ness connections with Massachusetts or, more subtly, of their sense of how the various parts of the empire should function? Certainly, the massive influx of New England settlers that followed the expulsion of the Acadians directly benefited them and their Massachusetts partners. It was the enterprise of these Halifax and Boston merchants — partners and often blood relations — that reveal what the concept of empire meant in the eighteenth century from the colonial point of view, and how the British imperial system worked.

George Rawlyk approaches some of these problems, but he seldom tackles them. At best his book is a recitation of those events, chiefly military, which dotted the history of the relations between Massachusetts and Nova Scotia for a century and a half. The detail occasionally becomes rich and interesting, as it does in his discussion of Louisbourg as a symbol of New England's purpose, and again of Paul Mascarene, the even-handed administrator at Annapolis Royal, although in both cases Rawlyk was heavily reliant on the work of former students. But where the book is about Nova Scotia, Rawlyk pretty much leaves Brebner in command of the field, and where it is about Massachusetts, Rawlyk ignores recent literature and fails to seize the opportunities for interpretation that present themselves. There is more to the Massachusetts-Nova Scotia dynamic than he tells us.

STEPHEN E. PATTERSON

Canadian Painting: Regional or National History?

The traditional test of the petty regional mind is how it responds to a national publication. The scenario is simple as it is common. The publication is received in the mail (late), and an immediate check made of the authors to see which old class-mate has taken unfair advantage of his proximity to the publisher to flog yet another modest article. That done, then it is on to the team check: a cumulative assessment of how our side made out and, finally, the formulation of a series of complaints on how misunderstood we are by the agents of centralism. I have just gone through a form of this exercise with some recent national publications in the field of art history. Persons of sense have long argued that a full knowledge of a country can only be obtained when the investigator is thoroughly knowledgeable in all the regional characteristics that together make up the whole. In the case of Canada surely no one believes any longer that the soul of the country was forged on and limited by the Laurentian Shield. That said, the question is how did the Atlantic provinces fare in the publications under review — fare in the sense of how well understood and how accurately assessed in terms of accomplishment and national importance? The answer is that the Atlantic provinces fare as well as the whole publication, and the reason is the presence or absence of sound scholarship.

The Atlantic provinces have accumulated over the past two hundred years a rich and varied heritage in architecture and the major crafts such as furniture and silver. The accomplishment in terms of what the Renaissance identified as the Fine Arts (painting and sculpture) is, as might be expected, very modest. It appears that then as now man must sit on furniture, eat out of dishes, and seek shelter from the elements in buildings, but not necessarily contemplate the intellectual and aesthetic potential of painting. It would seem, therefore, that this region should be a particularly rich source of that art which is conceived directly, sometimes naively, by men and women untrained in the Renaissance notions of Fine Art. This type of art called variously primitive, naive, or folk-art, is sometimes also within the trade called good-bad painting. It is painting in which the academic rules of composition, perspective, narrative logic and chronology are ignored or genuinely unknown. What makes it great is its ring of truth, its perfect matching of intention and image. That is a fragile and rare accomplishment and often confused with its enemy, bad-good painting in which the artist knows and respects the academic rules but does not quite make it.

On the face of it (to judge from the title) this is the story Barry Lord sets out to describe.[1] Not so. In fact Barry Lord has set out to re-interpret the fine arts of the country in terms of an imagined struggle for national liberation. The book is a parody of scholarship. Written from a nonsensical interpretation of art based on political beliefs, on material that reflects almost no original research, it would be beneath contempt were it not for its author's sincerity and proven abilities in other fields. Apparently he adopts Chairman Mao's view of the rôle of art. In essence, he tells us that an art of the people must be national. It must be scientific and realistic, deriving its ideas from facts. Those are not totally valid criteria for art, but they are rational unlike the last criterion that a peoples' art must be democratic: "it serves the people by helping to arm us for the national liberation struggles we have to fight" (p. 243).

The Atlantic provinces do not feature in Lord's book until the third chapter since our oppression is not as great as the Indians or the French of Quebec (Canayens), but we are indirectly given a humorous note at the end of the second chapter. In discussing the Benjamin West *Death of Wolfe* (of which he does not approve), a painting of considerable importance in the evolution of official historic art and romanticism, we are told that "It eventually came to Canada for a particularly appropriate reason. By arrangement through that arch-Imperialist Lord Beaverbrook, it was presented to this country by a descendent of its original owner in recognition of the service Canada had

1 Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada—Towards a People's Art* (Toronto, New Canada Press, 1974).

rendered to Britain during that great inter-imperialist conflict, World War I" (p. 59). In his discussion of Imperialist art (the topographical, military-trained style of the early recorders of the country), Lord sticks fairly close to the established men and monuments, and only towards the end of Section Two in Chapter Three does he take advantage of his knowledge of special collections in the Maritimes. He was, for several years, Art Curator of the New Brunswick Museum and from one painting exhibited at that institution he is able to formulate an Acadian tradition of painting. A small oil dated 1876 of the jail in Saint John is titled *Hôtel de Rankine.* John Rankine was the warden in 1876, and the general assumption is that the painter was a prisoner. On no real evidence at all Lord assures us that it is Acadian and suggests that "there may have been a documentary tradition of artisans painting, perhaps not unlike the Québécois votive painters art of the everyday lives of the people" (p. 101).

While still reeling from the possibilities of an entire cultural expression unknown to anyone else in New Brunswick, I was then exposed to the manifold sins and wickedness of what Prince Edward Island had always hoped would be a reasonably acceptable portraitist. The Robert Harris painting of the *Meeting of the School Trustees* is praised for the teacher Kate Henderson is considered as a representative of Canadian working women in the unequal struggle with the bosses. But sad indeed is the fate of *The Fathers of Confederation:* "The painting truthfully reflects the formation of Canada as a single unified colony by those drab businessmen. While Confederation was a step forward in keeping Canada out of the clutches of a rising U.S. empire, these sell-outs had banded together to figure out how to make more profits for their British masters and themselves . . . . *The Fathers of Confederation* is the most successful propaganda picture for the comprador bourgeoisie in the history of Canadian painting. It promotes the lie that Canada achieved independence by peaceful transition. Canada was not an independent country in 1867, nor is it today. The real mothers and fathers of our independence are the working people who have struggled to build our land, and are still fighting for its liberation. In Harris's time as today, these are the people whose portraits should be painted" (p. 103).

Among the contemporary painters of Atlantic Canada, Lord should be at home. He has known most of them and, in particular, had the chance to meet both Miller Brittain and Jack Humphrey in Saint John. That he never met Miller Brittain in his own house is regrettable, but Lord does deserve credit for the publicity he has brought to Miller Brittain's cartoon for the proposed Saint John Hospital mural of 1941-42, a major work never completed due largely to the provincial government's failure to grasp its significance. In terms of national accomplishment, it would have been one of the major works of the decade. However, Lord's interpretation of Miller Brittain's motivation and his character is pure fantasy. The text interlaces Norman

Bethune's philosophy with Miller Brittain's work in a way that suggests Miller's work was directly inspired by that heroic anti-colonial figure. This is where the flaws in Lord's scholarship begin. He is unable to correctly assess the character and attitudes of the people he writes about. In particular, in a drawing of 1936 entitled *Workers Arise* Miller is seen as approving of the revolutionary joy of the speaker. What utter nonsense. Miller Brittain, to those who knew him, had essentially the detached eye and mind of an eighteenth-century aristocrat. He could be intrigued by a Communist union organizer but never share his views. Thus, while eight of the fifteen illustrations on paintings of social realism are from the Maritimes (which even the most avid regionalist would admit is fair), yet they are presented to the national public out of context despite the ease of establishing the correct context.

The work of Jack Humphrey is less extensively covered, but more successfully. Lord had the advantage of personal contact with the man, with his work, and a considerable body of published material. Even with that, Jack Humphrey's social realist paintings require a finer interpretation than Lord is able to give them. Jack Humphrey was a painter like an Egyptian stone mason was an architect. Both were interested in permanence and certainty. Jack mistrusted anything he could not measure and assess with his mind. He was always fascinated with the accidental, the purely imaginative, yet his mind was most comfortable when every element in the work was the result of careful, sensitive, and intelligent thought. Every one of his major abstractions begins with observed nature and results from careful, painstaking thought. His paintings of social realism in the decade 1940-50 are the result of this constant attitude being focused on people rather than the earlier cityscapes and the later nature studies. The reason for the focus could be complicated or as simple as the fact that portraits sell when nothing else does and social realism must include the reality of making a living.

In their books, both Russell Harper and Barry Lord have attempted to tell a national story. In his earlier *History of Painting in Canada* (Toronto, 1966), Russell Harper made the first serious attempt to break away from the essay format and to set down the line of development in Canadian art fleshed out with real research and scholarship. Written to a tight schedule, it is what a musician would describe as a flawed masterwork. The flaws are not those of scholarship but of a format too limiting in both chronology and space. The first of the second-wave works coming out of it was the monograph, *Paul Kane* (Ottawa, 1971), and now the most recent work, *Peoples Art: Naive Art in Canada.*[2]

2 Russell Harper, *Peoples Art: Naive Art in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1974).

It is typical of Harper's thorough and relentless scholarly mind that page after page reflects new discoveries. This, perhaps, would not be so remarkable in the wider world of politics or biography, but in the incestuous, information-trading world of Canadian art history it is both remarkable and admirable. Typical of the impact some of these discoveries have had is the National Gallery's recent proposal to move a painted house interior from Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia to Ottawa. The walls of the Croscup parlour in Granville Ferry were decorated in 1848 by a young sailor who had jumped ship and was given shelter by the Croscup family. One of the most elaborate in the country, the decorative scheme entirely covers the walls of the 12 x 15 foot room and includes the Croscup's marriage, Mrs. Croscup and her first child, a ship launching, a group of Micmac Indians, a hunting scene, St. Paul's Cathedral, Somerset House, and Queen Victoria with the Royal Family. The importance of the work can be measured by the imagined cost of removing, moving, and restoring painted plaster walls. Here is a piece of regional work that was almost lost but for the knowledge of a national scholar.

Here we come close to a definition of purpose and a test of competence. Harper has a unique regional knowledge of art in Canada. He has worked in Nova Scotia (some of the pioneering work at Louisburg is his), in New Brunswick (at the New Brunswick Museum and for Lord Beaverbrook), in Ontario outside of Ottawa, in Montreal at the McCord Museum, and, while Curator of Canadian Art at the National Gallery, travelled the country with a sense of urgent national concern. No other Curator before or since has exhibited that concern. Compare that process of mastering detail and measuring and assessing cumulative importance with Barry Lord's performance in his *History of Painting in Canada,* and the latter is revealed for what it is.

Because of the strength and certainty of his scholarship, the history of naive or folk art in the Maritimes is shown in Harper's book as the major reservoir of continuous production in English-speaking Canada. The examples chosen for the National Gallery exhibition which preceded the book's publication (an exhibition intended primarily for Ontario), reveal an impressive knowledge of museum holdings and a more impressive ability to discover and borrow from private collectors. Unlike Lord who distorts to fit a preconceived context, Harper allows the detail accumulated slowly and carefully to define the context. The national context is built up by first defining all the parts. Conclusions are drawn from a complete sample, and in the process the Atlantic region takes exactly the position it deserves. Regionalism is served by a perfect nationalism.

Quite another aspect of Canadian art history is dealt with in Paul Duval's book on what he calls High Realism.[3] Duval also attempts to describe a national situation, but through only one genre or value system. He examines

3 Paul Duval, *High Realism in Canada* (Toronto, Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1974).

separately some thirteen artists of whom six can be considered as Maritime artists. Now that proportion would begin to suggest something to even the most casual viewer. Is there a contemporary predisposition to realism in the Maritimes? Was there the same attitude in the recent past? Is there, in fact, a continuing tradition of realist art all through the history of art in the Maritimes? Had he been interested, Duval might have found, by investigation, that of all the regions of Canada the Maritimes is the only one where realism is the continuing major movement from start to finish. All other expressions are present but they are minor. Where is there even an assessment of that possibility in Duval's long historical essay? Like Lord, Duval is suspiciously dependent on Russell Harper's 1966 *History* for his essay which does very little to define the realist ambition. The mind of the realist painter is revealed in thirteen aspects by the individual essays, but not defined. Those Maritime painters are seen as they appear to the world in press notices, in catalogue introductions, and in magazine articles. No attempt is made to see them against their social and artistic setting in the communities where they live. They become nationally important by being moved, pictures, biography and all to the author's Toronto world, just as every summer the furniture and early crafts of the Maritimes become "early Canadian" by being carried off in triumph on the roofs of those cars whose license plates admonish us to "Keep it Beautiful".

All this would seem to indicate that, as in any field, really competent scholars will rise above difficulties and manage to do all the regional detective work necessary to talk sensibly at a national level. But need we have and can we indeed afford so much wasted effort as in the case of the Duval and Lord books?

It would seem to me that the need is evident and urgent for a great deal of regional research and publication. There is, at present, almost no local literature on any of the arts that could provide outside scholars with the benefit of regional knowledge. A look at the Atlantic universities shows only four art historians on staff, and they are locked into maximum-load undergraduate teaching. Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia are without full-time art historians in their universities, and a forthcoming publication on Newfoundland architecture is being done by a Toronto man parachuted into the province. Constructive regionalism is not the enemy of nationalism, but Ontario-centred nationalism of the sort that we have so often experienced can be destructive of pride and optimism in any region of Canada. Until such time as those who care about regional identity begin to work on and encourage scholarly research on the material culture of this area, what is undoubtedly our strongest claim to identity will be at risk. As these three books demonstrate: left to chance, sometimes you win, but most often you lose.

STUART A. SMITH