

THE MARITIME WRITER AND THE FOLKS DOWN HOME

Donald Cameron

HE WAS DRUNK, leaning up against an ornate doorpost in one of Fredericton's elegant old houses, his tie askew, a half-full glass in his hand.

"Shay," he muttered, "you know shome-thin' I always wondered? How come all you guys come from away? How come none of yous is from N'Brunswick?"

"All you guys" were the people putting out the noisy leftwing monthly, *The Mysterious East* (1968-72) — and on the whole the man was right. The editors hailed from Vancouver, Toronto and Detroit; the layout was done by a refugee from Lethbridge and her husband, a native of Prince Albert; only the office manager was a native New Brunswicker.

"You guys come in," declared my inebriated friend, "an' fin' fault with everything. You don' like the gov'ment, you don' like the water authority, you don' like the roads, you don' like anything'. But what t'hell do you know? You don' come from here. You know? you don' come from here. Whyn't you go back where you come from?"

"I'll make you a deal," I said, "You get W. A. C. Bennett to go back where *he* comes from, which is Hampton, New Brunswick. Then I'll be interested in going back to B.C."

Harry Bruce calls it "birthplace bigotry", and any writer in the Maritimes with any commitment to truth *must* eventually face it. You don't come from here: you have no right to speak. Even being born in the Maritimes doesn't necessarily help. Alden Nowlan hails from Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley; should

he criticize the genteel culture of Fredericton in which he is now a fixture, people will mutter that of course he doesn't quite belong, he's only shanty Irish from Windsor, blood will out, you know. Back in Nova Scotia, Alden is someone who left, and anything he writes is suspect: he no longer knows the situation at first hand. Birthplace bigotry is the native Maritimer's first, automatic response to criticism. It's the gut reaction of a slighted people who feel shut off from the more glittering rewards of Canadian citizenship. It's the tavern crouch of people who for generations have been put down for their accents, their values, their traditions.

The relationship between the Maritime writer and his culture seems to me remarkably complex, and its complexity has been intensified in recent years because the Maritimes have lately been attracting a whole new kind of immigrant: the talented, successful people who are traditionally drawn to the great capitals of learning and enterprise, but who nowadays seek in the Maritimes the personal and cultural values which they feel have been neglected elsewhere. The newcomers find a great deal which is admirable — and more than a trifle which is outrageous. Especially if he is a Canadian, the newcomer assumes his citizenship is not in question. But when he criticizes, he finds himself at odds with what must surely be the toughest, most deeply rooted regional culture in English Canada. Becoming a part of that culture is no simple matter.

Maritime culture, after all, has long forgotten the process of expansion which still dominates the mores of the West. British Columbia and Alberta are full of immigrants, from the Maritimes as well as from every other corner of the globe, and drawing the immigrant into the life of his new community is a well-developed art. For the Westerner, broadly speaking, change is likely to be progress, things are opening up, and the immigrant is welcome as part of that growth. For the Maritimer, change is likely to be loss, things are closing down, and the immigrant is rocking what is already a rather unsteady boat. Besides, the Maritimer has learned over the years that in the rest of Canada his home is regarded as a kind of Wales or Appalachia: a land of closed coal mines and wasted forests, a stagnant and depressing society, a community of hillbillies who abuse the local blacks, a place where the spirit withers and the intellect flags, a place from which people escape. Indeed, the Maritimes used to boast that their main export was brains — and in fact the list of tycoons, statesmen, artists, and academics who graduated from Maritime society is a long one. Cyrus Eaton, Samuel Cunard, Bonar Law, Lord Beaverbrook, Izaak Walton Killam, Hugh MacLennan, N. A. M. MacKenzie, Nathan Cohen, W. A. C. Bennett, Allan Blakeney, D. O. Hebb, Louis B. Mayer, Walter Pidgeon and Donald Sutherland, Amor de Cosmos, Dalton Camp, Charles Bruce — if such people leave, the melancholy conclusion must be that those who remain are the inferiors, content to splash in the small pond east of Quebec.

Recently, however, things have changed. Jutting into the Atlantic with the only deepwater ports on the east coast of North America, the Maritimes are increasingly interesting to oil companies looking for supertanker terminals. Americans choking to death in the cities of New England and the megalopolis around

New York have discovered that only a thousand miles north lies a lovely region of lakes and harbours where the people mostly speak English, act quaint, and don't shout Yankee Go Home. Newsprint and fish are still in demand, despite the serious problems of those industries. Even coal is staging a comeback. I am not denying the realities of poverty and regional disparity; I am simply saying that life goes on at a level today which is a very different matter from the absolute privation of thirty years ago.

And what yesterday appeared to be backwardness today looks remarkably like conservation. This is a region of small towns and villages; even Halifax, the premier city, is no more than a modest town by Ontario standards. All the same, it has the facilities of a much larger capital city: a well-heelled civil service, a large CBC operation, a symphony, a permanent theatre, four universities, a college of technology and another of art, bookstores and galleries, restaurants and nightclubs. It offers many of the rewards of a city without the cancerous sprawl which makes, say, Toronto such an offence to the eye and the spirit.

Halifax is typical of the region in its provision of a remarkably *human* environment, with all the irritations and delights that phrase implies. Maritime life is intimate and abrasive, comradely and gossipy. History and politics are worn close to the skin. Maritimers know one another very well, which is not to say that they invariably like one another very much.

It is possible, in short, to live an interesting and rewarding life in the Maritimes, and to do it without being trapped by the whole Rube Goldberg apparatus of modern life. One can still actually hope to *own* a home here, as opposed to renting one in perpetuity from the mortgage companies. It is possible to eat well, as rural Maritimers do, by planting a garden

and raising some animals, or by buying directly from the farmers and fishermen. The Saturday farmer's market in Fredericton seems to bring out virtually the entire faculty of the University of New Brunswick. A writer here can know a community's inner life in remarkable detail, and can understand concretely the lines of force through which history affects the present.

I speak, perhaps, with the romantic passion of the convert — but to me it really seems that the rest of Canada offers nothing quite comparable to the Maritimes. I have lived, for varying periods, in London and New York, in California and in France, and though I recognize their attractions, I cannot think any of them compares with D'Escousse, Nova Scotia, as a place to live and work, as a place to grow old and decline and die. It would not be so for everyone, but it is so for an increasing number of refugees from the absurdities of the modern city. To paraphrase Stephen Leacock's remark about my native Vancouver, if I had known what it was like, I wouldn't have waited till I was thirty to come; I would have been born here.

But I wasn't.

Neither was Harry Bruce, Kent Thompson, Reshard Gool, Robert Campbell, Russell Hunt, David Walker, Robert Cockburn, William Bauer, or Anthony Brennan. And their work represents a fair proportion of the writing coming out of the Maritimes at the moment.

Not only that, but Hugh MacLennan, Bernell Macdonald, Louis Cormier, Tom Gallant, Ray Smith and Elizabeth Brewster *aren't* living here. And they are all born Maritimers.

I don't want to construct any vast theories; the facts are too various and recalcitrant, and for virtually every notion I might propose there are numerous exceptions. Some of the explanations are perfectly obvious: for instance, all the

newcomers I mentioned, aside from Harry Bruce and David Walker, have some connection with universities, specifically — Reshard Gool excepted — with the University of New Brunswick and its affiliates. Under the leadership of such men as Fred Cogswell and the late Desmond Pacey, UNB has always been remarkably hospitable both to imaginative writing and to Canadian literature, and the consequence is that Fredericton is positively infested with poets. Fredericton has a tradition of breeding poets as well as attracting them, and the lines of intellectual and even familial descent can be traced from, say, A. G. Bailey through Carman and Roberts to Jonathan Odell, the Loyalist eminence who was perhaps the leading Tory poet of the American Revolution, and beyond, to the Emersons of pre-Revolutionary New England. I remember once calculating that if you defined "nationally published poet" to mean any poet whose work had been published outside New Brunswick, then Fredericton had one nationally published poet per thousand of population. Even allowing for copious amounts of foul verse, that remains an astonishing statistic.

The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that while New Brunswick harbours poets, Nova Scotia is traditionally a province of journalists, satirists and novelists. From Howe, Haliburton and McCulloch through Will Bird and Hugh MacLennan to Ray Smith and Harry Bruce, Nova Scotia's writers are more like marginal men of affairs than men of letters. Even that generalization needs to be qualified, however, since it refers only to writing in English; in Gaelic, Nova Scotia has had its share of poets, and in New Brunswick the most visible of current Acadian works is *La Sagouin*, a monodrama which has had remarkable success throughout French Canada from Montreal to the villages of Cape Breton.

Nevertheless, I will venture a very ten-

tative observation. I suspect that literary people are attracted to the Maritimes because they sense the region's extraordinary literary resources, but that their association with universities largely prevents them from realizing those resources in their work. Native Maritimers have a vast advantage — but rarely have the comparative sense of culture, the shrewdness and breadth of judgment, to mine those resources without exposing themselves to a wider experience. They leave — and in the cities to the west they write about the east coast.

What I mean by resources is that vast, apparently endless supply of stories and myths, of superstitions and symbolism, which the east coast has developed over three hundred years of European settlement. A glance at Helen Creighton's work reveals its range and variety: a vital oral tradition which exhales the stuff of poetry and drama as naturally as the shoreline of Guysborough County produces fog. Down here, the news is still other people, and one's neighbours are perpetually cast as characters in the continuing play which is the life of the village. In fact the process almost becomes ruinous, at a certain point: once the casting directors in our minds have established that, say, René is a drunk, he finds it extremely difficult to convince anyone that he is ever sober, sensible or serious; such behaviour would be out of character. What's the news? Nothing to do with Henry Kissinger and Indira Gandhi; the news is that Pierre's pig went down the well, that Frank's wife ran off with that Newfoundlander who was staying with them, that Henry bought a new car. And *that*, rather than Kissinger and Gandhi, seems to me the stuff out of which literature can come.

Add to that the depth of history and legend: the understanding that Louisbourg has been foggy ever since it was captured by the English in 1758, while

the villages of Main-au-Dieu and Gabarus, on either side, remained Catholic, French and fog-free. Listen to the plaintive melodies of a Cape Breton fiddler, melodies whose titles are in Gaelic and which came to Canada a century and a half ago when the fiddler's ancestors settled on the farm he still occupies. Look at the Music Room on the Bedford Highway outside Halifax, built for his French-Canadian mistress by Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, the father of Queen Victoria. Watch the fog roll in over Mader's Cove and wait to see whether you will glimpse the *Teazer*, the ghost ship of Mahone Bay.

Such things are dissolved in the blood of Maritimers, and lucky is the newcomer who develops an understanding of them. Indeed, one wonders if a newcomer can ever have the instinctive grasp of the Nova Scotia farm communities which informs the work of Ernest Buckler, or the command of the human bearings of history which underlies the novels of Thomas Raddall. Yet Buckler spent ten years in Toronto before returning to farm and write in Bridgetown, and Raddall lived his first ten years in England and put in his young manhood at sea. Hugh MacLennan's chilling account of the young Jerome Martell's midnight journey down the Miramichi, dodging his mother's murderer, is one of the most brilliant passages of Maritime literature, an occasion which enters into one's personal rather than one's literary memory — and yet by the time he described that experience from the viewpoint of a New Brunswick boy so isolated he had never seen a train, MacLennan himself was a Rhodes scholar long resident in Montreal.

I have heard analogous stories from the people who experienced their events, and just once, in a story called *Snapshot: The Third Drunk*, I think I did literary justice to such material. (The story was published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, ap-

propriately; Malcolm Ross declares that the common denominator of Maritime life has been the similar way all Maritimers bounce off Boston.) But that one story came from years of listening to the sorts of yarns Maritimers grow up with, listening to the phrasing and rhythm of the various Maritime accents—and there are dozens of accents—and trying to deduce a system of values from the grid-work of assumptions in which the stories were told. For me to hear and understand these stories was a matter of conscious choice and effort, and at the end I knew only a part of what any bright kid in a fishing village simply absorbs in the process of growing up. Never mind, for the moment, the sheer pleasure of hearing good stories, of learning from moment to moment the dramatic and homely details of lives very different from my own. The point is that to make myself capable of writing the story required something resembling a reconstruction of my personal history—and even then, I used a narrator in the story who was *not* a native of the village in which the story took place.

Such a reconstruction of personal history means, I think, almost becoming one with people whose roots reach deeply into their locale and its history, and that process is almost inaccessible to someone in the university. The automatic assumption of the working man is that the university person is his superior, has manners no working man can share, has a distaste for colloquial speech and rough humour, speaks in a way he cannot imitate. The professor may take a summer home in a village, but he remains a professor, and nobody in the village is likely to assume that his interests and preoccupations match their own. At the end of the summer the professor goes back to his lucrative chair in town, and the village goes back to doing without the light and cursing the bread, goes back to pestering the

MLA to do something about the potholes and the snowploughs, goes back to the card games and bingos in the parish hall. A receptive professor will absorb an amazing amount from his few balmy weeks, but he will not have the same understanding he would have if he actually had to cope with the year-round conditions his neighbours face.

The result is evident in the work. Take, for instance, the novels of Kent Thompson. Thompson is fortyish, a sophisticated and well-travelled man, despite his strenuous proclamations of his proletarian origins in the backwoods of the American Midwest. He is a graduate of the Iowa writing programme, and a Ph.D. from the University of Wales. He has been a professor at the University of New Brunswick since 1967, and is now a Canadian citizen and a New Brunswick patriot. He is a respected teacher of writing, and a good writer himself.

His difficulty, it seems to me, is that he moves in a rather uninformative round of activities, a problem he has resolved in ways I consider revealing. His first novel, *The Tenants were Corrie and Tennie*, (1973) is the story of an American schoolteacher, William Boyd, who falls in love with Fredericton while on a bus tour of the Maritimes. Boyd resigns by mail, buys a duplex, and retires, intending to live on the rent from the other side. A young American professor and his wife become his tenants, and Boyd gradually becomes obsessed with his desire for the professor's young wife, Corrie. Gradually he slips over the edge into madness, imagining that Corrie has left Tennie and the children for him.

The action takes place in Fredericton, and various aspects of the setting, the climate and so forth, are captured with admirable precision. Yet all the important characters are American; the New Brunswickers make only cameo appearances. The reader senses, I think, that Thomp-

son simply doesn't know the natives well enough to risk a novel about them. That is not to say the novel doesn't work; it does work but in a very particular way which has very little to do with the literary resources of New Brunswick.

With his second novel, *Across from the Floral Park* (1974), Thompson retreats even farther from the realities in which he lives. A wealthy man buys a city mansion across from the Floral Park, and finds two women apparently in permanent residence. One woman is old and decrepit but maintains a suite of rooms in one wing of the house; she has some legal claim on the house, which will not be fully his until her death. The other woman is young, beautiful and gracious, apparently of servant origins, and the hero marries her. They have a series of ventures and adventures together — she becomes a patron of the arts, he has a successful fling at politics, they have a child together — and then he comes home to find all the locks changed on the doors. He is expelled from his sumptuous Eden; as the novel ends he is telling the story from his hotel room.

I suggested to Thompson that *Floral Park* "read like a novel by someone who had been an invalid all his life and had watched the human comedy taking place on the other side of a pane of glass." Exactly, he replied, "that's what I intended. I wanted something timeless and placeless. Thus, a very philosophical novel."

In that respect, Thompson's novels greatly resemble those of Anthony Brennan, who teaches English a quarter of a mile away at St. Thomas University, UNB's Catholic affiliate. A Yorkshireman by origin, Brennan has travelled widely and studied at various universities in Canada and England; he once spent two years on a 75,000 mile trek from Alaska to Colombia to Newfoundland. He has been in Fredericton since 1971.

Like its predecessor, *The Carbon Copy* (1972), Brennan's second novel, *The Crazy House* (1975) owes something to Kafka and Sartre and the theatre of the absurd. The works become less novels than philosophical parables, excursions into the theory and practice of revolution, the problems of identity and the need for self-assertion. Both are set in imaginary countries, in times of great political turmoil; both invoke imagery of terror and flight, and both feature protagonists who become enmeshed in events largely against their wills and for reasons they do not fully understand. I found them both extremely interesting, extremely pertinent to Canadian politics, and quite unusual in the context of Canadian writing. Canada has remained largely untouched by the violence and confusion of modern politics, and in one sense Brennan's novels are like a message from that turbulent world.

Yet once again I am struck by the utter absence of the kind of experience which actually surrounds Brennan on all sides. Like Thompson, Brennan deals in generalities; like Thompson, he reflects not the context he inhabits, but a context his experience permits him to imagine. And though I do not want to ride a hobbyhorse about it, I suspect the reason is the oddly insulated world of the universities. Gossip and meetings, term papers and fluttery infidelities, parking privileges and pecking orders: universities really do not provide very rich material, and what there is has been picked over very thoroughly. What is a writer to do? The answer seems clear: drop realism altogether, and rely entirely on the resources of one's intelligence and imagination.

I am not, of course, suggesting that Brennan or Thompson *should* necessarily write about New Brunswick's inner life; I am simply pointing out that in fact they don't. Their novels describe a rootless,

mobile, violent and existential world, a world quite unlike the Maritimes. Realism, the dominant mode of Western fiction for three centuries, perhaps assumes a reasonably stable society, in which linkages such as family, politics, money and class have some meaning. Brennan and Thompson actually live in one of the few places where such a society persists, but their imaginations are not at home in that context, and despite their obvious talents the literary resources of New Brunswick go untapped.

The modern novel, as Defoe should remind us, was actually an outgrowth of journalism, and I suspect that even now fiction is most vital when it relies heavily on the values of journalism: on immediacy, concreteness, the shrewdly observed details of behaviour from which an astute reader may deduce the involutions of the spirit. Reality, I suggest, is richer, more surprising and more authoritative than anyone's imagination, and the novelist who does not ask observation to help him deprives himself of his greatest resource.

I argue my case from a special vantage point: I have been a professor, I am now a journalist, and writers are notorious for their insistence that the only reasonable course for a good writer is the course the particular writer has chosen for himself. But I call once again on Kent Thompson, reflecting on my route and his own:

It's just a choice, I suppose, between doing articles as a job and marking first-year essays. I don't think there's a great deal between them — do you? Except that, dammit, you get to *learn* something, and I hear, and read, the same damn thing over and over and over again. The curse of teaching is its god-damned repetition. The 18-year-old mind is always just that — and so, for that matter, is the 40-year-old academic mind. Nothing bloody well happens!

Be that as it may, Kent Thompson has published two novels, and I have not. If the professor is remote from the concrete concerns of ordinary people, the journal-

ist is if anything too deeply enmeshed in them.

Consider, for instance, Harry Bruce, a native of Toronto who has lived since 1971 in Halifax. Harry is the son of Charles Bruce, the Nova Scotia-born poet and novelist, and like his father he is one of the finest journalists in the country. He is an accomplished prose stylist, an unusually knowledgeable observer, and his sense of the absurd is never asleep. The best of his articles and essays unquestionably rank as literature.

Yet Harry, too, is forty and essentially bookless. The curse of the freelance journalist's life is money: punching out articles for the national magazines, whisking off commentaries for CBC radio, hammering out a TV script here and a think-piece there, the journalist is perpetually tied to the events of the moment, perpetually haunted by the inexorable approach of the mortgage payment and the knowledge that if he dares to be ill this month, he will have trouble with that payment next month. A book-length project will consume not one month, but several, and how is the journalist to secure such a stretch of free time? And how, for that matter, is he to free himself from the habit of superficial brightness, from the easy and entertaining phrase which nevertheless glosses over the complexities of the situation before him? The journalist has always been a somewhat raffish and disreputable figure, and the rich variety of human life is easier for him to find than it is for the professor. But the long view of things, the practice of the art *as* an art, the fine indifference to the marketplace which the professor can take for granted — these are virtually unattainable luxuries for the drudges of Grub Street.

I am struck by the change in the literary marketplace since the young manhood of writers like Buckler, Raddall, Will Bird. In their day, the short story

was still a viable commercial form; Rad-dall could sit in Liverpool and write for *Blackwood's*, Buckler could farm in Bridgetown and write for *Esquire*, and each of them could utilize an established literary form. But today's market for imaginative literature as distinct from essays and reportage is sadly diminished. Aside from *Saturday Night*, *Chatelaine* and the CBC, Canada offers virtually no outlets for fiction except at purely nominal rates of pay. Fiction thus becomes a hobby for journalists as much as for professors — and journalists have less time to pursue any hobby.

The result is that the most successful Maritime fiction is often written in Montreal, where Hugh MacLennan soldiers on, where Ray Smith occasionally emits a polished and entertaining volume. And yet it sometimes seems that everyone down home is writing, too. A couple of years ago, I edited a literary supplement for the Halifax weekly *The Fourth Estate*. We advertised for contributions — and drew about 350 writers out of the woodwork, a surprisingly large number of whom were at least competent. The Nova Scotia Department of Recreation (which for reasons best known to the Liberals is the department responsible for culture) ran a writing contest last year and attracted over six hundred entrants. Prince Edward Island boasts Milton Acorn and a clutch of young hopefuls; in Saint John, Dan Ross has published literally hundreds of popular novels under half a dozen pseudonyms. After a stint writing fiction for Montreal's *Midnight*, Raymond Fraser is said to be back in Chatham, New Brunswick, and every season seems to introduce another new Maritime writer from a major Ontario publisher: David Richard Adams last year, Don Domanski this year with a book of poems provocatively entitled *The Cape Breton Book of the Dead*.

The writers I most admire are those who give voice to the fantasies and values,

the fears and assumptions, of an entire society. The achievement of such writers as Ernest Buckler and Alden Nowlan is precisely that kind of articulation, and the excitement and despair of being a writer in the Maritimes arises from the knowledge that this part of Canada cries out for such articulation, the knowledge that the material with which life here routinely presents one implies a constant, strenuous test of one's talents and one's character.

In the end, the question is not where a writer comes from or how he develops the mixture of love and judgment which the Maritime community — and perhaps any community — demands. The question is whether he does develop it, and how he uses it to elucidate and evaluate the life around him. My drunken friend was fumbling for something real, for *The Mysterious East* was strident in judgment and reticent about love, and what he was really saying, I think now, was that judgment without love can hardly fail to be harsh and merciless. In the course of justice none of us should see salvation.

I don't accept his view: I think our judgments were based on love, on the perception that Maritime political and economic structures are unrepentantly brutal to people — and it is people, not structures, that deserve our love. The writer who could really capture the quality of Maritime people in all their raucousness, their pragmatism, their desperation, nobility, comedy and mystery, could give us works to compare with those of Chekhov and Faulkner. Perhaps the parallel is really with Ireland, that other small, poor, haunted and talkative country. A Yeats or a Joyce would rub his hands at the speech and sensibility of Lunenburg or the Miramichi; I think, somehow, they would throw up their hands at Pickering.

Sometimes, when I give myself over to dreaming, I think of John Millington Synge, capturing forever the melody and

anguish of the Aran Islands. I reflect that I too live on an island off an island. And I remember that Synge was not raised on the islands that called forth his greatness.

The blend of what he brought and what he found gave the world *Riders to the Sea*, and that same sea washes at my doorstep.

THE CANADIAN GOLDSMITH

Doug Fetherling

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, the Canadian Oliver Goldsmith who wrote "The Rising Village" in emulation of his great-uncle's "The Deserted Village", occupies a place in Canadian writing unusual for being a compound of several small claims to fame. He was, as Lorne Pierce pointed out, "our first native-born, English-speaking poet". He was also the first Canadian poet to be published abroad (and the first to have his work panned overseas). Similarly, his brief *Autobiography* was one of the first literary memoirs by a Canadian. It can also be said without much exaggeration that Goldsmith was the father of a Maritimes poetic tradition, although this accomplishment, like the others, was rather involuntary and taken note of only in retrospect.

But if all these firsts were put aside, there would remain about Goldsmith's career one fact sufficient to immortalize him in the footnotes, if not actually in the anthologies he now occupies so curiously. This is the fact that he was our first, and one of our worst, great-bad poets, in the sense that William Arthur Deacon's four Jameses¹ are great-bad. He was the first to publish verse of such unabashed unsatisfactoriness as to make him stand out even among the poetasters, dabblers and crackpots who routinely inhabit the slums of verse. It is in this way that we should think of him and that he should appeal. It is also in this light that

he has been insufficiently recognized, just as in the others he has been, if anything, overpraised. Poor Oliver Goldsmith (1795-1861) was not very important as a literary figure. He was and is important only as a curiosity of literature — in the pathologist's or carnival barker's use of the phrase rather than Disraeli's.

"The Rising Village" has several characteristics in common with other great-bad poems, just as Goldsmith's personality resembles those of other writers who followed in his eccentric footsteps. Generally speaking, the truly, monumental great-bad poems can be divided into two types. First there are the occasional poems, in which the poet acknowledges or celebrates with lopsided rhetoric, topics of excruciating insignificance. An example is James McIntyre's ode to the mammoth Ontario cheese, made famous by Deacon. The second type is the kind intended as an epic, in which the poet brings to bear what he believes are the big guns of High Style on a poem-idea completely unsuited to such treatment. "The Rising Village" falls within this classification. It is probably one of the finest examples.

Goldsmith's aim was to depict the tribulations of the early Nova Scotia Loyalists, a group from which he considered himself to have descended, even though his father was an Irishman directly employed by the Crown and not what is ordinarily thought of as a Loyalist. Still,