MYTH AND PREJUDICE IN KIRBY, RICHARDSON, AND PARKER

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THE VIOLENT CLASH OF THREE CULTURES in Canada during the eighteenth century seems to offer an ideal setting for the classical historical novel as Lukacs described it. Crises like those in New France and among the Indian nations, the disintegration of feudal societies before the onslaught of imperialism, the drama of ambush, siege, and conquest, are the stuff of which Scott and Cooper made their books. Yet the best known of our nineteenth-century novelists who dealt with New France and the Indian Wars had preoccupations other than the dynamics of history. Notwithstanding the research that undergirds each work, John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877), and Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty* (1896), are shaped as treatments of myth rather than representations of history. Richardson's Introduction to the 1851 edition of *Wacousta*, Kirby's subtitle, "A Romance," and the melodrama of both works, qualify their claims as chronicles of the past. The anomaly is that their archetypal perspectives ultimately seem more credible than Parker's novel, which contrives a specious verisimilitude. While none of the three is significantly original, they are worth more attention than A. J. M. Smith thought when, in *Masks of Fiction*, he dismissed our nineteenth-century novelists in general, and Richardson, Kirby, and Parker, in particular. A reading of their work reveals a variety of currents in the literary imagination of early Canadians, and illuminates the characteristic hesitation between tradition and naturalization in colonial literature.

Many of our nineteenth-century poets vitiate their response to the Canadian landscape because they imitate the styles rather than the motives of the great Romantics. Similarly, *The Golden Dog* and *Wacousta* suffer (though they also gain) from their authors' fascination with sensational aspects of Jacobean tragedy. Though Kirby and Richardson use features we commonly associate with historical romances and Gothic novels, the kindred and prior influence of the Jacobean drama, especially of Shakespeare, is everywhere manifest in their work. The

strength of conception and the stylistic excesses in *Wacousta* and *The Golden Dog* are equally a consequence of their debt to Jacobean vitality; the Jacobean myths implicit in Kirby and Richardson merge with ironic treatments of the idea of the New World as Paradise Regained. In *The Seats of the Mighty*, Jacobean elements are minor, but certain cultural prejudices are embraced with an enthusiasm quite distinct from the visionary integrity of the other two books. "Myth" and "prejudice" are, it seems to me, useful terms for two kinds of mythology which Northrop Frye identifies in his Conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*:

> Literature ... is conscious mythology: it creates an autonomous world that gives us an imaginative perspective on the actual one. But there is another kind of mythology, one produced by society itself, the object of which is to persuade us to accept existing social values. "Popular" literature, the kind that is read for relaxation and the quieting of the mind, expresses this social mythology.

Richardson and Kirby on the one hand and Parker on the other, illustrate just this distinction.

At moments of great tension or import Kirby, especially, is apt to make direct allusions to his models, as when La Corriveau "makes assurance doubly sure" by stabbing the poisoned Caroline de St. Castin, or when Le Gardeur de Repentigny is summed up as "more sinned against than sinning." Kirby's taste for extravagant metaphors and set-piece monologues, prose emulations of the blank verse fireworks popular with Jacobeans, is nowhere indulged more freely than in the soliloquy of the ambitious Angélique des Meloises, who decides to have her rival, Caroline, murdered:

> She sat still for a while, gazing into the fire; and the secret chamber of Beaumanoir again formed itself before her vision. She sprang up, touched by the hand of her good angel perhaps, and for the last time. "Satan whispered it again in my ear!" cried she. "Ste. Marie! I am not so wicked as that! Last night the thought came to me in the dark — I shook it off at dawn of day. To-night it comes again, — and I let it touch me like a lover, and I neither withdraw my hand nor tremble! To-morrow it will return for the last time and stay with me, — and I shall let it sleep on my pillow! The babe of sin will have been born and waxed to a full demon, and I shall yield myself up to his embraces!"[1]

The reminiscence of Milton here is mixed with echoes of such scenes of self-consecration to evil as Lady Macbeth's and Edmund's. (Kirby excels in mimicry — his picturesque narrative poem, "The U.E.: A Tale of Upper Canada," reveals an altogether different set of literary voices.) Angélique experiences inwardly the kind of Faustian psychomachia that is dramatized in her role as the bad angel for both Bigot and Le Gardeur, in opposition to the good angels Caroline, Amélie de Repentigny, and Heloise de Lotbinière.

As for Richardson, the opening scene of *Wacousta* — a midnight alarum on the ramparts upon the apparition in the fort of a shadowy visitant who (we later

learn) seeks vengeance — is heavily in debt to the affair at Elsinore. *Hamlet* seems to have been a particular favourite of Richardson's: considering the mysterious visitor, one of the garrison's officers declares that "there is more in all this than is dreamt of in our philosophy"; and later the condemned sentry Frank Halloway recalls Clara de Haldimar, who once tended his wounds, as "a ministering angel." Ellen Halloway's mad scene toward the novel's end evokes Ophelia's shade, as do Amélie in *The Golden Dog* and Poor Mathilde in *The Seats of the Mighty.*

In whatever form, pure or bowdlerized, in print or on stage, Jacobean conventions evidently had a powerful appeal to the imaginations of Kirby and Richardson. The portentous Riddle of the Golden Dog and the "Prophecy" of *Wacousta*'s subtitle both stress the persistence of old grudges in inflaming passions, the motive so characteristic of Renaissance tragedy.[2] Indeed, Richardson's choice of an epigraph is explicit:

> 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.
>
> (Edward Young, *The Revenge: A Tragedy*)

Young's play was first produced in 1721, long after the heyday of the Jacobeans, but the role of Richardson's Wacousta as an implacable seeker of retribution who becomes monstrous as the criminal he pursues, is in the tradition of revengers who stalk the English stage from Kyd to Shirley. *Wacousta* also recounts the conspiracies and counter-plots of Pontiac and his foes, and stresses the ruses of disguise and entrapment popular upon the seventeenth-century stage. *The Golden Dog* weaves its course through a tangle of murder plots and palace conspiracies — Angélique's design against Caroline, fulfilled through the subtle device of a poisoned bouquet, and the scheme of Bigot to assassinate the Bourgeois Philibert.

Jacobean tragedy turns upon the irony that an aristocratic milieu, presumably the apex of "civilized" humanity, becomes the very core of corruption and violence. In *The Golden Dog* riot (that of the citizens against the corruption of Bigot and the Friponne) is, as in Shakespeare, the symptom of a diseased order. In fact the very middle of the book presents a long digression connecting La Corriveau and her murderous arts with the vicious courts of Renaissance France and Italy, favourite settings for all the major Jacobean tragedies. While the novel is an historical romance in the grand manner, set against a panorama of European and North American history, a recognizably Canadian environment is all but absent; as Northrop Frye noticed in *The Bush Garden*, "the forlorn little fortress of seventeenth-century [*sic*] Quebec, sitting in the middle of what Madame de Pompadour called 'a few arpents of snow,' acquires a theatrical glamour that would do credit to Renaissance Florence." Kirby may have found his "situation" in the history of New France, but his imagination had other bearings.

The society of Richardson's Fort Detroit is not as stylized, though the foppishness of Sir Everard de Valletort and the aristocratic demeanour of the officers are somewhat in the manner of Jacobean portraits; however, *Wacousta*'s setting is much larger than the fort, which is only a dubious refuge from the terrors of the surrounding forest. The novel develops a vision of the world as a chamber of horrors; its plot is a pattern of shattered hopes and renewed catastrophes. The relentless piling on of atrocities, the bludgeoning of morale in the beleaguered garrison of the tale and in its readers alike, resemble the most savage creations of the Jacobean mind, plays like Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Webster's *The White Devil*, works which have been well described by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* as "the sixth phase of tragedy, a world of shock and horror in which the central images are images of *sparagmos*, that is cannibalism, mutilation, and torture." Such a vision becomes attenuated among the Graveyard poets, then revives with a shock in the rise of the Gothic novel among such writers as Monk Lewis in England and Brockden Brown in America, who preceded Richardson by a generation. Like Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, to which Richardson acknowledges a debt in his Introduction, *Wacousta* borrows from the Gothic tradition the fleeing maidens, the pattern of escape and recapture, and the dominant theme of terror. Richardson explicitly contrasts the terrors of the forest and its lurking savages with a nostalgic regard for Europe:

> When the eye turned woodward it fell heavily and without interest upon a dim and dusky point known to enter upon savage scenes and unexplored countries, whereas whenever it reposed upon the lake it was with an eagerness and energy that embraced the most vivid recollections of the past, and led the imagination buoyantly over every well-remembered scene that had previously been traversed, and which must be traversed again before the land of the European could be pressed once more. The forest, in a word, formed, as it were, the gloomy and impenetrable walls of the prison-house, and the bright lake that lay before it the only portal through which happiness and liberty could be again secured.

This is the Gothic image par excellence, echoed by other Canadian settlers, most notably by Susanna Moodie twenty years later.

BUT THE ESSENTIAL MYTH WHICH APPEALED to Richardson and Kirby reaches back beyond the inventors of Gothic fiction. It was likely quite consciously that both novelists adopted the elemental plot of many Jacobean tragedies. Plays by Shakespeare, Tourneur, Webster, and Ford portray the dissolution of an all-but harmonious order into chaos masked by a false regime; genuine order is usually restored, but at tragic cost, and on a level inferior to the original order. This plot appears in Jacobean works with a frequency which suggests the

energies and significance of myth. And of course it has obvious affinities with the Biblical story of Eden, the Fall, and the survival of Adam, Eve, and their progeny in an imperfect world. Hamlet himself indicates the parallel in his sense of the world as "an unweeded garden," growing to seed. Both the Biblical and Jacobean versions emphasize two themes especially: the struggle of Good and Evil, and the role of sex in the disintegration of order.

Kirby's novel offers a paradigm of this myth. It begins with a chapter, "Men of the Old Régime," in which Peter Kalm, a Swedish visitor, compliments Governor De la Galissonière on his city:

> " 'See Naples, and then die!' That was a proud saying, Count, which we used to hear as we cruised under lateen sails about the glorious bay that reflects from its waters the fires of Vesuvius. We believed the boast then, Count. But I say now, 'See Quebec, and live forever!' Eternity would be too short to weary me of this lovely scene — this bright Canadian morning is worthy of Eden, and the glorious landscape worthy of such a sunrising."

The course of events will reflect a heavy irony on Kalm's courteous remarks. Even as he speaks, a cartel of exploiters, the Friponne, is undermining the Old Régime. The stable and harmonious order of an earlier time is chiefly represented in one of its hardy survivors, the honest old Chevalier La Corne St. Luc. It is also symbolized by the feudal Seigniory of Tilly, whose scions, Le Gardeur and Amélie de Repentigny, become the focus of a personal tragedy that also proves a tragedy for New France. Le Gardeur's rashness enables the agents of the Friponne to dupe him into killing the Bourgeois Philibert, centre of resistance to the cartel, and the father of Amélie's betrothed, Pierre Philibert. Greed in the Intendant Bigot, unscrupulous head of the Friponne, and ambition in the beautiful villainess Angélique des Meloises, bring about the destruction of the best young women and the loss of the best young men in New France. The predators thrive until Quebec falls to the English, when order is restored under Sir Guy Carleton, whose role here parallels those of Shakespeare's Fortinbras and Malcolm. In the final scene La Corne St. Luc has accepted service under Carleton, illustrating at once a link and a break with the past.

The conflict in *The Golden Dog* is unambiguous: it pits the Friponne against the *Honnêtes Gens*; the dark vaults of Bigot's house of debauch, Beaumanior, against the airy rooms of the Manor House of Tilly; La Corriveau's silver poniard and infernal cabinet of Italian poisons against the lamp of the Repentigny nuns and the "golden casket of Venetian workmanship" which the Bourgeois Philibert makes a betrothal gift to the ill-starred lovers, Amélie and Pierre. The characters of the tale are also simply drawn, generally resembling the stock figures of the overripe Jacobean stage: Villainous Favourite, Lecherous Duchess, Hired Cutthroat, Ruined Prince.

Destruction of sexual innocence is deeply implicated in the myth of the Fall,

and Shakespeare, Webster, Middleton, and other Jacobeans represented sexual infatuation as the seed of corruption and violence. *The Golden Dog* echoes the antifeminism of the Renaissance stage in certain remarks of Bigot and his henchman, the misogynist Cadet, and in the polarized stereotypes of Angélique as Temptress and Amélie as Amazing Virgin. The twenty-seventh chapter, "Cheerful Yesterdays and Confident Tomorrows," portrays the "green woods and still greener meadows of Tilly" as a fragrant pastoral paradise, the fondly remembered scene of childhood friendship and the chaste stirrings of love between Amélie and Pierre. Amélie, a blusher in the best sentimental tradition, is described at one point or another in the novel as saint, Madonna, and a "good angel," the inspirer of virtue in Pierre. After her brother slays Pierre's father, she enters a convent and fulfils her role, the virgin as martyr. The sexual passions of the virtuous are never consummated in *The Golden Dog*, whereas "the fair, false woman," Angélique, ultimately becomes the mistress of Bigot, "this inscrutable voluptuary," in the final diseased era of New France. And over the whole tale broods the absent but all-powerful figure of the King's mistress at Versailles, La Pompadour, whose whims and intrigues have no little part in the fatal weakening of the French empire in Canada. Early in the novel La Corne St. Luc fumes about the absence of "any law left us but the will of a King's mistress." It is a distant but kindred echo of the dying Hippolito in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*:

> Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us,
> And we are brought to nothing.

John Richardson's evocation of the myth is as shadowy as his novel is generally more intense than Kirby's. His tale of wilderness, fire, and bloodshed has a cruder and more authentically frontier character than Kirby's elegantly conventional narrative. The patterns explicit in *The Golden Dog* are more fitfully developed in *Wacousta*, but they are there. In the final part of the book, the renegade Wacousta, whose vengefulness has made him an ally in Pontiac's attack on Fort Detroit, explains his motives to his captive, young Clara de Haldimar. As Reginald Morton, a young soldier stationed in Scotland some twenty-four years earlier, he discovered and fell in love with Clara Beverley, a maiden whose misanthropic father raised her in a hidden oasis in the Highlands: " 'a garden abounding in every fruit and flower that could possibly live in so elevated a region; and this in time, under his own culture and that of his daughter, became the Eden it first appeared to me'." The point is reinforced by the presence of tame animals in the oasis and by the resemblance of its mountain fastness to the "steep savage Hill" which protects Eden in Milton's epic. Morton-Wacousta recalls how he persuaded Clara Beverley to abscond from the secluded eyrie, only to lose her to the envious rivalry of his treacherous friend, De Haldimar. The parallels with Genesis are inexact, but the stern father, the sweet dalliance, and the flight of the couple from a paradisal

place, form an approximate version. Morton embodies the roles both of Adam (overwhelmed with sexual adoration) and Satan (first as Tempter, later as a usurper of the divine prerogative of retribution). De Haldimar's role is also that of the Seducer. The main plot of *Wacousta* follows Morton's attempts to avenge his wrongs against De Haldimar (now in command of Fort Detroit) and the latter's three children by Clara Beverley. So an idyllic order of sorts is shattered by treachery which leads to anguish and carnage on a grand scale. Among the principal characters only Frederick de Haldimar, the elder son, and his cousin Madeline, survive. Peace is eventually restored, but in a terse final chapter which does little to dissipate the atmosphere of despair.

The struggle in *Wacousta* is less plainly a case of Good against Evil than the one in *The Golden Dog*. Wacousta owes as much to Byron's heroes as he does to the villains of Renaissance tragedy: associated with barbarous infidels, he is a sexual prodigy, and he nurses an incurable psychic wound. His adversary, Colonel de Haldimar, is also complex. Notwithstanding Richardson's declared repulsion from him in the Introduction to the 1851 edition, a case can be made for De Haldimar as an exemplar of competence and responsibility. His harshness is chiefly and implausibly exhibited against the Halloways. The terms appropriate to Richardson's vision are not Good and Evil, but the more ambiguous contraries, Order and Energy. While the warring savages are referred to at times as demonic, they are not envisioned as racially wicked — in fact it is the renegade Morton who manipulates them as agents of destruction. The selfless love of the Indian woman Oucanasta is clearly contrasted with Morton's selfish passions, and the final prospect of peaceful friendship between the Indians and the children of Frederick and Madeline suggests something like a reconciliation of barbaric energies with civilization.

In *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction*, John Moss makes a convincing case for the relationship among two of the De Haldimar children, Clara and Charles, and their friend Sir Everard de Valletort, as an implicitly perverse pattern of "incipient incest, homosexuality, and impotence." Wacousta's intent to violate the daughter of the woman he once loved, redoubles the incestuous overtones. Like so many tragedies, Richardson's novel links forbidden sexuality with horrendous violence. The subliminal pornography which Leslie Fielder argues as central in the American novel, is clearly one of the main sources of the curious power which sustains *Wacousta* despite its creaky structure and implausible dialogue.[3] Kirby's women are polarized as Seductress and Virgin. Richardson, however, unites the features of Venus *and* Madonna in his description of his heroine, Madeline de Haldimar. During the massacre at Michilimackinac, in a scene of pornographic virtuosity, Richardson combines suggestions of voyeurism, defloration, rape, and murder, as Clara, barricaded in the blockhouse, watches the abduction of Madeline:

> A tall savage was bearing off the apparently lifeless form of her cousin through the combatants in the square, her white dress stained all over with blood and her beautiful hair loosened and trailing on the ground. She followed with her burning eyes until they passed the drawbridge and finally disappeared behind the intervening rampart, and then, bowing her head between her hands and sinking upon her knees, she reposed her forehead against the sill of the window and awaited ununshrinkingly, yet in a state of inconceivable agony, the consummation of her own unhappy destiny.

There only remains one ultimate fillip when we later learn that the "tall savage" was in fact a disguised woman, the squaw Oucanasta, whose purpose actually has been to rescue Madeline, unharmed though bloodstained, from the slaughter. The consummation of the implicit sadism in Richardson's novel comes when Wacousta plunges a dagger into the virginal Clara, just before he is himself slain by Oucanasta's brother.

The myth of the Garden assumed a special meaning for certain North American writers who were tempted to regard colonization and settlement as opportunities to avoid the corruption of European culture and establish Eden in the New World. In the literature inspired by this idea, which culminated in the work of Thoreau and Whitman, the wilderness offers an "area of total possibility" for the American innocent, an area that remains as long as some frontier exists.[4] It is, of course, an essentially anti-social myth, for as soon as the innocent solitary is confronted with the wills of other individuals, the dream is broken. Such a vision is never entertained in *Wacousta* where the Old World resumes its conflicts in the New, the latter envisioned (as we have seen) as a dismal "prison" opposed to a fondly-remembered Europe. In *The Golden Dog*, the Bourgeois Philibert provides the nucleus of a new commercial society in Quebec distinguished by its justness from the decayed feudalism back in France. But this embryonic community is destroyed when the corrupt Old Order infects the New, a human inevitability symbolized by the immigration of a Machiavellian poisoner, the mother of La Corriveau:

> Marie Exili landed in New France, cursing the Old World which she had left behind, and bringing as bitter a hatred of the New, which received her without a shadow of suspicion that under her modest peasant's garb was concealed the daughter and inheritrix of the black arts of Antonio Exili and of the sorceress La Voisin.

The dream of Paradise Regained is shattered by the course of events in *The Golden Dog*. First Acadia falls, then New France.

THE CRUCIAL EPISODE IN THE CONQUEST OF NEW FRANCE is the setting for Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty*, a much slighter and

slicker work than either *Wacousta* or *The Golden Dog*. In contrast to Kirby's rhetoric and Richardson's somewhat laboured prose, *The Seats of the Mighty* proceeds quickly and vigorously as told in the first person by Moray, the protagonist Parker based on Robert Stobo, a Scottish major who actually escaped from Quebec City in time to participate in its siege and capture by Wolfe in 1759. And in contrast to the earlier books, there are few specifically Jacobean or Gothic elements in Parker's novel. Much of it describes Moray's detention in the Quebec Citadel, but his is a strictly literal dungeon, with none of the symbolic or pyschological value of Richardson's "prison." And though there is much stabbing and killing throughout, it is presented in the manner of adolescent fiction or of much television violence, as painless and bloodless excitement. Only one peculiar and rather gratuitous chapter, "In the Chamber of Torture," strains the limits of a "respectable" account of violence. Parker included in the first edition prints, maps, and an excerpt from J. M. Lemoine's *The Scot in New France* which deals with Stobo. But though the plot follows historical events in some detail, the significance with which Parker invests them depends on three popular myths of a rather different sort than the literary archetypes which shape *Wacousta* and *The Golden Dog*.

The first of these is the chauvinist myth of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Like Ranald Macdonald in Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (another novel of racial self-congratulation), Moray is conceived as an epic hero for a democratic age. An individual of humble origin who represents his people's strengths, he becomes the hinge of national destiny: it is Moray's honourable refusal to cooperate in La Pompadour's intrigues which — in the novel — precipitates war between France and England; and it is his intelligence of the secret path up the cliffs to the Plains of Abraham which leads to General Wolfe's victory. Moray is the emblem of bourgeois Protestant virtue against the vices of royalist Catholic France. His arch-enemy and tormentor is Doltaire, bastard son of King Louis, La Pompadour's spy, and Moray's rival for the love of Alixe Duvarney, the novel's heroine. Rationalist and cynic, Doltaire regards life as sport, and his abiding principle is expediency; he is only more refined than the other French nobles whose vanity and corruption undermine the effort to defend Quebec. The moral disapproval which prescribes Parker's treatment of the French aristocracy is coupled with a contempt for the superstitious peasantry which reaches its absurd climax in the scene of Moray's escape from a château: fantastically disguised as a witch, he paralyzes his guards with terror. Even those French characters whom Parker presents sympathetically undergo a kind of exorcism. Moray humiliates one of his "friends," the Chevalier de la Darante, and slays another, the soldier Gabord. Alixe, for his sake, defies her Church, State, and countrymen in a spectacular scene at the cathedral in Quebec. But the essential *locus* for the novel's racism is Parker's comparison of Wolfe and Montcalm, the two historical figures most familiarly associated with the Conquest:

> In Montcalm was all manner of things to charm — all save that which presently filled me with awe, and showed me wherein this sallow-featured, pain-racked Briton was greater than his rival beyond measure: in that searching, burning eye, which carried all the distinction and greatness denied him elsewhere. There resolution, courage, endurance, deep design, clear vision, dogged will, and heroism lived.[5]

This list of merits in fact summarizes Moray himself: he is a set of principles incarnate, a static character untroubled by doubt or inner conflict, and unlikeable compared to Doltaire, the much more alive, attractive personality. This is not, I think, deliberate ambiguity, but reflects a confusion of values which troubles the whole narrative, and which appears also in Parker's treatment of the woman in his story.

Indeed, a second popular prejudice which shapes *The Seats of the Mighty* is a bourgeois view of sexuality. If *Wacousta* and *The Golden Dog* are types of Gothic and Historical Romance, two of the major traditions distinguished by Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Parker's book shows aspects of the third, the sentimental tale of seduction. Certainly Doltaire's subtle arguments and Alixe's successful resistance dramatize the moral primacy of "heart" over "head" in the best sentimental manner. By Fiedler's account, this tradition descends from Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* to a debased popular form in the nineteenth century; in this later version *Clarissa*'s originally complex Seducer is split into two simple figures, villain-ravisher and hero-rescuer, with *both* of whom readers vicariously identify, more or less consciously. Something very like this psychic pattern underlies the scene which brings to a climax the romantic conflict in *The Seats of the Mighty*. Moray, hidden behind a tapestry in the Convent of the Ursulines, eavesdrops upon Doltaire's efforts to seduce Alixe. The latter is at this point still a virgin despite Doltaire's pursuit and despite her marriage, secretly and in prison, to Moray. Parker's characterization of Alixe is extremely ambivalent. As Elizabeth Waterston notes in her very perceptive Introduction to the New Canadian Library reprint of the novel:

> For the nice young ladies who constituted so powerful a part of the reading public in the 1890's, Alixe is a real gem: a pure young girl who manages to dance like a courtesan, lie like a Machiavelli, dress first like an officer then like a nun, slip undetected by sentries and even by her grim-faced father — and all in the name of virtue and constancy! She is indeed a "most perfect of ladies" for satisfying the needs of lady readers.

The other major female character, Mathilde, just reverses this measure of sexuality and innocence: a "ruined maid," victim of the libertine Bigot, she is portrayed as asexual and pious, a penitent in a scarlet robe. The erotic tensions between Alixe and Moray are heightened by her chaste visits in disguise to his cell, and by her flagrantly voluptuous description of dancing:

"As I danced I saw and felt a thousand things, I can not tell you how. Now my feet appeared light as air, like thistledown, my body to float. I was as a lost soul flying home, flocks of birds singing me to come with them into a pleasant land.

"Then all that changed, and I was passing through a bitter land, with harsh shadows and tall, cold mountains. From clefts and hollows figures flew out and caught at me with filmy hands. These melancholy things pursued me as I flew, till my wings drooped, and I felt that I must drop into the dull marsh far beneath, round which travelled a lonely mist.

"But this, too, passed, and I came through a land all fire, so that, as I flew swiftly, my wings were scorched, and I was blinded often, and often missed my way, and must change my course of flight. It was all scarlet, all that land — scarlet sky and scarlet sun and scarlet flowers, and the rivers running red, and men and women in long red robes, with eyes of flame, and voices that keep crying, 'The world is mad, and all life is a fever!' "

I quote this passage at length because it is part of the symbolism by which Parker reaches toward a third cultural myth, the one which brings the novel to a close. The long-prevented and long-sought consummation of Moray's and Alixe's love is associated with a motif of scarlet images, for which the refrain is a *voyageurs'* song which both cherish:

"Brothers, we go to the Scarlet Hills:
(Little gold sun, come out of the dawn!)
There we will meet in the cedar groves;
(Shining white dew, come down!)
There is a bed where you sleep so sound,
The little good folk of the hills will guard,
Till the morning wakes and your love comes home.
(Fly away, heart, to the Scarlet Hills!)"

The motif also includes Mathilde's red robe and a painting by Doltaire of Alixe which has a "red glow." Furthermore, British redcoats achieve the fulfilment of Moray's patriotic desire, the taking of Quebec, simultaneously with the achievement of his romantic purpose. At the end of the novel he journeys in quest of Alixe to the Valdoche Hills, covered with "crimsoning maples." This final chapter is intensely lyrical in its description of Moray's response to an idyllic Canadian forest, his sense of harmony with its creatures, and his sacramental gestures: "I came down to the brook, bathed my face and hands, ate my frugal breakfast of bread, with berries picked from the hillside, and, as the yellow light of the rising sun broke over the promontory, I saw the Tall Calvary upon a knoll. . . . " Of course he finds Alixe. Ultimately, *The Seats of the Mighty* affirms the notion of a New Eden in the New World: "Master-Devil" Doltaire is thwarted and a Canadian Adam and Eve take possession of their paradise. Parker does offer glimpses of a more tragic vision through two minor characters, the barber Voban and the cuckold Argand Cournal, but such intimations are effectively submerged in the rush of lyricism, sentimentality, and wish-fulfilment.

The popular prejudices which shape *The Seats of the Mighty* are myths of a kind inferior to the more enduring images of man's fate which Kirby and Richardson assimilated from their literary sources. And it is fascinating that these two early Canadian novelists found aspects of their form and meaning in seventeenth-century works which preceded the rise of the novel proper. Kirby's vision is ultimately and deeply ethical, a thinking conservative's affirmation of the value of traditions and the danger of their perversion. Richardson is less a moralist than an explorer of the psychological underworld. Of other nineteenth-century novelists who wrote about the Conquest, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé remains the best example of one who took a more strictly historical view of his subject, as opposed to the mythologizing done by Richardson, Kirby, and Parker. Amplified by abundant local colour and by numerous cautionary tales, the central concern of *Les Anciennes Canadiens* (1863) is with Canada's central historical problem. De Gaspé urges French-Canadian reconciliation to the fact of the Conquest, as well as an ideal of communal service associated with the Seigneury. The relations among his characters form an allegory of the relation between English and French Canadians, as is also true of Mrs. Leprohon's minor novel of Montreal society after the Conquest, *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1864).

Closer to our own time, writers such as Hugh MacLennan and Margaret Laurence have dealt with "the present as history" (Lukacs' phrase) and have achieved compelling insights into the gains and losses we inherit from the embroilment of Indian, French, and English here two centuries ago. In *The Diviners* Laurence deliberately explores the relation between history and myth, and this is also the crux of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and Peter Such's *Riverrun*, recent treatments of "the past as history." It is harder to distinguish myth from prejudice in our contemporaries than in our ancestors. But we do have the advantage of ancestors like Richardson and Kirby, and of the foundation they provide for our hindsight.

NOTES

[1] *The Golden Dog: A Romance of the Days of Louis Quinze in Quebec*, Authorized Edition (Montreal: Montreal News Company, 1903), pp. 252-53.

[2] "The Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas," is the subtitle of the first edition, published in London in 1832. My references are to *Wacousta: A Tale of the Pontiac Conspiracy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1923). The paperback versions of both *Wacousta* and *The Golden Dog* in the New Canadian Library are seriously abridged.

[3] See *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975). Richardson's fascination with sexual abuse and ferocious violence continued to his last novel, *Westbrook, the Outlaw; or, The Avenging Wolf*, written in 1851 and recently rediscovered and reprinted (Montreal: Grant Woolmer Books, 1973).

[4] The phrase is from R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 99. See also David W. Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1968). Similar tensions between ideas of East and West and of South and North, as they inform Canadian literature, have been pointed out by W. H. New, *Articulating West* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), and Allison Mitcham, "Northern Utopia," *Canadian Literature*, 63 (Winter 1975), 35-39.

[5] *The Seats of the Mighty*, Introduction by Elizabeth Waterston (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 145.

THE RAVENS

Glen Sorestad

Not minutes after the dust and sound faded
after Middleton's victorious militia
had quitted their zareba near Batoche
taking with them what they had brought,
all they had plundered, and Riel besides,

two black-garbed sisters from Batoche
flapped about the empty encampment,
alert eyes probing the trenches,
darting through the trampled grasses
as they scavenged for left-overs,

seizing a cast-iron pot or kettle here,
a fork discarded or perhaps forgotten,
a cup whose owner no longer needed
the early morning chill dispelled with tea,
removed forever from such concerns
by a shot from Dumont's rifle.