort.

With their third departure from its confines, they embark on a two-year journey into the heart of darkness which is the American wilderness. In compliance with the Major's instructions, Reginald, Wisp, and Ranoka set out to conduct Viola, Amie, and Bishop Desjardins safely to Virginia, where they will finally settle. As the expedition approaches the Bloody Grounds of Ohio, a mysterious stranger confronts the group and identifies himself in messianic tones as the Outcast Prophet:

I am the Great Spirit, the Outcast Prophet. . . . Names belong only to those who have dealings with the things of this world, my doings are with those above. All know me — the Indian — the wild beasts — the birds of the air — all — all alike dread my form, for they know I am the true Prophet. The storms and lightnings — the wind, and rain — rage at my bidding.

But Ranoka's eye immediately penetrates the outlandish disguise of the imposter, whom he recognizes as "one . . . nearly connected to [him] by blood." In private conversation the Prophet confesses to Ranoka that his "magic" is mere quackery, and he himself a "sham." (A curious touch is his use of ventriloquism as a means of duping his followers. This establishes an unexpected affinity between the Prophet and Brockden Brown's Carwin, surely the first North American in fiction to attempt seduction with the aid of biloquism.)

The Prophet then explains the reasons for his outcast state. Years ago his father, who is "still living somewhere in Canada," humiliated and rejected the youth's Indian wife, forever driving his proud son from the "trammels" of civilization. The death of one Rogers completed his estrangement from white society, and even from his fellow outsider, Ranoka, for although his kinsman had killed Rogers in self-defence, Ranoka thought him guilty of murder. The butchery by the Winnebagos of the outcast's beloved wife completed the chain of events which transformed him into the vagabond Prophet, obsessed with thoughts of "sweet revenge." His restlessness is sharpened continually by a recurring nightmare in which his wife rises up before him, her white garments stained with "purple gore."

Moved by his narrative, Ranoka forgives the Prophet and promises to keep his identity secret. The two are reconciled and the Prophet offers to help the group pass safely through the Bloody Grounds. But such gestures of reconciliation, indicative of harmony and order, will not appear again until the final chapters of the romance. The travellers' unsuspecting descent into the chaos and violence which will dominate their journey begins the following day, with Reginald's injury during a buffalo hunt, and another hunter's death, at the hands of an Indian, during the night.

CHANGES IN THE FORTUNES and identities of those principal characters who have not yet become outsiders are presaged in their acquisition of Indian names, bestowed upon them by a band of friendly Shawnees. There is an especially disturbing hint in Viola's new name, Drooping Lily, whose prophetic quality will be confirmed by her premature death. But seasoned readers of romance will by this time have already guessed the fate of the serious, dark-haired girl who is hopelessly in love with an outsider. She *must* die, for, like Cooper's Cora Munro, she cannot be accommodated by the inevitable marital resolutions of the romance ending.

The party is soon engulfed in no less than three Indian wars, each bloodier than the last. Ranoka, though saved once by the Prophet, is eventually captured by the Tuscaroras, who announce their intention to torture him to death. At this point, Sleigh splits his plot into two streams of narrative, one dealing with the adventures of Reginald (accompanied, as always, by Wisp) and the other with those of the Prophet. This strategy necessitates much rapid shifting of focus and geography, and a heavy reliance on such constructions as "meanwhile, in another part of the country," or "unbeknownst to the Prophet, Reginald. . . ." In the interest of clarity, the two strands will here be summarized separately, although they are interwoven in Sleigh's text.

As they lead their group through the wilderness in search of the captured Ranoka, Reginald and Wisp encounter a troop of American soldiers. The commander, informing the party that the United States and Britain are at war, attempts to arrest them. Amie, Viola, and Desjardins are taken prisoner, but Reginald and Wisp escape. The two join a group of fugitive slaves on a raft and begin to amass a "royalist" army, but all are soon captured and jailed by the Americans. Hearing while in prison that Ranoka has died, the bereaved Reginald faints.

He awakens from his swoon, the romance equivalent of the death that must precede rebirth, into his new identity as an outlaw. With Wisp and the fugitive blacks he escapes to the unwholesome recesses of Dismal Swamp, a Gothic covert

“dismal by name, dismal by nature, and dismal by every past recollection of lawless aggression and midnight murder.”⁴ There, his transformation complete, Reginald “throw[s] aside the garb of civilization” and assumes his command as “an outlawed chief”: “There was [now] stamped upon his countenance, a half melancholy recklessness, which, coupled to the piercing flashes of his eyes, the air of dignity with which he sat, his dress, and the fearsome fellows around, contributed to invest his bearing with wild and daring recklessness.”

As “Captain-General,” Reginald successfully leads his force of one hundred and eighty fugitives against the Americans, who are attempting to supply “Northern rebels” with guns at Baltimore. A captured officer informs the royalist “General” that Amie and Viola are alive, still the prisoners of the Americans who arrested them. Elated, Reginald plans the girls’ rescue.

TWO YEARS HAVE PASSED since the capture of Ranoka and the Prophet’s departure from the group of beleaguered Canadians. Like them, the Prophet experiences during that time many hardships and adventures. When his kinsman is abducted, the outcast returns (somewhat surprisingly, considering the bond that has been re-established between the two men) to his tribe and half-breed children at Prairie du Chien. For eighteen months, supposedly guided by the Great Spirit, he leads the Sacs in a war of revenge against the Winnebagos. (His motive, however, is purely personal; the reader recalls that it is the Winnebagos who killed his wife.) One night he is waylaid by a mercenary named Moses Amen, who informs him that a reward is offered for the Prophet’s safe return to Canada in order to claim his inheritance. The revelation of his true identity could have come only from Ranoka, for no one else has known the secret of the Prophet’s birth and disguise. Confronted with this indisputable proof of his father’s death (for Ranoka swore to maintain silence until that event), the Prophet admits that he is none other than Henry Harding, the oldest son and lost heir of the Major at Fort Ontario, and thus the brother of Viola and Reginald. Immediately, he gathers up his children and bids farewell to the tribe that has for twelve years sheltered him and conducted wars at his bidding. His transformation from outcast back to gentleman is as complete as it is abrupt:

On a sudden he found he was not a detested outcast; but that his memory was yet cherished, and held dear. . . . When kind words were used, to recal [*sic*] the tortured outcast to his home, the heart of the Prophet relented; the cold bar of passion that had restrained his noble impulses for twelve long years, and had caused the ill-used youth to become a human butcher, now burst asunder, carrying away the resentment which had so long triumphantly reigned within his breast, for he now felt a softening heart, the still and gentle upbraidings of a conscience.

Having set out to rejoin Reginald and his associates, Henry fortuitously meets in the vast wilderness Job Wisp, who conducts him to their camp. The coincidence is the device which enables Sleigh to once again unite his two narrative lines in the reunion of the Canadian brothers, Reginald and Henry Harding. A successful rescue mission effects a further reunion with Amie, Viola, and the Bishop (who dies, however, shortly afterward), and all return "as a family" to Canada. There, at the Harding "château" near Montreal, Reginald and Amie marry, Viola pines away for the love of her fallen hero Ranoka, Job Wisp takes a wife, raises a family and becomes a Member of Parliament, and even the emancipated blacks take up residence in the various outbuildings, "as happy," Sleigh glowingly assures us, "as any nigger can be!"

IF THE ALL-TOO-CALCULATED resolution which Sleigh provides to *The Outcast Prophet* does not seem to justify the foregoing lengthy recitation of the plot, I hope that the following remarks will reward the reader's patience. For, though flawed and difficult to unravel,⁵ Sleigh's opus is in many ways a microcosm of Canadian romance, treating three major groups of materials central to Canadian fiction — indigenous settings, aboriginal peoples, and the theme of the outcast — in ways that are broadly representative of our entire tradition.

Before attempting to differentiate between Sleigh's attitudes to Canadian and American settings, it is helpful to consider his approach to the North American continent in general. For him it clearly functions as the "enchanted ground" of romance, a place in which the social and moral codes whereby civilized Europeans govern and protect themselves have negligible authority. In his catalogues of the various components that made up the society of the North American wilderness in the eighteenth century (emigrants, "savages," hunters, soldiers, etc.), Sleigh repeatedly stresses what for him is the central, disturbing reality of life: "the face of affairs was unsettled [with each man] eagerly grasping" whatever he could get.

Sleigh depicts only two spots on the whole vast continent which offer the safety of a familiar, rational culture: Fort Ontario, the setting of the first two episodes of the romance, and Virginia, the goal of his young protagonists' journey. Both represent to the author recreations of England. The fort is presided over by Major Harding, that staunch, uncompromising representative of King George, whose portrait hangs over the Major's "throne." And Virginia, during Sleigh's lifetime, was the place which Mark Twain would ridicule for its wealthy planters' efforts to emulate the manners and sensibilities of Scott's idealized — and therefore counterfeit — British aristocrats. Even in the Virginia of 1775, Sleigh avows, "at the time of which we write, all the grandeur of the old English establishments

was maintained." Except for these two oases, then, the continent is "unsettled." It is, in fact, in turmoil; murderous savages infest the backwoods of Canada, and traitorous rebels wage their bloody War of Independence in America.

Close examination of the patterns informing the two opening episodes, which centre on Fort Ontario, reveals the "garrison mentality" and fear of the forest which pervade nineteenth- and much of twentieth-century Canadian fiction. Within the fort reign the rituals and institutions of British Christian society: the family, the Church, the army. As the story begins, Harding's wife, daughter, and niece are organizing a Christmas party which involves feasting, dancing, and singing — all activities connotative of prosperity, order, and harmony between the sexes; the harmony will soon be exemplified by the budding love of Amie and Reginald. Even Ranoka, the solitary wanderer of the woods, will be persuaded in these surroundings to sing a sentimental ballad of love.

But on this day, presumably December twenty-fifth, Grace, a female servant whose name connotes the event which Christmas celebrates, becomes the victim of savages, the personifications of the wilderness. Reginald and Wisp leave the security of the fort in search of her, thus initiating an adventure which will take a closed, circular shape. They enter the forest; they are attacked in a wilderness cabin, a product of civilization suggesting a miniature garrison but lacking, in the absence of fortifications and armed soldiers, its safety; in the temporary peace which follows their victory over the Indians, they return to Fort Ontario. On the following day a similarly circular route is traced. The hunting party leaves the fort and enters the forest; Amie is abducted, forcing the others even more deeply into the wilds; they penetrate the heart of alien territory, the Algonquin camp; narrowly escaping with their lives, they return to Fort Ontario. Each circular episode ends with a reaffirmation of the stability and order which the garrison symbolizes and which the British intend to bring to all the Canadas.

Their third emergence from the fort, however, takes the protagonists into America. This land, epitomized by the Bloody Grounds through which it must be entered, is doubly wild. Most of its territory is uncivilized, but even those parts where the white man's law prevails have risen up in rebellion against the Empire. The structure of Sleigh's plot reflects the dissolution which America represents, fracturing into separate accounts of the hardships experienced by individual characters. The initial reconciliation of the Prophet and Ranoka produced a group which seemed capable of offering formidable resistance to Indian attack, uniting the skill and bravery of the four experienced woodsmen: Reginald, Wisp, Ranoka, and the Prophet. In addition, the latter two possess the admiration and friendship of a number of Indian tribes who might have provided reinforcements. But their ranks are quickly dispersed. First Ranoka is captured, an event which precipitates the Prophet's departure. Then the women and the Bishop are arrested, leaving Reginald and Wisp to survive as best they can among fugitive slaves

aboard a raft. (Whereas the Indians are portrayed by Sleigh as “men of mighty stature,” bloodthirsty and terrible, the “niggers” he clearly considers contemptible and even comical.) Inevitably, the vulnerable community is captured and imprisoned, causing Reginald to plummet to the spiritual bottom of his romance descent, his swoon. He, Wisp, and the blacks then reside for a time in the Gothic purgatory of Dismal Swamp, where Reginald gives rein to his Other, renegade self, the self that will be rejected when he returns to his “real,” civilized life as an English aristocrat resident in a Canadian château.

WITH THE RETURN to Canada as a single “family” of all the surviving heroes and heroines, the romance structure once again comes full circle, repeating on a larger scale the shape of the two opening episodes. It is noteworthy that only Honour (again, the name is indicative of British Christian virtues), who has not even taken part in the arduous trek, finally settles in Virginia. She marries Piggot, an honourable (albeit American) officer whom the travelling protagonists have rescued and adopted in order, it seems to the reader, to ensure that he lives to fill the role of her husband. The darkest and most violent episodes in Sleigh’s romance occur in America, and it is ultimately Canada which he affirms.

It is, perhaps, this affirmation on the author’s part which amounts for the transitory nature of the male protagonists’ conversion, despite their acquired Indian names, to the status of outlaws. The Prophet’s eager return, already cited, to the lands of his inheritance resembles the breaking of a magic spell, the awakening from an evil nightmare. The murdered Ranoka, revealed to be the bastard son of the Prophet’s uncle, can, of course, never return; his illegitimate birth carries with it permanent exclusion. He dies an outsider, the Shadowy and discarded Other Self of the reinstated Henry Harding. The latter’s alacrity is also displayed by his brother, Reginald, who unhesitatingly resigns as an outlaw chieftain and becomes a moneyed gentleman and doting husband. Even Job Wisp is effortlessly transformed into a figure of respectability, the patriarch of a large family and an influential Member of Parliament.

Any suggestion of egalitarianism which Wisp’s rise to authority might suggest is cancelled by the nature of the domicile in which he and the others finally take up residence. Though situated in Montreal, the Harding château is nevertheless a castle, the structure built to house aristocrats. The word castle itself denotes a hold, a keep, a place where the *status quo* is preserved. In thus optimistically affirming the supremacy of law and order in Canada, Sleigh is certainly unaware of the ironic circumstances in which he complacently leaves his “happy niggers:

occupying outbuildings set apart from the mansion of a white "aristocrat" — just as they must have done in America before escaping to "freedom."

As the land of their forebears has impressed itself on the imaginations of Sleigh's Anglo-Canadian protagonists, so the climate and terrain of their native habitats have affected Canada's aboriginal peoples. The author explicitly contrasts the influence of their respective landscapes on Canada's "Esquimaux" and Indians. "Locked within their icy boundaries," the Esquimaux can entertain only "contracted . . . ideas" and ambitions. But the "luxuriant country" and "unrivaled clime" in which the Indians dwell awaken in them "noble emotions and ambitious projects":

[The Esquimaux] are a people inferior in every respect, to the European [a people] of whom it may be truly said, they have done neither good for God nor man. . . . [The Indians] are men of gigantic minds, noble and lofty ideas, and distinguished for many attributes that adorn the cultivated and classical European.

Although Sleigh usually portrays Indians as the extensions and embodiments of a nature actively hostile to whites, he also displays toward them an ambivalence similar to that which Northey detects in *Wacousta*.⁶ In some instances, nature's gentlemen are far nobler than civilization's. For example, the Shawnees acknowledge their respect for the courage and skill of Ranoka by conferring upon him the status of honorary chief. Their gracious reception and bestowing of complimentary names on Viola, Amie, and Reginald are equally courteous. There is even a certain innocence in the ease with which the Sacs and Foxes are deceived by the Prophet, who boasts to Ranoka that he maintains his authority over them by ventroliquistic "delusions heightened by two or three flashes of lightning accompanied by severe thunder storms." The credulity of Sleigh's Indians reminds the modern reader of the childlike citizens of Twain's Camelot, stupefied by the eclipse which the Connecticut Yankee "creates."

Although the Prophet's magic is as bogus as the Hardings' banshee (or as the spirits in the playful ghost stories of Haliburton's *Old Judge*) there is an authentic legacy of Indian superstition and folklore in Canadian fiction. It is epitomized by such unearthly creatures as the metamorphic wabeno and windigo, and documented by, among others, Honoré Beaugrand in *La chasse-galerie* (1900) and William Hume Blake in *Brown Waters* (1915). It is a legacy which persists in the haunted landscapes of Raddall, Atwood, and Joyce Marshall, in Wayland Drew's *The Wabeno Feast* (1973), and in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939).

THE SYLVAN GENTILITY often displayed by the Indians in *The Outcast Prophet* is antithetical to the extreme and even unnatural discipline meted out by Major Harding at Fort Ontario. After twelve years, the Prophet

still vividly remembers how his father “struck, with clenched fists, the face of an adored wife! Ah! and also spat — spat there — and with tiger grasp, tore the uniform [Henry Harding] then wore.” A further example of unnatural behaviour among whites is provided by Fort Ontario’s Captain Murray, who after the Major’s death anonymously offers rewards for the Prophet’s scalp, and who plots to marry into the Harding fortune. Murray’s duplicity and cowardice are unparalleled among Sleigh’s “savages,” as is the Major’s unfeeling adherence to the “letter of the law.”

But in Canadian romances, white men who reject the law, however valid their objections to it, have no alternative other than strangerhood. And strangerhood inspires dread. Outlaws crowd the pages of Sleigh’s narrative: Ranoka, the Prophet, Reginald, Wisp, Moses Amen, the fugitive slaves, and all the nameless inhabitants of Dismal Swamp. But the author regards their outcast state with the same uneasy ambivalence inspired in him by nature and her agents, the Indians. Absolute freedom — especially the freedom to obey the dictates of one’s individual conscience — terrifies the garrison mentality, suggesting not so much emancipation as “savagism,” the reversion to irrational, bestial impulses.

Outsiders in American romance usually conform to one of two types: Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, in whom are combined the “gifts” of Indian and white society; or Neal’s two satanic Logans, in whose lives are blended “brutality, sensuality, colossal hatred, delirium, rape, insanity, murder”⁷ — and incest. But no corresponding pair of opposites exists in Canadian romance, whose practitioners seem obsessed by the threat of the outlaw’s slide into violence and baseness. Our fictional outcasts are less often liberated individualists than they are criminals or madmen. Their line of descent can be traced from the schizophrenic swindler Henry More Smith in Walter Bates’ *The Mysterious Stranger* (1817)⁸ through Richardson’s demonic Wacousta and Westbrook,⁹ to the only recently rehabilitated Louis Riel, frenzied by his visions and voices. There is no equivalent in our tradition to the celebration of rugged individualism which reverberates throughout American fiction. Rather, our literature celebrates the virtues of accommodation, the compromises and even sacrifices of individual selfhood in the interests of the community.

The frequent appearance of the outcast in nineteenth-century fiction was a result of the interest among Victorians in categorization and definition. In *The Savage in Literature*, his study of “representations of ‘primitive’ society in English fiction,” Brian V. Street writes:

Characters who crossed the racial, national and environmental boundaries were important to the Victorians because they helped define those boundaries. . . . Victorians were suspicious, not only of biological hybrids but of those ‘cultural hybrids’ who had inherited one background but tried to adopt another. These

characters . . . present a dilemma which is central to Victorian conceptions of race and culture and popular writers devote a considerable amount of space to them.¹⁰

Most of the nineteenth-century romancers who were interested in the theme of the outcast wrote, as Sleigh did, accounts of white strangers who attempt to live among Indians. But the "translation" of an Indian into white society was also a popular subject. One such work is a Canadian variation on the story of Pocahontas, the Indian princess who saved the life of John Smith but married his friend John Rolfe, and who, after being transformed as fully as possible into an English gentlewoman, was presented at the court of Elizabeth I. In Gilbert Parker's *The Translation of a Savage* (1893), Frank Armour, an official of the Hudson's Bay Company, devises what he intends as "an absolute and lasting revenge" for his English fiancée's termination of their engagement and marriage to his rival. In order to "show how low [has] fallen his opinion of women,"¹¹ Armour marries Lali, the beautiful daughter of Chief Eye-of-the-Moon, and sends her alone to England to live with his titled family. His father's initial reaction to the news of Frank's marriage to an Indian confounds the Victorians' beloved racial categories, and makes even Sleigh appear tolerant: "Good God," exclaims General Armour, "a red nigger!"

Lali's gradual and subtle translation, and the dignity with which she turns Frank's revenge into a proof of her spiritual superiority to him, give to Parker's romance a moral dimension which Sleigh's work clearly lacks. Sleigh's cosy bundling of all his surviving characters, despite their disparate experiences and natures, into the family château constitutes a facile, not to say glib, resolution to his narrative. Although Sleigh does not take up (or even seem aware of) the issue, the reader may wonder how successful will be the translation of Henry Harding's half-breed children, for the sake of whose Chippaway mother the heir went into exile and eventually became the Outcast Prophet. Were a romancer more sensitive than Sleigh to write a sequel to *The Outcast Prophet*, would Iowa and Moonwah Harding seek acceptance among the white aristocrats of Montreal or among the "red" hunters of the forests? And would they find contentment in either society? (Sleigh himself would probably solve the problem by giving these children "Christian" names.)

The theme of education is common to all fictions whose authors profess to know something, in Hawthorne's phrase, of "the truth of the human heart." Arthur Sleigh did not possess the narrative talents of a William Kirby, a Gilbert Parker, or even a John Richardson; nor is his book one of the masterpieces of the romance mode. But in portraying the spiritual transformation of his protagonist Prophet, and in touching the romance's primary mysteries of birth, death, rebirth, and identity, he established a significant place in the tradition of Canadian romance.

NOTES

- ¹ A biography of B. W. A. Sleigh appears in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography 1861-70*, IX (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976) pp. 723-24. Also see *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (Toronto: Oxford, 1967), p. 767. An extended entry is forthcoming in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale/BC Research).
- ² I am indebted for my acquaintance with *The Outcast Prophet* to Professor Richard Landon, Head of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of Toronto.
- ³ B. W. A. Sleigh, *The Outcast Prophet: A Novel* (London, 1847). Further references will be to this edition.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 21. Compare to the description of Dismal Swamp, with its poisonous snakes, rank vegetation, and all but impenetrable darkness, the epigraph to *Wacousta*:
- Vengeance is still alive; from her dark covert,
With all her snakes erect upon her crest,
She stalks in view and fires me with her charms.
- Major John Richardson, *Wacousta: A Tale of the Pontiac Conspiracy* (Toronto, 1906), [i].
- ⁵ The details of Sleigh's complicated plot sometimes confuse even the author. Characters are misplaced or left behind in the confusion of Indian attacks, resurfacing chapters later apparently unscathed. In some cases, Sleigh's intention was altered by events or characters themselves. Honour, for example, clearly intended to play the role of the fair heroine (and therefore designated Reginald's "cousin" rather than his sister) is supplanted by Amie Desjardins and bundled off to Virginia in the final few pages. There she is married to "a gallant officer of that region" who seems to have been belatedly introduced into the romance for that express purpose. Similarly the avowed bond of brotherhood between Ranoka and the Prophet is inexplicably forgotten when Ranoka is captured and his kinsman disappears in order to take up again his mission of revenge against the Winnebagos.
- At times the preponderance of chaotic, undigested incident in the romance suggests that Sleigh may have been more interested in describing the geography and peoples of his dark North American continent than in working out the structure and sequence of his plot. Certainly his knowledge of the setting would have been of interest to his contemporary readers.
- ⁶ Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto, 1976). While a substantial part of Northey's argument concerns the "haunted" aspects of Nature as depicted in *Wacousta*, it should be noted that she clarifies the other aspect of Richardson's ambiguous attitude by demonstrating that "nature is not unequivocally evil":
- There is a suggestion that "civilized" rationality [the suppression of nature] is as much to be feared as primitive nature. . . . One finds a more loathsome, despicable evil in the colonel [de Haldimar], the embodiment of the civilized class, who rules with coolness and strict rationalistic observance of rules.
- ⁷ Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York, 1948).
- ⁸ Walter Bates, *Henry More Smith, The Mysterious Stranger: A True Story of the Most Remarkable Prisoner Ever Detained in a Jail in New Brunswick, as Told by Walter Bates, one time Sheriff of King's County* (St. John, N.B., 1910). [Originally published in the United States in 1817 and in England the same year under the title *A Companion to Caribou*.]

While incarcerated, Smith was reported to have made several “impossible” escapes from chains and handcuffs, and to have feigned serious illness by coughing and passing blood. He was also adept at fortune-telling, interpreting “prophetic” dreams, and fashioning remarkably lifelike puppets in the likeness of his wife and children. These dolls, he believed, conversed with and watched over him in his cell. Bates frequently describes the criminal’s powers as emanating from the devil.

⁹ John Richardson, *Westbrook, the Outlaw; or, the Avenging Wolf: An American Border Tale* (Montreal, 1973). Originally serialized in the *New York Sunday Mercury* from 4 September to 26 October 1851, the novel was discovered by David R. Beasley in 1972. In his preface, Beasley summarizes the subject of the book as follows:

Richardson, like the contemporary writers of American Renaissance, was concerned with the conflict between the New Romanticism of Jean Jacques Rousseau which believed in the innate goodness of nature, as represented in *Westbrook* by the pure love between Anselmo and Emily, and the innate evil prevalent in the world as represented in the protagonist, Westbrook [v].

¹⁰ Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of ‘Primitive’ Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London, 1975), p. 111.

¹¹ Gilbert Parker, *The Translation of a Savage* (New York, 1893), p. 12.

VIVALDI’S FOUR SONNETS

Doug Beardsley

Spring

Primavera, and the birds still sing
With the first pale hint of morning,
Trills and semiquavers in the human
Heart, blood pumping because it’s so.

The dark side of our days is held
In the mind’s knowing; black-coated
Dawns fill with ash and acid
And we all fade away.

Antonio, this is not the world you know,
Flower-strewn meadows, breath of leaves,
Tambourines between nymphs and shepherds.

In your day there was such sweet thunder;
Barking dogs and goatherds, repeated notes
Soloing to the fair spring sky.