HUGH MACLENNAN: THE NATIONALIST DILEMMA IN CANADA

by
Robin Mathews

Hugh MacLennan presents a major problem in Canadian literature and life. Quite simply it is the problem presented by many of our major writers in relation to the survival of the country and to a sure analysis of the forces working within it. MacLennan's failure on that level is as exciting as his success — and his success is not marginal. His body of work, the subjects he undertakes, the form he uses, and the 'aesthetic' success of his literary undertaking place him in a position which demands the attention of every serious Canadian.

He writes himself down as an elitist, as a man who refuses to face the implications of capitalism, who is sturdily anti-socialist, who has a sense of history that ultimately preaches helplessness before its determinism, and, finally, as a man who falls back upon individual salvation as the key to value and the good life. As a result he is haunted by individual human transience, and he sees human salvation in the almost private realization of the individual.

In those qualities he appeals to many readers in liberal capitalist society, and it is natural that he should. But he is a writer of profound moral conscience and consciousness, so he is neither a liberal anarchist nor a writer who willingly or consciously gives assent to exploitation or injustice.

He is a nationalist. And before looking at the fundamental *and* definitive weakness of his work, that fact and its implications must be examined.

MacLennan wrote two novels set outside Canada, both rejected, before publishing his first novel, *Barometer Rising,* the novel about de-colonization in Canada. The first two novels were set in the U.S.A. and Europe. Not until he turned to the Canadian subjects did he really begin as a writer. The Canadian subject and setting have absorbed him ever since the publication of *Barometer Rising* in 1941.

He is a master essayist in the personal and, in the best sense, *belles lettres* manner. He writes well, interestingly, with wide and sometimes eccentric knowledge, with an easy voice and with an almost chronicling

purpose. His essays tell a reader things of basic importance about the character, attitudes, values, sensibility and psyche of a generation. But they are written by an especially sensitive member of the generation who expresses himself flawlessly in a rhythm and with a use of language which catch more of a sense of his class and time than a hundred sociological studies could give. When he writes about Oxford, he fixes the essence of the old cultural colonialism, even unconsciously, to perfection. When he writes of literature in a new country he describes, without pretense, cultural colonialism as it continues unabated in Canada. When he writes of the shifting consciousness in Canada in an essay like "Came the Revolution", he is prophetic and sees, without sentimentality, the shape the anti-imperialist struggle in Canada will take for decades ahead. Because he is a nationalist, perhaps because he is a patriot, he has thought deeply and he has written with sharp insight about the colonial condition, the character of the powerful middle class in a colony, the psychological feeling of deracination among colonials, their fear of the people from imperial centres.

More than anyone else in the country he has addressed himself to the question of human significance in the social order in Canada. In novel after novel he has cut away a piece of the social fabric of this country and held it up for examination. The examination has been deeply flawed, but even through the flawed analysis, he has presented a view of Canada and a view of power in Canada that has been informative and has, incidentally, been approved of by the Canadian ruling class.

Ironically, he has been utterly rejected by the cultural anti-nationalists and the new colonials — those who owe spiritual allegiance to the U.S.A. and to a view of individualism that arises out of U.S. intellectual history. There has been a battle between the Canadians who are culturally colonized by U.S. culture and those who are either Canadian independentists or colonials subservient to European culture. But the battle with the cultural colonials of the U.S.A. — which makes MacLennan *look* especially strong on the Canadian question — disguises his attraction for the ruling class. The people colonized by U.S. culture have believed that to write with love of place in Canada is sentimental, outdated nationalism. They have believed that to treat Canadian problems is, by definition, parochial. They have fought long and tirelessly for "international standards" and subjects of "universal" interest. On the one hand, they failed to see how they shared his elitism, his anti-socialism, his confusion about class and capitalism. Their rejection of his work has been based upon his insistence upon the importance of history and the Canadian experience and *the form his work has taken as a result.* MacLennan consciously uses documentary and chronicle forms, closely connecting the larger history surrounding the actions of the characters in his novels. His detractors have described his method as "Victorian" since they have followed the U.S. development of

personalist, individualistic fiction alienated from or unconnected to the larger social structure.

His work has been readily accepted, on the other hand, by a more general readership because he has insisted upon dealing with Canada. He has written a novel about de-colonization, *Barometer Rising,* about Canadian/U.S. relations, *The Precipice,* about the trauma of the thirties, for individuals, in *The Watch That Ends the Night,* and two novels about the relations between Quebec and Canada in Confederation, *Two Solitudes* and *Return of the Sphinx.* Despite the contempt shown for him by the critics colonized by U.S. culture, he has been found pleasing to the Establishment and power in Canada. He has received the Lorne Pierce Medal for Canadian literature and the Canada Medal. He has received the Governor General's medal five times. He is acceptable to the Establishment because he rarely takes his anti-imperialism to effective lengths; and his disapproval of capitalism is never presented as a fundamental analysis. He never suggests the overthrow of capitalism and a redistribution of wealth and power.

He has, perhaps unwittingly, even served the interests of power because of his anti-socialism and his lack of clarity about the implications of class and capitalism in the country. In short, he believes that capitalists should be nice, but aren't usually. He believes that class division often creates injustice but he sees no solution. Class structure, he believes, is inevitable. Members of the upper classes should be, but aren't often, very nice. His fine people, his people locked in strong, certain values, who are gracious, kind, and wise, are people somehow removed from class. They generally have wide experience, *individual* integrity and insight. Angus Murray is a declassé doctor in *Barometer Rising,* Captain Yardley is an old sea captain in *Two Solitudes,* and uncle Matt is a kind of unconventional, drinking, individualist saint figure in *The Precipice.* All three teach those who are teachable a way of individual salvation. The way to treat class is to ignore it, they seem to say. By the same token, the way to manage capitalism is to make a personal choice, to save the self, and to go around capitalism, to live differently — not to take it face on in a battle to change the structure of society. The people who see Norman Bethune in MacLennan's creation of Jerome Martell in *The Watch That Ends the Night* criticize Martell's character. MacLennan categorically denies a relation between Bethune and Martell. But the argument is instructive. Because Martell never really accepts the struggle against class and capitalism. He is a myth figure of dynamic energy and charisma whose ultimate importance is in personal relations and personal quest. The ultimate importance of Bethune is, of course, as an anti-capitalist warrior in the class struggle who died in China working for the creation of a communist society.

MacLennan is too important not to be looked at closely. He is an anti-colonialist and an anti-imperialist. He is best on class and capitalism in

his first novel *Barometer Rising.* In that novel the capitalist colonialist oppressor is killed and the community builders — the new young Canadians — begin life afresh. The representative of the ruling class is destroyed. The reader can imagine the rest. But in *Two Solitudes,* Paul Tallard's answer to the capitalist exploitation of Rupert Ironsides and Huntley McQueen is to refuse the struggle. Huntley McQueen is very much alive at the end of the novel. Paul Tallard refuses to work for him. But Tallard's resistance is wholly on a cultural level. He is perfectly bilingual — a symbol of perfected federalism. But he doesn't recognize that while racial differences played a part in the betrayal of his Quebec father by the Ontarian, Huntley McQueen, McQueen simply acted as a capitalist would act with anyone weak enough to exploit. Huntley McQueen was not nice to Anthanase Tallard. But Huntley McQueen wouldn't be nice, in like circumstances, to anyone. A perfectly bilingual Huntley McQueen would have been the same. Paul Tallard is going to write a novel; he is, that is to say, going to show the structure of society so that people can see the value of bilingualism, confederation, and amity. They somehow will get around the problems of class and capitalism, it would seem, by doing so.

MacLennan's failure, however, must be placed beside his success, in order to see his value to Canadians. In order to look at both in full fairness, *Barometer Rising,* his first published work, and *Return of the Sphinx,* his last, should be permitted to speak for themselves.

Barometer Rising is a central novel about Canada's colonial character, its struggle for self-respect and self-determination, and the ambiguous contradictions created by what are, in fact, at the time of its action, repressive ties with Britain which — at the same time — give expression to generous ideals of communal relation and shared history. The material of *Barometer Rising* is handled in relation to the community builders working against the exploiter who is both individualist and garrison representative. The novel is at one and the same time liberationist and deeply conscious of the positive and historically inescapable aspects of the British connection, 'the British tie'. Characters who are strongly attractive in the novel present us with what was until very recently an English Canadian fact: an English Canadian nationalist was very often expected to be, also, a strong supporter of the British connection, even of British imperialism. Penny Wain questions the tie — forces the legitimacy of Canada into the consciousness of the reader. Neil Macrae, the young World War One junior officer, is able to express a thought about Canada common among Imperial Unity adherents: "maybe instead of being pulled eastward by Britain she would herself pull Britain clear of decay and give her a new birth."[1] But how was it possible to liberate a uniquely Canadian milieu

[1]Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising,* Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1969, p. 201.

while accepting the implications of the word 'colony'? Where did one loyalty end and the other begin? MacLennan places the personal crisis of Neil Macrae in the centre of that major set of contradictions. He is divided in loyalty, threatened by the garrisoned capitalist class, robbed of his community, and taken to an 'imperial' war which is not a primary Canadian concern. He must struggle towards the kind of identity that will make the survival of his community possible. At the end of the novel Penelope Wain says that Neil doesn't know much about the country. He doesn't. He has fought and won a personal battle, but he has no real sense of the contradictions of class in Canada, no clear sense that the settlers and community builders are in genuine conflict with the operating class that exploits land, wealth, and people for class gain. Of Neil Macrae's relation to Canada, Penny Wain says:

> He had never been able to see how it was virtually owned by people like her father, the old men who were content to let it continue second-rate indefinitely, looting its wealth while they talked about its infinite opportunities.[2]

Barometer Rising deals with crisis of identity, with deracination, and with the return to self and community as a result of the power of place, kin, and culture. The novel deals with a fundamental experience of the twentieth century, with a fundamental crisis, but it resolves the crisis in a way that it peculiarly Canadian. Much opinion in this century — especially in the U.S.A. — says that crisis of identity comes out of the fundamental social order to which the person suffering the crisis belongs. But MacLennan — in a way which relates to the work of writers in the third world who deal with colonialism and imperialism — says that the crisis arises as a result of a superimposition of imperial values upon the colonial society and a state of deracination caused when the person in the colonial society is displaced psychologically and is confused about his identity and the identity of his people. Penelope Wain describes the condition cryptically at the end of *Barometer Rising* when she thinks about the condition of her country. "Neil," she thinks "knew next to nothing of his own country!"[3] Neil Macrae, who is the hero of the novel, knows next to nothing of his own country! The person involved in the kind of identity crisis MacLennan deals with is not *alienated* from his country, he is *deracinated.* He is not set in opposition to his own country; he is uprooted from it, separated from it. The solution, in Hugh MacLennan's terms, to that crisis of identity is not a rejection of nation, but the breaking through the imperial superimpositions to a recognition of the genuine reality which

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 217.

[3]*Ibid.*

is always there among the people but disguised from them. MacLennan also makes us see that the big powers can perhaps afford crisis of identity and alienation from the real community among members of their population. But in countries like Canada the case is different. As Neil Macrae says: "A man has to think he hasn't got a country before he knows what having one means. . . ."[4] The solution to the identity crisis in *Barometer Rising* is a re-rooting. And since the condition of psychological deracination is pervasive in colonial society, Macrae's statement is a present and meaningful one for many people in the world. To readers elsewhere in the world, MacLennan presents a treatment of modern identity crisis which must make them — if they read the novel seriously — question many of the accepted terms in which they consider the problem. The crisis of identity which Neil Macrae suffers is dealt with on a domestic, a national, and an international level, and as it relates to the problem of psychological deracination in any colonial country.

The novel is crafted with sureness and economy. The themes and actions interdepend flawlessly. On the domestic, national, and international levels the book is all of a piece. At the level of domestic conflict Neil Macrae is forced to serve in France under the command of his uncle who hates him. Geoffrey Wain is also the father of the woman Macrae loves, his cousin, Penelope Wain.

At one point in the battle in France Colonel Wain sends up an impossible order, and it is received by Macrae who is one of the few surviving junior officers. Macrae must fall back, must retreat, if he is to fulfil the necessary part of Wain's order. His action is construed as cowardice, and he is arrested. But before any action can be taken, the place where he is held is blown up, and he is announced as missing and presumed dead. He awakens in an English hospital where he is believed to be an Englishman whose name he adopts when he realizes who he is. He realizes that as Neil Macrae he is liable to immediate court martial because — though he has been charged unjustly — he believes all witnesses to the real events on the fateful day have since died.

He discovers, however, that a runner who had memorized Colonel Wain's order is alive and in Halifax. And so Macrae returns to Halifax still suffering from shell shock. He has been forced to remain away from his own country and from Penelope who, unknown to him, has born a daughter by him and had it adopted by relations.

The novel begins with his first hours in Halifax. He discovers the indissoluble bond with his own country — his place. He finds that Penelope Wain still loves him and has waited for him, working as a successful ship designer. He manages to have his name cleared of the false

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

charges and to be rid of the uncle who stands for the generation of colonial-minded oppressors in Canada. The clearing of his name would have happened in the novel — as we are made to see clearly — despite the Halifax explosion. The explosion gets rid of Colonel Wain more easily than would have been possible without it and it forces Neil to reassume confidence, to take responsibility, to retrieve his lost, his smothered identity.

Before the novel begins, the family of Neil Macrae exists, though the pieces are scattered and must be brought together. Penelope Wain loves him and wants him. Together they have produced a daughter. The primary community exists even when Macrae is hospitalized and doesn't know who he is. At the level of the domestic action he must find himself, find Penelope Wain, clear his name, and assemble into order his already achieved family. The illegitimate child in *Barometer Rising* is not a sign of chaos in the social order but of the reality of the new community even when it is oppressed and not visible, even when the old powers are smothering and disguising it. Penelope Wain, moreover, is a liberated woman: she is an expert professional; she has her baby and has it adopted by accessible relations; she knows what her own struggle must be — even against her closest male friends — as a woman seeking full and just individuality. She waits in Halifax for Neil Macrae to find himself, to find his city and his country, to move towards the completion of new possibility. All those things come to pass. The barometer is rising for Neil Macrae, Penelope Wain and the country.

The novel becomes complicated at the national and international levels because MacLennan refuses to simplify the very complicated loyalties of the characters and of the country. Halifax is presented as many kinds of city. It is primary place to Neil Macrae: it is home. It is also the "bastion of the British Empire."[5] It is a place that is recreated "each time Britain goes to war."[6] It is a city that is truly careless of itself: "It seemed willing to lie out in the wet forever," Angus Murray thinks, "to take what other people and powers prepared for it. . . ."[7] Moreover, he thinks, "It would do its duty by England as long as there was an England left."

Halifax, is itself, and it is tied by strong bonds to England. Halifax is also a symbol of all Canada, a Canada reaching for its own self-expression and self-determination. It is also a place where a large part of the whole human condition may be observed. MacLennan says of Halifax, in an essay published in 1954, that it has been for a long time "an unfailing barometer

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[5]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 49.

of social health and prosperity of the whole country."[8] In another place, in an essay called "Portrait of a City" he describes Halifax as a human microcosm:

> A boy growing up in Halifax may see life small, but he will see it clearly as if he were watching through the large end of a telescope. It is so compressed and vivid that he can see, grasp, smell, feel and understand the whole interdependent organism.[9]

Halifax — historic, strategic, colonial, stable — provides exactly the place for Neil Macrae to get himself into perspective. Halifax, then, is not easy to define. Like Canada itself, and like the family made up by Neil, Penelope, and their daughter Jean, it is not completely visible; it is scattered and disguised and difficult to define. When Macrae thinks about Canada, he experiences "a furious desire for expression. . ."[10] Penelope is offended by the war propaganda that appeals to British and imperial loyalties only. They don't want Canada, she thinks, "to aspire to anything higher than a position in the butler's pantry of the British Empire."[11]

The relation between Neil Macrae and Colonel Wain is like the relation between Canadians in general and the people in power with their colonial mentality. Colonel Wain is a fifth generation Canadian. The history of his family is "to some extent the history of the town itself."[12] The family fortunes have been founded on privateering against U.S. shipping and are only increased as the family increases and needs more. Colonel Wain wants to be in England where the people live who he thinks are important. His view of Canada is bitter: "Everything in this damn country is second rate. It always is in a colony."[13] He is a capitalist and he is willing to destroy his nephew, Neil Macrae, in order to insure his future abroad during the war and in the military government he believes will come after the war. Angus Murray thinks of Geoffrey Wain as,

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[8]Hugh MacLennan, "Voltaire said. . . .", *Thirty and Three,* Toronto, MacMillan, 1954, p. 137.

[9]Hugh MacLennan, "Portrait of a City", *Cross Country,* Edmonton, Hurtig, 1972, p. 100.

[10]*Barometer Rising,* p. 79.

[11]*Ibid.,* p. 129.

[12]*Ibid.,* p. 19.

[13]*Ibid.,* p. 101.

> the descendant of military colonists who had remained essentially a colonist himself, never really believing that anything above the second rate could exist in Canada, a man who had not thought it necessary to lick the boots of the English but had merely taken it for granted that they mattered and Canadians didn't.[14]

Neil Macrae, like Canada, is fighting for the right to have his identity without oppression and to express it freely. He is blown up, ironically, as Halifax is blown up; and he has to carry the identity of an Englishman for two years — in order to survive. Neil Macrae is closely linked by MacLennan to Canada and its genuine identity, and it is Neil Macrae whom Colonel Wain would smother if he had the power. Both Macrae and Halifax are blown up as part of a war for which they are not responsible. The Halifax explosion, nonetheless, creates a real emergency, a genuine crisis. In the aftermath, Roddie Wain, Penelope's twelve year old brother, discovers that what has happened is "not an adventure but a catastrophe." It is real, not "a vision transported from France or Serbia. . . ."[15] But the explosion in Halifax, like the blowing up of Neil Macrae, is not tragic; neither Neil nor Halifax, that is to say, is responsible for the horror. As Neil Macrae thinks:

> . . .no matter what the Canadians did over there, they were not living out the sociological results of their own lives when they crawled through the trenches of France. The war might be Canada's catastrophe, but it was not her tragedy; just as this explosion in Halifax was catastrophic but not tragic.[16]

The family that exists from before the beginning of the novel — Neil, Penelope and Jean — is also a comment about Canada. The war is a catastrophe to it; the war happens to it. The war is not a sociological result of their lives; it is not their tragedy. After the explosion Colonel Wain and Alex MacKenzie — the two men closest to Neil's experience in France — are dead. Angus Murray, the drunken, philosophical doctor, has risen to the needs of his people. The Frasers, who adopted Jean, are dead, and she is there to be returned to her real parents. The catastrophe imposed upon Halifax by the European war forces the pattern of genuine relations and values to the surface. Colonel Wain is discovered dead, in the snow of a

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[14]*Ibid.*, p. 208.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 187.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 201.

blown out house, with his naked mistress. Neil, Penelope, and Jean are ready to begin life together. The force of old colonial-mindedness has been wiped out; the representatives of liberated Canada move inland to take up their future. They are not conscious of what will happen, but when Penelope thinks about Neil,

> she knew that it was inevitable for him and Jean and herself to go on together, even if they could do nothing better than preserve themselves for a future she felt to be epitomized by the events of the past few days. She was too much of a scientist to forget that titanic forces once let loose are slow in coming to rest again.[17]

Colonel Wain is a representative of the garrison mentality. That is the mentality possessed by the people who operate the machinery of ruling class order as a part of a general policy of controlled exploitation. He is both commander of military forces and an operating capitalist. In *Barometer Rising* he is doing both jobs at the same time. He combines both aspects of the garrison mentality into one figure as surely as did the chief of an early Hudson's Bay Company or North-West Company fort:

> Although he was on active service with full pay, his duties as transportation officer kept him busy only in spurts and he still had time to manage his own firm, which was busier than it has been in a century.

Colonel Wain is prepared to use the court to manoeuvre a false judgment against Neil Macrae. He destroys Macrae in reputation even without legal basis and has, indeed, manipulated him into his own battalion in order to be able to persecute him. Colonel Wain is an exploiter, Canadian style. As a capitalist he has served the interests of his family only. As a Canadian officer he has sought to repress Canadian independence and to get a place for himself among the British military command. Neil Macrae wonders at Wain's success:

> Why the devil should a man like Geoffrey Wain inherit the earth? . . . . It's firms like his that have ruined the fishermen in the province.[19]

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[17]*Ibid.*, pp. 215-216.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 57.

[19]*Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

Penelope Wain too, sees her father clearly, but she sees more deeply than Neil does. She knows he has a lot still to learn about class and power in Canada:

> Neil knew next to nothing of his own country. He had never been able to see how it was virtually owned by people like her father, the old men who were content to let it continue second-rate indefinitely, looting its wealth while they talked about its infinite opportunities.[12]

Macrae has been manipulated and traumatized as a result of Canada's colonial condition. He suffers a catastrophe that robs him of identity and then pushes him to re-possession of self and to the struggle for legitimacy in relation to place. His identity crisis, his *deracination* is intimately related to the crisis of identity and *psychological deracination* of his community. He stands in the novel, moreover, for the growth of love and self-respect and community despite imperial, class and capitalist oppression. He stands for the qualities of love and self-respect and community partly as a result of his natural, spontaneous energy expressed in his almost wanton creative genius in ship designing, his paternity of the natural daughter, Jean, and his passionate feeling for his country:

> his throat became constricted and he had a furious desire for expression: this anomalous land, this sprawling waste of timber and rock and water where the only living sounds were the footfalls of animals or the fantastic laughter of a loon, this empty tract of primordial silences and winds and erosions and shifting colours, this beadlike string of crude towns and cities tied by nothing but railway tracks, this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself. . . .[21]

Penelope Wain is the highly organized other aspect of their representation of love, self-respect and community. She bears the natural child and makes sure it is well placed and accessible. She translates some of Neil's ideas about ship design into substantial form. She declares the legitimacy of woman as expert and professional, as fully realizable human being. Together they are, according to Angus Murray, "two people who could seem at home almost anywhere, who had inherited as a matter of course and in their own country the urbane and technical heritage of both Europe and the eastern United States."[22]

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[20]*Ibid.*, p. 217.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 79.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 208.

The character of the Canadian nation "this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself"[23] has meaning, has significant presence, a past, and a future. Its development is related to its history, and indeed to all the history of the world symbolized by the meeting of the *Mont Blanc* and the *Imo* in Halifax harbour on the eventful day of the explosion. The community in Halifax and Canada has developed. "We've been taught to think we're pioneers," Neil says. "We ended that phase long ago, and now we don't know what we are."[24] But the novel tells us what Neil Macrae can't tell us. The family is there; the country is there; the novel, itself, is there. The recognitions are coming together and a pattern is emerging. Perhaps the most important fact, at one level, is that MacLennan is able to view the forces in all their ambiguity, to bring the characters together who provide the possibility of reconciliation, and to state the equality and complementary character of the hero and heroine. MacLennan sees the necessity of de-colonization. He sees the characteristics of the opposing forces. He exposes the values of the bourgeois class. He understands the meaning of the sense of place in a national liberation struggle. He shows Canada colonized from abroad and betrayed from within. His characterization of the psychologies of colonialism is keen and deep. It is an important work and the first of its kind in English Canadian literature.

But MacLennan never repeats the analysis that by accident or design is present in *Barometer Rising. Two Solitudes* avoids any confrontation with the capitalist/oppressor figure, and the hero, Paul Tallard, escapes into bilingualism and art. In *The Precipice,* though MacLennan writes a fascinating novel depicting a view of Canadian and U.S. character, he avoids the concept of class exploitation except on a personalist level. The novel, published in 1948, closes with a kind of allegorical statement that the good qualities of Canada may resurrect the U.S. and make life on the continent possible. *The Watch That Ends the Night* is a brilliant novel in many ways, but MacLennan deals with individual spirit and avoids any serious concern with class, capitalism, imperialism, or exploitation.

MacLennan's last novel, *Return of the Sphinx,* lies at the farthest end of his development away from the analysis in *Barometer Rising.* It is a deeply felt work and because MacLennan is serious about the ideas in it, an interesting one. Alan Ainslie is the Minister of Cultural Affairs. He lives in Quebec and is attempting to push bilingualism in the civil service. He is a federalist who is caught between the two camps, being pleasing to neither the extremists of English Canada nor of Quebec. His son becomes an interviewer on CBC for the separatist cause, and is caught by police on the

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[23] *Ibid.,* p. 217.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 217.

way to plant a bomb. His father's political career is destroyed, and he resigns from Parliament.

Return of the Sphinx is written from a strongly sentimental federalist point of view. Alan Ainslie is a Paul Tallard three decades later, a war hero who married a Quebecois. His work for the survival of confederated Canada is wholly on the cultural level because he analyses the causes of separatism in wholly Freudian and spiritual terms. At the end of *Return of the Sphinx* the big capitalist, Tarnley, offers Alan Ainslie a job. Like Paul Tallard in the earlier novel who would not work for Huntley McQueen, Ainslie refuses it, revealing, perhaps, that he will not ally himself as a visible servant of the capitalist class.

MacLennan deals very briefly but clearly with the multinational corporation and U.S. imperialism. He has Tarnley, the big capitalist, say that the socialists and the nationalist politicians curse international business. But international business goes on "for the simple reason that it adapts itself to human nature and no country on earth can do without it."[25] In the case of a civil war, it would be stopped in forty-eight hours by the U.S. Marines. If the U.S. came in, Tarnley says, "this country wouldn't be fit for a dog to live in."[26] The U.S. is referred to in the book, thereafter, but does not have any serious motivating part in the action. Alan Ainslie has entered politics because of what would happen to Canada with a U.S. takeover. He quit the Department of External Affairs and became a politician. "What's the use of a country having a foreign service," he asks a friend, "if the country's disintegrating and selling itself out. . . ."[27] But his work and his life are not lived thereafter in an anti-imperialist struggle, even with Canadian capitalism as goal. Rather he is working to hold the two nations in confederated union; he is seeking justice, as he sees it, for Quebec. He seems to believe in confederated independence without major struggle against the U.S. And, of course, as usual with MacLennan, socialism is unthinkable. That is because socialism, like a number of other fads, "had foundered in the ancient ocean of human nature."[28] That ocean is a place of inexplicable determinism and mystery, based upon psychology — often paranoid psychology.

The events in Quebec are given no economic, no genuinely political, no historical basis — in relation to French Canadian history. They are caused by "the mysterious emotion which was sweeping the world and causing crowds to break the windows of American embassies in country

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[25]Hugh MacLennan, *Return of the Sphinx,* Scribners, New York, 1967, p. 18.

[26]*Ibid.,* p. 21.

[27]*Ibid.,* p. 93.

[28]*Ibid.,* p. 75.

after country."[29] Joe Lacombe tells Ainslie the Quebecois want and are going to have a *patrie.* He analyses the shift in the demands made by the Quebecois. But he ends up saying, *"Nobody started this movement.* Nobody had to. It just happened."[30]

The "ancient ocean of human nature" from which all motivation arises has produced "the mysterious emotion" sweeping the world. Politics comes from the same ocean. It comes in the form of the conflicts set up in the nurseries of large families or among those outside of such groups. "Love-hunger" becomes politics when it grows "imperceptibly into hunger for power." That hunger is related to the relation of generations, attitudes to sex, domestic relations, and emotional security. The middle-aged, experienced first lover of Daniel Ainslie tells him that if a man fears "loving a woman" then "it is very natural for him to talk and dream about bombs and war."[31] Moreover, she preaches against fighting for a better social order. She speaks of "an idealist" like Daniel. "He had a lovely mind, but he's dead now. So is the cause he died for."[32] Daniel Ainslie has a martyr complex. He follows a man MacLennan intends to represent as a cold fanatic. Finally, when Daniel begins to talk to his father about Quebec as an orphanage, a subject which could lead to a genuine analysis of the forces at work in the country, Alan Ainslie turns the subject to the fact that he is, himself, an orphan. The analogy is presented directly and interest is focussed on the character of Alan Ainslie.

He wants federalism. The problem as he sees it is world-wide — "the crisis came when humanity lost its faith in man's ability to improve his own nature."[33] People no longer believe in personal immortality, and so they crack-up and become real criminals and madmen. Manifestations of violence, then, are senseless crimes. What is going on is a revolution in the way of life, and "all revolutions have neurotic roots."[34]

In those terms the conflict MacLennan sets up becomes difficult to defend. Daniel Ainslie and his friends are working for a separate Quebec. But their campaign, however legal, might cause violence. Violence, by definition, is evil. And so Daniel Ainslie's T.V. show is ended politically. He then takes the next step, and is caught with a home-made bomb. When

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[29]*Ibid.,* p. 13.

[30]*Ibid.,* p. 105.

[31]*Ibid.,* p. 153.

[32]*Ibid.,* p. 141.

[33]*Ibid.,* p. 267.

[34]*Ibid.,* p. 69.

he uses non-revolutionary means, he is denied his rights. When he moves to violence, he is, of course, sick, predictable. MacLennan keeps the conflict on a relentlessly personalist basis and refuses to make any serious analysis of economic, political, and class conflict in Quebec. He admits only cultural conflict, and it, for MacLennan, is based on personal neurosis not injustice in the larger social order. When Joe Lacombe picks up Daniel Ainslie in a car carrying a home-made bomb, Lacombe is angry. Daniel Ainslie's father saved Joe Lacombe's life once; how could Daniel, therefore, be so unfeeling?

The conclusion of the novel probably says more than MacLennan intends. Because Alan Ainslie, the man who is too good for politics, is destroyed. His way does not work for Canada. He transcends the conflicts personally, loves his children, is happily sacrificed for the cause, and even believes God is on his side:

> When I see you in prison, Daniel, will you mock me when I tell you that God Himself may have sent Joe Lacombe after you that night?[35]

God, we discover, is a federalist politician who wants to hold Canada together because unity is good and because the U.S. must be held off. But God helps those who help themselves; and *Return of the Sphinx* turns away from any of the ways that would seriously address the roots of injustice in Canada.

The long journey MacLennan takes from *Barometer Rising* to *Return of the Sphinx* presents a body of work that is always interesting and always important to an understanding of power, the criticism of power, and the rhetoric of power in Canada. MacLennan speaks the language of a vast body of Canadians. He is smiled upon by ruling class power for the best reason: he is a patriot and an anti-colonialist — even an anti-imperialist — who will not develop his analysis to the point where he presents a genuine criticism of the power groups that are destroying the country. He is a badge that can be worn by the ruling class to show they "care" about Canada. On the other hand, he takes the country seriously, hears its expression occasionally with a flawless ear, insists relentlessly upon a psychological examination of the character of colonialism — sometimes brilliantly, sometimes very badly. But he is the only writer thus far who has taken the larger social order in Canada — as it effects individual lives and motivation — as his pervasive subject. And for that reason alone those who like him and those who dislike him must handle his work seriously. They must give it all the space it needs to show its virtues and its fundamental and definitive weakness.

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[35]*Ibid.*, p. 303.