

CANADIAN EXPLORATION AS LITERATURE

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THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF THE *Literary History of Canada* can be seen as raising an interesting problem in literary theory: In what sense should the writings of the Canadian explorers be viewed as "literature"? Certainly exploration writing cannot be viewed as part of the literary mainstream. In fact, it is quite probable that the explorers are allotted their place in the *Literary History* more as auxiliaries to cultural history than as full members of the belletristic community.¹ On the other hand, exploration writing exercises a considerable fascination over many readers. The writings of the explorers tell many exciting stories of adventure, relate many entertaining and even amusing anecdotes, and introduce the reader to a gallery of interesting and unusual characters. In some way, then, a number of conventionally "literary" qualities have found their way into the writings produced by the explorers. Nonetheless, to argue that exploration writing *is* literature simply on the grounds that it *can* be approached in a literary manner is surely to avoid the real issues. The pertinent questions are: Have the explorers' literary qualities arisen by accident or design? And are these literary qualities pervasive and consistent enough to constitute a set of literary conventions?

In his well-known "Conclusion" to the *Literary History* Northrop Frye roundly asserts that the explorers wrote with "no more literary intention than a mating loon." Frye's contention may be sound when we are dealing with explorers whose accounts were intended only as a rough diary of their journey, or as a private report to their European backers. But the situation changes when an explorer prepares his journal for publication. Then he faces the essentially literary problem of revising his original account of daily occurrences into a form which will maintain the attention of his prospective readers. As Victor Hopwood astutely points out, accounts of exploration usually must be subjected to a considerable amount of revision before they are ready for publication:

Exploration tends to be repetitive, and the fourth or fifth adventure with a bear, boring, at least in the telling. If journals are to become interesting to the ordinary

reader, they need suppression of repetitive detail, expansion with incident and description and development of direction and purpose.²

The explorer must choose which events to record and which to omit; he must select some events to stress and others to pass over lightly; he must decide on the amount and kind of interpretive commentary he will offer; and above all he must shape his account in accordance with his own sense of the pattern inherent in his personal experiences.

The transformation which an exploration account undergoes before it is published can be clarified by comparing the literary activity of explorers with the literary efforts of historians. The comparison will be based on an analysis of historical writing borrowed from Hayden White's massive study of nineteenth-century historiography, *Metahistory*. White argues that the bare chronicle of events which is the historian's starting point possesses no intrinsic shape or meaning. It is the historian who transforms a mere chronological sequence of events into a "story" by associating particular events with "inaugural motifs," "transitional motifs," and "terminal motifs." Before the historian goes to work, each event

is simply "there" as an element of a series; it does not "function" as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.³

But the historian does more than simply bracket a portion of the historical record within a kind of verbal punctuation marks; he shapes each story in a particular manner. According to White, the historian patterns the broad outline of each historical story after one of the four *mythoi* identified by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*. That is, the historian shapes his stories as either Comedy, Tragedy, Romance, or Satire. This shaping of the historical record into one of Frye's categories White labels "emplotment."

White's analysis of historical writing is relevant to a consideration of exploration writing because the explorer is in fact a kind of historian. Like the historian the explorer is engaged in imposing order on a set of events which are given rather than imagined. White writes that the historian

confronts a veritable chaos of events *already constituted*, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting *a story of a particular kind*.⁴

This description of the historical process is very similar to Hopwood's account of the changes an explorer's journal must undergo before publication. Both Hopwood and White describe a process of "exclusion, stress, and subordination"; moreover,

Hopwood's "development of direction and purpose" is parallel with White's "emplotment" into a story of a "particular kind."

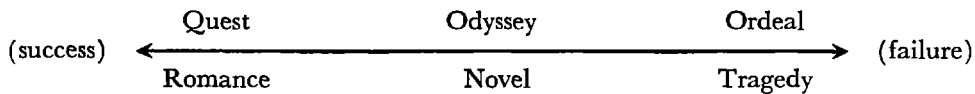
In applying White's concept of "emplotment" to exploration writing only one change in White's analysis must be made: a different set of narrative categories must be used. Exploration accounts seldom, or never, fall into the areas of Comedy or Satire. Moreover, although many exploration accounts are emplotted in ways that resemble Romance and Tragedy, explorers do not possess the wide scope for action available to characters in many works of the Romantic and Tragic modes. (In particular, explorers are much less powerful than those Romantic heroes for whom the laws of nature are suspended.) As a result, it is most convenient in the present discussion to use a typology of narrative which directly pertains to accounts of exploration. It is the contention of this paper that most accounts of exploration are emplotted in one of three ways, either as *quests*, as *odysseys*, or as *ordeals*.

When an explorer sets out on a journey, he usually has a specific goal in mind. If his journey is successful, it is quite natural to make the attaining of the goal the central theme of the ensuing narrative. The result will be an account in which every episode will have a clear relationship to the explorer's progress towards his goal, an account structured as a successful *quest*. Events and people will be mentioned only insofar as they either help or hinder the attainment of the goal. The dangers and hardships encountered will be emphasized. The journey will be portrayed as a succession of crises, in each of which some obstacle is overcome, rising to a climax with the final attainment of the goal. This authorial strategy results in a swiftly-moving, straight-line narrative, focused on limited issues. The explorer himself appears as a determined and forceful hero, a conqueror. Such heroic explorers tend to resemble each other, all displaying bravery, physical strength, resourcefulness, and unflagging determination.

There is, of course the possibility that an explorer may fail to complete his journey, due to circumstances beyond his control. The obstacles may be too great or he may lack the requisite resourcefulness and strength of character. Such a failure is usually accompanied by great suffering and hardship; in extreme cases the explorers may die. (Accounts of an exploring party's extinction have been preserved because in some cases the explorer's diary — notably Scott's — has been recovered after his death.) When an explorer tells a story of disaster or near-disaster, his account may aptly be termed an *ordeal*. The action of an ordeal will focus on the attempts of the exploring party to ensure their survival, and the thematic focus will fall on the human capacity to endure privation. A further thematic emphasis will grow out of the means by which rescue or escape is achieved, whether Providential, fortuitous, or brought about by human means. The climax of the account will be the eventual rescue or escape itself — or the final scene of disaster.

A third possibility arises when the explorer's goal is only of secondary importance in comparison with his desire to obtain an overall view of the unknown regions he is traversing. Then, the incidental details of the journey become the main focal point of the account. The explorer describes the things seen and the experiences undergone for their own sake rather than simply as adjuncts to a quest for some specific place or object. Such an explorer often gives extensive descriptions of the lands and the peoples he encounters, and may describe his own gradually growing understanding of a non-European way of life. Focusing on incidental details in this way results in a loose and digressive structure, which may be described as an *odyssey*. Like Homer's wanderer the explorer will often seem more interested in his immediate surroundings than in reaching his distant objective. Such odyssean explorers display a greater range of personality traits than do heroic travellers or sufferers. The personal interests of an odyssean traveller determine the centres of attention of his narrative; individual characteristics are allowed a greater expression than in a quest or ordeal.

THE THREE FORMS OF EXPLORATION ACCOUNT do not correspond directly to Frye's typology of narrative forms, but they can be related to an overlapping, but less inclusive, set of fictional categories. A heroic quest-explorer, who succeeds either by mental or physical force in overcoming all difficulties, will emerge as an inflexible and indomitable proponent of a fixed scheme of values, rather like some of the righteous heroes of certain quest-romances. On the other hand, an explorer who undergoes an ordeal emerges as an enduring sufferer, rather like the heroes of certain simple tragedies. Most explorers who depict their journeys as either quests or ordeals cling to the values of their society of origin, and seek to impose themselves and their purposes on both their own subordinates and on the native peoples they encounter. In contrast, an odyssean explorer adapts himself to the non-European conditions with which he is surrounded; his account depicts a learning process analogous to the education or initiation undergone by the central characters of many novels. Thus, the correspondences between the three forms of exploration account and ordinary forms of fictional narrative may be summarized in a simple diagram:⁵



As the diagram suggests, the three kinds of exploration account are not absolutely distinct categories, but rather are convenient labels to identify portions of a literary continuum. Quest and ordeal are the extreme points, polar opposites. An

account emplotted as a quest emphasizes the explorer's success in attaining his goal; an account emplotted as an ordeal stresses difficulties and suffering which are not redeemed by success. The odyssey falls between the two extremes; an odyssean explorer places less emphasis on his desire to reach a particular goal, and pays more attention to the incidental details of the journey. Moreover, the three forms are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but may exist in combination. For example, an account may combine the traits of quest and odyssey, or of odyssey and ordeal. Or an odyssey may contain incidents emplotted as a quest or as an ordeal — and so on.

Nonetheless, in any individual account one of the three forms will dominate. To explain why, we can again appeal to White's analysis of historical writing. White remarks that historians' stories fall into simple pre-existing patterns

precisely because the historian is inclined to resist construction of the complex peripeteias which are the novelist's and the dramatist's stock in trade. Precisely because he is not (or claims not to be) telling the story "for its own sake," he is inclined to emplot his stories in the most conventional form. . . .⁶

Like the historians described by White, explorers are also relatively unsophisticated storytellers, who tend to emplot their stories in a simple manner. Once an explorer has decided how he interprets his journey (a decision which may be either consciously or unconsciously made), he normally presents the details of his journey in a way that supports his overall vision of what he has accomplished.

The emplotment of an explorer's story in one of the three forms is signalled principally through large-scale structural features; that is, the explorer expands or otherwise emphasizes those scenes and incidents which reinforce his interpretation of his experiences, and compresses or omits scenes which do not contribute to his chosen interpretation. However, he may also explicitly signal his intentions by attaching verbal motifs to certain events and at times by making overt authorial statements of purpose. For example, in *Voyages from Montreal* Alexander Mackenzie clearly warns his readers to expect the undeviating, relentless movement of a quest account:

I could not stop to dig into the earth, over whose surface I was compelled to pass with rapid steps; nor could I turn aside to collect the plants which nature might have scattered on the way, when my thoughts were anxiously employed in making provision for the day that was passing over me. I had to encounter perils by land and perils by water; to watch the savage who was our guide, or guard against those of his tribe who might meditate our destruction. I had, also, the passions and fears of others to control and subdue. To-day, I had to assuage the rising discontents, and on the morrow, to cheer the fainting spirits of the people who accompanied me. The toil of our navigation was incessant, and oftentimes extreme; and in our progress over land, we had no protection from the severity of the elements, and possessed no accommodations or conveniences but such as could be contained in

the burden on our shoulders, which aggravated the toils of our march, and added to the wearisomeness of our way.⁷

In contrast to Mackenzie, David Thompson allows his attention to wander freely away from the actual progress of his travels, and expands incidental happenings until they become the main features of his account. Thompson's awareness of this trait in his *Narrative* is indicated when he remarks, after delivering one of his most famous digressions (that on the two races, man and beaver), "From this long digression, I return to my travels in the Nut Hill."⁸ Even when he inserts into his account a portion of his journal describing a mid-winter journey over the prairies, Thompson's purpose is not simply to describe his geographical progress, but to make clear the nature of the experience he has undergone:

As my journey to the Mississourie is over part of the Great Plains, I shall give it in the form of a journal, this form, however dull, is the only method in my opinion, that can give the reader a clear idea of them.⁹

In these passages, and in others throughout the *Narrative*, Thompson's awareness of the odyssean nature of his account is clear to the attentive reader.

It should be apparent that the present argument does not support a theory of environmental determinism. It might seem that whether an explorer undergoes an "ordeal" or completes a "quest" is not a matter of authorial choice, but is the result of the actual physical conditions he encounters. Of course, the influence of external conditions cannot be disregarded. But subjective factors are also extremely important — one man's ordeal may be another man's odyssey. For example, suppose we compare Luke Foxe's *Northwest Fox; or, Fox from the North-West Passage* (1635) with Thomas James' *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage* (1633). These books both describe expeditions made to Hudson Bay in the same year, yet they present very different pictures of the dangers and difficulties of such a navigation. The easy voyage experienced by Foxe and the difficulties encountered by James probably have as much to do with the personalities of the two captains as with the actual conditions encountered.

Examples drawn from the early records left by French travellers also help to illustrate how a writer's attitude can colour his presentation of his experiences. At one extreme is the trader and adventurer Pierre Esprit Radisson:

I took my gun and goes where I never was before, so I choosed not one way before another. I went [in] to the wood some three or four miles. I find a small brook, where I walked by the side awhile, which brought me into meadows. There was a pool where were a good store of bustards. I began to creep [as] though I might come near. The poor creatures, seeing me flat upon the ground, thought I was a beast as well as they, so they came near me, whistling like goslings, thinking to frighten me. The whistling that I made them hear was another music than theirs. There I killed three, and the rest scared, which nevertheless came to that place

again to see what sudden sickness befelled their comrades. I shot again; two paid for their curiosity.¹⁰

Surely Radisson has embroidered this scene more than is necessary merely to get his story told; the additional details reflect his zestful delight in the free hunting life. At the other extreme are many of the writers in the *Jesuit Relations*, who present life with the "savages" as a kind of penance, a purgatory on earth. "A soul very thirsty for the Son of God," writes Father LeJeune, "I mean for suffering, would find enough here to satisfy it."¹¹ LeJeune's preconceptions, even more than actual physical conditions, seem to underlie this remark.

The wide applicability of the proposed classification of exploration writing can be suggested by undertaking a brief survey of some of the major Canadian accounts of exploration. Among the records left by the early northern voyagers, the ordeal is the predominant form. The nature of these accounts is well indicated by Tryggvi J. Oleson, in his history of the early exploration of territories now included in northern Canada:

The annals of these expeditions are records of courage, perseverance, and almost incredible endurance amidst some of the harshest and most difficult natural conditions ever encountered by man. They are true tales of heroism, for the Canadian Arctic . . . can be the deadliest of all regions to those who bring little more than ignorance to the conquest of it. And this was the case with the great majority of those who, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, ventured to penetrate its ice, fog, and mists — in what can only be described as frail little barks, fitted for little more than coastal navigation or for sailing the high seas under the most favourable conditions.¹²

As Oleson's comments indicate, the keynotes of these accounts are danger and hardship. Some of the accounts are one continuous succession of perilous experiences, brought on by the ice and storms of northern water. Dionyse Settle's account of Frobisher's second voyage conveys the helplessness all of these navigators must have felt at times:

the ship and barks . . . were forced to abide in a cruell tempest, chancing in the night amongst and in the thickest of the yce, which was so monstrous, that even the least of a thousand had been of force sufficient, to have shivered our ship and barks into small portions, if God (who in all necessities, hath care unto the infirmitie of man) had not provided for this our extremitie a sufficient remedie through the light of the night, whereby we might well discern to flee from such imminent danger, which we avoyded with 14. Bourdes in one watch the space of 4 heures.¹³

Although these accounts may often be, as Oleson says, tales of heroism, the chief characters are not heroic in the usual sense. The early voyagers do not strike the modern reader as determined and powerful, but as beleaguered and confused. Whatever discoveries they make seem fortuitous, as their tiny ships drift at the

mercy of wind and current. The voyagers may be personally brave and at times reckless, but their stories illustrate the small scope of man's knowledge and his helplessness in the face of natural forces.

The presentation of a voyage as an ordeal is most pronounced in those accounts which tell of enforced winterings in Hudson or James Bay. To the dangers of northern navigation these accounts add the hardships of a long, dark Arctic winter. Such misadventures befell Hudson in 1610-11, Bylot in 1612-13, Jens Munk in 1619-20, and Thomas James in 1631-32. James, the last of the early seekers after a Northwest Passage, depicts his voyage as beset by difficulties right from the time he left England. Once he reaches Hudson Strait his difficulties are multiplied by the ice and storms he encounters there, so that on numerous occasions he writes as though destruction is imminent:

All night, the Storm continu'd with Violence, and with some Rain in the Morning; it then being very thick Weather. The Water shoal'd apace, with such an overgrown Sea withal, that a Sail was not to be endur'd; and what was worse, there was no trusting to an Anchor. Now therefore we began to prepare ourselves, how to make a good End, of a miserable tormented Life.¹⁴

As well as describing such overt dangers, James has an astute eye for the small personal details which make his men's plight more moving and immediate to the reader. His eye for the pathetic is well illustrated in his description of the last days of one of his men, injured when ice caused a capstan to get out of control:

The 19th, our Gunner, (who, as you may remember, had his Leg cut off) languish'd irrecoverably, and now grew very weak; desiring, that, for the little Time he had to live, he might drink Sack altogether; which I order'd he should.¹⁵

Throughout the account James goes out of his way to enlist the reader's sympathies by describing the difficult conditions under which the men laboured, their poor equipment, and the weakness of their conditions as a result of scurvy.

IN LATER YEARS, WHEN MOST EXPLORERS were either men connected with the fur trade or had acquired experience in wilderness travel in some other way, the chances of an expedition turning into an ordeal were lessened. However, when an inexperienced traveller ventured forth, especially into the extreme conditions of more northerly regions, disaster could still strike. A vivid example is the first overland journey of John Franklin, which records the gradual disintegration of his party into starving near-skeletons, beset by the twin spectres of death and cannibalism:

We now looked round for the means of subsistence, and were gratified to find several deer skins, which had been thrown away during our former residence. The

bones were gathered from the heap of ashes, these with the skins, and addition of *tripe de roche*, we considered would support us tolerably well for a time. . . .

When I arose the following morning, my body and limbs were so swollen that I was unable to walk more than a few yards. Adam was in a still worse condition, being absolutely incapable of rising without assistance. My other companions fortunately experienced this inconvenience in a less degree, and went to collect bones, and some *tripe de roche* which supplied us with two meals. The bones were quite acrid, and the soup extracted from them excoriated the mouth if taken alone, but it was somewhat milder when boiled with *tripe de roche*, and we even thought the mixture palatable, with the addition of salt, of which a cask had been fortunately left here in the spring. Augustus today set two fishing lines below the rapid. On his way thither he saw two deer, but had not strength to follow them.¹⁶

The stiffness of Franklin's language, his inability to convey an emotional response to the situation he depicts, adds an ironic dimension to the account. The reader perceives that the self-control which is reflected in Franklin's unflappable tone mirrors the rigidity of personality which is partly responsible for the plight of the expedition.

Franklin's difficulties arise largely because he is a British naval officer sent out by the Admiralty rather than an experienced northern traveller. More typical of Canadian explorers are the two fur traders Alexander Mackenzie and Samuel Hearne. Both of these explorers utilize Indian methods of travel and rely to a great extent on Indian helpers. However, their journeys represent two very different approaches to the explorer's task. Hearne's method is to cut his party to the minimum — one man — and place himself under the protection of a prominent Indian and allow the Indians' normal wanderings to carry him into regions unknown to Europeans. In contrast, Mackenzie forces his party ever onwards, in spite of the frequent hostility of the natives and the occasional reluctance of his own men. Hearne adjusts himself and his purposes to the Indian way of life; Mackenzie, although necessarily using Indian methods of travel and relying on the natives for much of his food, bends the natives to his own purposes. In other words, Hearne presents his travels as an odyssey whereas Mackenzie presents his two journeys as successful quests.

In their books the two men create very different authorial personalities. Mackenzie emerges as a heroic figure. He does not change in the course of his travels; instead, he imposes his values on his companions and on the Indians. There are no real digressions in Mackenzie's account; every event is either a step towards the goal or a setback to the progress of his journey. The recurrent theme of Mackenzie's account is the overcoming of an obstacle, whether human or physical. He emphasizes the danger and hardship of his journeys, and makes it plain that his own personal efforts are the primary factor in overcoming the obstacles his party faces. Most often it is the natives he must manipulate into serving his purposes; but upon occasion it is the fears of his own men he must control:

I brought to their recollection, that I did not deceive them, and that they were made acquainted with the difficulties and dangers they must expect to encounter, before they engaged to accompany me. I also urged the honour of conquering disasters, and the disgrace that would attend them on their return home, without having attained the object of the expedition. Nor did I fail to mention the courage and resolution that was the peculiar boast of the North men; and that I depended on them, at that moment, for the maintenance of their character.¹⁷

If Mackenzie is a hero, Hearne is more like an anti-hero or a picaresque figure. Hearne's virtues are endurance, adaptability, and tolerance rather than forcefulness and overbearing strength. In fact, Hearne's efforts to influence his Indian companions are often quite ineffectual. His strength of character emerges only indirectly from his story, for he seldom stresses the difficulty of the journey, and does not emphasize his own role in ensuring its completion. Rather, Hearne presents himself as a relaxed, inquisitive, and at times amused spectator of life among the Indians. He often gives the impression of enjoying their erratic, unplanned mode of existence:

The little river lately mentioned, as well as the adjacent lakes and ponds, being well-stocked with beaver, and the land abounding with moose and buffalo, we were induced to make but slow progress in our journey. Many days were spent in hunting, feasting, and drying a large quantity of flesh to take with us, particularly that of the buffalo.¹⁸

The choice of pronoun here seems to indicate a tacit identification with the Indians. Hearne has adjusted completely to the Indians and to the natural environment. He implies that the world contains more than one way of looking at things; whereas Mackenzie admits only one correct viewpoint.

Mackenzie and Hearne have long been well known. But David Thompson, who is probably the most outstanding of all Canadian explorers, was for a long time a relatively neglected figure. In particular, only in the past fifteen or twenty years have the remarkable literary merits of Thompson's account of his travels come to be adequately recognized. Nonetheless, as Victor Hopwood insists, Thompson's book "belongs among such master works as Cook's *Voyages*, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, Bates' *Naturalist on the Rivers Amazon*, and Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic*."¹⁹ Thompson's *Narrative* is a good illustration of the literary problem posed by an odyssean account. When an explorer understands his journey as either a quest or an ordeal, many of his literary decisions are virtually made in advance, or at least are confined within narrow limits. But an odyssean explorer must choose his own thematic focus, and must organize a mass of details in a way that is both consistent and interesting. In general terms, there are two main themes which an odyssean explorer may emphasize: his own initiation into the ways of the wilderness and its peoples, or the

nature of the native way of life as understood by the natives themselves. We might call these two themes the personal and the anthropological approaches.

In contrast to Hearne's personal emphasis, Thompson's *Narrative* stresses the anthropological approach. His *Narrative* tells the story of a lifetime spent in the Northwest as a fur trader and explorer, but also presents an extensive description of the geographical regions over which he has ranged and gives a sympathetic portrait of the native peoples of these regions. This wide range of subject-matter encourages a digressive structure, with many passages of summary and description inserted into the narrative, as well as many anecdotes illustrating features of native life. Frequently, too, Thompson gives insights into native life by assigning Indian characters the role of spokesman for the native way of life. Thompson succeeds brilliantly in combining his life-story with a "scientific" account of the Northwest and its peoples. He emphasizes the westward progression of his travels through various geographical regions, so that from one perspective his book is, as John Warkentin points out, a skillful regional geography of the Northwest.²⁰ As well, he adds an ethical dimension to his portrayal of the Indian. The details with which Thompson fills out his personal story — Indian legends, anecdotes of Indian life and history, details of Indian belief and customs, descriptions of the animals he sees and the land he traverses — are all designed to expound the nature of Indian life, and to make clear the tragic decline of the Indian as a result of contact with Europeans. Thus, Thompson's account, by portraying the extinction of a vital and harmonious non-European culture, has the ultimate effect of presenting an implicit critique of European society.

The element of social commentary is common in odyssean accounts. For example, Vilhjalmur Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic* also presents an alternative to the usual European way of seeing the world. In this case, it is Stefansson himself who embodies the alternate vision. To the Eskimo's methods of northern survival Stefansson adds a few scientifically based contributions of his own and presents himself as a kind of improved Eskimo, combining the native's adaptation to northern conditions with the European's rationality and freedom from superstition. Stefansson's ostensible purpose in the book is to prove a thesis about methods of Arctic travel. Stefansson believes in the existence of game in the unexplored regions of the polar lands and ocean, and he believes in his ability to secure food by hunting this hypothetical game. He does not want to arrive at some particular place so much as to prove that it is possible to travel more or less indefinitely, with a minimum of supplies and equipment, by obtaining food from the land. Therefore, he need not organize his account as a quest, but can adopt the looser, more digressive, odyssean approach. In fact, a description of the daily life of his party is his principal means of proving his thesis. However, from this near-idyllic description of northern camp life emerges the implicit message of Stefansson's account, a critique of the over-complicated and artificial nature of civilized life.

Stefansson emerges as the hero of his account; but he is a hero with an odyssean slant. His prime attribute is not the ability to perform heroic deeds, but his superior knowledge of the Arctic regions and his skill in living there. Every detail in *The Friendly Arctic* is arranged to highlight what Stefansson refers to as his "polarcraft." Unlike the American explorer Robert Peary, with whom he contrasts himself, Stefansson does not marshal his intellectual and physical resources to direct a journey of conquest; his intelligence is used to come to terms with the environment, not to subdue it. "I have always been temperamentally inclined to deal with natural difficulties by adaptation and avoidance rather than by trying to overwhelm them," writes Stefansson.²¹ His whole book supports this self-analysis.

One major conclusion suggested by the preceding survey of Canadian exploration writing is that over the years odyssean accounts have almost entirely supplanted accounts emplotted as either quests or ordeals. Such a change is only natural. Inadequate equipment and inexperience with northern conditions left the early explorers open to the difficulties which led them to present their experiences as ordeals. Increasing acquaintance with wilderness conditions, and especially the adoption of techniques borrowed from the Indians and Eskimos, enabled travellers to venture forth with greater safety and a greater chance of success. However, improved exploring techniques and a more complete understanding of the northern environment were not the only factors encouraging the production of odyssean accounts. Perhaps even more important were the gradual diminution of purely economic incentives for exploration and the spread of a scientific outlook throughout Western society. The scientific attitude encouraged a more disinterested and objective scrutiny of the remote regions of the world, which in turn was conducive to the writing of odyssean accounts of exploration.

This paper began with a question, to which we can now return. Certainly exploration writing cannot be viewed as "pure" literature in the conventional sense. But it is a form of writing into which literary considerations enter in important and systematic ways. An explorer chooses the form of his story from within a restricted set of literary strategies, and he shapes his narrative throughout in conformity with the underlying thematic concerns entailed by his chosen way of understanding his travels. Moreover, the three forms of the exploration account embody three of the most hallowed of literary themes. The quests of the heroic explorers reveal powers of mind and body beyond the reach of ordinary mortals; the wanderings of the odyssean explorers expose the reader to modes of behaviour and of thought that are beyond the range of everyday experience; and the ordeals undergone by those explorers who suffer a series of misadventures show the incredible strength of man's will to survive. Thus, the three forms of exploration account highlight respectively the explorer's achievements, his education and initiation, and the testing of his faith and endurance. These are themes whose enduring interest for readers has been proved time and again over the years. In its own

way, each kind of exploration account tells a story which, like the stories told in so many conventional works of literature, reveals an unexpected dimension of human possibility.

NOTES

- ¹ In the "Introduction" to the *Literary History* the editors remark: "This book treats, not only works generically classified as 'literature,' but also, chiefly in separate chapters, other works which have influenced literature or have been significantly related to literature expressing the cultural life of the country." *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. xi.
- ² "Explorers by Land: To 1860," *Literary History of Canada*, p. 25.
- ³ *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), p. 7.
- ⁴ *Metahistory*, p. 6, n. 5.
- ⁵ The necessity to invoke the category "Novel" points up an omission in Frye's typology of narrative. As White points out, Frye's "method of analysis works well enough on second-order literary genres, such as the fairy tale or the detective story," but "it is too rigid and abstract to do justice to . . . richly textured and multi-levelled works" (p. 8, n. 6). Historically, more complex or "mixed" modes of narrative evolved out of the simpler traditional forms when authors fused the characteristics of two or more traditional forms, or when (as in *Don Quixote*) they subjected the conventions of a traditional form to a sceptical or "realistic" examination. The end point of this historical progression was the mode of narrative we loosely term "Realism," of which the Novel is the prime representative. Therefore, in order to cover the entire range of narrative possibilities, Frye's four modes must be understood to cover a wide range of variations on the basic types he describes, and the admittedly somewhat catch-all category "Realism" must be added to Frye's scheme. White finds Frye's four categories adequate for his discussion. However, White is dealing with nineteenth-century historians, and historical writing did not become thoroughly "realistic" until the twentieth century. If White were to extend his analysis to twentieth-century historians, he might well feel the need to invoke a category of historical writing analogous to the Novel.
- ⁶ *Metahistory*, p. 8, n. 6.
- ⁷ *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 58-59.
- ⁸ *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), p. 154.
- ⁹ *Narrative*, p. 161.
- ¹⁰ *The Explorations of Pierre Esprit Radisson*, ed. Arthur T. Adams (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1961), p. 126.
- ¹¹ *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, ed. R. S. Mealing (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), p. 33.
- ¹² *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), p. 161.
- ¹³ *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-05), VII, 216.

- ¹⁴ *The Dangerous Voyage of Captain Thomas James* (Toronto: Coles, 1973), pp. 37-38.
- ¹⁵ *Dangerous Voyage*, p. 51.
- ¹⁶ *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea in the Years 1819, 20, 21, and 22* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969), pp. 439-40.
- ¹⁷ *Journals and Letters*, p. 299.
- ¹⁸ *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771 and 1772*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), p. 175.
- ¹⁹ "Introduction," *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, ed. Victor Hopwood (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), p. 34.
- ²⁰ "Early Geographical Writing in English on British North America," in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, 12 (Toronto, 1974), pp. 38-71.
- ²¹ *The Friendly Arctic: The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), p. 103.

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