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Major John Richardson. *Wacousta; or the Prophecy. A Tale of the Canadas*. 1832, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991. 284-286.

At the western extremity of the lake Huron, and almost washed by the waters of that pigmy ocean, stands the fort of Michilimackinac. Constructed on a smaller scale, and garrisoned by a less numerical force, the defences of this post, although less formidable than those of the Detroit, were nearly similar, at the period embraced by our story, both in matter and in manner. Unlike the latter  
5 fortress, however, it boasted none of the advantages afforded by culture; neither, indeed, was there a single spot in the immediate vicinity that was not clad in the eternal forest of these regions. It is true, that art and laborious exertion had so far supplied the deficiencies of nature as to isolate the fort, and throw it under the protecting sweep of its cannon; but, while this afforded security, it failed to produce any thing like a pleasing effect to the eye. The very site on which the fortress now stood had at one  
10 period been a portion of the wilderness that every where around was only terminated by the sands on the lake shore: and, although time and the axe of the pioneer had in some degree changed its features, still there was no trace of that blended natural scenery that so pleasingly diversified the vicinity of the sister fort. Here and there, along the imperfect clearing, and amid the dark and thickly studded stumps of the felled trees, which in themselves were sufficient to give the most lugubrious character to the scene, rose the rude log cabin of the settler; but, beyond this, cultivation appeared to have lost her  
15 power in proportion with the difficulties she had to encounter. Even the two Indian villages, L'Arbre-Croche and Chabouiga, situate about a mile from the fort, with which they formed nearly an equilateral triangle, were hid from the view of the garrison by the dark dense forest, in the heart of which they were embedded.

Lake-ward the view was scarcely less monotonous; but it was not, as in the rear, that monotony which is never occasionally broken in upon by some occurrence of interest. If the eye gazed long and anxiously for the white sail of the well known armed vessel, charged at stated intervals with letters and tidings of those whom time, and distance, and danger, far from estranging, rendered more dear to the memory, and bound more closely to the heart, it was sure of being rewarded at last; and then there was  
20 no picture on which it could love to linger so well as that of the silver waves bearing that valued vessel in safety to its wonted anchorage in the offing. Moreover, the light swift bark canoes of the natives often danced joyously on its surface; and while the sight was offended at the savage, skulking among the trees of the forest, like some dark spirit moving cautiously in its course of secret destruction, and watching the moment when he might pounce unnoticed on his unprepared victim, it followed, with momentary  
25 pleasure and excitement, the activity and skill displayed by the harmless paddler, in the swift and meteor-like race that set the troubled surface of the Huron in a sheet of hissing foam. Nor was this all. When the eye turned wood-ward, it fell heavily, and without interest, upon a dim and dusky point, known to enter upon savage scenes and unexplored countries; whereas, whenever it reposed upon the lake, it was with an eagerness and energy that embraced the most vivid recollections of the past, and led  
30 the imagination buoyantly over every well-remembered scene that had previously been traversed, and  
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which must be traversed again before the land of the European could be pressed once more. The forest, in a word, formed, as it were, the gloomy and impenetrable walls of the prison-house, and the bright lake that lay before it the only portal through which happiness and liberty could be again secured.

**Northrop Frye. "Conclusion to A Literary History of Canada." *The Stubborn Structure. Essays on Criticism and Society.* New York: Cornell UP, 1970. 281-284.**

Canada began as an obstacle, blocking the way to the treasures of the East, to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it. English Canada continued to be that long after what is now the United States had become a defined part of the Western world. One reason for this is obvious from the map. American culture was, down to about 1900, mainly a culture of the Atlantic seaboard, with a western frontier that moved irregularly but steadily back until it reached the other coast. The Revolution did not essentially change the cultural unity of the English-speaking community of the North Atlantic that had London and Edinburgh on one side of it and Boston and Philadelphia on the other. But Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. The traveller from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where five Canadian provinces surround him, for the most part invisible. Then he goes up the St. Lawrence and the inhabited country comes into view, mainly a French-speaking country, with its own cultural traditions. To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent.

It is an unforgettable and intimidating experience to enter Canada in this way. But the experience initiates one into that gigantic east-to-west thrust which historians regard as the axis of Canadian development, the "Laurentian" movement that makes the growth of Canada geographically credible. This drive to the west has attracted to itself nearly everything that is heroic and romantic in the Canadian tradition. The original impetus begins in Europe, for English Canada in the British Isles, hence though adventurous it is also a conservative force, and naturally tends to preserve its colonial link with its starting-point. Once the Canadian has settled down in the country, however, he then becomes aware of the longitudinal dimension, the southward pull toward the richer and more glamorous American cities, some of which, such as Boston for the Maritimes and Minneapolis for the eastern prairies, are almost Canadian capitals. This is the axis of another kind of Canadian mentality, more critical and analytic, more inclined to see Canada as an unnatural and politically quixotic aggregate of disparate northern extensions of American culture – "seven fishing-rods tied together by the ends," as Goldwin Smith put it.

The simultaneous influence of two larger nations speaking the same language has been practically beneficial to English Canada, but theoretically confusing. It is often suggested that Canada's identity is to be found in some *via media*, or *via mediocris*, between the other two. This has the disadvantage that the British and American cultures have to be defined as extremes. Haliburton seems to have believed that the ideal for Nova Scotia would be a combination of American energy and British social structure, but such a chimera, or synthetic monster, is hard to achieve in practice.

It is simpler merely to notice the alternating current in the Canadian mind, as reflected in its writing, between two moods, one romantic, traditional and idealistic, the other shrewd, observant and humorous. Canada in its attitude to Britain tends to be more royalist than the Queen, in the sense that it is more attracted to it as a symbol of tradition than as a fellow-nation. The Canadian attitude to the United States is typically that of a smaller country to a much bigger neighbour, sharing in its material civilization but anxious to keep clear of the huge mass movements that drive a great imperial

power. The United States, being founded on a revolution and a written constitution, has introduced a deductive or a *priori* pattern into its cultural life that tends to define an American way of life and mark it off from anti-American heresies. Canada, having a seat on the sidelines of the American Revolution, adheres more to the inductive and the expedient. The Canadian genius for compromise is reflected in the existence of Canada itself.

The most obvious tension in the Canadian literary situation is in the use of language. Here, first of all, a traditional standard English collides with the need for a North American vocabulary and phrasing. As long as the North American speaker feels that he belongs in a minority, the European speech will impose a standard of correctness. This is to a considerable extent still true of French in Canada, with its campaigns against "joual" and the like. But as Americans began to outnumber the British, Canada tended in practice to fall in with the American developments, though a good deal of Canadian theory is still Anglophile. A much more complicated cultural tension arises from the impact of the sophisticated on the primitive, and vice versa. The most dramatic example, and one I have given elsewhere, is that of Duncan Campbell Scott, working in the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. He writes of a starving squaw baiting a fish-hook with her own flesh, and he writes of the music of Debussy and the poetry of Henry Vaughan. In English literature we have to go back to Anglo-Saxon times to encounter so incongruous a collision of cultures.

Cultural history, we said, has its own rhythms. It is possible that one of these rhythms is very like an organic rhythm: that there must be a period, of a certain magnitude, as Aristotle would say, in which a social imagination can take root and establish a tradition. American literature had this period, in the north-eastern part of the country, between the Revolution and the Civil War. Canada has never had it. English Canada was first a part of the wilderness, then a part of North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world. But it has gone through these revolutions too quickly for a tradition of writing to be founded on any one of them. Canadian writers are, even now, still trying to assimilate a Canadian environment at a time when new techniques of communication, many of which, like television, constitute a verbal market, are annihilating the boundaries of that environment. This foreshortening of Canadian history, if it really does have any relevance to Canadian culture, would account for many features of it: its fixation on its own past, its penchant for old-fashioned literary techniques, its pre-occupation with the theme of strangled articulateness. It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question "Who am I?" than by some such riddle as "Where is here?"

William McFarlane Notman. *Douglas Pine Tree, Vancouver, BC, 1887.*

1887, 19th century. Silver salts on glass - Gelatin dry plate process

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