

# THE SLEEPING GIANT

*Or the Uncreated Conscience  
of the Race*

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Neither capons nor pullets nor hens  
Can wake the sun and the world;  
Only the prophets of the Old Testament,  
Huge old cocks, all speckled and barred,  
Their wings like the ragged pages of sermons,  
Only they from their roosts in the henhouse  
Can rouse the bread from its oven sleep,  
Raise the smoke from the haunted chimneys.  
James Reaney, "The Horn".

**M**ANY VOICES now agree that our chimneys are haunted. Mr. Brian Stock, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Nov. 1964), argues that he cannot be accused of betraying Canada by leaving it; on the contrary, Canada has betrayed him by failing to provide him with a sense of identity, a sense of *patria*. "The trouble with you Canadians," says M. Pierre Bourgault, President of the R.I.N., "is you have no identification with your country." Earle Birney begins a poem, "Once upon a colony/ there was a land that was/ almost a real/ country called Canada." Elsewhere he tells us, "It is by our lack of ghosts we're haunted." Leonard Cohen in *The Favourite Game* brings us full circle back to Mr. Stock when he writes, "Some say that no one ever leaves Montreal, for that city, like Canada itself, is designed to preserve the past, a past that happened somewhere else." In the latest issue of *Cité Libre* (Mai-Juin 1965) André Rossinger presents

a very similar analysis of the Canadian mentality as it has developed historically, and he concludes his discussion of Canada's present situation by saying categorically, "Le Canada n'a que deux choix: ou grandir ou mourir." It must either grow up or die.

A small but growing line of criticism is concerned to comment on the haunted character of the life reflected in Canadian literature. It is represented by W. P. Wilgar's "Poetry and the Divided Mind in Canada" (1944), Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow" (1960), and most recently T. E. Farley's thesis submitted at Carleton University, *Love and Death in Canadian Poetry*.

Whether they look at the poetry or the novel they uncover a picture of irresolution, of isolation and frustration, of exile. All suggest that Canadians have developed a kind of cultural schizophrenia, a division between their conscious aspirations and their unconscious convictions which undermines their lives and leads to the development of a profoundly negative outlook.

For example, Mr. Farley's reading of English-Canadian poetry presents us with a world in which the past is to be preserved while the future is to be resisted; in which intellect and will must rule over all passion and spontaneous impulse; in which, even so, human ideals, human loyalties, and love itself are constantly betrayed; in which man is burdened by a sense of guilt, and God, if he appears, becomes a God of Vengeance rather than a God of Love; in which frequent symbols of vitality and abundance, such as the sun and the sea, become more often symbols of paralysis and death, the Medusa sun, the capacious tombs of the sea. Death alone is both triumphant and final. English-Canadian poetry is a poetry of exile, increasingly negative to the point of being neurotic.

This view has been "suppressed, officially denied." So far I have not heard that Mr. Farley has been shot, "as a precautionary measure." Still, whatever the weaknesses of Mr. Farley's thesis, the point of view which he presents is not to be easily dismissed. It is an extreme development of Mr. Wilgar's earlier essay. It comprehends or confirms in the poetry what Mr. Tallman has observed in the novel. And it is supported by the comments of Mr. Stock, Mr. Rossinger, and others quite outside the literary universe.

At any rate, it is clear that a number of critics have been able to characterize Canadian literature as essentially negative, even neurotic, and that they have suggested that this negative character reflects the absence of a positive national myth or sense of identity. As Mr. Wilgar would put it, it reflects "the inability of the Canadian to decide what he is or, more dangerous, what he wants to be."

My point is not that this view is wrong, but that it is a partial view. A closer

study of Canadian literature reveals both positive and negative characteristics; more especially it reveals not only the anxiety which results from the lack of any clearly defined identity, but also, and sometimes simultaneously, a confidence that such an identity exists and is to be realized. In a moment I would like to illustrate how this duality reveals itself in a number of recurring images in Canadian literature. But first I would like to suggest a general way of looking at Canadian literature which would allow us to acknowledge the many negative characteristics and yet maintain that the literature has a basically positive character.

If we were looking for a single large or archetypal pattern in terms of which Canadian literature could be placed in perspective, the pattern of the Old Testament might suit us best. It is a pattern that would comprehend the critical view so far presented but that would also allow us to modify that view. For if the world of Canadian literature is a kind of Old Testament world, if the literature to date is a kind of Old Testament of Canadian literature, we can say that it is finally no more negative and no more neurotic than the Old Testament of the Bible. And we can suggest that the poets and novelists who produced this literature are not simply the advanced victims of a national neurosis, but also the prophets of the Old Testament who can raise the smoke from our haunted chimneys.

If the world of Canadian literature is an Old Testament world, it is a world of Adam separated from his Creator and cast out of Eden to wander in the wilderness. It is a world of the scattered tribes of Israel, in exile from the Old Kingdom and not yet restored to the New, in bondage to foreign powers, aliens in their own land, tied to the law of the fathers from which their hearts tend nonetheless continually to turn away. It is a world of angry patriarchs and rebellious children, and of the prophets of the wrath of God. It is a world in which life in all its fullness remains distinctly a promise rather than an actuality. Its prophets go into the desert to listen to the still small voice, to wrestle with the angel, or to discover the mountain of God, the Sinai, Ararat, or Eden from which a Moses, Noah, or New Adam shall bring down the word and reveal the new order of the world. It is an Old Testament world which implies, sometimes without much hope, sometimes with great confidence, its completion in the New.

That Canadian history bears some resemblance to this Old Testament archetype is, I think, self-evident. Were there time, a few specific illustrations could be given to show that the world of Canadian literature is often a world of scattered tribes and of prophets of the wrath of God. Both Mr. Farley and Mr. Tallman make clear that it is often a world of exile and isolation, of guilt and conflict,

a world in which the jealous God of the Old Testament is very much at home.

For the present, however, I would like to examine a number of images which are quite clearly related to this Old Testament archetype and which illustrate the point that Canadian literature exhibits not only a sense of exile, of alienation from a vital community, but also a sense of expectation, of restoration to a vital community. Here we find the exiled Old Adam. Here we also find the sleeping Adam or dreaming Adam, who is a somewhat different figure. He is the sleeping giant, the major man, or, if you like, the personification of a world order, lost or as yet undiscovered. If there is a Canadian identity as yet unrealized, he is it. He embodies what James Joyce called the uncreated conscience of the race. Associated with this figure are the images of the Ark and of the Mountain, also potential symbols of a world order. Basically, then, the images which I propose to examine are these three, the images of Adam, Ark and Mountain. They appear in a variety of forms throughout Canadian literature, with varying degrees of positive and negative feeling, and reveal in a purely formal or archetypal manner something of the drama of the uncreated conscience of the race.

I WOULD LIKE to begin with an example from a fairly contemporary poem and then, with the poetry of Jay Macpherson as a guide, look at a number of variations as they appear throughout the poetry. Finally, I would like to look at two examples of this imagery as it appears in the novel.

The images of Adam, Ark, and Mountain are practically all announced, if we include the title, in Margaret Avison's poem "The One Ship Beached on One Far Distant Shore."

We sprawl abandoned into disbelief  
 And feel the pivot-picture of old Adam  
 On the first hill that ever was, alone,  
 And see the hard earth seeded with sharp snow  
 And dream that history is done.

Here we are placed in exile. Our pivot-picture is that of Adam, once the major man at home in Eden but now cast out in the wilderness. In moments of despair (or perhaps of rational clarity) we dream that history is done, that our exile from a unified world, from a universal spiritual community in any traditional sense, is permanent. The one ship, the ark of life, is beached on some other shore,

and the first hill that ever was, the World Mountain and seat of Eden, is seeded with barren snow.

This is the negative form of the image. The same general image reappears in other contexts and, as we shall see, with only slight modification, takes on a much more positive character.

Jay Macpherson's book *The Boatman* provides us with a kind of skeleton key to the equations and permutations into which these images may enter. With "Eve in Reflection" we begin, as in Miss Avison's poem, with an image of exile. Adam and Eve have been cast out of the garden, which is here symbolized by Eve's own reflection, "the lost girl under the sea." And while Eve, "the mother of all living," lies contemplating her image locked behind the mirror of ocean, Adam wanders alone.

The adored face is lost from sight,  
Marred in the whelming tide of blood,  
And Adam walks in the cold night,  
Wilderness, waste wood.

The image of the garden, nature unified and restored to community with God and man, becomes in the fallen world a mirror image, a world locked behind glass, frozen in ice, or drowned in the sea. Interestingly, Eve, in some sense, tends to be locked in, Adam out. The garden is either unattainable or becomes a travesty of itself as the garden of the isolated ego, the garden of the little king as opposed to the garden of God, or the big king. This is Miss Macpherson's "Garden of the Fall."

The garden where the little king  
Contemplates his loves in stone,  
Breathless, branching in a ring,  
All for his delight alone. . . .

These negative images of exile appear elsewhere in more or less obvious form. James Reaney's "The Katzenjammer Kids" and "The School Globe" both present us with Edens from which the speaker has been locked out. Instead of the happy paper world of the school globe, he has inherited "The great sad real one/ That's filled/ Not with a child's remembered and pleasant skies/ But with blood, pus, horror, death, stepmothers and lies."

In the strange poem "Arras" by P. K. Page and in Phyllis Webb's poem "Marvell's Garden", we are presented with gardens of the fall where the speakers

have been locked in. As Miss Page says, "No one joins those figures on the arras." And of her version of Marvell's *Garden* Miss Webb concludes:

And I have gone walking slowly in  
his garden of necessity  
leaving brothers, lovers, Christ  
outside my walls  
where they have wept without  
and I within.

More distant in time and in their connection with the Old Testament archetypes are certain images in the poetry of Roberts and Lampman. Roberts' poetry reveals a progressive withdrawal or deepening sense of exile, and though such poems as "The Brook in February" or "Ice" are ostensibly no more than occasional descriptive pieces, I would suggest that they are also symbolic and that here again we find the image of the frozen garden from which man has been expelled. For example, the poem "Ice":

When Winter scourged the meadow and the hill  
And in the withered leafage worked his will,  
The waters shrank, and shuddered, and stood still, —  
Then built himself a magic house of glass,  
Wherein to sit and watch the fury pass.

In a like manner I suggest that the image of Adam and the lost garden lies behind several of the poems of Archibald Lampman. In the longer of his poems "In November" the speaker wanders through a waste wood and comes upon a circle of dead mulleins looking like hermits who have died at their prayers. In a brief moment of sunshine they revive within him a kind of spectral happiness. He is the exiled Adam who here finds intimations of the lost paradise. Other poems, such as "In October", "Winter Solitude", or the sonnet "In November", present us with related images. At the end of the sonnet the speaker says:

Fast drives the snow, and no man comes this way;  
The hills grow wintry white, and bleak winds moan  
About the naked uplands. I alone  
Am neither sad, nor shelterless, nor grey,  
Wrapped round in thought, content to watch and dream.

We may be reminded here of the man on the hill, alone, while the hard earth is seeded with sharp snow. Yet there is a difference. There is a sense of optimism here that was lacking before. I believe that we can illuminate this image by going back to Miss Macpherson.

The lost Eden becomes a memory, an ideal, a dream in the fallen mind. It is the “lost traveller’s dream under the hill”, as Blake describes Satan. Thus the garden becomes identified with the dreaming Adam or, in pastoral terms, with the sleeping shepherd, which is the title of Miss Macpherson’s poem.

The gold day gone, now Lucifer  
Lights shepherds from the eastern hill.  
The air grows sharp, the grasses stir.  
One lies in slumber sunken still.

Oh, wake him not until he please,  
Lest he should rise to weep:  
For flocks and birds and streams and trees  
Are golden in his silver sleep.

A related poem, “The Faithful Shepherd”, identifies the sleeping figure with the ark, also a symbol of the totality of life unified and preserved from destruction.

Cold pastoral: the shepherd under the snow  
Sleeps circled with his sheep.  
Above them though successive winters heap  
Rigours, and wailing weathers go  
Like beasts about, time only rocks their sleep,  
An ark upon a deep.  
And drowsy care, to keep a world from death,  
Maintains his steady heartbeat and warm breath.

The speaker in Lampman’s poems frequently becomes just such a faithful shepherd in whose dream, as in an ark, a world is kept from death. In Miss Macpherson’s “The Anagoric Man” the same figure is identified as Noah.

Angel declare: what sways where Noah nods?  
The sun, the stars, the figures of the Gods.

We can now turn to a series of images which have been related already by Milton Wilson in his article “Klein’s Drowned Poet”. For as Eden becomes Ark, Adam in the snow becomes the Poet in the sea.

A vivid transition is provided by Duncan Campbell Scott’s “The Piper of Arll”. The piper in the little cove of Arll is a lonely shepherd. With the arrival of a mysterious ship, he hears the music of a larger life (associated in the poem with the more dynamic elements in his own little world). He strives to learn the music, but when the ship sails away without him he is heartbroken and accordingly

breaks his pipe. Yet he mends it again, and as the mysterious ship returns he sings his soul out and expires. The crew take his body to the ship, whereupon piper, crew, and all sink beneath the sea. Thanatos overcomes Eros. Negative as it may be, the conclusion remains haunting, rich and beautiful.

The ship is another ark, and the sunken ark and the piper are one, just as in the case of the dreaming shepherd in whose faithful sleep the plenitude of Eden is preserved. Here too, the ship, the shepherd, and the crew become jewelled and "golden in their silver sleep."

Tendrils of or and azur creep,  
And globes of amber light are rolled,  
And in the gloaming of the deep  
Their eyes are starry pits of gold.

And sometimes in the liquid night  
The hull is changed, a solid gem,  
That glows with a soft stony light,  
The lost prince of a diadem.

And at the keel a vine is quick,  
That spreads its vines and works and weaves  
O'er all the timbers veining thick  
A plenitude of silver leaves.

The struggle between Eros and Thanatos, which is here so decisively won by Thanatos, becomes more open and violent as Scott's poetry develops. If the sleeping shepherd may be said to wake, he often does so only to rise and weep. Nevertheless, there is a deliberate attempt to recover the dynamic life which here lies sunk and to affirm what Scott calls "the beauty of terror" as well as "the beauty of peace".

A similar affirmation characterizes the poetry of E. J. Pratt, where the arks become more realistic, more mixed or ironic, but always struggle fiercely to stay afloat, as in *The Titanic* or *The Cachalot*. The Titanic is, of course, an actual ship; but it is also the symbol of a world, an ark, and in part at least a false ark. The cachalot is very like a whale, but he too is an ark, capable of containing rivers, islands, and the little boats of men, sounding the heights and depths, gold and beryl in the sun and brushed by the sea gulls with their silver wings.

The whale is capable of being related very closely to our initial image of the dreaming Adam, as the beast tells us himself in one of Miss Macpherson's poems.



I am an ark to swim the perilous flood.  
 With gold and spices, with candles burning sweet  
 In wakeful silence at his head and feet,  
 Vaulted in my sepulchre lies the first man.

As in the case of the garden, the whale may also appear in a negative or demonic guise. In Earle Birney's poem "Mappemounde" he becomes "Cetegrande, that sly beast who sucks in / with the whirlwind also the wanderer's pledges." In Phyllis Webb's poem "A Tall Tale, or a Moral Song", it is a fantastic fish story that brings us back to the garden of the fall or "Eve in Reflection."

The whale, improbable as lust,  
 carved out a cave  
 for the seagirl's rest;  
 with rest the seagirl, sweet as dust, devised  
 a manner for the whale to lie between her thighs.

Lying for ages under the sea, "this strangest whale aslant the seagirl's thighs", they've turned to stone. The story makes sense if we see here Eve, "the lost girl under the sea", embracing the lost order, Eden, which is equally her major man, the dreaming Adam.

The attempt to catch the world by the tail in all its manifold variety is an unlikely business. A. J. M. Smith offers a few directions in his "Plot Against Proteus", where the imagery is drawn from a different mythology and old Proteus takes the place of the whale.

There are echoes of this theme in other poems on swimmers which Milton Wilson notes in F. R. Scott, Klein, and Layton. However, it is Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" which brings us back most directly to the image of the sleeping Adam. The shepherd or piper is now the poet. He too remains as effectively sunk beneath the sea of modern life as Scott's piper of Arll. Yet he too carries the secret within him and is, with the piper, "the lost prince of a diadem."

meanwhile he  
 makes of his status as zero a rich garland,  
 a halo of his anonymity,  
 and lives alone, and in his secret shines  
 like phosphorus. At the bottom of the sea.

His Old Testament connections are established a little earlier in the poem where we are told:

Look, he is  
the nth Adam taking a green inventory  
in a world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising

The poet in his formal guise is Adam, who gives names to the creation. Though he may be sunk in anonymity, he holds the key to the new Eden or “world but scarcely uttered”.

Irving Layton has adopted the formal role of the nth Adam in a number of his poems, notably “The Birth of Tragedy”, in which the speaker proclaims:

In me, nature’s divided things —  
tree, mould on tree —  
have their fruition;  
I am their core. Let them swap,  
bandy, like a flame swerve  
I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve.

Not quite drowned under the sea, in this poem the speaker says, “I lie like a slain thing/ under the green air the trees/ inhabit.” And the note of expectancy is heard at the end of the poem, where we are told that all the while “someone from afar off/ blows birthday candles for the world.”

In “The Cold Green Element” the drowned poet is hauled from the water and in a new incarnation returns to it as an active swimmer. At the beginning of the poem the speaker sets out from the end of his garden walk toward a mystery and finds the undertaker going in the same direction.

Hi, I tell him,  
a great storm in the Pacific has blown a dead poet  
out of the water,  
who now hangs from the city gates.

Crowds depart daily to see it, and return  
with grimaces and incomprehension;  
if its limbs twitched in the air  
they would sit at its feet  
peeling their oranges.

The last image may suggest the crowd in the pit at a Shakespearean play, or any old-fashioned hanging. In the context of the biblical archetype, however, the hanged man is a Christ-figure; he is not really or finally dead, though that is incomprehensible to the crowd. He has, in fact, found his resurrection in the speaker. Though the undertaker has seen his heart in the grass, though he has

seen himself in the eyes of old women, “spent streams mourning his manhood,” he is not dead; what they have seen or mourned was but one of his “murdered selves” which, like the poet hanging from the city gates, can be seen everywhere “hanging from ancient twigs”. At the end of the poem he tells us, “I am again/ a breathless swimmer in that cold green element.”

THE IMAGE of the mountain appears more fleetingly in both its positive and negative guises. It appears explicitly as Ararat in F. R. Scott’s poem “Lakeshore”, where the speaker becomes a kind of pessimistic Noah watching the modern rationalistic world — indeed, all exiles from the primal ocean — go down before the flood. Yet we tend to adopt the point of view of the speaker who stands safe on the world mountain and who has already allied himself as a swimmer with the underwater world.

The appearance, I suspect, of this image in two poems, one by Birney and one by Layton, would seem to confirm Birney’s pessimism and Layton’s optimism. In Birney’s poem “Bushed” the isolated man is finally destroyed by an increasingly alien and hostile nature, which at the end of the poem takes on the form of the mountain in its darkest guise.

Then he knew though the mountain slept, the winds  
 were shaping its peak to an arrowhead  
 poised  
 But now he could only  
 bar himself in and wait  
 for the great flint to come singing into his heart.

Layton’s “Mount Rolland” presents a more positive version by far. Here the mountain is opposed to a commercial and industrial society which tries to tame it. But the speaker is not an alien. Filled with pity for the trees which like monks climb the exhausted hillside, he is one of the chosen, a kind of Moses.

While all around me, as for a favoured intruder,  
 There’s an immense silence made for primeval birds  
 Or a thought to rise like a great cloud out of a crater,  
 A silence contained by valleys,  
 Gardes Civiles in green capes.

Frequently enough Layton is an angry prophet crying for destruction: he tells us of his kin when he says that from time to time he will take his hot heart to Ezekial

and Jeremiah, to stand awhile "in aching confraternity." Yet in the context of this discussion, he is the most confident prophet of a new life.

*The Mountain and the Valley* is a realistic novel which nonetheless brings us back to Miss Avison's image of Adam on the first hill that ever was, alone, while the hard earth is seeded with sharp snow, or perhaps more exactly to Miss Macpherson's cold pastoral: the shepherd under the snow.

Buckler tells the story of David Canaan from his childhood to his death in early middle age. As he grows up and the members of his family get married, move to the city, or die, we see him increasingly isolated on his Nova Scotia farm. His isolation is not just an individual or family matter. It reflects the disintegration of the old rural way of life and the final failure of the cultural community of the previous generations. David is aware also that a new cultural community has not developed simultaneously with the development of the cities. There is no point in simply following his sister or his brother-in-law into the towns. The people there are only superficially better off.

The town people seemed to have only a thin personal topsoil. Nothing grew on it except a sparse crop of self-assurance. They were absolutely unresponsive to anything outside their own narrow communion.

More or less intuitively he has come to write. He keeps an old copy-book in which he chronically attempts to come to terms with his experience and give it significance within an order of words. At such moments he escapes from his isolation. When not trying to formulate his world anew in this way, he finds that even his most immediate life becomes unreal and his alienation is total.

Even the sensations of his own flesh had become outside. The inside was nothing but one great naked eye of self-consciousness, with only its own looking to look at. The frozen landscape made no echo inside him.

If he is to escape from this growing sense of unreality, he must do no less than remake the world in his own image — in his own words. His realization of this fact is associated with the realization of another ambition.

Ever since he was a boy, David has wanted to go up the nearby mountain, but something has always prevented his going, the death of a neighbour, some division in the family. Several times he has hoped to go with his father to cut a particular tree, one that his father has marked out for a ship's keel. Interestingly, his father is killed on the mountain cutting the keel-tree. Having set off abruptly in anger against his wife, he fails to concentrate adequately on the job of felling the tree and he is struck down as it falls. What was to have been a kind of ceremonial

affair becomes no more than a tragic accident. The ark with that particular keel is never launched.

At the end of the book David finally makes it to the top of the mountain by himself. There he looks out over the whole valley, and there the urge to describe every minute thing, to express its unique intensity and find precisely the right word for its individual character, sweeps over him again. To do this, to be at all, he must be these things.

He must *be* a tree and a stone and a shadow and a crystal of snow and a thread of moss and the veining of a leaf. He must be exactly as each of them was, everywhere and in all times; or the guilt, the exquisite parching for the taste of completion, would never be allayed at all.

So he resolves to take a green inventory of this world but scarcely uttered. It will be like the day in his youth when he composed a petition for some of the villagers: "When he read it back to them they heard the voice of their own reason speaking exactly in his." This time it will be the voice of their world, of their lives, speaking exactly in his.

Up to this point he has been intimidated by the overwhelming task of finding words for every minute detail in every light and in every season. Suddenly he sees that he need find only the core or central word.

It wouldn't be necessary to take them one by one. That's where he'd been wrong. All he'd have to do . . . oh, it was so gloriously simple . . . was to find their single core of meaning.

The single core of meaning would be nothing less than a complete cultural identity, a central myth or fundamental conception of the world. That is what will restore him to the community of his fellow men. That is what will allow them to find their real community with each other, with the land, and with the dead as well. For the word redeems not only the present but the past.

He caught his breath. He felt like the warm crying of acquittal again. Even my mother and father and all the others who have gone will know somehow, somewhere, that I have given an absolving voice to all the hurts they gave themselves and each other — hurts that were caused only by the misreading of what they couldn't express.

One of the things Mr. Farley noted in his study of Canadian poetry was precisely the lack of such a communion with the past, which is here to be restored only with the complete reformulation of the world in new terms.

Unfortunately, the effort of climbing the mountain has overstrained David

Canaan's already weak heart. Like Moses, he shall not enter the promised land. He dies of heart failure, and he and his vision lie like the faithful shepherd on the top of the mountain under the falling snow.

One more example should make clear the persistence with which this imagery recurs in Canadian literature. Gabrielle Roy's *The Hidden Mountain* is a more deliberately symbolic novel about the artist's role in the recreation or rediscovery of his world. The central character is an artist named simply Pierre. He too sets out to take a green inventory of the world. His isolation and solitude are concretely rendered by the setting. He journeys across the Canadian sub-arctic from the Mackenzie River to Ungava, where he too finds his mountain. It rises in the wilderness unknown to all but himself and a few Esquimaux. Fascinated by its shifting lights and iridescent beauty, he sets to work to paint it, not all at once, but aspect by aspect, for like David Canaan he cannot at first comprehend it as a whole. In his preoccupation, he paints through the short summer season and is caught in the first snows. It is then that he sees the mountain change into a demonic power. It is then also that he encounters a great buck caribou whom he must hunt down to survive. It leads him an exhausting chase through a stony landscape of hell, until he brings it down, finally, face to face, with an axe. In the night, nearly dead himself, he becomes as it were the blood brother of the great animal lying beside him. He survives.

Later a priest arranges for Pierre to go to Paris to learn to paint the mountain as it needs to be painted: so that it may speak to all men. He lives meagrely; his painting goes badly; he becomes seriously ill. Yet he paints a final self-portrait in which a friend discovers a strange and haunting power which he had caught glimpses of in Pierre's earlier work. The head, in a tangled thicket of shadows, seems to be sprouting horns, antlers. Like the great buck caribou, or like Michelangelo's Moses, he wears the horns of primitive divinity, the symbol of godhead or power. For Pierre is also a kind of Moses who has come down from the mountain bearing a vision of the godhead or universal power.

At the very end, having been given a drug to stimulate his heart, he feels prepared at last to capture the whole mountain on canvas. He sets to work, but in the midst of laying in the background colours, he too suffers a heart attack and dies.

Forms, beloved images, dreams, the witchery, and the colours — all spun about, snowflakes in the storm, snow seen in a kaleidoscope.

The lofty mountain faded away.

Who, in the mists, would ever find it again?

CANADIAN LITERATURE has no priority on the imagery of the Old Testament, nor on the themes of exile and alienation, the loss of identity and the search for a new community. Nevertheless, our discussion of the images of Adam, Ark, and Mountain, or of related images, reveals a certain persistence of such imagery through a variety of authors over a fairly long stretch of time, from Confederation to the present. And the fact that these images often recur with the same peculiar constellation of details or with the same peculiar ambivalence of feeling suggests that they do reflect a peculiarly Canadian concern with the question of our cultural identity. That this should be so is not altogether surprising.

It was inevitable that for Canadians, as for Americans, "The land was ours before we were the land's". But, unlike the Americans, Canadians have had no intention of giving the gift outright, of finding "salvation through surrender". They have been colonials not simply from necessity but from choice. The early Canadians, says William Toye in his Collins' *Book of Canada*, "were not, and did not want to be, wholly independent. The cultural standards and interests they developed had little to do with Canada." He goes on, quoting from Edward Hartley Dewart in an early collection of Canadian poetry:

"Not only are our mental wants supplied by the brains of the Mother Country, under circumstances that utterly preclude competition, but the majority of persons of taste and education in Canada are emigrants from the Old Country whose tenderest affections cling around the land they have left." Thus the colonial state of mind was succinctly explained in 1864. It was probably the most potent single enfeebling influence on the native voice and character; it prevailed long after Canada ceased to be a collection of colonies, well into the present century, and can even be detected today.

As Mr. Rossinger puts it in his article in *Cité Libre*, for the English-speaking colonists, whether they were frustrated Loyalists, frustrated Scots, or frustrated Irish, Canada was only a place in which to establish a new residence, not a place in which to develop a new way of life or build a new nation. *Des Canadiens? Non, des Européens désenchantés.*

The intention on the part of each separate group of colonists to preserve an inherited culture rather than create a new, even if the inherited culture had little to do with Canada, Mr. Farley has labelled generally "the Loyalist response", and he argues that it is this response which lies behind the cultural schizophrenia he detects in the poetry. Canadians, he contends, have ignored the implications of their actual experience to the point where their authentic identity lies stillborn

in the unconscious, at any rate in the realm of the inarticulate, so that they remain divided within and against themselves. Precisely such a state of affairs is symbolized by the images we have been looking at, the images of the drowned poet, the sleeping shepherd, the dreaming Adam under the snow. One of our examples clearly implies that we shall continue to be plagued by feelings of guilt, by “an exquisite parching for the taste of completion”, until we are willing to surrender ourselves to our authentic experience, until we are willing to be the tree and the stone and the thread of moss and the crystal of snow.

What Mr. Tallman said of MacLennan’s novel *Each Man’s Son* represents what he said of all the novels he examined: at the heart of the novel lies a conflict between the cultural facade and the naïve violence of place. Again, these novels imply that the conflict is to be resolved only by rejecting the facade and accepting the authentic reality of the characters’ everyday experience. For this reason Mr. Tallman is led, not simply to condone, but to recommend the behaviour of Duddy Kravitz in Mordecai Richler’s novel. He explains:

Duddy has ceased to care for appearances and this insouciance releases him from the nightmare. All the other people in the novel cannot possess themselves because their vital energies are devoted full-time to maintaining the false appearances in terms of which they identify themselves. These appearances — the cultural, ethical, communal pretensions to which they cling — mask over but scarcely conceal the distinctly uncultured, unethical, isolated actuality in which they participate.

Duddy Kravitz’s cry of “I don’t care” is the cruder, North American version of Stephen Daedalus’ “*Non serviam.*” “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church.” It is on the basis of this apparently negative resolution that Joyce’s character sets out to encounter “the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race.”

Our predicament is not unique. Ortega y Gasset in an essay on Goethe says even more generally:

However much a man searches heaven and earth, the past and the future, for his higher destiny, he remains the victim of a perennial vacillation, of an external influence which perpetually troubles him until, once and for all, he makes up his mind to declare that right is that which is in accord with him.

It is not unique; but it may have a uniquely Canadian application.

The trouble is that even though Mr. Dewart’s brand of colonialism may well retire with Mr. Diefenbaker, the colonial state of mind may not. Whereas our



mental wants were long supplied by Great Britain, since the second world war they have been increasingly supplied, along with our investment capital, by the United States. So argues Mr. Rossinger, who fears that Canadians may become confirmed in the mentality of a satellite country, the mentality of a “*satellite à béquilles*,” to quote his almost untranslatable phrase, the word *béquilles* meaning “crutches.” Canada’s leaders, he writes, “being conditioned to the mentality of a *satellite à béquilles*, a mentality which had always sustained them on a national level throughout the periods of childhood and adolescence, the transition was effected without regrets, and with the blessing of Great Britain.” That is, we have simply exchanged one external influence for another. With the possible exception of the French-Canadians, who may have decided once and for all to declare that that is right which is in accord with them, we remain the victims of a perennial vacillation.

Margaret Avison protests against the world of “someone not at home. Exporters. Glutting us/ with Danish spoons.” In “The Local and the Lakefront” we hear the voice of the prophet raised against the false gods of Sumer and Babylon.

I, stevedore of the spirit,  
 slog day and night, picketing  
 those barges and brazen freighters with their  
 Subud, Sumerian ramsgate, entrails and altars.

She frames her grievance ironically, in an image that is at once technical and symbolic.

Who that must die but man  
 can burn a bush to make a bar of soap?

She directs us to our salvation, if only by asking us to recognize that we have created nothing that is authentically ours.

Committeeman:  
 there are no ships or cargoes *there*.  
 Believe me. Look. Admit it.  
 Then we start clean:  
 nothing earned; a nowhere to exchange  
 among us few  
 carefully.

However negative the situation, this is not a negative poem. To discover an illusion and to recommend the acceptance of a reality, however bleak, is a perennial theme and a positive achievement, in literature or in life.

Some of the images we looked at earlier are even more bleak; a few may be brighter; the majority are ambivalent. They too tell us of a world that has not been realized; they also tell us that it exists, inchoate. It is just this ambivalence which Al Purdy exhibits in a poem explicitly entitled "On Canadian Identity: A Sentimental Monograph for the Daughters of the Empire." The paradoxical conclusion suggests very nicely the Old Testament mood of one whose kingdom has not come but who is sure that it is there waiting for him to possess it. He says:

The worth of life not being necessarily noise  
we kept unusual silence, and then cried out  
one word which has never yet been said.

We *have* kept unusual silence. And we have no doubt cried out in our hearts the word which we have never said with our mouths. We may even have cried out in our literature the word which has not yet been read. In fact, I suspect it may be possible to trace in the literature certain elements of a Canadian view of life, a view of man and his relationship to the universe of a fundamental kind, which is surely what we must mean by a Canadian identity if it is to be anything more than a parochial difference in accent or in the details of economic and political organization. But that is another matter.

The images of Adam wandering in the waste wood are patently images of exile. And one could emphasize the persistently negative conclusion to which all but one of our examples lead. Yet I think such an emphasis would be perverse. There is a good deal of difference between the exiled Adam in some of these images and the sleeping Adam in others — or the figures of David and Pierre pregnant with vision at the moment of death. Despite the heart-failures, despite the fragmentary success of a David or a Pierre, there is a conviction that the major man is alive, that he is, or can become, "again a breathless swimmer in that cold green element."

Just at this point, then, when many are concerned to express their doubts about the existence of a Canadian identity, when Mr. Stock and others have in fact given it up as a lost cause, it seems to me possible to detect its presence, in the conviction of certain voices if in nothing else.

*Ou grandir ou mourir?* In answer to this question, let me quote what I should hope is the voice of a prophet. She often speaks with an Old Testament accent. It is from the final poem in Gwen MacEwen's book *The Rising Fire*, the poem entitled "Generation Cometh."

THE SLEEPING GIANT

the boy  
a coy root or  
bright among cities  
is growing you  
cannot stop him you  
cannot stop him  
growing.

try to  
pull him out  
by the roots  
from your loins he  
is green like a tree  
planted there . . .

*(This paper was originally presented at ACUTE in Vancouver, June 1965)*

