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Consolation To Distress: Loyalist Literary Activity in the Maritimes

THE LOYALIST MIGRATION INTO THE Maritime provinces has often been examined for its social, economic, and political impact, but it is also to the Loyalists that literary historians must turn in any discussion of creative activity in the area during the early years of its cultural development. Among the approximately 30,000 refugees settling in the region were a number of the most active literary figures of the Revolutionary war period, including such well-respected Tory satirists as Jonathan Odell, Jacob Bailey, and Joseph Stansbury, and a number of lesser-known occasional writers like Mather Byles, Jr., Roger Viets, Joshua Wingate Weeks, and Deborah How Cottnam. Bringing with them a sophistication of literary experience and a taste for lyric and satiric writing hitherto unknown in the region, these authors were part of a wider Loyalist cultural phenomenon that saw the founding of a literary periodical, the establishment of schools and classical colleges, the endorsement of theatrical performances, the development of newspapers and printing shops, the organization of agricultural and reading societies, and the writing of polite literature as part of the fabric of conventional society. Looking to their old life as a measure of their new, Loyalist exiles in the Maritimes did much to develop the expectations, structures, and standards of taste necessary for the growth of a literary environment. Although economics, geography, politics, and personal differences militated against their founding a literary movement between 1776 and 1814 or leaving behind an identifiable literary tradition, the Loyalists did illustrate the imaginative and cultural possibilities awaiting a later, more securely-established generation of writers. When an indigenous literature finally did begin to develop, first in the columns of newspapers like *The Acadian Recorder* (founded 1813) and then in the periodicals of the 1820s and 1830s, the debt of that next, native-born generation to the Loyalists and their cultural institutions was both obvious and acknowledged.

Of all the Loyalist writers who came to the Maritime provinces after 1775, the Reverend Jacob Bailey and the Reverend Jonathan Odell were the most prolific in output and the most enduring in reputation. Particularly effective in a war-time climate where satire dominated as a literary form and where a sense of immediacy heightened the passion of ridicule,¹ Bailey and Odell shared with other Loyalists a sense of bitterness and betrayal after the cessation of hostilities in 1783. Of the two, Bailey was the most tenacious in continuing to explore

1 Bruce Granger, *Political Satire In the American Revolution* (Ithaca, 1960), pp. 5-7.

political themes in his writing after leaving American soil. A Church of England clergyman from Pownalborough, Maine, who had moved to Nova Scotia in 1779 to escape persecution, Bailey turned increasingly to the Hudibrastic conventions of Samuel Butler to reduce and caricature his republican subjects. For Bailey, writing poetry and prose was a form of consolation, a way of re-articulating his moral vision in the face of folly and insanity. “When I am disappointed, harrassed or chagrined”, he wrote Samuel Peters in 1780, “I immediately revenge myself upon the fathers of rebellion”.² Thus, in such poems as “The Factious Demagogue” or “The Character of a Trimmer” written during the war years, he lashed out at the equivocation, irrationality, and stupidity of the rebels and their political philosophy. Although the world as he knew it was disintegrating, Bailey was able to enshrine in his writing the old verities that gave moral and social direction to his life.

After 1783 when the Tory cause had finally collapsed, Bailey ceased flagellating the perpetrators of the war and began to focus instead on themes of encroachment and betrayal, particularly directing his wrath against American Methodism and the hypocrisy he perceived in the post-war Loyalist camp. Poems such as his Hudibrastic narrative “The Adventures of Jack Ramble, The Methodist Preacher” (c.1787-1795) reflected Bailey’s sense of frustration over the spread of levelling principles into Nova Scotia, and a short satire on the Reverend Jonathan Odell revealed his sensitivity to the shifts in personal loyalty that were beginning to take place amongst the post-war exiles. An admirer of Odell’s Revolutionary War satires, Bailey felt aggrieved when his fellow clergyman visited Annapolis Royal en route to his new post as Provincial Secretary of New Brunswick and failed to pay his social respects either to Bailey or to his former Loyalist compatriots. “I suppose you are sufficiently informed that your worthy Secretary of New Brunswick was formerly a clergyman and Missionary of Burlington in the Jersies with a salary of fifty pounds a year”, Bailey wrote Henry Barlow Brown of St. Andrews on 31 January 1785, “and in his progress from Halifax to the seat of his appointment he was at Annapolis several days at which time there resided at my house two daughters of Dr. Seabury, Mr. Campbell of Burlington, clerk of your Supreme Court, Mr. Cutler a Merchant and his Lady a daughter of Col. Hicks, all of these had been his fellow passengers — and yet this newly exalted being never once called at the house to look upon his former brother, or his ship mates — three of whom had been his most intimate acquaintance”. “To amuse the Ladies”, added Bailey, “and to soften the chagrin we all felt at being denied a visit from this dignified priest, I wrote a couple of poems — the former it is not prudent to insert — but the other in the same kind of measure as his poem on Dr. Franklin I here

2 Jacob Bailey to Samuel Peters, 26 November 1780, Samuel Peters Papers, Church Historical Society, Austin, Texas. Also quoted in Thomas B. Vincent, “Keeping the Faith: The Poetic Development of Jacob Bailey, Loyalist”, *Early American Literature*, XII (Spring 1979), p. 8.

produce”.³ The resulting parody of Odell’s “INSCRIPTION for a Curious Chamber Stove” detailed how Bailey had “waited in vain to behold/ Such a favourite man of my tribe”. The snub was followed by salutary if rueful reflections, causing the poet-speaker to draw the bitter conclusion:

I have learnt that those mortals who soar
aloft on the wings of ambition
disdain their importance to lower
to friends of their former condition.⁴

In spite of the trenchant quality of satires such as this one, it is likely that the private nature of its circulation prevented Bailey’s work from having a broad influence on public taste in the Maritimes.⁵ Ironically, Jonathan Odell, that “man of my tribe” whom Bailey had grown to despise, was to be more conspicuously and frequently associated with Maritime satire in the late 18th and early 19th centuries than was Bailey. It was Odell, “the leading Tory satirist of the American Revolution”, Alfred Bailey argues, “whose literary propensities helped indirectly to form the tradition in which Carman and Roberts were nurtured”.⁶ It was also Jonathan Odell to whom Ray Palmer Baker turned as the literary progenitor of Thomas Chandler Haliburton and his circle during Nova Scotia’s intellectual awakening in the 1820s and 1830s.⁷ Using “the heroic couplet with a dash and vigor attained by no other Revolutionary writer except Freneau”, noted Baker in *A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation*, Jonathan Odell “stamped his conservative ideas and his satiric methods on Canadian literature”.⁸ Yet such a claim for Odell poses problems for any modern analysis of the poet’s influences, since even a cursory examination of the availability and content of Odell’s poetry after he removed to New Brunswick belies Baker’s assumption that Odell had a stylistic and philosophical impact on a successive generation of writers. Less than a dozen of Odell’s poems were published in provincial newspapers after 1785 and his verses did not become accessible in book form until 1857-60 when *The Loyalist Poetry of the Revolution* and *The Loyal Verses of Joseph Stansbury and Doctor Jonathan Odell* were published in limited editions in the United States.⁹ Moreover, his

3 Jacob Bailey to Henry Barlow Brown, 31 January 1785, “Places: Annapolis Royal”, Fort Anne Papers, reel 1, letter 17, pp. 92-5, Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS).

4 *Ibid.*

5 Thomas B. Vincent, *Narrative Verse Satire in Maritime Canada, 1779-1814* (Ottawa, 1978), p. 3, n. 10.

6 Alfred Bailey, “Creative Moments in the Culture of the Maritime Provinces” in G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Historical Essays On The Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1967), p. 239.

7 Ray Palmer Baker, *A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), p. 71.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

9 Winthrop Sargent, ed., *The Loyalist Poetry of the Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1857) and *The*

poems after 1785 tended to be domestic and patriotic in nature, becoming satirical again only in 1812 when the American invasion of the Canadas re-awakened the spirit of outrage which had provoked his political writing during the Revolution.

What Jonathan Odell, Jacob Bailey, and other Loyalist writers did do was to introduce into the Maritime region and into Maritime literature a body of active and educated authors who regarded the composition of poetry and prose not only as a pleasant avocation but also as a social grace reflecting the standards of taste and sensibility of cultured society. That many of these writers were Anglican rectors was of significance, for the American clergy had exerted considerable influence over their nation's literary life in the 17th and 18th centuries.¹⁰ Many Tory clergy merely transferred this relationship and influence into the Maritimes when they left the United States, reaffirming through their authorship their sense of traditional values. They did not perceive the writer to be an agent of innovation or change. "The role of the poet at this stage in Maritime literature", as Tom Vincent has argued, "was not to explore or create uncharted literary worlds, but to establish a cultural base that 'meant something' to the people for whom he wrote. These people were trying to establish themselves in a variety of ways, and, consciously or unconsciously, the poet worked to do his part".¹¹

Nowhere was the public role of poetry and the poet better illustrated than in the Reverend Roger Viets' "Annapolis-Royal". Appearing first in pamphlet form in Halifax and then on 12 August 1788 in *The Halifax Gazette*, the poem opens with a conventional image of order and harmony. "The King of Rivers" flows languorously through "fair" and "verdant" banks decked in "gayest Cloathing of perpetual Green". As the Annapolis River reaches the sea, this marriage achieves fruition in the vision of Annapolis-Royal, that "Royal Settlement", "washed" by the river, "blest" by Heaven, and "dear" to the poet. The imagery throughout the first part of the poem is pastoral, reinforcing the sense of a harmonious plan of divinity informing this world and offering the stability on which "a newborn Race" could be "rear'd by careful Hands".¹²

The progress of Viets' poem was designed to complement the vision of society projected by the poet in the opening, pastoral sections. The village is a model of 18th century order where "The Streets, the Buildings, Gardens, all concert/ To

Loyal Verses of Joseph Stansbury and Doctor Jonathan Odell (Albany, 1860).

10 Emory Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers. Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725-1810* (New York, 1982), pp. 26-8. For further references to the role of the Tory clergy in Nova Scotia, see Arthur Hamilton Wentworth Eaton, *The Church of England in Nova Scotia and The Tory Clergy of the Revolution* (New York, 1891) and Judith Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783-1816* (London, 1972).

11 Thomas B. Vincent, "Eighteenth-Century Poetry In Maritime Canada: Problems of Approach — A Research Report", in Kenneth MacKinnon, ed., *Atlantic Provinces Literature Colloquium* (Saint John, 1977), p. 18.

12 Roger Viets, *Annapolis-Royal* (Kingston: 1979 [1788]), pp. 1, 2, 4.

please the Eye, to gratify the Heart". Within the context of this town plan, "decent mansions" rise, "deck'd with moderate Cost,/ Of honest Thrift, and gen'rous Owners boast". Hard work, marriage, procreation, and death all unfold within the confines of this community, reinforcing a vision of the future when the "newborn Race" "Thr'o numerous Ages thus they'll happy move/ In active Bus'ness, and in chastest Love". Two-thirds of the way through "Annapolis-Royal", the poet effects a synthesis of pastoral and town imagery in anticipation of the claims and the purpose of his poem: a revelation of the Divine power behind the rural and social harmony just described. His symbol of this power evolves naturally from the architectural references provided earlier in the poem, for the eye is now invited to move from the "gardens", "streets", and "decent mansions" of the town landscape to the "Spire majestic" rearing "it's [sic] solemn Vane" over the community. Here, under man's symbol of God's order and benevolence, the rector marshalls his spiritual forces and sets an example for his "flock" by eschewing "pomp", "pride", and the "empty Joys of Sense". In the hierarchical structure of the community where he represents both church and state, the rector is the one who most fully appreciates the significance of the "celestial" choir that raises its voice to God under the "Spire majestic". In an image consistent with Viets' 18th century social vision, the poet envisages a band of "Youths and Virgins fair,/ Rank'd in due Order", harmonizing their strains until:

By those harmonious Sounds such Rapture's giv'n,
Their loud Hosannas waft the Soul to Heav'n:
The fourfold Parts, in one bright Center meet,
To form the blessed Harmony complete.

The poem ends, then, on a note of harmony and order, proffering a vision of stability and growth if civilization honours certain values and social conventions.¹³

Although "Annapolis-Royal" can be read as a topographical and inspirational poem,¹⁴ it was in many respects a political poem as well. Viets, Anglican rector of Digby and a Loyalist from Simsbury, Connecticut, re-affirmed in his verse the values which the Loyalist elite had sought to protect. The world he presents is ordered, stable, hierarchical, and conservative. At the very heart of it is the Anglican Church, a symbol of God and the Crown. In the aftermath of the Revolution, British policy endorsed placing Church of England clergymen "in every strategic locality, to hold aloft the torch of civilization, to become a little centre of culture, and a recruiting agency for schools".¹⁵ In a sense, Viets and his

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

14 Thomas B. Vincent, "Introduction" to *ibid.*, p. v.

15 D.C. Harvey, "The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia" in Rawlyk, ed., *Historical Essays On The Atlantic Provinces*, p. 105.

poem fulfilled that official aim. In the midst of exile and financial exigency, the rector offered quiet reassurance that the refugees' world would be rebuilt. "We and our Cause were ruined together", Viets observed in a sermon on "Brotherly Love" delivered to his Digby congregation in 1789: "So [God] in his all-wise Providence, for Reasons unknown to Us, gave Us up, like Holy Job, to Affliction & Distress; the just & wise tho' unsearchable Providence of God has placed Us in a Neighbourhood together; in which Situation, altho' We want some of the Conveniences, & many of the Luxuries of this [world], yet We enjoy all the Spiritual Privileges that any People ever *did* or ever *can* enjoy".¹⁶ By striking an affirmative note in his sermon, Viets was in fact upholding the "torch of civilization" which had been threatened by war and exile. By writing and distributing "Annapolis-Royal", he was also representing that "centre of culture" which Church and State saw as essential in reinforcing British values in the Maritimes.

In spite of the positive note struck by Viets in his sermon and his poem, he identified a very real problem for the Loyalists when he observed that "We want some of the Conveniences, & many of the Luxuries of this [world]". Looking back on his childhood in Nova Scotia from the vantage point of the 1860s, the Reverend James Cuppaidge Cochran, the son of a Loyalist, recalled that even in the late 1790s and the early 1800s, "We had no reading rooms — no lectures — no social gatherings for mental improvement — no performer to delight the ear and refine the taste by his admirable readings — no libraries except two filled with such things as Mrs. Radcliffe's romances, about haunted castles, mysterious knockings, after reading which, one would cover up the head and be afraid to go to sleep — We had nothing in short to elevate and improve".¹⁷ Cochran's recollections find reinforcement in the letters, diaries, and documents of many Loyalists who came into the region between 1783 and 1789. Writing to Lord Hawkesbury a few years after the war, Charles Inglis similarly noted: "On my arrival at Halifax soon after I was appointed Bishop of this new Diocese in 1787, I found the country destitute of the means of education — there was not even a good Grammar-school in the whole province".¹⁸ "Nothing but wilderness", was the way Walter Bates put it on arriving in New Brunswick in 1783 — "Nothing but wilderness before our eyes; the women and children *did not refrain from tears!*"¹⁹

The task facing the Loyalists was to re-establish in this "wilderness" the educational and cultural institutions left behind in America. In doing so, they

16 Roger Viets, "On Brotherly Love", Sermons: Reverend Roger Viets, Lawrence Collection (Ward Chipman), MG23, D1, series I, vol. 14, Public Archives of Canada (PAC).

17 James Cochran, "Recollections of Half A Century", 1864, Vertical Mss. File, pp. 17-8, PANS.

18 F.W. Vroom, *King's College: A Chronicle* (Halifax, 1941), p. 20.

19 Walter Bates, *Kingston And The Loyalists Of the "Spring Fleet" of 1783* (Fredericton, 1980 [1889]), p. 13.

accelerated the process whereby universities, libraries, and other facilities were organized in colonial Maritime society. Printers, publishers, booksellers, stationers, and teachers contributed to the support and dissemination of literature, and organizations such as the Windsor Reading-Society established precedents that were followed in other communities. Consisting of approximately a dozen subscribers, the Windsor Reading-Society usually met in October or November to order periodicals for the winter months, including *Dodsley's Annual Register*, *The Monthly Review*, *The Edinburgh Magazine*, *Exshaw's Dublin*, and *Carey's American Museum*. Demands for the works led to a rule in 1794 which limited to a fortnight the amount of time a member might have a volume of more than 200 pages. Records maintained until 1797 reveal that as many as seven or ten volumes might be delivered to a household during the winter period.²⁰ Like many books in colonial society, these volumes probably had a wider audience than is discernible, for they were undoubtedly read aloud around the fireplace much in the fashion described by Sarah Ann Anderson in the Bliss Papers or by William McCulloch in his biography of the Reverend Thomas McCulloch.²¹

While family readings of poetry, essays, and periodicals may have brought amusement and literary influence to the Loyalist hearth-place, some refugees saw the advantages of extending literature into the public sphere by supporting theatrical productions in both Halifax and Saint John. Play attendance had not been a common phenomenon in the United States until the 1770s, for prior to the Revolution there had been few facilities and even fewer opportunities for companies to mount productions. The war had changed all that. Leaders on each side recognized the diversion from combat offered by theatricals and the possibilities for propaganda provided by productions. Whig and Tory writers both turned to satirical drama as a way of making a political point, and by the end of hostilities there existed a dramatic repertoire and a newly-acquired taste for theatre which the Loyalists brought with them into the Maritimes.

Prior to the arrival of the Loyalists, garrison theatricals had been performed in military centres like Annapolis Royal and Halifax. However, the Loyalist demand and taste for drama led to an increased interest in theatre and to the first performance of a play in New Brunswick, a dual production of *The Busy Body* and *Who's The Dupe?* staged in Saint John in February 1789. The event involved the young Loyalist actors Jonathan and Stephen Sewell and the audience included the prominent Loyalist, Colonel Edward Winslow. A theatre aficionado, the Colonel made an overnight journey down the frozen Saint John River from Kingsclear to attend the production and subsequently wrote his own play in 1795, the "Substance of the Debates of the Young Robin Hood

20 "Journal of the Reading-Society of Windsor, Nova-Scotia", Nova Scotia Historical Society, #8, MG20, #214, pp. 2-5, 7-8, PANS.

21 Sarah Ann Anderson to Henry Bliss, 5 August 1816, Bliss Papers, MG1, vol. 1604, PANS; William McCulloch, *Life of Thomas McCulloch, D.D.* (Truro, 1920), p. 73.

Society".²² A political piece lacking dramatic possibilities, this play nevertheless illustrates the way in which local themes began to be worked into the productions and prologues of regional theatre.

One such prologue, publicly delivered in the same year that Winslow's play was privately read, was "On Opening A Little Theatre in This City", a poem that buoyantly justified the Loyalists' selection of Saint John as a site for settlement and self-consciously avoided the political reasons for the city's being "rais'd" on that "dreary coast" in 1783. Printed in *The Royal Gazette and The New-Brunswick Advertiser* on 20 January 1795 and still extant in handwritten form in the papers of the Loyalist Jonathan Bliss, the prologue initially assumed an argumentative position by querying the reasons for anyone's settling on the barren coast of Saint John:

What rais'd this City, on a dreary coast,
Alternately presenting Rocks and Frost,
Where torpid Shell-Fish hardly found a Bed
Where Scarce a Pine durst shew a stunted Head?

The response is not the political or patriotic one which Loyalist descendants and mythologizers would project in their poetry a century later. Instead, the answer is positive and forward-looking, based on a vision of Saint John's geographical and commercial advantages ("'Twas commerce — commerce smooth'd the rugged strand./ Her streets and buildings overspread the land"). Speculating on the control of "mighty Fundy's tides" through vast fleets of commerce, the poet concluded the prologue by arguing the importance of literature in refining sensibilities wearied by affliction or the pursuit of business:

Make then the muses your peculiar Care,
'Midst Loss, 'midst profit, still to Verse repair,
Verse, which refines the Pleasures of Success,
Brings Hope, and Consolation to Distress.²³

The marriage of imagination and reason advocated in this poem reflected the emphasis on harmony and balance central to 18th century thought and reiterated elsewhere in Loyalist poetry. It also points to the tempering influence literature was seen as having on the new society and to the importance it

22 See Ann Gorman Condon, "'The Young Robin Hood Society': A Political Satire by Edward Winslow", *Acadiensis*, XV, 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 120-43.

23 "Prologue On Opening a Little Theatre at St. Johns, New Brunswick", Bliss Papers, MGI, vol. 1610, #86, PANS. The title in the Bliss Papers substitutes "St. Johns, New Brunswick" for the more usual printed version "in This City". The poem seems to be in Bliss' handwriting and has a slightly different form of punctuation and capitalization from the published newspaper version, but it is difficult to ascertain whether Jonathan Bliss wrote the prologue or whether he copied it from the original.

assumed as an anodyne to discouragement and regret. Jacob Bailey, Roger Viets, Jonathan Odell, Joshua Wingate Weeks, Mather Byles, Jr., and other Loyalist writers in a sense provided a "consolation to distress" for themselves and for others by continuing to write as an avocation when they left America and moved to the Maritimes. Thus, prologues like this one assumed a role as public and as important as Viets' "Annapolis-Royal" in re-affirming for Loyalists the rightness of their social vision and in reinforcing for them the importance of literature in society in refining sensibilities threatened by "Misfortune's Strokes".²⁴

An even more significant contribution to the evolving cultural life of the Maritimes than reading societies and dramatic productions was the Loyalist establishment of schools, academies, and universities in the region and the introduction of a classical curriculum into the educational system. At a time when classical education was being de-emphasized in American institutions, the Loyalist founders of King's College, Windsor, encouraged and sustained a taste for poetry, language, and the humanities among scholars enrolled in the college. In the century following the founding of King's College, Windsor, in 1789, writers like Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Henry Bliss, Joseph H. Clinch, Robert Norwood, H.A. Cody, and Theodore Goodridge Roberts emerged from this classical curriculum, and in Fredericton, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, and Francis Sherman experienced a comparable training at the Loyalist-inspired University of New Brunswick. As Fred Cogswell has pointed out, the result of this non-utilitarian approach to education was that Maritime writers were prevented from committing "the barbarisms perpetrated by many frontiersmen elsewhere".²⁵ Schooled in translation and familiar with classical styles and verse forms, graduates perpetuated these standards of taste in their own writing and passed them on to the next generation. Although later writers knew about contemporary literary movements from their reading of current periodicals and books and from the many colonial newspapers which endeavoured to keep readers informed of developments in literary circles, a number of 19th century Maritime authors chose to employ the neo-classical verse patterns and the satirical sketch form which had been favoured in the 18th century when Loyalist reading tastes had been shaped and when the classical bias of Loyalist-inspired educational institutions had been established. Long after the couplet had fallen from popularity in England, it was still favoured in the Maritimes by Joseph Howe, Oliver Goldsmith, and a series of pseudonymous periodical poets of the 1820s. Similarly, the newspaper satirists of the 1820s, the "Club" members of *The Novascotian*, and Thomas Chandler Haliburton in his "Recollections of Nova Scotia" (*The Clockmaker*) all turned to the urbane, personal and ironic tone of the 18th century sketch for their models.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Fred Cogswell, "Literary Activity in the Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880" in Carl Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto, 1976), vol. 1, p. 118.

Conservatism in literary form was therefore reinforced by the educational system and was bred by the standards of taste which Loyalist writers like Viets, Odell, Byles, and Bailey helped to establish in both their public and private work. But, while Loyalist writers softened the impact of exile on their contemporaries by encouraging a continuum in literary patterns and traditions through their work, they may also have contributed to a hardening of literary attitudes. The barbarisms of the frontier were avoided, as Cogswell has argued, but too often at the cost of originality and “the unique expression” of the writer’s personality through form.²⁶

A Loyalist-related literary venture which helped to define and confirm the very standards of taste about which Cogswell writes was *The Nova-Scotia Magazine and Comprehensive Review of Literature, Politics, and News*, a periodical founded by the Anglican clergyman and classical scholar, William Cochran, and produced by the Loyalist printer, John Howe of Halifax. First advertised in Saint John and Halifax on 25 May 1789 as *The Nova-Scotia Magazine, and History of Literature*, the journal promised to publish extracts from the best British magazines, review the year’s new books, provide a forum for discussion on natural science, give readers the latest domestic and foreign intelligence, and encourage indigenous writing. The editor’s task was to read widely and to select from books and periodicals examples of the “good taste and sound sense” found in publications in Great Britain.²⁷ The result was to be a miscellany in the tradition of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* or *The London Magazine*, although Cochran’s decision to include regional and American material made the publication far more inclusive than any to be found in Great Britain.

Cochran’s personal interest in education and his encouragement of literature not only shaped the editorial character of *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* but also reflected his understanding of an eclectic readership struggling to establish institutions and reinforce standards of taste in a developing area. The son of an Irish farmer and a graduate in Classics from Trinity College, Dublin, Cochran had moved from New York to Nova Scotia in 1788 because of his growing disillusionment with the educational standards and social conduct of post-war America. Although not a Loyalist refugee himself, he clearly developed in his editorials and essays the vision of an agriculturally-based, ordered society sympathetic with that found in Tory circles. His editorials on the importance of farming were influential in encouraging the formation of agricultural societies, and his essays on education reinforced traditional standards in their call for well-trained teachers, classical curricula, educational opportunities for the poor,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁷ “Proposals, For publishing a Monthly Work, by the title of *The Nova-Scotia Magazine, And History of Literature*”, *The Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser* (Saint John), 27 October 1789.

and the involvement of Church and State in the educational process.²⁸ In the material which Cochran selected for the magazine, as well as in his own contributions, there were further revelations of the values and ideals which formed part of his social vision. Not surprisingly, the poetry which he selected from contemporary British periodicals illustrated in its late Augustan preoccupations many of the influences which had shaped and informed the reading tastes of the Loyalists before and during the war. However, it did not include satirists like Dryden, Pope, and Churchill who had provided literary precedents for the trenchant Revolutionary verse of Odell, Bailey, and Stansbury. Instead, the poetry was that of Cowper, Collins, Gray, and Warton, the late 18th century lyricists who began to relax the conventions of the couplet as they explored sentimental strains and rural themes in their work. Their unselfconscious harmonizing of the sentimental and the traditional seemed to meet Cochran's favour as he searched out poetry and prose "to preserve and diffuse a taste for British literature",²⁹ and their themes and verse forms found echo in the small body of indigenous poets who appeared in the magazine between 1789 and 1792. Eager to stimulate "young writers, among the rising generation, to try their strength, and lead them on to greater attempts",³⁰ Cochran received in the contributions of "Werter", "Amintor", "J.C.", "Amicus", "Minimus" (Joshua Wingate Weeks), and "Pollio" a modest but encouraging response to the magazine's invitation for original work. Of all these writers, the pseudonymous "Pollio" was the most capable and the most prolific, developing in his "vanity of human wishes" theme and his pastoral motifs the tone of adaptation found elsewhere in poems like Roger Viets' "Annapolis-Royal" or Anonymous' "On Opening a Little Theatre in This City":

Here blest with health, with peace and plenty blest,
Should wild ambition e'er disturb my breast?
Should discontent, or envy rack my soul,
To see Lord Cringer in his chariot roll?
To me more dear than all that wealth can show'r
Sweet independence of the man in pow'r!
While free amid my native woods to rove,
To tend my flocks and sing the maid I love,
In falsely flatt'ring crowds I scorn to toil,
Of fawning court a titled blockhead's smile:
Below the anxious cares that plague the great,
Above the groveling flatterer in state,

28 See "A Plan of Liberal Education For the Youth of Nova-Scotia, and the Sister Provinces in North-America", which appeared in *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* under the pseudonym "W" I (August 1789), pp. 105-6; I (September 1789), pp. 199-203; and I (November 1789), pp. 364-6.

29 "To The Public", *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*, I (June 1790), n.p.

30 *Ibid.*

Screen'd in obscurity, from slander's sway,
In humble bliss I waste the careless day.³¹

The repetition of the word “blest” in Pollio’s poem and the association of “health”, “peace”, and “plenty” with Nova Scotia (“Here”) reinforced the forward-looking tone to be found in *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* whenever the province and its sister settlements were mentioned. Given its conservative editor, William Cochran, its Loyalist printer, John Howe, and its strongly Loyalist subscription list, there would be every reason to suppose that *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* might have reflected some sense of regret about the past or some sense of bitterness about the triumph of republicanism to the south. However, the emphasis was on current international events, recent British and American publications, and social and cultural items of interest to a developing community. The temper of the journal was both positive and non-partisan, and to this end Cochran included in the magazine in February and March 1790 the full text of *The Father: or American Shandyism*, William Dunlap’s conciliatory post-war American play that had been performed for the first time in the John Street Theatre in New York in the fall of 1789. The polemical dramas written during the Revolution had been followed in the United States by patriotic productions like Royall Tyler’s 1787 comedy, *The Contrast*, which pitted British-style effiteness against the vitality of Brother Jonathan, a stage Yankee figure destined to become a stereotype in North American literature. Dunlap’s play had followed closely upon Tyler’s, but differed vastly in tone by advocating friendship and the healing of old wounds between Britain and America. The reunion of the Patriot war hero and his Tory son at the end of the play, and the marriage of the American heiress and the young British officer from Halifax, indicate Dunlap’s conciliatory purpose in writing the drama. Working with the prodigal son theme so popular in literary America at the time of the Revolution,³² Dunlap brought England back to the welcoming arms of America. Attitudes toward America had already begun to soften in many Loyalist circles, as Neil MacKinnon has pointed out,³³ and Loyalist readers of *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* certainly could not miss the open message of reconciliation expressed by Dunlap’s Cartridge when he says: “I think not the worse of a soldier, or a man for being English. We are no longer enemies, your honour”.³⁴

The significance which Cochran ascribed to *The Father: or American*

31 Pollio, “Rural Happiness”, *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*, I (December 1789), p. 472.

32 Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals & Pilgrims* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 36-89.

33 Neil MacKinnon, “The Changing Attitudes of the Nova Scotian Loyalists towards the United States, 1783-1791” in P.A. Buckner and David Frank, eds., *The Acadiensis Reader: Atlantic Canada Before Confederation* (Fredericton, 1985), vol. I, pp. 118-29.

34 *The Father: Or American Shandyism*, *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*, II (March 1790), p. 183. Cochran took his version of the play from *The Massachusetts Magazine*.

Shandyism can be judged by his editorial note commending the work to his readers and by the fact that he reprinted no other play in his magazine during his tenure as editor. Its inclusion suggests that he may have seen his journal as playing a neutral role in his provincial constituency, especially amongst the Loyalist component of his readership. Circulating in a sparsely-developed and poorly-connected region as it did, *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* never had more than 300 subscribers. Yet those 300 included the colonial hierarchy in Halifax, Saint John, and elsewhere; a generous proportion of Loyalist subscribers throughout the Maritimes; and the unknown listeners and borrowers of the magazine who probably swelled its readership tenfold.³⁵ At a time when a demand for periodicals had swept England and had spread to America, Cochran clearly detected among colonial readers a taste for miscellany literature little satisfied by the colony's newspapers. Appealing to their desire to acquire a judicious blend of recent information and the best in current British, American, and Maritime writing, he had carefully gauged the amount of money, time, and space that could be allotted to his purpose. At £4 a year the journal was an expensive investment for most families, but for that sum, the subscriber received 80 pages of double-column print on a monthly basis. When at least one farmer offered Cochran doggerel and potatoes instead of cash ("As cash in the country is quite out of use"), the editor accepted the arrangement with the proviso that the bluenoses be superior to the verses.³⁶ However, the farmer's dilemma reflected a very real problem for Cochran. While the taste and demand for the journal were real, the cash basis to support it was not. Another difficulty arose when in June 1790 Cochran was appointed to the presidency of King's College, Windsor. When he felt compelled to resign from the editor's chair because of the demands of his new position, the magazine lost the one man who had the imaginative vision, scholarly background, and eclectic interests necessary to keep it going. Thus, in spite of the best efforts of its new editor, John Howe, *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* began to lose momentum in 1791. Forced to retrench from 80 pages to 64 in January 1791, Howe gradually decreased both the political and literary content of the periodical. By March 1792 he was forced to admit defeat, citing a small subscription list and the reluctance of subscribers to pay their bills as reasons for terminating the journal.³⁷

The impact of *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* on Maritime literary life was both psychological and immediate. On a practical level, it provided an outlet for regional essayists and creative writers for a short period in the late 18th century and, long before such a development could otherwise have been expected,

35 In *Sketches And Tales Illustrative Of Life In The Backwoods Of New Brunswick* (London, 1845), pp. 40-1 and 54, Mrs. Emily Beavan described the way in which periodicals were passed around in her community on Lake Washademoak.

36 A Farmer, "Poetical Letter to the Editor of *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*", *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*, I (November 1789), p. 389.

37 "To the Public", *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*, V (March 1792), p. 192.

brought colonial Nova Scotia into the periodical revolution taking place in Great Britain and the United States. It provided a forum for discussion on topics of regional importance like education and agriculture; it provoked Maritimers into a reconsideration of their recent history by publishing extracts and letters on the events of the time; it encouraged classical education by reporting faithfully on the progress of Latin scholars at the grammar schools in Halifax and Windsor and by providing readers with translations from Pindar and Anacreon; and it kept readers informed of the latest book and periodical literature available in Britain and America. In a sense “an experiment in adult education”, as D.C. Harvey has described it, the magazine reinforced the social attitudes and aesthetic tastes which the British government and the Anglican Church hoped to see firmly entrenched in Maritime society and brought a pride of accomplishment to the region early in its literary life. Although Harvey also observed that the periodical was “another muniment of that loyalist effort which could find fulfilment only in the second generation”,³⁸ it is significant that the next generation did not forget the example set by *The Nova-Scotia Magazine*. The editors and publishers of *The Acadian Magazine* in 1827 and *The British North American Magazine* in 1831 both looked back to *The Nova-Scotia Magazine* as a standard against which to measure their own periodical efforts, remarking on the quality achieved by the journal in spite of the precarious economic and cultural climate in which it had tried to publish.³⁹ As late as 1866, the periodical was still being referred to as an important exemplar in the periodical field and as a significant contribution to the birth of Nova Scotian literary activity.⁴⁰

The organization of publications, classical colleges, reading societies, and theatrical productions all represented Loyalist initiatives in a public sphere, and, in a sense, initiatives in a male domain. Often ignored in discussions of cultural activity because of the dearth of information available is the more private role played by Loyalist women in preserving and influencing standards of taste. The surviving letters of Rebecca and Eliza Byles reveal that these descendants of one of New England’s most famous literary and intellectual families knew no literary time lag in Halifax as they corresponded with their Boston aunts from the 1780s to the 1830s. Their letters range easily over discussions of Francis Brooke, Sir Walter Scott, Washington Irving, and Hannah Moore. “What do you think of *Rob Roy* and all that class of novels?” Rebecca Byles was to write to her New England relatives in 1821; “they have had a very popular run”. “I am very much pleased with *The Sketch Book*”, she adds after reading Washington Irving’s recently published work. “I think it is the best American production that I have

38 Harvey, “The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia”, pp. 107, 111.

39 See “Address”, *The Acadian Magazine*, I (January 1827), pp. 278-9, and “To the Public”, *The British North American Magazine, and Colonial Journal*, I (February 1831), p. 2.

40 James Cuppaidge Cochran, “More Recollections of Half A Century”, Vertical Mss File, p. 26, PANS.

met with. The sentiments are natural and the stile chaste and elegant”.⁴¹ Elsewhere, Sarah Ann Anderson was to engage in lively analyses of fiction in her letters to Henry Bliss of Fredericton, praising the forceful language of Scott’s *Guy Mannering* but criticizing the insipidness of his female characterization. “But let it be always remembered”, she playfully reminds her male correspondent, “a gentleman wrote them”.⁴²

Rebecca Byles and Sarah Ann Anderson came from culturally sophisticated families and their letters point to the existence of a body of women in Maritime society who had an impact on the literary tastes of the children whom they raised and taught. One of the best illustrations of the way in which this influence was exerted lies in the curriculum and the literary example set by Deborah (How) Cottnam, a resourceful teacher and poet who had been raised on Grassy Island, Nova Scotia, from 1728 to 1744, but had spent the pre-Revolution years in the Salem-Boston area with her husband, Captain Samuel Cottnam of the 40th Regiment. Forced to leave Salem on 29 April 1775 because of the intense local reaction against Tories, Mrs. Cottnam had retreated to Nova Scotia in company with the Loyalist family of George DeBlois. Faced with supporting herself, an unmarried daughter, and an invalid husband in Windsor, Mrs. Cottnam set about the task of organizing a school for gentlewomen, first in Halifax and then in Saint John. A person of refinement and intellect, she was on intimate terms with the most influential families of both cities, and her student population included the daughters of a number of prominent Loyalists. “Mrs. Cottnam is in town at the Head of a Female Academy”, Rebecca Byles wrote to her Boston aunts in 1777; “my sisters and myself go to her, they to plain sewing and Reading, and I to writing, learning French (Parley Vous Francois Mademoiselle) and Dancing, which employs a good Part of my time”.⁴³ By the time she had graduated from Mrs. Cottnam’s care, Rebecca Byles could confidently bandy about the name of John Locke in her letters and was proficient enough in French that she could be “imploy’d in translating a very long sermon for Doctor (John Breynton) from French into English”. She was also “reading Pamela and Terences Plays in French” and was engaged “in hearing Popes Homer”.⁴⁴ Boys in the colony were poorly educated, Rebecca confided to her aunts, knowing nothing more than how to dance and make polite conversation. “Girls”, on the other hand — or seemingly the ones educated under Mrs. Cottnam — “have the best Education the place affords, and the accomplishment of their Minds is

41 Rebecca Byles to the Misses Byles, 12 March 1821, the Byles Papers, MG1, vol. 5, #163, p. 14, PANS. Rebecca and Eliza Byles were daughters of the Loyalist and Church of England clergyman, Mather Byles, Jr. Their grandfather was the Boston clergyman, wit, and poet, Mather Byles, Sr., and their direct and collateral lineage included Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, and Richard Mather.

42 Sarah Ann Anderson to Henry Bliss, 5 August 1816, Bliss Papers, PANS.

43 Rebecca Byles to the Misses Byles, November 1777, Byles Letters, MG23 D6, PAC.

44 Rebecca Byles to her “Dear Aunt”, 6 January 1779, *ibid.*

attended to as well as the adorning of their Persons". With such training behind them, argued Rebecca Byles, "In a few years I expect to see women fill the most important offices in Church and State".⁴⁵

Approaches to women's education underwent considerable revision in America in the post-war years as Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton have both pointed out,⁴⁶ so that Rebecca Byles' comments on Mrs. Cottnam's influence have a strikingly contemporary ring. That Mrs. Cottnam was known to her students as a poet as well as an effective teacher becomes clear in surviving fragments of her work found in the Ward Chipman Papers and in Joseph Howe's 1845 newspaper series, "Nights With The Muses".⁴⁷ Her poem "On Being Asked What Recollection Was" illustrates her disciplined control of the couplet as a poetic vehicle, her sense of process as she brings the poem to its logical conclusion, and her ability to free herself from convention as she informally and bemusedly ends the poem on a personal rather than a formal note. The young Eliza has posed the question which gives form and title to the poem. At the completion of the exercise, there remains only human tenderness offsetting the failure of rational argument to address a child's innocent query: "Struck and Convinced, I drop the onequal [sic] task/ Nor further dare though my Eliza ask".⁴⁸

Although Deborah How Cottnam set a literary example to her students and friends, her own family best demonstrates the way in which literary attitudes and standards of taste passed from one generation to the next. Mrs. Cottnam's work circulated privately in the Maritimes under her pseudonym "Portia" and at some point in 1845 her poems were shown to Joseph Howe. Her daughter, Martha Cottnam Tonge, was an occasional and private poet; her grandson, Cottnam Tonge, was an eloquent orator in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly; and her great-granddaughter, Griselda Tonge, was considered one of Nova Scotia's most promising young writers at the time of her death in 1825. Praised by the former Blackwood's critic, James Irving, as a fine achievement in Spenserian stanzas, Griselda Tonge's poem "To My Dear Grandmother On her 80th Birthday" appeared in *The Acadian Recorder* in 1825, just before Griselda's death. Ostensibly a tribute to her grandmother, the poem in fact begins with a eulogium to Griselda's great-grandmother, the poetess "Portia" (Deborah How Cottnam), who has inspired a sense of literary tradition in her descendant:

How oft from honor'd Portia's hallow'd lyre

45 Rebecca Byles to her "Aunt", 24 March 1784, *ibid.*

46 See Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect And Ideology In Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1980), pp. 185-264, and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston, 1980), pp. 256-94.

47 "Portia", "Birth-day Address", Ward Chipman Papers, Microfilm M-153, pp. 1-2, PAC; "Nights With The Muses", *The Novascotian* (Halifax), 16 June 1845.

48 "Nights With The Muses", p. 1.

Consolation to Distress 67

In tones harmonious this lov'd theme has flowed —
Each strain, while breathing all the poet's fire,
The feeling heart and fertile fancy showed;
Oft times, in childhood, my young mind has glowed
While dwelling on thy sweet descriptive lay —
Oh, that the power had been on me bestowed
A tribute fitting for the theme to pay! —
With joy I'd touch each string to welcome in this day.⁴⁹

With its appreciation of family tradition and its consciousness of literary continuity, this poem confirmed the “power” which had been “bestowed” or passed on from one generation to another. Patterns of literary and cultural taste have been little examined in Canada, nor have scholars even begun the task of assessing the influence of curricula, periodicals, libraries, reading societies, churches, and publishers on standards of public taste in this country in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, in glimpses of family literary traditions like those in the Cottnam-Tonge family, there is some insight into the effect which individual Loyalists may have had on standards of cultural taste in 19th century Maritime Canada.

Described by all who knew her as “everything that (was) excellent in woman”,⁵⁰ Deborah How Cottnam summed up her life in a letter to a friend just a few years before she died: “My morning of life was happy; but Fortune smiled deceitful; many have been the chances and changes of my pilgrimage, various the vicissitudes, poignant the afflictions”.⁵¹ The tone is familiar to anyone reading the literary works of Jacob Bailey or the personal correspondence of displaced Tories like Jonathan Sewell and Joshua Wingate Weeks. Yet, with the exception of Bailey's satires on Methodism and republicanism and Odell's later poetry on the War of 1812, the poetry, prose, and drama written by Loyalist writers in the Maritimes after the Revolution tended to be domestic, topical, and ceremonial in subject matter and forward-looking in tone. Although Ray Palmer Baker has suggested that “it is folly to argue that they [the Loyalists] made any advance in the decades after the Revolution”, he does admit that to them must be given credit for “the maintenance of literary ambition”.⁵² The point is an important one. Thwarted in their economic and political aspirations,⁵³ the Loyalists

49 “The Fount”, *The Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 5 March 1825.

50 Lois Kernaghan, “How, Deborah”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, V (Toronto, 1983), pp. 429-30.

51 D. Cottnam to Nancy, 16 March 1794, Wolhaupter Papers, MC 300/18/2, p. 4, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

52 Baker, *A History of English-Canadian Literature*, p. 51.

53 See D.G. Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origin of New Brunswick Politics, 1783-1786* (Fredericton, 1983), and Ann Gorman Condon, *The Envy of the American States: The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1984).

nonetheless succeeded in establishing literary standards and cultural structures on which successive generations could build. The couplet form and the ironic sketch employed by both formal and vernacular writers in the 18th century were to remain forms of literary expression for Maritime writers well into the 1820s. Casting back to the example of their Loyalist antecedents as well as to 18th century literary progenitors in Britain, Joseph Howe, Oliver Goldsmith, Jr., Griselda Tonge, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, and other writers of the second and third generation could well acknowledge their practical and psychological debt to those who had founded the academies, colleges, libraries, periodicals, printing establishments, and dramatic societies that had consolidated standards of taste in the region. In 1795 the writer of "On Opening a Little Theatre in This City" had advocated turning to verse as a "consolation to distress". By the time the writers of the 1820s and 1830s were publishing in the Maritimes, verse had become more than a "consolation to distress". It was also one of "the pleasures of success".