

# FICTION IN ATLANTIC CANADA

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**I**N HIS INTRODUCTION to *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James analyses the problem of objective value in the subject of a novel. He describes how Turgenev helped him to see that it is valid to work from character, particularly as crystallized in some stray figure, into structure in the story, rather than from plot into character. He then perceives that if character, or human experience, is at the centre of the work, a very simple test of the worth of a subject emerges; "is it the result of some direct impression or perception of life?" And this leads to an assertion of "the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it."

It is a phrase casually dropped — "felt life" — and yet a useful one, which helps to get at a quality in much of the fiction of Atlantic Canada which holds the secret of its value and importance. No group of authors in Canada has been more singly concerned with the sense of place and the value of heritage than our Maritime fiction writers, and those values can often be perceived through the intensified quality of "felt life" in their writings. This has been largely true of our best writers for the last two decades, from Charles Bruce's *The Channel Shore* of 1954, to David Richards' *The Coming of Winter* of 1974.

Ever since R. E. Watters announced in 1954 that Ernest Buckler's new novel, *The Mountain and the Valley*, was the most excellent first novel ever written in Canada,<sup>1</sup> the book has grown in reputation, until it is now thought of as a Maritime classic. However, Buckler's themes go far beyond merely regional concerns. David Canaan, whose life the novel traces from early boyhood, is an embryonic artist, a sensitive soul searching for a means of uncovering and expressing the meaningful patterns in life, and failing to find it in the essentially inarticulate society around him. David sees the farm folk of the Annapolis Valley with wonderful insight and compassion, never with contempt of any kind, and he finally grasps a vision of personal salvation, of what he might do with his life, ironically at

the point of death on the mountain top. "I know how it is with everything. I will put it down, and they will see that I know . . . It would make him the greatest writer in the whole world."

David had spoken, or thought, something very similar at an earlier stage, when he acted in a school play. It was the first of many traumatic experiences which gradually robbed him of the confidence to direct his own destiny as he grew older. At the climax of the play, in a moment of grand inspiration, David thinks "I will be the greatest actor in the whole world", and adds a touch of personal interpretation. He strides onto the stage and kisses the Princess, as he imagines it should be in real life. The result is instant disaster, and he stumbles from the stage and out into the snow, bitterly disillusioned and cursing the side of himself which has betrayed him into this acute embarrassment. One could conclude that he learns nothing in twenty years. As any rate, we have no reason to suppose that David could carry out the intention of his moment of vision on the mountain. It is Ernest Buckler who writes the novel. He knows "how it is with everything", and we see that he knows the people and the place. That is what makes the book regional, and moral in the Jamesian sense. If *The Mountain and the Valley* has a weakness, it lies in Buckler and not having trusted enough in this quality for the shape of his novel.

But before we examine the quality of felt life in *The Mountain and the Valley*, let us look at its rival where that quality is concerned, the lesser known novel by Charles Bruce, *The Channel Shore*. The structure of this novel is quite simple. We are taken through three significant periods in the history of a family, one after World War I, one in the thirties, and the third just after World War II. The plot is not really a plot at all, but a set of conditions which create human problems demanding resolutions. In the process of working out these resolutions, Bruce brings into realization the pattern of a culture.

Anse Gordon has left the Channel Shore, apparently for good not realizing that the lover he leaves behind is pregnant. Hazel is sent away to Toronto, the open shame to be avoided. Grant Marshall is in love with Anse's younger sister Anna, but Grant's uncle, and father by adoption, is a Protestant patriarch, while Anna's family is Catholic. Grant bows to James Marshall's will. A short time later, Anna is killed on a trip to Halifax, which she has undertaken in part as a gesture of independence from Grant. Haunted by a sense of guilt, and struck by the need to emancipate himself from his uncle's stern and prejudiced, though loving presence, Grant goes to live with the now-childless Gordons. Shortly thereafter, he comes to feel that it is right that he should rescue Hazel from her banishment and bring the Gordon's grandchild by Anse back to the Channel Shore, so he goes to Toronto, marries Hazel, and brings her back. The child is Alan. Hazel does not survive, but Grant keeps Alan. This is the post World War I phase. In the thirties we find Grant re-married to the school teacher, Renie, with a daughter

Margaret to go with his son, Alan. That Alan is not his blood son is a secret kept, out of respect for Grant, by those of the Shore who know the truth. Father and son are close. But Alan begins to catch hints, and finally learns the truth, realizing simultaneously that he cannot bring himself to shatter Grant's illusion, so carefully cultivated over the years. In the third section of the novel, Alan has just returned from five years in the war. Margaret is twenty. Both know that they are not blood relatives. Grant discovers, unknown to Alan, that Alan knows the truth, but in turn cannot bring himself to shatter openly the cultivated illusion. Anse, however, returns to the Shore, discovers he has a son, and subtly tries to lay claim to him. This results in a violent public confrontation which finally shatters all the illusions of a generation.

If anything in this bald description of the conditions that form the framework upon which *The Channel Shore* is woven appears improbable, all doubts are laid to rest by the main substance of the novel. Its value, its moral force, is entirely dependent upon the amount of felt life which goes into fleshing it out. One essential ingredient which defies second-hand exposition, is the constant presence throughout the novel of sun on skin, wind on face, sound of the channel muttering on gravel beaches, smells of the kitchens, all the minute paraphernalia of rural life which Bruce reproduces with unselfconscious skill. But the insight into character and human values deserves analysis.

After Alan's return from the war, the Shore seems a little dull by times, so one evening he and Margaret, with some friends, go down to Forester's Pond, a neighbouring community, to a dance. Margaret, without really meaning to, snubs a Pond boy. Bad language follows, and Alan's friend, Buff Katon, steps into Alan's moment of hesitation and starts a fight. This is no more incident for Alan. Grant had not approved of them going, because the Pond is known as a rough place. For all his independence, Grant is in thrall to uncle James' austere morality. Violence is unthinkable. People who fight are *Those* people, not his people. And Alan has absorbed Grant's notions of propriety. "This was the sort of thing the women of The Head (part of the Shore) had meant, years ago", reflects Alan, "when they said with loathing in their voices, 'a downshore dance'." Bill Graham, a visitor at the shore that summer, whose father had left a generation before, was among Alan's friends that evening. Bruce uses Bill as a foil throughout the novel. Grant goes to him later to get the story from an objective observer. Bill tells of Buff's defence of Margaret's honour. Grant's reply is: "I don't like that kind of thing. I don't like the Katons. They're violent people . . . But you can't give orders! He thought: . . . What good are orders when the qualities that make behaviour are born into you, brewed in the blood." Bill remarks that he doesn't see what else was to be done — sees it as "a kind of natural courtesy".

We realize that it is fortunate for Grant that it was not Alan who threw the punch. With his philosophy, Grant would have been torn by seeing it as evidence

of that other sonship — the blood of the reckless Anse Gordon. Grant is wrong here; he is suffering from one of the negative aspects of his particular, long, and upright heritage, symbolized in James Marshall. He is guilty of an inbred, totally unrealized sense of pious moral superiority. And this is very much tied up with the more central theme of the novel, his sense of parenthood. Grant goes through half a lifetime, fearful of Alan's discovery of something he already knows, almost wrecking both of their lives in the process, because his false sense of the importance of public appearances leads him away from the truth he knows deep in his heart. Only at the end of the novel, at the moment of public disclosure, does the look on Grant's face reveal his discovery of what old Richard MacKee thinks later on — that the thing between him and Alan was “a thing deeper and more telling than the accident of blood”. Only then does he understand the force of Bill Graham's earlier assertion that you can't figure inheritance on a slide rule. Then the Channel Shore relaxes, finding for the first time in a generation no need to whisper, no need to guard against impropriety.

That is the secret of Bruce's insight: the ability to perceive the intricacy of the interweaving of impression, rumour, motive, regret, hope, misunderstanding, religion, loyalty, fear — over generations of time, which goes into making an individual what he is. He has the confidence to let that be his plot. For Bruce, that process is symbolized by the ever-present sound and movement of the eternal sea: by the constant influence of the channel on the channel shore.

This insight of Bruce's is valuable partly because, as Alan puts it in a moment of vision after he discovers the truth of his parenthood:

The Channel Shore — it was not a little world, now, from which people went and to which they sometimes returned, but a living part of a larger world . . . He saw the Shore now not as the one place loved and friendly and known, but as his own particular part of something larger, embracing all, the bright and the ugly, the familiar and the strange.

It is valuable also because it is an eminently particular book, capturing in fine detail the essence of a disappearing way of life and system of values. For Grant, as well as for Alan, a major problem is to find a way of expanding and liberalizing that way of life, without losing the richness of that heritage — without leaving the Shore. They cannot live the austere and pious life of Uncle James: “Duty was another word for life to James, a straight road, uphill, between the fences of labour and religion. It worried him to find his eyes drawn by the grassy by-ways of affection.” They are deeply moral people, but must find a way to accommodate the various and peculiar demands of love as well. What they find is that when the concept of duty is replaced by frankness, when the trusted guide is love, not propriety, many of the burdens of a lifetime melt away. Grant discovers that “in the face of his faith in Alan's stature as a man, he could find in nothing else, not even in fatherhood itself, a sense of urgency.”

THE CHIEF POINT of contrast between Bruce and Buckler is that we find in Buckler no such sense of unity and salvation rooted in an on-going process of living. For Buckler, salvation is possible only through transcendence by imagination. That is Buckler's particular kind of insight, and it shapes every aspect of *The Mountain and the Valley* from David's mountain-top experience to the fine details of his literary technique. Where Bruce has the trick of telling philosophically what is in the mind of his character, Buckler has the poet's trick of transposing what is in the mind into figures of speech. One effect is the occasional achievement of an intensity of emotional experience which exceeds anything in Bruce. Another effect, not always desirable, is that whole sections of Buckler's prose become extended prose poems. This is perfectly appropriate in his pastoral idyl, *Oxbells and Fireflies*, but slows the pace of the already ruminative *The Mountain and the Valley* to a near standstill at times.

*The Mountain and the Valley* is full of passages which use a technique of moving back and forth from drama to poetry with great effect:

Sometimes it would take no more than that: the sight of Joseph completely taken up in conversation with another man; forgetting that she was waiting or, remembering, making no account of it.

She caught her breath and started back to the baskets. But it was faster than movement. Movement couldn't lose or shake the wind of exile. It sprang up from nowhere, and she was helpless, once she had felt it, not to feed it. It was like the blue dusk light of August exiling the mountains; or the cold horizon light of winter exiling the skeletons of the prayer-fingered apple trees; or the retreating October light draining the fields.

Buckler's study of reality is a study in patterns of isolation. Martha and Joseph, David's parents, have a fine relationship, but one which is plagued by moments of misunderstanding and intense separateness. Finally their relationship is severed permanently by Joseph's accidental death, not in the normal course of events, but under the peculiarly unfortunate conditions of one of their misunderstandings. The whole novel moves from warmth and unity, brought to a high point in the description of Christmas in Chapter VIII, to the loneliness and isolation of David's standing in the field while the train carries Toby away.

But Toby didn't glance once, not once, toward the house or the field. The train went by.

David stood rooted in the row. He leaned on the hack he'd brought with him to dig out the stubborn parsnips. He followed the train with his eyes. The train wound quickly through the cut. The grey cloud of its smoke thinned and settled over the trees. The clucking of its rails became a far-off clatter. And then the whistle of the train blew ever so distantly for the next station, and the whole train had disappeared from the day.

A hollowness sucked suddenly against his breath. Toby's knife still lay there,

abandoned beside the carelessly topped turnips . . . and Toby had gone away in the train. All the thinking came back in a rush.

But the panic wasn't only that the one friend he'd ever had had gone away. It was more than that. *It was always someone else* that things happened to, that was the panic of it. . . .

This scene is a recurring pattern in Buckler. In "Another Man" from *Oxbells and Fireflies*, we find a direct parallel, though in this case the character is an older man who has lived alone for years. Syd Wright, about to attend the funeral of a neighbourhood kid, whose death was known to everyone else in the community before it was known to him, sees a cabbage which had been tossed aside on Halloween night, perhaps by Lennie himself. "It was the trifle that can suddenly daze a man with the news of his whole life. . . . I am never in on anything at the time. The afterwards is all I ever know."

There is something basic to Ernest Buckler here, something that necessitates his reliance on salvation through memory and imagination. Thus the quality of felt life in Buckler is essentially tragic, unlike that in Bruce, which is joyous, though there is a kind of high seriousness about both which renders them very similar. Bruce's *The Channel Shore* moves from the isolations caused by James' austerity and Anse's irresponsibility, to the order and optimism of Grant's and Alan's new pattern. In the end, Buckler's David must leave the Valley, climb the Mountain, and transcend the loneliness and pain of reality through imaginative vision and death. Alan will not leave the Channel Shore, but settles in to "begin the change in the pattern — in the memory and imagination and knowledge of the Shore. . . . A beginning, not an end." David must work his miracle through imaginative translation if at all, by giving "an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves or to each other — hurts that were caused only by the misreading of what they couldn't express." Grant and Alan act out that absolution; Grant by bringing Hazel back from the exile of shame; Alan by learning the value of openness, even at the cost of violence, and living this by taking the name of his blood father and preparing to marry Grant's daughter before the startled, but relieved eyes of the Channel Shore.

These are our foremost writers of fiction; both are men with a vision which aspires to the highest purposes of literature. But literature has many purposes. Two other names spring immediately to mind when one thinks of Maritime fiction: Hugh MacLennan and Thomas Raddall. They are more prolific writers than Buckler and Bruce, perhaps because they are less artistic. That is not to say that they are less competent, but that their novels are of a different kind.

**T**HOMAS RADDALL is thought of as an historical novelist primarily. *Hangman's Beach* provides a typical example. This is one of his more

recent books, first published in 1966, and reflects an impressive knowledge of nineteenth century Halifax and its role in the politics of the age. From the historical point of view, the central character in the novel is Peter MacNab, son of the original MacNab of MacNab's Island and a prominent Halifax merchant. Around this figure Raddall builds a picture of Halifax in the early eighteen-hundreds, and of a business intrigue involving him in the transfer of American goods to Britain during the American embargo. This is very interesting material, and as a character MacNab seems to have lots of potential. However, after eight chapters, a new section is begun, centring in a French officer, Cascamond, captured by the British and held at Halifax. Cascamond takes over the book, forcing MacNab into a supporting role, and the chief interest in the remaining three sections of the novel is provided by his dangerous affairs and miraculous escapes. The romantic plot built around him is capable of providing the framework for the historical content of the novel by itself. Cascamond is linked to MacNab by being paroled into his custody as French tutor for the MacNab boys. While living on MacNab's Island he falls in love with a niece of Peter's, Ellen Dewar. After many intrigues and mortal dangers, all turns out well through the intervention of MacNab, who throughout the novel is seen as a champion of justice and common sense in the face of the excesses of the British Admiralty. The two lovers are sent off to live in peace in Acadia, or "Arcadie, the land of simple plenty, of innocent pleasures, of peace without end", as Father Sigogne puts it. Perhaps we could say that Cascamond and Ellen, elemental man and woman, find their way to a garden of peace and love through the intervention of the Promethean MacNab against the Joves of the Admiralty, but that would be stretching a point. In fact, the romance which dominates two-thirds of the novel is largely for popular appeal, and remains crudely spliced into the more serious historical themes of the novel by circumstance alone. One is left with a sense of disappointment that more was not done with MacNab in answer to the promise of Part I. The romance detracts not only from the excitement which attaches to MacNab as a potential Canadian "man for all seasons", but also from the realism. It does not bear the imprint of "some direct impression or perception of life".

Raddall's most serious novel is *The Nymph and The Lamp* first published in 1950. This is set in the twentieth century and draws upon Raddall's personal experience as a wireless operator on Sable Island just after the First World War. Here the inevitable Raddall romance is the serious centre of the novel, and there is no division of purposes. Sable Island, or Marina as it is called in the novel, is more than just a setting; it imposes conditions of isolation upon the characters which make the normal directives of society irrelevant, and force them to rely upon their inner resources. This is a novel of self-discovery, urging that it is the responsibility of the individual to discover his own principle of integrity. And the basis of direct experience upon which Raddall builds much of the novel lends a

serious quality of felt life often lacking in his other works. Isabel learns to operate the equipment, for "something to do" during the long empty days, and is finally allowed by Matthew to sit a watch by herself.

Stentor in the engine room awakened at her touch and snarled obediently. She smiled, and wondered why she had ever feared the thing . . . The spark screamed through the station and over the dunes . . . the dots crackling out like musketry, the dashes blaring, an immense, all-powerful sound. She exulted in it now. The sensation was marvelous.

Even this kind of experience is directly related to the central theme of the novel, for Isabel is also learning to seize control of her own destiny. When she returns to Carney, too, it is essential that she be a competent operator. The novel possesses a nice artistic unity, with no sense of a split between academic research and romantic tale-telling to reduce the artistic stature of the work.

Hugh MacLennan is a similar writer in some ways. Like Raddall, he writes an eminently readable book but when we look for more, difficulties arise. *Barometer Rising* is a specifically maritime novel, published in 1941. It is built around the Halifax explosion of 1917 — a subject with tremendous possibilities. But somehow the story goes astray amid confused purposes. One theme suggests that somehow, Canada came of age at that time, ceasing to be a colony, and rising from the ashes of Halifax, a new nation. This is neither convincing nor true, but of course MacLennan's conception of Canada has changed considerably since 1941. Nevertheless, there is too much architecture and not enough life here. The description of the explosion itself is entirely successful in a documentary way. But the most convincing theme seems to be associated with Dr. Murray, who rediscovers his purpose in life and regains his self-confidence in the midst of the chaotic aftermath of the explosion. Doctors seem to inspire Hugh MacLennan, no doubt because of his own father.

A doctor is at the centre of *Each Man's Son*, published just a year before *The Mountain and the Valley*. Daniel Ainsley is a general practitioner in a Cape Breton coal town. The central theme of this novel is summed up by an older medical friend of Ainsley's, Dougal MacKenzie:

Dan you haven't forgotten a single word you've ever heard from the pulpit or from your own Presbyterian father. You may think you've rejected religion with your mind, but your personality has no more rejected it than dyed cloth rejects its original color.

Ainsley's life is torn by guilt, instilled by his Presbyterian past and focussed upon his wife, his work, and his purpose in life. He cannot enjoy a full and happy relationship with his wife because he cannot believe that he should take the time from his labours to do so, and because he feels guilty about an operation which he had to perform on her, rendering her sterile. He scourges his soul by translat-



ing Greek when he should be enjoying life. In an attempt to recover his lost immortality, he tries to take over the son of a local girl whose husband has been away for four years pursuing an unsuccessful career in the ring. Molly, the boy's mother, is thereby pushed into accepting the proposal of a shipwrecked French sailor that she and the boy, Alan, run off to France with him. Ainsley discovers the plan and realizes what he has done. He collapses under an awful sense of emptiness and futility, feeling that he has been cheated by the criminals who inflicted a false and cursed religion upon him, but feeling that he has nothing to put in its place.

He felt as though his spirit had hurled itself against the window of his life and broken the glass. It had been caught in a prison and now it was free. But its freedom was the freedom of not caring, and the things it witnessed now were different from those it had seen before. Now his spirit flickered like a bat over a dark and sinister landscape as lifeless as the mountains of the moon.

And then Alan's father returns, suffering from brain damage. He discovers Molly and the Frenchman together, kills them both, and dies himself shortly thereafter. Alan is Ainsley's to bring up.

Obviously, the plot is resolved by some rather startling coincidences, but in dealing with Ainsley's latent guilt and his loathing of his Presbyterian heritage, MacLennan writes with energy and conviction. Ainsley's descent into the "bat-black night" of his personal hell is entirely convincing. But though a resolution is claimed for him — "He got to his feet and looked down at the brook. In that moment he made the discovery that he was ready to go on with life" — we are not led to understand why he is ready; and though a salvation is arranged for him in Archie's homicidal rampage, it is not found credible or satisfying. We know that Ainsley will leave Cape Breton, and go on to become a great surgeon elsewhere, perhaps finding in his new sense of family life and his new professional horizons a sufficient purpose for his life. The problem addressed here, in what MacLennan refers to specifically as the curse of the Calvinist faith, is an intensified version of one Charles Bruce grapples with in *The Channel Shore*, but MacLennan's characters leave it largely unresolved, and take the alternative of leaving Cape Breton in the hope of leaving the curse behind. We realize, in reading the rest of MacLennan's novels, that he also is one who left. Other problems of wartime and of Canadian politics occupy them — particularly the problem of Quebec and the federal system, featured in *Two Solitudes* and *Return of the Sphinx*. In fact, in the latter, Alan Ainsley turns up in federal politics and his son is involved with the separatists.

The religious problem in *Each Man's Son* brings MacLennan close to something at the heart of Maritime life, and apparently something close to his own experience of it. The novel scratches the surface, but hardly gets beyond polemic,

and MacLennan does not return to the theme, or to the Maritimes, in his later fiction.

Except for Raddall's more recent historical novels, these books are all from an earlier decade of Maritime literature. Another from that era deserves mention. Will R. Bird's *Here Stands Good Yorkshire*, which provides an insight into the lives of the Yorkshire immigrants to the upper Fundy in the 1770's, is highly valued among the descendants of those people, though as a novel, it is a bit thin in characterization, a fault common to Bird's historical novels. Though one of his best, it is no longer available in print, but a movement is afoot in Canada to republish such books, and may catch up with this one. The University of Toronto Press has recently published in paperback, with an introduction by Dr. Alan Bevan of Dalhousie University, C. P. Day's *Rockbound*, set on Ironbound Island and among the Tancooks. This particularly interesting little novel originally appeared in the twenties. It has a somewhat sentimental plot, but sketches vividly the way of life in the little Nova Scotia fishing empires of the last days of sail.

THESE WRITERS speak largely of the Maritime past, but there is a group of younger writers speaking through fiction of Atlantic Canada today. Many write short stories. Kent Thompson of the University of New Brunswick has recently collected some of the best in an anthology for Macmillan of Canada, *Stories from Atlantic Canada*. Most of the women in Atlantic Literature are poets, but there are samples here of Elizabeth Brewster's ventures into prose, and of the work of Beth Harvor and Helen Porter. Alden Nowlan, Ray Smith, Harold Horwood, Gordon Pinsent, and David Richards have all published novels. Alden Nowlan is best known as a poet, short story writer, and journalist. His recent novel, *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien*, is not really a novel at all, any more than is Buckler's *Oxbells and Fireflies*. They are collections of short stories, tied loosely together by a thread of theme — in Buckler's, memories of Norstead (a fictionalized place where he grew up, "No More Place"); in Nowlan's memories stimulated by a trip back home. One gets a little tired of all this reminiscing, and hopes it is *not* a trend.

Ray Smith has been causing some confusion with his "compiled fiction", but there is something exciting in the idea — a way of getting at the complexity and infinite variety of life on the street. Gordon Pinsent, who turns a hand to many of the arts, has been entertaining Canadians and upsetting some with his acting and writing about Newfoundland characters. But Pinsent never intended to create stereotypes. The Rowdyman is a unique character, and if something of his zest, his language, his gift of the gab, his flights from giddiness to the depths of despair, is identifiably Newfoundland there is no shame in that.

Harold Horwood has met with some criticism at home too, but his fiction is not dishonest, any more than Farley Mowat's *A Whale For The Killing* is dishonest. *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* is a particularly good novel, though it may offend some readers. Perhaps the theme of emancipation from religious zealotry and pious ignorance is a little heavy-handed, but it is not unrealistic. Horwood draws a line down the centre of his fictional Newfoundland outport. On the side of the zealous fall the minister, Brother John, who believes the world is about to come to an end, his wife, Sister Leah, and various elders of the church and members of the community. On the side of the emancipated stand the Markadys and the Simms; Joshua Markady is a retired merchant and ship-owner who has made his fortune and seen the world: Peter Simms is a retired magistrate. "Mr. Simms and Mr. Markady were deeply entrenched institutions in Captain Bight, beyond the touch even of religious fanaticism, far too eminently respectable to be purged." Allied with them are Simms' son Christopher, who goes away to college and returns to teach school; Virginia Marks, daughter of the storekeeper and "not only an outstanding beauty but a woman who took no trouble to hide her brains"; Eli, a boy of the village who is really the central character of the novel, and Johnny, a much younger boy who is rescued from the Pious Ignorant by Chris, Virginia, and Eli.

During the novel, Eli becomes involved homosexually with Brother John, which finally brings about John's destruction after he has been temporarily successful in laying the same charge against Chris, and Chris and Eli both fall in love with Virginia, to Eli's ultimate heartbreak. The characterizations are skilfully drawn, with just the right touch of caricature in the more extreme types, and most important, all aspects of experience in this religion-torn, love-torn outport are treated with a genuine touch of felt life. Chris is thrown into direct confrontation with Brother John and triumphs, Eli and Johnny are rescued from psychological damage at the hands of the self-righteous, Virginia is led into fidelity and happiness — all through Christopher's absolute faith in the triumph of knowledge, common sense, and love, over ignorance and superstition. That theme, unalloyed, would run the risk of a new piety, but the conflict between Eli and Chris over Virginia saves the novel. Eli must learn to accept the sight of the woman he desires in the arms of the man he loves, and in doing so, achieves a worthwhile self-realization.

The theme of religious emancipation is similar to MacLennan's in *Each Man's Son*, but goes farther. Whereas the Presbyterian faithful are only distantly condemned in *Each Man's Son*, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* examines even Brother John in depth and with considerable understanding. Horwood's personal philosophy allows him to place a fully emancipated figure at the opposite end of the spectrum, one for whom inherited guilt has no meaning. The result is a more relaxed, wide-ranging, and humorous view of the whole problem, allowing a

genuine resolution as opposed to the contrived one of MacLennan's conclusion.

Christopher Simms' character represents an ideal, a man liberated from the guilt and superstition of the past, not only intellectually, but in personality as well, and there are few enough such people in real life. Horwood is yet another Romantic, and we have yet to look at the chief exponents of a new and different sensibility, Alden Nowlan and David Richards. They focus with an unflinching gaze on the hard realities of another kind of life in rural Atlantic Canada. With a mixture of understanding and concern, but little hope, Nowlan sees the impoverished Maritimers, robbed of the ability to help themselves by despair. "They built that shack right in the middle of a bog hole. Could have built it anywhere. But they built it in a bog hole. What you gonna do with that kind of people?"<sup>2</sup> Little hope, unless there is hope in the very act of publicly facing the hardest realities. That heritage of values rooted in the land, baptised in the sea, which some of us have been drawing about us for warmth against the coming of winter, must be preserved, but it is not enough to ward off the evil drafts of unemployment, poverty, foreign ownership, ecological destruction, and quiet despair. Our literature must tell us the whole truth about the society around us. It is for this reason that David Richards' first novel, *The Coming of Winter*, published in 1974, is an important novel, perhaps the most important first novel published in Canada.

Richards treads carefully a path between traditional novel structures and the de-structured experiments of other contemporaries. He intentionally underscores no themes and comes to no general conclusions, in sharp contrast to Hugh MacLennan, but relies on the book to make its own statement. He draws for us a picture in which the quality of felt life is so intense that no "architecture" at all is required. It is a picture of several weeks in the life of Kevin Dulse, leading up to his marriage. Kevin does not live in the tradition of religious, educated, pioneer farmers of *The Channel Shore*. His folks are mill workers and poor farmers without much vision. When we first meet Kevin he is occupied in his favourite pastime, hunting with his .22 rifle. He loves the woods and being outdoors — it is his one escape from a dreary life — but he is inept, and before long he has shot a cow by mistake. It's a messy business, finishing it off with a .22, and he is in serious trouble. As the days go by, he moves from one minor disaster to another. His hands and feet are burned shovelling lime at the mill. A friend, Andy, gets drunk and kills himself in a car. He gets drunk, and smashes up his truck, which was his grandfather's '48 International. His fiancé discovers just before their marriage that he owes \$300 for the cow. His father leaves it too late to buy a new suit for the wedding, but buys a bottle of champagne in a last-minute moment of inspiration. There are no champagne glasses in the house, however, and his wife won't serve it. Very dreary, the whole business, but one can't put the book aside because it is so real, so compassionate.

Kevin and his friend John are deeply disturbed by Andy's sudden death. He

has left behind a pregnant girl, Julie, whom he intended to marry. John is really in love with her, but he thinks he doesn't believe in love. Neither knows what to do. There is no possibility of John's taking the kind of action Grant Marshall did, because he hasn't the same sense of purpose — has no reason for any faith in the "rightness" of certain things. Kevin had gone up to see Julie:

"Did Julie say much when you were there?"

"Nothin' no — I can't talk to her. I want to but I can't so I didn't stay long up there. I'd just like to know what she's going to do."

They would all like to know what they are going to do.

Work. The sound of the mill coming down across the water. It would wake him again. But yes, they couldn't remain here long — not long. A year or so.

And so, in November, he gets married. Everything is sliding inexorably downhill into winter. The relationship which leads to his marriage is based upon undefined needs and unrealized hopes. We see almost no evidence of love between the two — only habit and inevitability. Entirely absent from Kevin's mind is the kind of conscious choice of a way of life which we see in the young Alan of the Channel Shore. This is true, not because Kevin is dumb, but because he is numb — numbed by an environment which has none of the sense of destiny and heritage celebrated by Charles Bruce. The coming of winter is not merely symbolic of entering into a marriage without hope, without a shared sense of where one came from and where one is going; it is also symbolic of the descent of a way of life into the cultural void of endless shiftwork, bickering, drunkenness, inevitable accidents, and stunted sensibilities.

This is a world that very much concerns Alden Nowlan. His best short story, "The Glass Roses", sets up a contrast between a mind nurtured in a rich culture, and a mind about to be quenched by back-woods ignorance and prejudice. Nowlan describes a Ukrainian second world war refugee, come to New Brunswick to work in the pulp woods. He is teamed with a boy, the son of the foreman. The woodsmen think he is from Poland and call him a Polack. He is a man whose heart is constantly warmed by the memory of the culture he once beheld — cathedrals, castles, cavalymen — and whose dreams are racked by the spectre of its destruction. The boy is enchanted by the tales he tells while they work, attracted by the stranger's open friendliness and warmth, yet confused because he knows that "men do not tell one another fairy tales about cathedrals." One of the "Polack's" stories is about a bunch of glass roses, exquisitely crafted, which stood on the windowsill at home and refracted the sun's rays. They had fallen and smashed when the first bombs fell, and this is the substance of one of his nightmares. "There is not much room in this world for glass roses", the Polack reflects. Certainly not here in the woods, where the men sit and play cards in silence when

it is too dark to slave. The foreman notices the arm around the shoulders, the cuff on the cheek, and is alarmed. "Them Wops and Bohunks and Polacks got a lot of funny ideas", he tells his son. "They ain't our kinda people . . . Just make that polack keep his hands off you."<sup>3</sup> The seeds of shame and suspicion are planted. Glass roses teeter precariously on the edge of destruction.

Perhaps we look too much to the past, or are like the psychiatrist of Anthony Brennan's new fantasy novel, *Carbon Copy*, insisting that the world around us is "peaceful, democratic, stable", that "there is no poverty and injustice", and being told by someone we consider to be mad that it is not so. But if our Maritime writers continue, as seems likely, to be regional in character, if their themes are contemporary, and if they are moral in Henry James' sense of the word, we will come to understand ourselves better.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> R. E. Watters, "Three Canadian Novelists", as printed in G. M. Cook (ed.) *Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Ernest Buckler*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., p. 41.
- <sup>2</sup> Alden Nowlan, "A Call in December." *Stories From Atlantic Canada*, p. 70.
- <sup>3</sup> Alden Nowlan, "The Glass Roses." *Stories From Atlantic Canada*, p. 82.

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