

THE ALIEN ROLE: FARLEY MOWAT'S NORTHERN PASTORALS

T. D. MacLulich

Farley Mowat is undoubtedly one of Canada's most visible, most vocal, and best-known writers. Yet his work has not received wide critical recognition. As Al Purdy has recently complained, in the course of reviewing Mowat's book of short stories, *The Snow Walker*, "academic critics are a pretty snobbish bunch when it comes to writers such as Mowat. They demand 'great art'; they require other themes than desperate Eskimos."¹ Purdy's comments may be unduly harsh — but not by much. Mowat's books have certainly not been accorded a great deal of recognition in the pages of our academic journals. Even that all-inclusive compendium of opinion on Canadian writing, the *Literary History of Canada*, gives scant attention to Mowat, recognizing him only as the author of two humorous animal stories and a work of children's fiction.² In many cases the neglect of Mowat's work is justified. Much of his recent output has consisted of travelogues and long pieces of topical journalism which are essentially ephemeral in nature. But at least two of Mowat's earlier books appear destined to survive beyond their own time and are worthy of serious critical attention. The discussion given in this paper points to the conclusion that Mowat is an important figure in a little-known strand of the Canadian literary tradition. Two of his early books, *People of the Deer* and *Never Cry Wolf*, express in a vivid and forceful way several preoccupations central to the Canadian imagination, and both books are part of a vigorous Canadian tradition of nature writing. In *People of the Deer* Mowat acquaints his readers with the life of an almost-extinct tribe of Eskimos living on the Canadian tundra, the Ihalmiut, and in *Never Cry Wolf* he describes the habits of an endangered species, the arctic wolf. *People of the Deer* is thus part of a small but important group of Canadian writings attempting to interpret the life of Canadian native peoples from the viewpoint of the native's own culture, and *Never Cry Wolf* is related to the well-known Canadian tradition of the subjective animal story, told from the animal's own viewpoint. However, Mowat's two books are also closely related to another less familiar literary context, the tradition established by earlier Canadian explorers and northern travellers. It is Mowat's place in this latter tradition which the present paper sets out to delineate.

¹"Farley's Fling at Fiction," *Books in Canada*, Oct. 1975, p. 13.

²The books which the *Literary History of Canada* mentions are *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* (1957), *Owls in the Family* (1961), and *Lost in the Barrens* (1956).

Mowat's books are part of the last phase in the development of the Canadian literature of exploration. In this final phase before its disappearance, the Canadian literature of exploration not only itself moved closer to the usual forms of literary expression, but also contributed an important theme to conventional fiction and poetry. Mowat's desperate Eskimos and beleaguered wolves are not isolated figures in our literary landscape, but are closely related to some of the trapped animals of Charles G. D. Roberts and to the vanishing Indians contained in works such as Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* or John Newlove's "The Pride" — works which also take as their starting point a spiritual identification with the land and its original inhabitants. Like the earlier explorers, Mowat describes a journey into a relatively unknown and little-travelled region. However, Mowat's principal intention is to communicate a subjective interpretation of his experiences, not an objective, factual account. Rather than detailing his own personal adventures, as Alexander Mackenzie does, Mowat resembles those explorers who, like David Thompson or Samuel Hearne, concentrate on understanding the strange lands and peoples they encountered. In his two books Mowat seeks to express the viewpoint of a people and of an animal who are unable to explain themselves to an audience of white readers. No less urgently, he seeks to give expression to the land itself — to the great wind-swept, rock-strewn, storm-lashed arctic plains. To this end Mowat has selected events from his own experience and re-shaped them in the telling, so that they serve his own purpose. Mowat actually combines the subject-matter of the explorer with the literary strategy of the novelist. Despite being "nonfiction," *People of the Deer* and *Never Cry Wolf* are as much works of imaginative literature as factual records of personal experiences.³ Instead of simply reporting his observations and adventures in a journalistic or a scientific manner, Mowat tries to convey the excitement of intellectual discovery by recording his information in the way in which he received it; he recounts the steps by which he arrived at his conclusions, rather than simply stating the conclusions themselves. As a result, in Mowat's books the physical journey becomes a symbol for a mental journey into new areas of understanding.

Because his aim is different, Mowat's literary strategy is not the same as that of his predecessors. He neither adheres to a strict chronological order in the events he recounts nor feels obliged to include a complete account of how he spent all the time of his stay on the Barrens. Instead, he is highly conscious of the need to keep the reader interested, and even to entertain him. Therefore he adopts many devices which are designed to amuse or divert. For example, although the overall organization of *People of the Deer* is

³The imaginative quality of *People of the Deer* is readily appreciated if the book is compared with *The Desperate People* (1960). Mowat's second book on the same group of Eskimos. *The Desperate People* is written from a more conventional documentary viewpoint. It discusses the impact of the white man on the inland Eskimos in a more generalized, journalistic way than *People of the Deer*, which shows the effect of the white man and his goods and diseases by means of specific tales involving particular characters and events.

topical, many of the chapters and incidents are deliberately cast in a narrative form; and, rather than confining himself strictly to personal experiences, Mowat often includes stories he has obtained at second-hand. In both books Mowat manipulates the presentation of his own role to achieve particular effects. In *People of the Deer* he downplays his own part and emphasizes the role of the Eskimo characters, even to the extent of putting several lengthy passages of narration into their mouths. In *Never Cry Wolf* Mowat treats himself as a more prominent character, but always in the guise of an incompetent bumbler — a foil for the Eskimos and their knowledge. Mowat's presentation of "reality" often assumes a highly emotional colouring. In *People of the Deer* the land itself becomes one of the book's major characters; and in *Never Cry Wolf* Mowat turns the wolves into characters with human traits, taking a license no strictly scientific writer could allow himself. In fact, Mowat acknowledges that his use of actuality is often rather free. At one place in *People of the Deer* he explains: "This tale . . . is not given to you as being completely factual in all its details. Nevertheless it is a true history of one spring in the present years of the Ihalmiut."⁴ It is an inner truth Mowat is seeking to express, a vision of essences which is not always dependent on the historical authenticity of every last detail.

Mowat demonstrates an awareness of his predecessors in the tradition of exploration writing. Indeed, he presents his books as a revision of ideas contained in previous writings about the north. *People of the Deer* contains several direct references to books by previous explorers such as the Tyrrells and Samuel Hearne, and Mowat claims that prior to his journey he had read widely in the literature on the arctic regions, much of which consists of the explorers' own writings.⁵ Commenting on the efforts of previous writers, Mowat says:

All who had attempted to write of what they found had evidently been seized by an inarticulate paralysis when they tried to put their deepest impressions into their writings. They seemed to grope futilely for words with which they could express the emotions the Barrens had instilled in their hearts. And they were baffled by that effort to speak clearly. Most of them gave up the attempt and sought refuge in minute descriptions of the component parts, which only if they are taken in their entirety can give the true measure of the great arctic plains. (PD, 20-21)

⁴*People of the Deer* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1971), pp. 125-26. The book was first published in 1952. Subsequent page references are given in the text and identified by the abbreviation PD.

⁵Subsequently Mowat has also proved his familiarity with this literature by editing a series of three volumes, which he calls *The Top Of the World* trilogy (1960-73), consisting of selections from the writings of the northern explorers.

Insofar as they had succeeded, the previous writers had stressed the negative aspects of their subject: "Emptiness and the terrible space! These were the things which haunted the imagination of the few white men who had known the Barrens" (*PD*, 21). Yet Mowat finds that the Barrens are also a place of unsuspected life, and he tries in his books to give expression to that life: "The People lent me their eyes so that I might see what has been hidden from white men. Now I, in turn, have lent the People my voice so that the white men might hear the words the Ihalmiut cannot speak for themselves" (*PD*, 289). When Mowat speaks of previous inarticulate responses to the arctic, he has in mind men such as Warburton Pike, the Tyrrells, Frank Russell, David Hanbury, and Ernest Thompson Seton, all of whom published accounts of their experiences during travels through the north.⁶ These books marked a turning point in the literature of northern exploration. Around the turn of the century, spurred on by wide public interest in accounts of travels to out-of-the-way places and in accounts of sportsmen's wilderness expeditions, many writers made hurried, usually single-season, northern dashes, and then wrote fast-paced popular narratives of their experiences. These narratives were aimed at a mass audience and were somewhat superficial in their treatment of the north. Usually, the authors made a hunting story the climax of their tale and stressed the colourful "roughing it" aspects of northern camp life. Recurrent themes were the vagaries of the Indian guides and porters, the picturesque features of native Indian life, and the notable features of the land itself. The authors could not invite the reader to enter deeply into the northern experience, for they were essentially tourists in the north, relying on the expertise of their guides. They did not become experts in Arctic techniques or in the life of the native peoples. Staying only a short time, they did not necessarily see a great deal. The noted naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, for example, wanted to make an encounter with the great caribou herd the climax of his book. However, the caribou failed to cooperate, and Seton was forced to use a passage quoted from Warburton Pike's book as the capstone of his own work.

These authors all share, though to a lesser degree, the geographical imperialism of the American explorer Robert E. Peary, who set out to "conquer" the north pole as if it were a military objective and he an army commander. Even the accounts of serious scientists like Tyrrell and Russell stress the adventurous wilderness escapades of the authors' journeys, which come to resemble the hunting or touristic trips of Pike, Hanbury, and Seton. In general, the books of these temporary visitors emphasize the spectacular, or at least superficially unusual aspects of northern life, at the expense of a deeper understanding of the land and its peoples. Nonetheless, the reader obtains an experience which he can recognize, one which is not too strange and disorienting. The north is reduced to a somewhat larger, somewhat more remote, version of the reader's own usual hunting or hiking grounds.

⁶Warburton Pike, *The Barren Ground of Northern Canada* (1892) and *Through the Subarctic Forest* (1896); J. W. Tyrrell, *Across the Subarctics of Canada* (1897); Frank Russell, *Explorations in the Far North* (1898); David T. Banbury, *Sport and Travel in the Northland of Canada* (1904); Ernest Thompson Seton, *The Arctic Prairies* (1911).

The books describe a romantically new but still safe-seeming wilderness interlude, an exotic holiday.

When, at a slightly later date, the Canadian explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson came to report on his northern journeys, his immediate model — both as an explorer and as an author — was also Robert Peary. However, Stefansson modified Peary's literary emphasis, just as he had modified Peary's actual methods of travel. Trained as an anthropologist, Stefansson filled his principal books, *My Life with the Eskimo* (1913) and *The Friendly Arctic* (1921), with information on the Eskimo's culture and with a description of how the Eskimo was able to travel and survive in the arctic. Most of Stefansson's innovations as an explorer were based on imitating Eskimo ways. He describes how he learned to travel like an Eskimo, hunt like an Eskimo, eat Eskimo food, and build Eskimo snow houses. He used his newly acquired abilities, along with his white man's curiosity and rationalism, to carry out journeys over the sea-ice which no one before him, Eskimos included, had thought possible. In fact, Stefansson depicts himself as a kind of improved Eskimo, for he claims to have used his European rationalism to strip away illogical superstitions from the Eskimo's ideas. Stefansson's tales of northern adventure appeal to a primitive fantasy: the dream of being self-sufficient and totally free of all restrictive social conventions. *The Friendly Arctic* in particular makes arctic travel seem easy. The book offers detailed descriptions of all the procedures necessary for arctic survival — hunting, igloo-building, wearing the proper clothing, how to avoid getting lost, and so on. The clarity and precision of the descriptions make the reader believe that he too could carry out Stefansson's journeys. Not only that — he would enjoy doing so. Stefansson minimizes the aspects of his expedition which involve relations with large numbers of other people, and he emphasizes the long journeys he undertakes with only a few companions. For the space of these journeys, he and his companions become, in spite of their modern rifles and their scientific knowledge, nomadic primitives depending for their survival wholly on their own efforts in mastering the surrounding country. Beyond securing food for their next meal and finding a good place for their next camp, they appear — unlike the denizens of civilized society — to have absolutely no problems. Stefansson's book makes the arctic appear a healthier and more desirable place than the civilized world of crowded cities.

Stefansson legitimizes his escapist fantasy by performing it nominally in the service of science and geographical discovery. Later northern travel writers have appealed to the same fantasy, but have not been able to justify it in quite so straightforward a way. After all, the basic geographical discoveries have been made, and the Eskimos are relatively well known. Moreover, the arrogance of attempting to "conquer" nature has become increasingly obvious to later explorers and to the naturalist-writers who seek instead to articulate a vision of man in harmony with nature: man as a part of nature, instead of man in opposition to nature. Instead of describing a geographical quest, these men present their journeys as a search for some unique northern experience, a special Arctic vision of life. What they seek is a "natural" or "organic" view in contrast to the artificial life of the "civilized"

with. They
 M. and mer
 some way th
 Eskimo by
 standards.
 (1941). Earle
 Long Day (19
 and de Pon
 language in
 experience:
 Fundament
 and self-stu
 arguing, ei
 than civiliz
 equivalent
 north is ju
 Mowa
 Canadian
 separate
 biurcated
 conventio
 statistical
 scientific
 has progr
 subject by
 reactions.
 condition
 subjective
 on the ne
 Most
 emphasize
 deliberat
 People of
 journey
 over his
 Thewia
 encounte
 ran num
 in only
 In
 att
 mi
 th
 wa
 Like the
 coasting
 they ha
 Mowat

south. They achieve their new perspective through sharing in the Eskimo's life and mental outlook until they can understand the Eskimo's world in the same way the Eskimo understands it. Instead of judging or analyzing the Eskimo by outside standards, they seek to discover the Eskimo's own standards. Such efforts are described in Gontran de Poncins' *Kabloona* (1941), Farley Mowat's *People of the Deer* (1952), Doug Wilkinson's *Land of the Long Day* (1955), and Duncan Pryde's *Nunaga* (1971). The books of Mowat and de Poncins are by far the best written of this group, for both men use language in a deliberately literary way to create the subjective effect of their experiences, not simply to recount the external sequence of events. Fundamentally these writers still appeal to an escapist fantasy of simplicity and self-sufficiency. However, they justify their pursuit of the simple life by arguing, either openly or covertly, that the northern "natural" life is better than civilized life because it is more moral. "Moral" and "natural" become equivalent concepts in their vocabulary. Whatever violence exists in the north is justified because it is carried out in the service of group survival.

Mowat's works are part of this last stage in the development of the Canadian literature of exploration, before it disappears as an identifiably separate literary tradition. The tradition of exploration writing has bifurcated. One mode of treatment has moved further and further from conventional literature by becoming increasingly objective, factual, and statistical, reaching the nonliterary status of a completely impersonal scientific report. The other mode — the mode to which Mowat belongs — has progressively evolved towards a deliberately literary presentation of its subject by becoming more and more an expression of its author's subjective reactions, a record of his development under the stimulus of strange new conditions and cultural standards. Increasingly, writers in this second, subjective mode have sought not to impose their own preconceived values on the new peoples they encounter.

Most of the books which are comparable to Mowat's work still emphasize the author's own travels and achievements. Mowat, however, deliberately diverts attention away from his own personal survival story. In *People of the Deer* there is only a casual reference to a five hundred mile journey to obtain supplies, and at the end of the book Mowat skips rapidly over his own final journey down the Thlewiaza or Great Fish River. The Thlewiaza is a river of the same type that the Tyrrells navigated in 1893, encountering considerable dangers. Mowat and his lone companion also ran numerous rapids on their way downstream, but he presents their ordeal in only the most general terms:

In five days we covered a hundred miles. We had soon given up any attempt to count the rapids. They were often continuous for many miles at a stretch, and the interludes of calm water were so rare, and therefore startling, that they impressed us more than the rapids would have done on any other rivers. (PD, 284)

Like the Tyrrells, Mowat and his companion tried to reach Churchill by coasting along the shore of Hudson Bay in a canoe, and in this adventure they had several hairbreadth escapes from destruction. For example, Mowat writes about

a day and night when we fought with an offshore gale and a blinding snow blizzard and, for a while, held onto the canoe, and to our lives, only because we found a reef and were able to stand waist-deep in the frigid green waters for the long hours until the tide changes and the wind dropped. (PD, 285)

In the end, they had to give up the attempt to paddle to Churchill and hope for a rescue by a chance passing plane. Yet the whole journey, with all its hazards, is dismissed in only two pages of Mowat's text. However remarkable an "adventure" or survival story it may have been in its own right, it did not form a part of Mowat's primary story, the story of the Ithalmiut.

In *People of the Deer* everything is subordinated to the goal of explaining the outlook and life of the Eskimos who are the subject of the book. There are separate chapters on the clothing and houses of the Ithalmiut, their relationship to the caribou, their social customs, their history and pre-history, and their religious beliefs. Mowat wants to convince the reader that the Eskimo is not a squalid and unfortunate savage but a human being worthy of respect and that the arctic Barrens are not in fact a lifeless desert but are full of vitality. All the chapters and incidents are designed to add to the reader's understanding of Mowat's point of view about the people who are his subject. His chapters tell the story of a number of different individuals and relate different aspects of Eskimo culture and history, but all add their mite to the developing picture of what these Eskimos once were and of how they have been reduced in numbers and in spirit by the efforts of unthinking, selfish white intruders into their world.

Mowat's most important techniques in conveying his vision are his use of narration, characterization, and language that gives emotional colour to every event and every scene he describes. Especially important is the attitude he suffuses throughout his description of the land itself. Stefansson argues that the Arctic is "friendly," that it will yield a good living to a man familiar with its ways. But Stefansson's Arctic is still a place of ice and snow and cold, against which a man must defend himself by the correct use of his knowledge and his wits. Mowat's Arctic is more temperate:

I came to understand that the arctic is not only a world of frozen rivers and icebound lakes but also of living rivers and of lakes whose very blue depths are flanked by summer flowers and by sweeping green meadows. The arctic not only knows the absolute cold of the pole but it also knows days of overpowering heat when a naked man sweats with the simple exertion of walking. And most important of all, I came to understand that the arctic is not only the ice-covered cap of the world but is also nearly two million square miles of rolling plains that, during the heat of midsummer, are thronged with life and brilliant with the colours of countless plants in full bloom. (PD, 17)

Most important of all, Mowat's idealized Arctic contains the great herds — *la foule* — of the caribou, which flow over the plains like a living river. His Arctic is above all a place of life, where want and death are only occasional intruders. Abundance of life and ethical purity are the two qualities he most

admires in the north he seeks so earnestly to depict. These are also the qualities he finds conspicuously lacking in the southern "civilized" world, and early in the book Mowat suggests his viewpoint on the relative merits of white and Eskimo societies:

When I was nineteen years old, I had to exchange my old shotgun for a Lee-Enfield rifle, for I became a soldier in the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment. I exchanged the prairies and mountains for the close confines of an infantry regiment, and the world that now lay outside those narrow bounds suddenly became a mad, nightmare creation which I feared and could not understand. (PD, 16)

He reports how a later reading of the brief notices given to the inland Eskimos in one of J. B. Tyrrell's papers made him feel that perhaps there he could find relief from the madhouse he saw around him:

Obviously they were men whose total strength had been devoted to a bitter struggle against the implacable natural forces of the Barrens, and the idea came to me that they might never have found the will or the desire to turn their strength against one another. If this was indeed true, then it was certain they were a people I wanted to know. (PD, 19)

This early characterization of the Ihalmiut serves to alert the reader to the moral position Mowat intends to take in his exposition. Mowat clearly sees himself as setting out to refute an existing conception of the Eskimos as a callous, barbarous, and savage people:

Of all the stories written about the Innu, as a whole, the majority have dwelt with a morbid and smug satisfaction on the Eskimo deviations from the moral codes we white men have developed. Tales of cannibalism, wife-sharing, murder, infanticide, cruelty and theft appear with monotonous frequency in arctic stories, where they not only serve to supply a sensational element, but also provide the popular justification for the intrusion of the self-righteous white men who destroy the laws and beliefs of the People in order to replace them with others which have no place in the land. (PD, 169)

The refutation of this set of charges, then, is the purpose which gives direction and energy to Mowat's book. His prose is propelled by moral indignation, by a vigorous sense of truth, as well as by a love of the Arctic and its people.

The moral values which Mowat finds in the Ihalmiut are of a special kind. His portrayal of them comes close to being a portrait of the romantic noble savage. Many of the difficult, unpleasant, or repellent aspects of Ihalmiut life are readily admitted by Mowat. But he consistently finds these aspects to be an inevitable consequence of the harsh realities of life on the Barrens. That is, he views the Ihalmiut as a completely natural people, living

a life wholly determined by their environment. The chief factors in this environment are the weather and the food supply, namely the caribou: "The People and the deer fused in my mind, an entity. I found I could not think of one without the other, and so by accident I stumbled onto the secret of the Ihalmiut before I had even met them" (*PD*, 65). In all their activities, as Mowat sees them, the Ihalmiut have adopted the natural way:

They have bridged the barriers of their land not by levelling them, as we would try to do but by confronting them. It is like the difference between a sailing vessel and one under power, when you compare an Ihalmiut and a white trader in the Barrens. The white man, driven by his machine instincts, always lives at odds with his environment; like a motor vessel he bucks the winds and the seas and he is successful only while the intricate apparatus built about him functions perfectly. But the Barrens People are an integral part of their environment. (*PD*, 81)

Stefansson presents the ideal northerner as a white man who has adopted the Eskimos' methods but not their restricting and irrational superstitions. Mowat, in spirit at least, goes further, goes completely native. Both conceptions are romantic, but Stefansson's ideal retains something of the aura of the conquering hero, although he has removed the military overtones of a Peary and put the stress on skill rather than on sheer strength and determination. Mowat appears to have repudiated western values entirely in his portrait of the Eskimo as ideal northern man and espouses instead a brand of primitivism. However, there is a strong thematic counter-current running through the book, for Mowat's presentation also makes it plain that the Eskimo way of life he depicts in such positive terms has already been irrevocably shattered. The destruction of the Eskimos' society has come about as a result of the intrusion of the white man's world into the northern barrens inhabited by the Ihalmiut. Mowat's description reveals graphically that the white man's mania for property is totally at odds with Eskimo values and causes great dissension within a previously harmonious community. The prime evidence of the disintegration of the Eskimo society is the story of the malevolent shaman, Kakumee. Motivated by a fierce desire for the white man's wealth of goods, Kakumee undertook a near-epic solitary winter journey, as a result of which he became, relatively speaking, a wealthy Eskimo. But this state of affairs was unheard of in the Eskimo communal scheme of things, so Kakumee, who unaccountably insisted on keeping his new possessions to himself, was isolated by the community, while still being feared for his shamanistic powers. Infected by the desire for personal possessions, he becomes in Mowat's description a living symbol of the hostile culture which is silently but surely destroying the Ihalmiut. Mowat stresses the neat dovetailing of circumstances which arranged that the epidemic which decimated the Ihalmiut was introduced by Kakumee on his return from his journey seeking the white man's goods.

Never Cry Wolf is quite a different kind of book from *People of the Deer*. In a structural sense, it is closer to the usual norms of the exploration tradition, for it adheres more closely to a chronological presentation than does the

earlier book. But in mood it is a distinct departure from the tradition, for it is richly comic in tone throughout, and comedy is rare in the exploration writings, except as an occasional and specially introduced interlude or break in the action. The chief means of introducing comedy is through Mowat's presentation of his own role. Instead of the usual intrepid and long-suffering explorer of nineteenth-century writings, or the competent and knowledgeable explorer of Stefansson, Mowat presents himself as an ill-informed, clumsy, and disorganized novice in the wilderness. He is propelled into the Barrens laden down with a vast and cumbersome array of government-issue equipment and guided by a totally unrealistic set of detailed instructions, which direct him in the step-by-step performance of certain impossible tasks. As if this situation were not already comic enough through its potential for absurdity (which Mowat exploits to the full), Mowat also stresses his own innate impracticality. One of his first descriptions of himself, which refers back to his childhood, sets the tone he uses throughout the book: "I took to roaming about by myself, resolutely eschewing the expenditure of energy on anything remotely useful; and thereby, if anyone had had the sense to see it, giving a perfectly clear indication of the pattern of my future."⁷ Mowat's use of the comic tone is frequent and assured. He makes himself at times a kind of slapstick figure, describing how, for fear of a supposedly dense population of savage killer wolves, he initially refused to venture even a short distance from the cabin without the protection of his prodigious arsenal; how he later rashly gained a reputation among the Eskimos for madness by setting off in the nude to observe the caribou-hunting technique of a group of wolves; and how he astonished the Eskimos by living on a diet of mice in order to demonstrate that a large mammal such as a wolf (or a man) could survive on such food. He makes the story of a male wolf's courtship of a female Eskimo dog into a ribald joke; and he makes a scatological joke out of his description of how, while conducting his biological examination of the wolf feces he had collected, he was discovered at this peculiar and unsavoury task by the Eskimos.

Mowat's humour is intended to serve the serious purpose of attracting readers for his message that wolves are not the wanton beasts-of-prey of popular legend and that they should be understood as an essential part of an harmonious natural system. Mowat introduces his theme by indirection into even the most farcical part of the book. After recounting the effect on his grandmother of an unfortunate and unexpected nocturnal encounter with three catfish which he had stored temporarily in the toilet bowl, Mowat continues: "As for myself, the effect was to engender in me a lasting affinity for the lesser beasts of the animal kingdom. In a word, the affair of the catfish marked the beginning of my career, first as a naturalist, and later as a biologist" (*NCW*, 7). He marks the important stages in his gradual enlightenment by explaining the changes in his outlook. After several close encounters with the wolves, during which they displayed none of their reputed savagery, he reports:

⁷*Never Cry Wolf* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 6. The book was first published in 1963. Subsequent page references are given in the text and are identified by the abbreviation *NCW*.

Inescapably, the realization was being borne in upon my preconditioned mind that the centuries-old and universally accepted human concept of wolf character was a palpable lie. On three separate occasions in less than a week I had been completely at the mercy of these "savage killers"; but far from attempting to tear me limb from limb, they had displayed a restraint verging on contempt, even when I invaded their home and appeared to be posing a direct threat to the young pups. (NCW, 56-57)

As a result, he resolved to "go open-minded into the lupine world, and learn to see and know the wolves, not for what they were supposed to be, but for what they actually were" (NCW, 57). As Mowat's experience and knowledge of the wolves deepen, the frivolous and not strictly necessary details gradually drop out of his accounts. Yet, as his intentions grow more serious and his reasoning more analytical, his writing does not become ponderous or abstract. For the most part he conveys his insights by means of illustrative anecdotes, or by recounting the story of how he discovered a particular aspect of wolf behaviour. He encapsulates his discovery that for a good part of the summer wolves live by eating mice within a humorous account of the plague of mice which overran his camp. He explains his conclusion that the wolves habitually take only the weakest or sickest of the caribou by recounting several of his own experiences in following after the wolves on their caribou-hunts. In the end, the picture which emerges of the wolf family under study is one of harmony and even affection, of mutual tolerance and respect between wolf and Eskimo, and of natural balance between the wolf and his environment.

The last scene in *Never Cry Wolf* adds an important element to Mowat's vision of his subject. The scene describes Mowat's unplanned encounter with two of the wolves at the bottom of their den, which he has crawled down to investigate. The wolves remain passive and are probably more frightened than he is. Mowat himself finds that his fear quickly turns to violent and aggressive anger, and only the absence of weapons in the immediate vicinity, he reports, saved the lives of the wolves. But he quickly reflects:

Mine had been the fury of resentment born of fear; resentment against the beasts who had engendered naked terror in me and who, by so doing, had intolerably affronted my human ego. (NCW, 176)

He grows ashamed of his reaction, for he feels it shows the inner depravity of the human species, a gratuitous savagery and cruelty which wild animals do not possess. Hearing the howl of the male wolf, he finds in the sound

a voice which spoke of the lost world which once was ours before we chose the alien role; a world which I had glimpsed and almost entered . . . only to be excluded, at the end, by my own self. (NCW, 175)

This passage
Mowat's ap
mythical Ec
shared a cot
merging wi
Canadian li
identifies h
the wildern
intruder on
and spiritu
appeal to r
all wild liv
mutual su
invokes th
Eskimos h
needs and
white ma
unnecessa
The l
in giving
version of
version of
wolves se
pastoral
andscap
something
The natu
of the Ar
articulate
describin
Mars dis
and sen
sentimen
other pr
escapism

Me
en
wi
pl
un
w
ag

The Ma
Oxford.

This passage comes close to articulating the underlying archetypal basis of Mowat's appeal to his readers. Mowat seems to allude to an ideal state or mythical Edenic condition in which man and animals communicated and shared a common life. Thus, in Mowat's work the process of adapting to and merging with the land and its people, which is so prominent a theme of the Canadian literature of exploration, reaches its final stage when the author identifies himself in spirit with the wolves and with the Eskimos who inhabit the wilderness. Instead of being, as the earlier explorers had been, a fearful intruder or a conquering invader, or even a skillful temporary resident, he had spiritually become a part of the new land. *Never Cry Wolf* makes an appeal to man's apparently innate desire to think that all life is one and that all wild living things somehow naturally exist in a state of balance and mutual support and understanding. In the same way, *People of the Deer* invokes the romantic conception that in their untouched, primitive state the Eskimos had a way of life which was completely satisfying to all their human needs and that this way of life was in many ways ethically superior to the white man's ways because it created almost no crime and no wanton, unnecessary violence.

The longing for an Edenic state is a perennial theme of literature, and in giving this theme expression Mowat has actually created a Canadian version of the age-old pastoral dream. His two books embody a northern version of the Edenic pastoral retreat, with primitive Eskimos or idealized wolves serving as the inhabitants of his wilderness Arcadia. It is a cold pastoral (to steal a phrase from Keats) that Mowat creates, cold not only in landscape and climate but in the chilly sternness of its ethical structure, but it is nonetheless a place which has a deep appeal to the Canadian imagination. The nature of Mowat's pastoralism can be clarified by referring to the work of the American scholar Leo Marx. In *The Machine and the Garden* Marx articulates a conception of pastoralism which is designed to be useful in describing an important aspect of North American literature and culture. Marx distinguishes between "two kinds of pastoralism — one that is popular and sentimental, the other imaginative and complex." Popular or sentimental pastoralism locates the source of value in an idealized rural or other pre-industrial setting. In imaginative or complex pastoralism, simple escapism is qualified by a more sophisticated viewpoint:

Most literary works called pastorals — at least those substantial enough to retain our interest — do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt towards pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another, if only by virtue of the unmistakable sophistication with which they are composed, these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture.⁸

⁸*The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford, 1967), pp. 5, 25.

This pattern, consisting of an idealized and innocent rural setting disturbed by the intrusion of a more complex and ambiguously structured urban world, Marx terms the "pastoral design." It is the second, more complicated version of the pastoral theme which Mowat's books contain. The pastoral design of *People of the Deer* and *Never Cry Wolf* does not present an unqualified retreat into romantic sentimentalism about the goodness of nature and natural man in contrast to the badness of civilized man. Mowat does not argue that civilized man should imitate either the Eskimo or wolf. At the end of *Never Cry Wolf* he makes it plain that man and wolf are separate beings, that man's very nature puts an unbridgeable barrier between himself and the animal kingdom. Similarly, *People of the Deer* has an elegaic tone throughout, which makes plain Mowat's realization that modern man cannot revert to the Eskimo's primitive simplicity. Mowat also acknowledges, though with regret, that the primitive Eskimo way of life he finds so attractive has effectively been destroyed forever by the intrusion of the white man's goods and values.

Mowat's use of the pastoral design marks his work as embodying a literary or imaginative vision, not a straightforward factual record. In Mowat's two books, exploration writing has evolved from a kind of scientific adventure story into a means of criticizing the writer's own society. In the manner of a novelist, constructing a fictional world, Mowat presents the wolves' or the Eskimos' world as an alternate model of society that makes a comment on our own world. Thus the pastoral design does not simply serve the purposes of escapism or naive primitivism. The understanding of an alien world is an important part of Mowat's programme, but in the end, through studying an alternate reality, he hopes to reach a deeper understanding of his own society and its shortcomings.

University of Alberta

THE I
I
Canadian
a mode
Neverth
Canadian
tion. If s
and who
it's nost
existed
e "Old Fa
i go bac
r." Whe
tonted o
jurists, w
suddenl
W
know t
is neat
from th
box he
all agl
signs,
Tea R
next s
"Nor
is.
reader
and t
ght wh
and h
we h
ter re
it's Lan
s of s
hen L
onto. l