THE BODY-ODOUR OF RACE

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THE PROBLEM OF RACE and ethnic relations has never been a major concern of Canadian Literature. By contrast, the great American classics — *Moby Dick*, the Leatherstocking tales, *Huckleberry Finn* — have all focused upon the communion between persons of different races, and this theme has persisted in the works of Faulkner, Porter, Baldwin, Ellison and many others. These writers, it would seem, either concluded or sensed that the realization of the American Dream, indeed the survival of the American nation, would depend upon the ability of people of different ethnic origins to learn to live with each other in a mutually satisfactory manner. And to the outside observer of the United States, it is becoming increasingly clear that this thesis is all too true. As a matter of fact, we can go a step further than the survival of the United States — it is now clear that the survival of man will be ultimately determined by the capacity of the various peoples of the world to live together in reasonable harmony.

For Canadians, looking at the problems south of the border has long been a comfortable spectator sport. It is right that American authors should be preoccupied with race and ethnic relations — after all, the Americans brought most of their miseries upon themselves, and the Negro situation in the United States, because of hardcore ignorance and prejudice, has progressed no more than from a frightening atrocity into a frightening mess. In Canada, on the other hand, all has gone relatively well. There are not enough Negroes to create a real disturbance, and the most prominent are generally great athletes or football stars who seem satisfied to function as idols in a nation of the under-exercised. Outside of the occasional claim on real estate in downtown Brantford, Ontario, or the

contention that old worm-eaten treaties entitle them to all the amenities of modern medicine, or slight misunderstandings about what constitutes a murder, Canadian Indians and Eskimos have come up with very little that the R.C.M.P. could not handle. The tourist trade, profitable sale of little birchbark canoes, structural steel construction jobs for the more energetic, and the complete annihilation of the Beothuks of Newfoundland before they could become a problem, have all helped to preserve the national peace of mind. And so far as the Jews are concerned, ever since a pioneer farmer called Abraham, as one story goes, supplied the site for a famous battle near Quebec City, people of Jewish extraction have always seemed to fit quite smoothly into the Canadian scene, if not entirely so into the stock exchanges and the school commissions. Indeed, Jewish writers have made such a disproportionate contribution to what is significant in Canadian Letters that without them the field would be a Barebones' parliament, complete with generous share of Roundheads.

There has been, nevertheless, and there continues to be a great deal of friction in Canada between what are sometimes referred to as the two "founding races" — English-speaking Canadians and French Canadians. Of course, in the strictest anthropological sense the term "race" should not be used to distinguish either of the two major ethnic groups of Canada from the other. So far as I can determine, there is no true racial divergence between French and English Canadians. *Les canadiens*, having come largely from Normandy, Brittany and Picardy, are the result of a mixture of many strains, including the Celts, Germanic tribes such as the Franks, Jutes and Frisians as well as the Norsemen or Normans, not to mention a number of exiled Highland Scots and wandering Irishmen. English-speaking Canadians, strange as it may appear to some, are more or less a blend of exactly the same elements, with a good measure of Norman French blood thrown in besides. The notion of a uniform *mentalité anglo-saxonne*, despite the exclamations in Daniel Johnson's recent book *Egalité ou Indépendance*, is about as valid as the notion that British, Canadian and American beer are identical. Like that other catch-all "the Latin temperament," it is a term far easier to use than to justify, and I strongly suspect that both of these expressions, handy as they may be to resolve the irresolute, are completely meaningless.

The fact, however, that there are no true racial differences between English- and French-speaking Canadians has not prevented the emergence, reflected in Canadian Literature, of the ugly phenomenon known as racism. A set of attitudes which has single-handedly filled the chamber of twentieth-century horrors, racism is defined in the Standard College Dictionary as "an excessive and irrational

belief in or advocacy of the superiority of a given group, people, or nation, usually one's own, on the basis of racial differences having no scientific validity." Racism, then, does not require that there be any real differences of race; it simply requires an irrational belief in the superiority of a given group on the grounds of supposed differences. In Canada, compared to the United States and South Africa, racist attitudes have often been well disguised, of a subtle and covert nature, aroused in many instances by individuals and small groups to exploit a particular situation.

In his poem "Political Meeting," the Montreal poet A. M. Klein put his finger on it brilliantly. The poem concerns a rally addressed by Camillien Houde, the former mayor of Montreal, in the wake of conscription in 1942. I can recall as a small boy witnessing such rallies, and I have always marvelled at the power and detailed accuracy of Klein's description — the absence of the religious brothers, signifying the Church's unsure position, the singing of "Alouette," the *joual*, the clever turn of phrase, the hypnotic force of a skilled orator. Here is how the poems ends:

> Worshipped and loved, their favorite visitor,
> a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets,
> full of wonderful moods, tricks, imitative talk,
>
> he is their idol: like themselves, not handsome,
> not snobbish, not of the *Grande Allée! Un homme!*
> Intimate, informal, he makes bear's compliments
>
> to the ladies; is gallant; and grins;
> goes for the balloon, his opposition, with pins;
> jokes also on himself, speaks of himself
>
> in the third person, slings slang, and winks with folklore;
> and knows now that he has them, kith and kin.
> Calmly, therefore, he begins to speak of war,
>
> praises the virtue of being *Canadien*,
> of being at peace, of faith, of family,
> and suddenly his other voice: *Where are your sons?*
>
> He is tearful, choking tears; but not he
> would blame the clever English; in their place
> he'd do the same; maybe.
>
> Where *are* your sons?
> The whole street wears one face,
> shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises
> the body-odour of race.[1]

BEFORE CONSIDERING the observations made by Canadian writers on racism and cultural identity, however, I wish to examine certain racist ideas which can be found in the personal philosophies of a few Canadian writers themselves. I have tried to limit the examination to certain significant authors, and to those ideas which by virtue of being apparently widespread or especially persistent, continue to have repercussions in our own day. It is necessary, also, to try to distinguish between the conviction of superiority which characterizes racism and simple cases of exaggerated pride in the presumed merits of one's ethnic group.

Among minor writers of English Canada, for instance, there have been many who were carried away by exaggerated pride. One need only glance through Edward Hartley Dewart's *Selections from Canadian Poets* to find choice examples. Here is Charles Sangster, a poet of considerable talent in more sober moments, beginning his "Song for Canada":

> Sons of the race whose sires
> Aroused the martial flame,
> That filled with smiles
> The triune Isles,
> Through all their heights of fame!
>
> With hearts as brave as theirs,
> With hopes as strong and high,
> We'll ne'er disgrace
> The honoured race
> Whose deeds can never die.[2]

More apropos, perhaps, in this time of bilingual cheques and bonused government clerks, are lines such as the following from Pamela Vining's "Canada":

> Forests, whose echoes never had been stirred
> By the sweet music of an English word,
> Where only rang the red-browed hunter's yell,
> And the wolf's howl through the dark sunless dell.[3]

And one could go on and on. But verses such as these merely indicate an overflow of spontaneous patriotism, coloured by a normal enough preference for one's own ethnic culture. There is a profound difference, it seems to me, between this kind of expression and the attitude which can be detected in the work of Susanna Moodie, the English lady who roughed it in the bush — to a certain extent, that

is. For she was seldom reduced so low as to be without servants and a good liquor supply.

Mrs. Moodie was manifestly convinced of the superiority of the particular class of English gentlefolk to which she belonged, and she makes the idea clear in passages such as the following in her book *Roughing It in the Bush*:

> The hand that has long held the sword, and been accustomed to receive implicit obedience from those under its control, is seldom adapted to wield the spade and guide the plough, or try its strength against the stubborn trees of the forest. Nor will such persons submit cheerfully to the saucy familiarity of servants, who, republicans in spirit, think themselves as good as their employers.[4]

Moodie makes the same point many times, always carefully differentiating between "superiors" and "inferiors." She speaks of the "vicious, uneducated barbarians, who form the surplus of over-populated European countries." At one point she observes: "The semi-barbarous Yankee squatters, who had 'left their country for their country's good,' and by whom we were surrounded in our first settlement, detested us . . ." And to this last remark of Susanna Moodie's, one is tempted to reply "No Wonder." In many respects her classification of people is reminiscent of Samuel Richardson in *Sir Charles Grandison*, where he divided his characters into three categories: men, women, and Italians. Only for Moodie the classes would be English gentlemen, English ladies, and barbarians.

Of course, her standards for herself were exceedingly high. Here she is admitting to an "unpardonable weakness":

> In spite of my boasted fortitude — and I think my powers of endurance have been tried to the utmost since my sojourn in this country — the rigour of the climate subdued my proud, independent English spirit, and I actually shamed my womanhood, and cried with the cold. Yes, I ought to blush at confessing, such unpardonable weakness; but I was foolish and inexperienced, and unaccustomed to the yoke.

After having read the works of Susanna Moodie, one is left with the undeniable impression that everybody — Irish, French-Canadian, Scottish, Indian, lowborn English and especially American — who is not of her particular caste has been hopelessly predestined to insignificance, *ipso facto*. Moreover, her attitude, which appears to be essentially unconscious and without malicious intent, led her to remarkable conclusions on occasion. Speaking of the cholera doctor Stephen Ayres, for instance, she comments: "A friend of mine, in this town, has an original portrait of this notable empiric — this man sent from heaven. The face

is rather handsome, but has a keen, designing expression, and is evidently that of an American from its complexion and features."

Now it may appear to some that I have been looking at the writings of Susanna Moodie with a magnifying glass, considering that she did no more than echo the accepted English spirit of her time, but certainly through a magnifying glass is the way Mrs. Moodie consistently looked at herself. I do not deny the merits of her literary achievement — her keen eye for appropriate detail, her ear for dialect, her capacity to capture scenes and moods. Nevertheless, throughout her work, as throughout the works of Ralph Connor, to name one other obvious example, there is always the disconcerting body-odour of race, the undertone of racism. Not the screeching, messianic racism of a Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the man who talked with demons and who sowed the field which Adolf Hitler was to harvest, but something perhaps almost as malignant in the long run, because it is in the form of a deeply ingrained pattern of thought, a conviction which may even be unconsciously held. Furthermore, it is the very conviction which in various guises has haunted and continues to haunt a nation which, if it is going to survive, must perforce develop a *modus vivendi* for people of different ethnic origins.

Moodie herself, it should be pointed out, merely chanted a common tendency of many nations, a tendency which was perhaps an inevitable adjunct to strong cultural identification, a tendency which in most circumstances was probably not of great harm or consequence. What is important to us here is that the Moodie attitude has not died a natural death, but continues to infect the thinking of many English Canadians, and that in the particular circumstances of modern Canada it could be of vital consequence.

It is the kind of attitude, whether conscious or unconscious, which has often thrown up a formidable psychological barrier to satisfactory and harmonious relations between Canada's two major ethnic groups. One becomes aware of it in letters to the editor, in statements by university professors, in articles such as the recent *Chatelaine* feature called "Women of Ontario," in pronouncements of the Canadian Legion, in parliamentary speeches, in the Protestant school boards of the Province of Quebec which objected to the suggestion of the Parent Commission that they integrate with the French Catholic system. For it is well known that the English Protestant system has always been superior to its French-Canadian counterpart, and for obvious reasons.

A NUMBER OF ENGLISH-CANADIAN WRITERS, especially in recent years, have been conscious of the lingering miasma of racism in Canada. They have dramatized and satirized it, moving further and further away from the spirit typified by Susanna Moodie. As Canadian poets have turned from landscapes to social and psychological realities, they have become increasingly sensitive to the false values in established Canadian patterns of thought and have reflected this sensitivity in their poems. Among the more obvious examples are Earle Birney's "Anglosaxon Street", Frank Scott's "The Canadian Social Register", and Ralph Gustafson's "Psalm 23". In several poems by Irving Layton, A. J. M. Smith, or Alfred Purdy, one finds less explicit but equally effective reaction to the Moodie attitude. In the area of prose writing, Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* reveals a tone in striking contrast to that found in Susanna Moodie's work. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Ross's *As For Me and My House*, Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, and especially Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* may be added to the list.

It is of interest to note, incidentally, that whenever there is a confrontation of races or ethnic groups coupled with racist ideas, a variety of myths inevitably springs up. In the United States, there is the well known myth of the extraordinary virility of the Negro, which most probably arose from the fear that the Negro constituted a threat to the supposed purity of the white race. Stressing in its earliest form the idea that the Negro male was possessed of violent, uncontrollable animal passions, it presumably acted as a taboo to protect white women. The cohabiting of white men with Negro women, of course, was always regarded as a special service to genetic improvement.

Now in Canada, one ethnic myth which has developed is that the French-Canadian girl is more highly sexed than her English-speaking compatriot, and this myth, still very much alive, has had a whole complexity of effects. It is difficult to say exactly how such a myth could have taken root. As Gilles Marcotte points out in his *Une Littérature qui se fait*,[5] a series of early French-Canadian novels, seemingly in an attempt to gild the pill of military defeat, presented love affairs between British men and alluring French-Canadian maidens, and in each of these affairs the girl, having reduced her suitor to blubbering incapacity, haughtily refuses to marry him. The best of these novels, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's *Les Anciens Canadiens*, a book rich in fascinating detail about early Canadian life and mores, tells how the handsome Archibald Cameron of Locheill, desperately in love with Blanche d'Haberville since the prewar days when he had

lived in Quebec as a guest of her family, is forced to take part in the defeat of the French regime and consequently loses his true love.

Perhaps the romance theme in novels such as *Les Anciens Canadiens* had something to do with the emergence of the French-Canadian-girl myth. A more probable explanation, however, is racist conviction of the type seen in Susanna Moodie's writing. Since the possibility of ethnic intermixture in colonial Canada almost exclusively involved English men and French-Canadian women, the English women being either here with their husbands or left at home, the myth focused on the threat of the French-Canadian female rather than the male. When, for example, Frances Brooke, in *The History of Emily Montague*, is not ranting about "the mild genius of our religion and laws, and that spirit of industry, enterprize, and commerce, to which we owe all our greatness," she is strongly suggesting through the tone of the letters which make up her novel that French-Canadian girls are abandoned coquettes, more passionate than sensible, with a definite inclination toward seducing the unwary English gentleman. Thus it seems quite plausible that the myth of *la femme fatale canadienne* traces back to the feeling of superiority and female possessiveness of the colonial English ladies.

In addition to the myth just described, there are several others, such as the notion that French Canadians are deficient in business sense, or that Roman Catholicism and the French language are mystically interdependent. These last two are now in a state of decreasing currency and may soon disappear entirely. The sex myth of the French-Canadian girl, however, like the sex myth of the Negro, continues to hold ground because of an intriguing reversal of social perspectives. When these myths emerged, the ascendency of the animal passions was generally held to be the essence of human depravity. But in the last few decades, positions have changed drastically, and now any indication of powerful heterosexual drive, reasonably free from neuroses, perversions and inhibitions, is regarded as a recommendation rather than a condemnation. Consequently, the erstwhile targets of these sex myths have now become the contented guardians. And as the American Negro writer James Baldwin might put it — the chickens, baby, have come home to roost!

TURNING TO THE LITERATURE of French Canada, it must be said at the outset that the kind of racism which has found its way into the works of certain French-Canadian writers is more obtrusive than that in English-Cana-

dian books, sometimes entirely devoid of subtlety. This fact is both a good thing and a bad thing. It is good in that readers have been able to apprehend immediately the position of a particular author and to react accordingly. It is bad in that some have reacted by embracing the racist attitudes extolled. In the case of Lionel Groulx's *L'Appel de la race*, for instance, such distinguished critics as Camille Roy, who was to become Rector of Laval University, Louvigny de Montigny, and René du Roure, Stephen Leacock's old friend, reacted immediately against the thesis presented by Groulx. On the other hand, the influence of Lionel Groulx, through his writings in history and literary history as well as the novel in question, has been immense and remains unbelievably strong. Seldom has a man with such misguided ideas been able to guide so many. Though there *are* some other obvious examples.

L'Appel de la race is the story of a man called Jules de Lantagnac who goes to a classical college, then completes law studies at McGill. He sets up practice in Ottawa and manages to build a clientele of prosperous businessmen. Eventually he marries an English-Canadian girl called Maud Fletcher, after she has changed her religion. They have four children — Wolfred, Nellie, Virginia and William — who, naturally enough, grow up speaking the language of their mother, the boys eventually attending the Jesuit's Loyola College in Montreal, and life for a time is peaceful, prosperous and pleasant for everyone. But then Jules de Lantagnac visits some relatives back in Quebec, and while there he hears *l'appel de la race*. He becomes possessed of guilt feelings about having betrayed his ancestry. Upon his return to Ottawa, he begins regular visits to an Oblate priest, Father Fabien, who becomes his personal confessor. He also begins to practice French again, to teach it to his children, and he tries to create in them a sense of their French heritage.

The rest of the book presents a number of startling developments. Jules is elected to parliament and becomes entangled in the controversy over Bill 17, an unfortunate piece of legislation pertaining to the teaching of French in Ontario schools. Lantagnac is asked to speak against the bill in parliament, and for reasons that are not made clear his wife Maud decides that if he does make the speech, she will leave him. Lantagnac, accordingly, must choose between his immediate family and his ancestral loyalty. Egged on by Father Fabien, he decides in favour of his ancestors and makes the speech. Then unlike those legions of women who periodically threaten to leave their husbands, Maud sticks to her word, packs her bags and gets out. Nellie and William decide to go with her, while Wolfred and Virginia stay with the old man. Virginia finds herself moved to enter a con-

vent, and Wolfred changes his name to André, which is understandable enough under any circumstances.

Now we need not be concerned with the intricacies of the plot of *L'Appel de la race*, nor with the political implications. I, for one, agree with Lionel Groulx that the treatment of French Canadians in school systems outside of Quebec has often been an injustice, brought about mainly by an overdose of the Susanna Moodie creed. What does concern us here, however, is the authorial comment on race contained in Groulx's novel.

Mason Wade, the American historian of French Canada, has observed that "Groulx is a disciple of the historical school of the Count de Gobineau," and "was greatly affected during his studies in Switzerland and France by the anti-democratic ideas of Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès."[6] Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, of course, is the man who influenced Houston Stewart Chamberlain and whose racist theories prepared the way for Fascist ideology. Gobineau himself, it would appear, never entertained the thought of genocide, but he was greatly instrumental in bringing about that cruel, ironic twist of fate which caused the Jews, whose ancestors invented racism, to become victims of the unspeakable perversions and atrocities which racist theories can so easily promote.

In *L'Appel de la race*, Groulx actually quotes from Barrès and from Dr. Gustave Le Bon's *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, published in 1894. Le Bon, a French doctor and sociologist who died in 1931, published some 17 volumes over a period of fifty years. The passage from his work cited by Groulx is as follows:

> Between two superior races as close to each other as the English and Germans of America, crossbreeding may be an element of progress. But it always constitutes an element of degeneration when the races, even if superior, are too dissimilar.
>
> To interbreed two peoples is to change at the same time their physical and mental constitutions . . . Thus at the beginning the personality remains very irresolute and feeble, and it requires a long accumulation of hereditary traits to become established. The first effect of interbreeding between different races is to destroy the racial soul, that is to say the complex of ideas and common sentiments which is the strength of a people, and without which there can be neither a nation not a homeland . . . It is therefore right that all those peoples who have attained a high degree of civilization have carefully avoided mixing with foreigners.[7]

Lionel Groulx's novel is essentially an application of these ideas, granting the premise that French and English Canadians are too dissimilar to be successfully crossbred, to the situation in Canada. In a conversation with Lantagnac, Father Fabien says:

> Who knows if our former Canadian aristocracy did not owe its decadence to the mixture of bloods which it accepted too readily, and too often actually sought after. Certainly a psychologist would find it of great interest to observe the descendants of that class. Does it not seem to you, my friend, that there is a good deal of trouble and silly anarchy in the past of these old families? How do you explain the delirium, the madness with which the offspring of these noblemen have thrown themselves into dishonor and ruin?[8]

Frantic condemnation of mixed marriages, meaning primarily those between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, is splashed throughout the pages of *L'Appel de la race*. Groulx speaks of the "cerebral disorder, the psychological dilution" which results from such ignoble combinations. He is careful to point out, incidentally, that the English are a "superior race" along with the French, but the true texture of his thought comes to the fore in an illuminating manner when he has Lantagnac make the following observations on his four children, to whom he is giving lessons in French:

> Lantagnac had only distantly followed the education of his sons and daughters. He knew the basic qualities of their temperaments, but little or nothing about their essential characters. Their success having always been assured by a good measure of intelligence, he had never bothered to think more about them. But now he was discovering in two of his pupils a kind of unhealthy imprecision, a disorder of the thought, an incoherence of the intellect which he did not fully grasp. It was a sort of incapacity to follow a line of reasoning to a conclusion, to concentrate diverse impressions or slightly complex ideas around a central point. It was as if they had in them two souls, two warring spirits which alternately dominated. And strange to say, this mental dualism manifested itself especially in William and Nellie, the two who were predominantly of the well defined type of the Fletchers. Whereas Wolfred and Virginia almost exclusively resembled the French race, with the fine, bronzed features of the Lantagnacs and the equilibrium of body proportions, the older daughter and younger son, in contrast, with their blond hair and pale complexions, their lanky and somewhat thread-shaped builds, strikingly resembled their mother.[9]

It does not seem to have occurred to Canon Groulx that William and Nellie were hardly the products of virgin birth, that they had as much redeeming Lantagnac blood in them as Wolfred and Virginia. He takes an almost diabolical delight in describing the younger son, William. At another point in the story he says:

> William remained always the same, with his stubborn and choleric spirit. As he grew older the Saxon traits became stronger in his face and long adolescent's body.

> The set of his forehead became more rigid, the pout of his lips more arrogant, and one nearly always saw him walking along with his neck arched and his fists half closed, like a rugby player.[10]

With regard to "Saxon traits," by the way, there is some difference of emphasis between Lionel Groulx and Susanna Moodie, as might be expected. Describing her son Donald, Mrs. Moodie says that he had been nicknamed "Cedric the Saxon; and he well suited the name, with his frank, honest disposition, and large, loving, blue eyes." As they say in French, *chacun son goût.*

In the matter of "superior races," then, it is clear that Groulx felt some races to be more superior than others. As a matter of fact, the good canon's most bitter invective is reserved for the Irish Roman Catholics, whom he accuses of serving their Anglo-Saxon masters with a "slave mind." For a historian, incidentally, Lionel Groulx was on many occasions superbly indifferent to history — no "slave mind" his. He seemed to feel so strongly about what he calls "les affinités profondes" between French Canadians and Catholicism, that one wonders if he would include the Pope as a legitimate believer.

But it will serve no good purpose to explore *L'Appel de la race* further. The book is a racist, idiosyncrasized morality play, lacking even the merits of a good description or a clever turn of phrase. Outside of a small, privately published treatise by Pierre-Paul Rioux called *L'Espoir du Canada français* and the various pamphlets written by Adrien Arcand, former leader of the former Quebec Nazi Party, there is nothing else I know of in Canadian Literature that is quite in the same category. A hint of racism occurs in Félix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud maître-draveur,* but Savard is too sentimental to be vicious.

So much, then, for the racist ideas in English-Canadian and French-Canadian Literature. If the expression of these ideas is stronger and more bitter on the French-Canadian side, the difference in degree is no doubt explained by the fact that French Canadians have long felt themselves to be fighting for survival. Susanna Moodie spoke from a position of security; Lionel Groulx had his back against the wall. It is therefore partly understandable that the attitudes of Groulx and his followers should have gone to extremes, especially when one considers that they are reactions to similar attitudes in a presumed opposing camp. Which, of course, is the ominous aspect of racist tendencies in a society of mixed ethnic groups — they inevitably produce a reaction, which inevitably results in a setback for the cause of tolerance and compatibility. Or to use a phrase which would perhaps be more meaningful for the Reverend Canon Groulx, the cause of Christian brotherhood.

THE REAL PURPOSE of this study, however, is to provide something more than a display of the dirty linen of Canadian Literature. When a nation is composed of two major cultural groups, with, as Earle Birney aptly put it, "parents unmarried and living abroad," and when each of these groups is susceptible to the very notions most certain to create misunderstanding and hatred, can a complete breakdown of relations be avoided? Assuming that we want to preserve this single nation, and I think that we have a commitment to do so, a challenge to our resources of humanity and understanding, and a chance to prove a vital principle to the world — assuming that we want to preserve the union, is there any way to solve the disease of national schizophrenia? I believe there is, and I think that certain Canadian writers have already provided the diagnosis and treatment.

But before we have a look at these writers, it is necessary to determine exactly what is meant by the terms culture and cultural identity. For clearly the major concern of French Canadians such as Lionel Groulx, and the motivating force behind Quebec separatism, is the avowed desire to preserve an established cultural identity; while for English Canadians the big problem of recent years, a problem which has been discussed so often that it is becoming a national neurosis, is to discover whether such an identity actually exists.

The famed comparative ethologist Konrad Lorenz, in his latest book, called *On Aggression*, offers an important insight into the nature of culture. In answer to his own question, "What is culture?" he says:

> A system of historically developed social norms and rites which are passed on from generation to generation because emotionally they are felt to be values. What is a value? Obviously, normal and healthy people are able to appreciate something as a high value for which to live and, if necessary, to die, for no other reason than that it was evolved in cultural ritualization and handed down to them by a revered elder. Is, then, a value only defined as the object on which our instinctive urge to preserve and defend traditional social norms has become fixated? Primarily and in the early stages of cultural development this undoubtedly was the case. The obvious advantages of loyal adherence to tradition must have exerted a considerable selection pressure. However, the greatest loyalty and obedience to culturally ritualized norms of behaviour must not be mistaken for responsible morality. Even at their best they are only functionally analogous to behaviour controlled by rational responsibility.[11]

To people like Susanna Moodie, Frances Brooke and Lionel Groulx, this simple, scientific explanation by Konrad Lorenz would be the blackest of heresies

against all that is noble, pure and praiseworthy in human experience. Yet, what Lorenz says is unquestionably, indeed startlingly true. Cultural identification is no more and no less than an emotional involvement, an infatuation if you will, with a particular set of social norms and rites. And in the majority of cases, what are thought of as values are merely the arbitrary "sweet nothings" of an ethnic love affair. It must be pointed out, however, that because cultural identification is not attended by bolts of lightning and a voice from the heavens, it is none the less a necessary condition for the average human being, and particularly for the creative writer. It is as necessary as emotional involvement with other human beings is necessary for the normal person. It provides the framework, the pattern of attitudes and approaches to life which permit the individual to begin functioning meaningfully. But as Konrad Lorenz explains, there is the danger that cultural identification will be confused with rational responsibility, that a person will hold those norms which are sanctioned by his own culture to be absolute moral principles. And because of the high emotional element involved, any attempt to re-establish a proper perspective is like trying to explain reality to a lovesick adolescent.

Taking into account these observations on the significance of culture, one must come to the following conclusion: Since the worth of any cultural identity resides in its usefulness in permitting individuals to function meaningfully, to adapt to the social and psychological realities of a particular time and place, then it is a mistake to think that a culture ought to be preserved simply because it exists. Fanatic devotion, such as that of Lionel Groulx, to any established culture for its own sake can become childish irresponsibility. Cultures must evolve with changing patterns of life. Those aspects of any culture which become obsolete, which become impediments rather than aids to the individual in his struggle to achieve a measure of success and happiness, should not be preserved. Let them enter the realm of nostalgia; let them become art forms along with Marshall McLuhan's superseded media. For when it so happens that a particular cultural mystique is prevented from evolving to fit with reality, the people who are inadvertently engulfed by that mystique will suffer undue anxiety and frustration. Lorenz describes in detail the situation of the Ute Indians in the U.S.A., for instance, whose apparatus of cultural identity has not undergone sufficient adjustment to the modern American way of life. These Indians suffer more frequently from neuroses than any other human group, says Lorenz. But even more fascinating is the fact that the Ute Indians have a rate of automobile accidents which "exceeds that of any other car-driving human group." Now anyone who has had occasion to

drive a car in Quebec Province does not have to be told that the rate of automobile accidents there is not far behind that of the Ute Indians.[12] And anyone who has read Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode*, or Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table*, or any of a dozen other recent French-Canadian novels, will immediately appreciate how involvement with cultural elements which are maladjusted to reality can produce frustration and despair.

Many French Canadians, of course, have long been aware that the established ethnic culture of French Canada, with its emphasis on unwavering continuity and its isolationist tendencies, represents an obstacle to progress in a number of fields, including industrialization and education. But one does not erase an emotional involvement in a day or two, as the Lesage government found out in the last provincial election. If, however, the culture of French Canada has up to now hindered the group's adaptation to the Twentieth Century, then the culture of English Canada has been equally effective in hindering that group's adaptation to the fact of French Canada. Distinguished English-Canadian scholars are still descanting upon what was guaranteed or not guaranteed by the British North America Act, as if that mattered a damn when there are social realities to face. And the question remains — what, if anything, can we conclude about all this?

I mentioned earlier that certain works of Canadian Literature offer insight into the problem of ethnic groups and cultural identity. In particular, there are Yves Thériault's *Aaron*, and Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*. The first of these novels, *Aaron*, does not in fact deal with relations between French and English Canadians; the story is about a Jewish boy in Montreal. It is of interest to note, moreover, that almost all the recent French-Canadian novels which discuss relations between ethnic groups have involved Jewish characters. These novels include Claire Martin's *Quand j'aurai payé ton visage*, Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table*, Robert Goulet's *Charivari*, Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*, and the book which nearly won France's Prix Goncourt, Réjean Ducharme's *L'Avalée des avalés*. It is evident, however, that in each of these novels the Jewish figure operates as a symbol with which the French Canadian can identify, and that in effect the authors are more or less vicariously exploring the situation of the French-speaking Canadian in North America.

In THERIAULT's *Aaron*, three possible approaches to culture and cultural identity are outlined. First there is the position of Aaron's grandfather and guardian, Moishe, who sticks to every detail of the Orthodox Jewish

culture, ready to endure every inconvenience, refusing to adapt in any way, satisfied to remain poor and despised by many of those in the community around him. Secondly, there is the attitude adopted by Viedna, the beautiful Jewish girl whom young Aaron loved and lost. She decides that the solution to the problem of racial discrimination is simple — one becomes assimilated to another ethnic group. When Aaron meets her again after a long separation and calls her by name, she corrects him. "Je ne m'appelle plus Viedna. Je m'appelle Cécile," she says. Then she goes on to explain:

> You remember I spoke to you about it, Aaron. The only condition of survival is this — stop being Jewish. The Jew can accomplish anything, provided he is no longer Jewish. Consequently we . . . we are French, you see! My father is pulling certain strings to obtain French citizenship for us.[13]

The third position is that initially decided upon by Aaron himself. He will continue to think of himself as a Jew, he will not try to be what he is not. At the same time, he does not wish to follow in his grandfather Moishe's footsteps. He wants to abandon the isolationist aspects of Judaism and to adapt to the society in which he finds himself. Eventually, however, before throwing Aaron out of the house, Moishe manages to make him feel such a painful sense of guilt that the boy reacts desperately. At the end of the story the reader is told that Aaron has changed his name and is left to speculate what will become of him.

Of the three attitudes to cultural identity presented by Thériault, clearly the author, despite his understanding and admiration of it, is not recommending the standpoint of Moishe, for whom there is no question of adjustment to social realities. Governed by a multitude of restrictions and taboos, the leftovers of adjustment to the realities of an age more than two thousand years in the past, subjected to constant pressures and inconvience, Moishe's position invites frustration and tragedy. This point is made clear in other Canadian novels besides *Aaron*. One thinks immediately of Abraham in Adele Wiseman's gripping story *The Sacrifice*, or of the Zeyda in Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and *Son of a Smaller Hero*, or the parallel examples of Father Beaubien and the Westmount group in Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*. The Moishe attitude, then, is that a culture must be preserved simply because it is there. Generally, this attitude is reinforced by a great super-structure of rites, traditions and religious dogma within the culture itself, and of course, it is the prime cause and sustenance of racist philosophy.

The Moishe attitude thus coincides in essence with the position of Lionel

Groulx and the various extremists of English Canada; and when it happens that any culture is preserved unchanged beyond the point of usefulness, then the continuity must be partly attributed to the Moishe way of thinking. I say partly attributed because, as happened in the case of Aaron, excessive coercion to embrace an ideology which is too prohibitive, too far removed from actuality, can very often drive a person to total rejection of it. Or as happened with the hundreds of thousands of French Canadians who emigrated to New England, when a static and obsolescent set of values is confronted by a strong, dynamic culture, more favourable to the self-realization of the individual, the result will be complete assimilation into the new culture within two or three generations. Thus when a static culture is maintained without change, the Moishe-Groulx attitude is only partly responsible. Of greater significance is what can perhaps be called the facility for assimilation of surrounding ethnic groups. Ironic as it may seem, the English-Canadian attitude typified by Susanna Moodie, with its exclusiveness and its tendency since the days of Thomas Haliburton to shun the dynamic, has probably done more to preserve French-Canadian culture in North America than the attitude exemplified by Lionel Groulx.

Which brings us to Thériault's second approach to cultural identity, that of Viedna-Cécile. The tone of *Aaron* strongly suggests that the author does not favour Viedna-Cécile's solution. She has decided to become completely assimilated; and to do so she is prepared to deny her true identity. The first weakness in this approach is that it may not work, and Viedna-Cécile will be caught in a ethnic no-man's land. In another of his poignant short poems, A. M. Klein captures the idea precisely:

> Now we will suffer loss of memory:
> We will forget the things we must eschew.
> We will eat ham, despite our tribe's tabu,
> Ham buttered . . . and on fast days . . . publicly . . .
> Null, then, and void, the kike nativity.
> Our family albums we will hide from view.
> Ourselves, we'll do what all pretenders do,
> And like the ethnics mightily strive to be.
> Our recompense? . . . Emancipation-day!
> We will find friend where once we found but foe.
> Impugning epithets will glance astray.
> To gentile parties we will proudly go;
> And Christians, anecdoting us, will say:
> "Mr. and Mrs. Klein — the Jews, you know. . . ." [14]

The novel *Under the Ribs of Death*, by John Marlyn, provides a vivid dramatization of the same idea. Sandor Hunyadi is ashamed of his Hungarian cultural identity, and he attempts to submerge it completely. He changes his name to Alex Hunter. Eventually, however, in a scene reminiscent of Anton Chekhov, he finds himself alone staring at a beetle; he has not been accepted into the English-Canadian establishment, and he is no longer able to join even the circle of his immediate family. Noah, in Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero*, has a similar experience.

Assimilation, evidently, is a more complicated process than one would suspect. As I intimated earlier, it can take place involuntarily when a static culture encounters a dynamic one. Yet, as Thériault, Klein, Marlyn and a number of other writers make clear, when an individual consciously sets out to become assimilated by another ethnic group, the consequences most likely will be isolation and demoralizing loss of self-respect. A person cannot simply dismiss all the habits and associations which result from emotional involvement with a culture. Moreover, the great majority of people, it seems, would never dream of attempting to do so. Assimilation is like romantic love — it cannot be charted or forced; if it is going to happen, it will take its own natural course.

Thériault's third approach to cultural identity, that which Aaron first considers adopting, is both more simple and more complex than the other two, but to my mind it is the only intelligent and legitimate approach. It is a course somewhere in between blind devotion and total rejection, and it is motivated by the normal human desire for self-realization. In effect, it is an attempt by the individual to adapt to the social realities in which he finds himself without denying his identity. But he must of necessity abandon those aspects of his ethnic culture — the taboos, the racist notions of purity and superiority, the inculcated pseudo-religious duty to protect and preserve traditions — which interfere with accommodation to a broad community of human beings.

In other words, the individual must treat culture not as an untouchable mystical force, but as a set of social norms which permit him to be himself, to be part of a special community, and at the same time to live with people who are not of his special community. His self-respect must depend upon himself and his personal achievements rather than upon identification with a culture, and once he comes to that realization he will regard other people accordingly. Reversing the decision of Jules Lantagnac in *L'Appel de la Race*, he must put his natural inclinations, his own happiness and that of his dependents, before any duty to pro-

tect a cultural mystique. For surely a culture is there to serve people rather than people to serve a culture.

In both *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes*, Hugh MacLennan, the author who has probably examined the problem of Canadian cultural identities more closely than any other, provides a strong tonal endorsement for our third approach. The characters Geoffrey Wain, Marius, Athanase Tallard, Huntly McQueen and Father Beaubien are all warped one way or another by their feelings of obligation to an ethnic ideology. Each one is prevented from obeying his natural inclinations. Wain and McQueen are materially successful, but from the human point of view they are grotesques, both given to ruthlessness disguised as duty, Wain finding human contact only in the paid-for embrace of his pitiful little mistress and McQueen sharing his dream mansion on the mountain with a Persian cat and a photograph of his mother. Marius and Father Beaubien stew in their own venom, while old Tallard re-enacts a Greek tragedy. On the other hand, Wain's daughter Penny and her boyfriend Neil free themselves to adjust to life abandoning the prejudices of the old Halifax society. Yardley, Paul and Heather in *Two Solitudes* also insist upon being themselves rather than the serving vessels of a cultural ideology. And it is clear that Hugh MacLennan presents their attitude as the only acceptable approach to cultural identity in Canada.

But as illustrated in *Two Solitudes* as well as in *Aaron* and *Son of a Smaller Hero*, even for those who see culture in the proper light, there is one major obstacle to uneventful and natural implementation of the third approach — the accusation of being a traitor to one's ethnic group. Moreover, as Lionel Groulx contends in *L'Appel de la race*, once the barrier is lowered just a bit, once the exclusiveness is dropped, total assimilation is sure to follow sooner or later. My answer to Groulx is simply this: whenever there is danger of an ethnic culture disappearing, then there is something seriously wrong with it, and it is ready for the museum case and the social history textbooks. When, to use the Lorenz phrase, a set of social norms and rites are impediments rather than aids to the individual, then it is time for them to be either modified or permitted to die.

In the case of French-Canadian culture, incidentally, the influence of Groulx and his disciples notwithstanding, modification is indeed beginning to take place. From all appearances, the cultural ideology of French Canada is becoming less static, stronger and more practical. It is being put to the

test of twentieth-century reality, and the revered traditions *du bon vieux temps* — huge families, classical college education for the elite, distrust of everything foreign and especially of France, pea soup instead of chicken in the pot, the parish priest as a unique link with absolute truth — these traditions have already gone the way of the snows of yesteryear. There is now a strong possibility, indeed a probability, that French Canada, released from the duty of preserving an obsolescent status quo, will emerge with a viable, distinctive and highly dynamic new cultural identity. The phenomenon is reflected in the vigour and variety of recent literary production, in the works of Bessette, Godbout, Major, Martin, Blais, Aquin, Ducharme and a number of others, and especially in such novels as Jean Simard's *Mon Fils pourtant heureux* and Richard Joly's *Le Visage de l'attente*, where the customs of the good old days are significantly treated as subject matter for nostalgia rather than patterns for modern living.

Some of these authors, as I pointed out earlier, also dramatize the frustration and anxiety which are in large part the lingering effects of the old static culture. For the influence of the philosophy of Lionel Groulx can no doubt be more accurately calculated in automobiles wrapped around trees at a hundred miles an hour on antique roads, than in genuine French-Canadian accomplishments. But undoubtedly the most fascinating aspect of the emerging new cultural identity of French Canada is that it may well replace the old group inferiority complex by a sense of confidence, which, coupled with the right attitudes on the part of English Canadians, could lead to a highly satisfactory *modus vivendi* in Canada.

It would appear that attitudes in English-speaking Canada are also being modified. Whereas the racism of French Canada simply perpetuated the vicious circle of racist action and reaction, producing only antipathy, Quebec's current "quiet revolution" has aroused a great deal of interest and sympathy. The changes taking place in English Canada are, of course, not quite so dramatic. Having never been homogeneous in the first place, and having always been quite unavoidably affected by the culture of the United States, an awareness of which has too often led to the neurotic pointlessness of anti-Americanism, the English-speaking elements of the Canadian population are now searching for the kind of cultural distinction French Canadians have always had. And ironically enough, if there is indeed the possibility that one of the major ethnic groups of Canada is eventually going to be assimilated by the other, it could well be the new French-Canadian cultural identity which comes out on top. One need only witness the recent frantic rush among English-speaking businessmen in Quebec and else-

where for courses in French conversation, to realize that such a speculation is not entirely groundless.

Whatever might come to pass in the far distant future, however, need not concern us here. Free from stunting racist philosophy, this nation will grow in the natural way that it should, adapting to the exigencies of each successive age. Canada may always have two principal ethnic groups and a variety of other smaller groups, but what all these groups already have in common has in fact created a distinctive, all-embracing Canadian mystique, something independent of and transcending the separate ethnic identities. For as I pointed out in a previous study,[15] it can be shown that the major literary works of both English and French Canada share a common spectrum of basic themes.

The problem of ethnic relations, on the other hand, as we observed at the very beginning of this analysis, has so far never been a basic theme of Canadian Literature. And perhaps this fact is a good omen. It can be said, nevertheless, that certain Canadian writers have provided insight into the subject of ethnic co-existence. As Susanna Moodie, Lionel Groulx, John Marlyn, Hugh MacLennan, A. M. Klein and Yves Thériault each in his own way makes clear, with regard to cultural identity both fanatical devotion and total rejection are negative attitudes, tending to foster racism, hatred, frustration, isolation or needless discord. These attitudes have existed and continue to exist in Canada, but there are indications, reflected in the more recent of the works examined, that as a nation we are steadily evolving away from the limitations of Lionel Groulx and Susanna Moodie. We are beginning to comprehend the significance of the Rilke lines quoted by Hugh MacLennan in *Two Solitudes* that "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch and greet each other." We are rightly not about to lose our separate cultural identities, but we are beginning to realize that the value of any ethnic culture in a nation such as ours can never depend upon its power to isolate people from one another, that Canadian consciousness can be a good deal more than, to use MacLennan's own phrase, "race-memories lonely in great spaces."

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Canadian Anthology*, ed. C. F. Klinck and R. E. Watters (Toronto), pp. 392-393.
[2] *Selections from Canadian Poets* (Montreal, 1864), p. 106.
[3] Dewart, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[4] *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto, 1923), pp. xviii-xix.
[5] *Une Littérature qui se fait* (Montréal, 1962), p. 15.
[6] *The French-Canadian Outlook* (New York, 1946), p. 124.

[7] Cited in *L'Appel de la race* (Montréal, 1962), p. 131.
[8] Groulx, pp. 130-131.
[9] Groulx, p. 130.
[10] Groulx, p. 168.
[11] *On Aggression*, trans. Marjorie Latzke (London, 1966), p. 236.
[12] Although I have been unable to obtain exact statistics pertaining to the various regions of Canada, Insurance company officials have assured me that accident rates in Quebec, especially in the Chicoutimi area, have always been significantly higher than elsewhere.
[13] *Aaron* (Montréal, 1965), p. 143.
[14] *Canadian Anthology*, p. 383.
[15] "Twin Solitudes," *Canadian Literature*, No. 31 (Winter, 1967), pp. 5-24.