JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR: THE JOURNAL FORM IN PLACE D'ARMES

Elspeth Cameron

A first reading of Scott Symons' book *Place d'Armes* (1967)[1] is likely to be confusing because Symons has actually published in full what is a journal from which a novel is later supposed to be fashioned. A variety of type faces that act as indicators of the various stages through which the "novel" is beginning to take shape conveys this sense of a form in evolution. Symons, first of all, creates a narrator, Hugh Anderson, whose defection from Toronto to Montreal is described in fine print in the third person. In an old note book he has picked up in an antique shop, dated significantly 1867, Hugh keeps a journal of his day-to-day responses, sections from which appear in *Place d'Armes* in the first person in ordinary print. His "Notes" — also in the first person — are set off by italics. Hugh Anderson is a writer who intends to use these notes and the daily entries in his journal as raw material for the novel which he plans and which he begins to write about one third of the way through *Place d'Armes*. This "novel," set off by heavy print in the third person, concerns the character Andrew Harrison who is obviously a surrogate for Hugh, just as Hugh is a surrogate for Symons. There is in this relationship a sense of mirror reflections stretching to infinity, yet the "I" in the journal is all three men — Andrew, Hugh, and Symons. Finally, yet another type face is used to distinguish the letter and the newspaper ads quoted in the journal.

Place d'Armes is not the novel Hugh set out to write; it is the journal chronicling his mission to do so. From the 1867 journal comes the form of the book itself. Its full title, *Combat Journal for Place d'Armes: A Personal Narrative by Scott Symons*, appears in old-fashioned print on the title page alongside a fold-out of illustrations and a map of old Montreal, all annotated by Symons during his "campaign." The end of the book contains a handwritten checklist used for messages, phone numbers, etcetera in Symons' adventure. The journal proceeds chronologically on a daily basis starting with "The Day before one" and ending with "Day twenty-two." Each "day" is underlined different distances from the top of the page according to the "highs" and "lows" of the experiences recorded. Thus a glance at the closed book from the side or from above resembles a graph or "temperature chart" of the advances and retreats Symons chronicles.

Any random examination of published journals reveals the great extent to which Symons has used the journal form. The original journal was the log-book which, as in the case of Hakluyt's *Voyages*, primarily served to inform the Old World about events in the New World. Two of several

[1]Scott Symons, *Combat Journal to Place d'Armes: A Personal Narrative* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), p. 22. Subsequent references will be to *PA* and will appear in brackets immediately following quotations.

off-shoots from this basic log-book concern us here: the missionary journal and the military journal. Although these categories are somewhat arbitrary, since they frequently overlap, they do represent slightly different impulses. The missionary journal, such as the Jesuit *Relations,* primarily records the struggle between good (in this instance, Christianity) and evil (pagan beliefs). Descriptions of local customs and new territories are subordinated to the great drama of God's work on earth. The military journal concentrates more on the day-by-day progress of a campaign. As in Tiger Dunlop's "Recollections of the Amerian War of 1812-1814," this type of journal approximates most closely the "journalistic" impulse to take down history as it is made. Accuracy is of the utmost importance. Thus letters, lists, orders, enumerations, and treaties are often recorded *verbatim,* not paraphrased. Both missionary and military journals are naive forms of literature. Almost always chronological in structure, they usually begin with a change of *place:* a ship embarks, the campaign is under way, or a missionary settlement is founded. The conclusion of a journal is arbitrary, but usually the completion of an enterprise determines it: the voyage is over, the battle concluded, the mission a success or failure. The power of the journal lies in its immediacy. It is, above all, *a firsthand* account of some experience the reader will probably never have. The traditional journal consists of daily entries kept chronologically. This linear pattern encourages a similar linear presentation of ideas — even a linear grammatical form (subject-verb-object). A typical sample of a journal entry occurs in the "Relation of What Occurred in New France in the Year 1643" from the Jesuit *Relations:*

> On the first of July, Father Brébeuf and Father Daniel left in a bark to go to Three Rivers, there to wait for the Hurons. This bark was destined to begin a new settlement in that quarter. Father Davost, who had come down from Tadoussac, followed our Fathers three days later in company of Monsieur the General, who wanted to meet these people at the trading post. They waited there some time for Hurons, who did not come down in so great numbers this year as usual.[2]

Symons' style in *Place d'Armes* is to a great degree reminiscent of this type of writing: "It was 5:35 p.m. Temp. 35F. Already dark dusk . . . The Square was there beyond any shadow of a doubt. It was decisively there. He did not have to reach out to palp it, to feel it out — nor did he have to defend himself from it this time." From the mention of time to a strong sense of place and a linear development of action, Symons' style reflects his form. There is, in short, almost nothing in the physical lay-out of *Place d'Armes* for which precedent cannot be found in early journals.

Why should Symons choose the journal form for his book? To answer this question, it is necessary to elaborate on his theories of art. Early in the book, Hugh records his original aim: "after all he wouldn't be able to present the complete truth in the Novel. So it was important to have complete notes for his own private edification. A kind of private revenge

[2]Paul LeJeune, "Relation of What Occurred in New France in the Year 1634," in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents,* ed. Edna Kenton (New York, 1925) p. 85.

against the restrictions of the Novel itself — a sort of intimacy. The intimate privilege of the first person" (*PA*, 4). The notes in the journal, then, are private; the novel will be the transformation of their essence into art for the public. As in Henry James' *Notebooks*, the collection of material precedes art. But quite early on, Hugh recognizes the hostility he entertains for the structured form of the novel:

> As I write I note something very dangerous to my Novel . . . that by allowing my protagonist, Andrew, to write directly of his adventure, into his Diary (which then becomes me! weird, that), by presenting the rationale of it, his Diary becomes my Novel, becomes my Adventure, becomes me now — and my Novel, being merely his Diary is reduced, and what I am living becomes merely my Novel. Whereas what I am doing is the totality. And to try to reduce it to Novel, Diary or other, I acquiesce in the fact that I myself do have some existence beyond this Adventure into my life, into life. And I thus reduce the Adventure to an accessory — which God knows (well!), it ain't! . . . It must then cease to be my Diary — or my Diary of the protagonist of my Novel . . . and become the Diary of the Adventure. Because I must submit totally to the Adventure.
> . . . if I wrote Andrew's Diary, the Adventure would recede out of me, and I would recede, would diminish. I would lose that appalling magnificent immanence of the world. . . In other words Andrew's novel is dangerous to my Novel — to me. . .I don't understand! (*PA*, 97)

Having recognized this problem, Hugh gradually comes to the conclusion that he must not sacrifice his notes to the novel form:

> He thought of his novel again — of course, it wasn't a novel — it was Life. Much of it was down now . . . in notes, in diary, in full. He had read over parts of it — and he knew that the real book — his book — his Testament, was in fact all of it . . . he knew that he would never get it all reduced to a novel. He couldn't. Or if he did, it might be a good novel — but it wouldn't be the book he had to have. It would be less than life. (*PA*, 228)

It is only at the end of his "campaign" that the decides to call the book "a Combat Journal": "and as I type this diary now I realize that my novelette is in fact some deeper assault on reality than I cared to admit. It is war . . . between reality and me — I'll call this diary a Combat Journal: That's it — my Combat Journal — I'll stick a label on the front cover."

This process is a part of a philosophy expounded by Symons in the book concerning the various levels of reality — levels which he labels 2-D, 3-D, and 4-D:

> In 4-D body is imbedded . . . a world of love.
> In 3-D body is detached . . . world of common-sense.
> In 2-D body is dissolved . . . world of non-sense.
> And the Canadian is exposed in a unique immediacy to all three at once. His American heritage is 2-D (the American Dream); his British heritage is 3-D (Parliamentarian's Club); his French-Catholic heritage is 4-D (Peasant Baroque!) (*PA*, 137)

The 4-D experience is, as Symons puts it elsewhere, the "Total Sensorium" (*PA*, 194). Anything less than this ultimate experience he views with disdain. Of necessity, the deliberate ordering involved in writing novel, the imposition of a rational structure, impedes the free-flowing involvement of 4-D. Consequently, writing for Symons is "a 3-D affair": "And there I'm trapped — because the essence of my siting La Place is 4-D. And the very medium I use to convey that insite, the written word, betrays my quest . . . I'm a deserter" (*PA*, 188). If as he says elsewhere, "Real Presence kills mere words — demands that words be Flesh" (*PA*, 245), the likelihood of Hugh's recasting his experience in the form of a novel becomes remote. The journal form is much closer to the 4-D experience Symons wishes to describe for the reader. Representing as it does a day-to-day account of the flux, the highs and lows, of his emotional life, the journal for Symons is a more honest account than the novel could ever be. The preference for the direct record over the consciously molded aesthetic form is reflected in his comments to Graeme Gibson:

> because our culture is so inflexibly glib-liberal in its modes, I have to write what people think are novels. They have to put my writings into categories such as this must be a novel, so plunk, it goes in as a novel. *You* know it's my diary, but they have to call it a novel because they can't think that one publishes one's diaries.[3]

For Symons, diaries, letters, journals are alive; to delete, revise, pare down is to kill. As Hugh puts it, "when form imposes content, then content is counterfeit" (*PA*, 149). This corresponds with Symons' views on "still-life" — that state of repressed emotions and senses which he finds symptomatic of English Canadians and against which he rebels. Margaret Atwood, too, in her poem from *The Circle Game*, "Against Still Life,"[4] speaks out against that kind of "containment" which imprisons life and thereby kills it. In "Pre-Amphibian,"[5] the poem that precedes it in the same volume, she argues on behalf of a state of flux where "I blur into you." Similarly, although Hugh frequently comments that this or that entry into his notes or journal will be deleted from the novel, he finally decides that "starting to say it all, there is no structure for expressing it" (*PA*, 140). Thus it is the apparently *unstructured* aspect of the journal form which best suits Symons' aims in the book.

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[3]*Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi 1973), p. 314.
[4]Margaret Atwood, *The Circle Game* (Toronto, 1969) pp. 65-67.
[5]*Circle Game*, pp. 63-64.

Not only do Symons' aesthetic (or rather anti-aesthetic) theories help to determine the book's form, so also does the theme. As missionary quest, *Place d'Armes* reveals Hugh as a "Hell-bent Heaven-seeker" (*PA*, 107) who embarks on a "Holy War." His "demission" from Toronto "Cubism" is determined by an interview with his boss in which he tells him point-blank that he has no balls. After being fired from his job as curator of the Canadian section of the R.O.M., he embarks on a quest "to re-instate the world [he's] nearly lost" (*PA*, 68); symbolically, *Place d'Armes* represents that "inner Place in Everyman's heart, that he never really explored, never really saw" (*PA*, 86). The archetype behind this theme is that of the Fall from Eden into a wasteland and the search for reinstatement in Paradise. Modern life for Symons is the fallen world. The Canadian (especially the male) is betrayed at birth — his feelings confined in a straightjacket of society's making. Like the young boy Hugh observes in Notre Dame Cathedral at the end of the book, they are mal-formed:

> A son with one of them. Junior vision. Age 17? He has the felinity of youth — but already over that imposes the same kind of jerked electronically controlled order that entirely governed the body of the choirmistress. His brain keeps sending out messages to his body. Do this. Do that. Don't do that. And his body conforms correctly, but always a split second after the order, so that there is that accusative slight divergence . . . Mind over matter it is called. Or intellect over sensibility. The beginning of the long slow death. (*PA*, 253)

It is against this "long slow death" that Hugh rebels in *Place d'Armes*. For Symons, Canadian society has lost all that makes life worthwhile; it is, in a very literal sense, "out of touch" with itself. From some earlier state (pre-social conditioning) in which visceral response informs life, the demands of convention dissociate one's fluid body-life from the logical processes. This dissociation is, for Symons, a vicious, violent process akin to castration. It has resulted in a distortion of sexual identity both for men and for women. Men are "gelded," "emasculated," "super-drones"; women have become aggressive alter egos of their passive mates. Hugh, visiting his friend George and his wife, speculates:

> So — he is absolved, by her presence, of his own Real Presence. He exists only as her keep . . . I mourn us — because thus George man-slaughtered I am less. How could it be otherwise?
> I'll have to start my own suffragette movement — for men! Women accomplished theirs in the last hundred years . . . But they've undone us. (*PA*, 70)

Consequently, sex has become "an act born of despair. It despairingly seeks joy, knowing full well it cannot be achieved, and that 'sex' is but the last tattered vestige of some original condition now lost to our century" (*PA*, 169). Symons describes here a state of alienation in which man is detached from many aspects of life. Automation takes over the power vacuum that

remains; we become, in Symons' phrase, "televictims." Visiting his friend Alphonse at an investment firm, Hugh is told: " 'We can speak direct with any major city in this country from here . . . this button' — But what I was asking myself was whether I could speak direct with anyone who might be in this room. Or whether I existed at all" (*PA*, 132).

Alienation is a chronic malaise throughout the nation — Man *and* his World. But Hugh's embracing of French Canada is a single-handed attempt to bridge the gap between the "Two Solitudes" MacLennan portrayed some twenty years earlier. He fights the "Holy War" in part to regain his heritage — to tap the strength of his roots in history. Hugh comments that English Canadians "have put our cultures into national committee. They have deliberately killed any danger of a positive personal response" (*PA*, 47). Suffused with guilt, he recalls: "I watched the French agonize under our history. In front of my eyes. And knew that I had maimed this people . . . my people had maimed . . . my maimed people had maimed this maimed people had maimed . . . And I couldn't forgive me" (*PA*, 77). In a cultural sense, then, Canada is dissociated — English "sense" from French "sensibility" — in much the same way as the individual is cut off from his emotional life. Consequently, Symons casts famous Canadians as heroes or villains according to their implication in this process. On the one hand, men like Laurier are "bland," and MacKenzie King is "the man without a face who effaced us." On the other, Robert Service is "real," Van Horne is "mighty," Sir John A. Macdonald "the only full man we ever produced," and Leger "the only 'great man' in Canada today." Symons loves Canada. His deep concern to keep what is worth keeping of history and tradition motivates much of his quest: "All I want is the right to love my country, my wife, my people, my world. All — all . . . the right to love. That is why I have come here . . . because I cannot live without that right" (*PA*, 93). To give back the "garden" (*PA*, 224), as Symons calls it, is to recapture the "Paradise lost" that is our national heritage. In his conversation with Graeme Gibson, Symons places contemporary Canada as follows:

> We are now between two minds . . . the traditional three dimensional mind . . . of which the Blandman is simply the decadent end . . . and some kind of neo-mediaeval mind. . . . The square mind sees everything in simple, detached, objective, three-dimensional terms. He sees things in terms of subject and object. But the new mind sees things in multiple terms — it sees many things at once, all intersecting, conjugating, interrelating. . . .
> We are en route from the old, square, liberal mind, which is a product of the Renaissance, to a new mind, which is a cousin of the old Mediaeval world.[6]

The phrase "en route" is central here, for Symons' journal documents the "route" by which this "new mind" can come to be.

Hugh laments the difficulties such a quest poses for a man from his background:

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[6]*Eleven Canadian Novelists*, pp. 310-11.

> Oh — how difficult to write all this . . . each word a brand seering the flesh. Impossible to write it, for we who have never said us. . . . So much easier to be a Jew, a member of that fraternity of exiles, whose only redemption lives in the magnificent written plaint — in a whole North American literature culminating in Bellow, and, in Canada, in Richler and Layton and Cohen. I don't lessen their achievement . . . but they were born into a culture of expostulation! They were born with right to permanent exile. But what of the goddamn Legitimist, Establishment, Hereditary, Infeodated, Loyalist, Christian Canadian Tory? For him to speak his mind . . .requires a Counter-Revolution at least. And — worse (or better!) — for him to bespeak his sensibility requires at least a nervous breakdown! (*PA*, 140)

Symons presents Hugh's search for grace and communion as a modern allegory — a contemporary *Pilgrim's Progress*. This modern missionary explores new territories in the attempt to "to reinsite the world [he's] nearly lost." To overcome the alienation of English from French, Hugh immerses himself in French Canadian culture and language. Early French Canadian furniture provides a rich, sensual life that restores the object to its rightful place — a pursuit Symons was later to follow to its logical conclusion in *Heritage: A Romantic Look at Early Canadian Furniture*. In his introduction to *Heritage*, Symons was to describe French Canadiana as "hallucinogenic furniture of Being and celebration."[7] And Hugh *lives* in French. "ça saute aux yeux . . . again, I find me, as of often, living in French . . . and what I am seeing, living, says itself so much better in French" (*PA*, 190). As Symons puts it elsewhere: "the language I use as the very vehicle of my personality is *against* certain traditional elements of rejoicing and celebration within me. The language I use is in considerable measure Puritan and pragmatic. I am happier speaking French, believe me, and I am happier living in French."[8] And in the nostalgic architectural monuments of Old Montreal, Hugh rediscovers his ancient heritage.

Having defected from WASP Anglicanism, Hugh embraces Roman Catholicism. In Notre Dame Cathedral, he contacts a spiritual life in which life is "an enactment, and not merely a syllogism." Symons himself is a Catholic convert, partly because, as he comments to Gibson, "areas of Grace . . . feed into us, areas of celebration, areas of palpable liturgy, which mean that our writing can be, if we use these things, warmer, richer, less merely cerebral."[9] Hugh's attraction to Roman Catholicism fulfills several aspects of his quest. First, it asserts faith in a spiritual dimension; second, it offers the ritual consumption of the Blood and Body of Christ as a celebration of that faith; and third, he discovers "the liturgy of life" — a union of feeling, sense and mental experience. It is in Notre Dame Cathedral that Hugh begins the enrichment of his bodily life through the homosexual (or,

[7]Scott Symons, "Introduction," *Heritage: A Romantic Look at Early Canadian Furniture*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971.)
[8]*Heritage*, p. 321.
[9]*Heritage*, p. 315.

more accurately, *homosentient)* affairs which liberate both sense and spirit. Oddly enough, he feels that these encounters restore his whole sexuality: "Somehow his capacity to love women was linked to his ability to accept his love for men" (*PA*, 165). Through the "purifying lust" (*PA*, 61) of physical hedonism, Hugh searches for a communion with a spiritual dimension notably lacking in the civilized culture of Blandman. Through sexual rebirth, he is restored to the birthright of Adam: "I have no choice but to absolve me of the arrogance of autonomy, of asserted independence, in this way . . . by umbilinking me from cock to cock back to Adam. To pass into this plenitude, the Kingdom of God, of love" (*PA*, 192). Thus the journal is a kind of chronicle of Adam's naming of the world around him — "The First Day. Genesis!" (*PA*, 269). Symbolically, the club in which he makes some of his sexual encounters is called the Eden Rock. Like Cohen in *Beautiful Losers* and Davies in *Fifth Business,* Symons is preoccupied with sainthood; Hugh's "deepest concern was that of sainthood. Not to be a saint — but to bind to himself that reality of which the harvest was the saint. Nothing else matters."

The means by which Hugh realizes this missionary quest is, significantly, military. The book's epigraph from Douglas Le Pan sets the keynote:

> Stranger reconquer the source of feeling
> For an anxious people's sake.

Since he begins with the observation "they have deliberately killed any danger of a positive personal response" (*PA*, 47), Hugh feels that violent retaliation is not only justified but necessary. The imagery in Symons' book is in fact heavily military. To carry out his stated "campaign" to "re-insite the world I've nearly lost" (*PA*, 68), he "reconoitres" using his "perceptor set" (his five senses). Avoiding "ambushes" and surviving "haemorrage," he takes "sanctuary" to avoid "riot" or to "evade" the enemy. The following passage is typical of much of the description in the book with its concentration of such images:

> He rolled over again . . . wondering how to extrude this presence in him. How to protect himself from it. He knew that once his lines had been breached this way he was endlessly vulnerable. And he felt vulnerable as he lay there. Utterly. Crunch of bones was railwayshunt was truck loading bottles in nearby alley was the Greyway vertebrate in him was his back cracking under the strain. Fart of carhorn, roar of motors . . . a jungle rumbling him. It was all amplified in him — and it all amplified. So that every sound was present in him the way the Place was . . . an invasion on all fronts. It all detonated inside him. . . . and threatened to detonate him. (*PA*, 105)

The risk of "detonation" is ever present because he is "vulnerable." But to live in a state of continual "vulnerability" is an essential part of this combat for Symons:

> Vulnerable . . . was it always necessary to be this vulnerable, just to see, to hear, to know? Did it have to be that way? And then he knew that it did. That that was the marvellous about man . . . his vulnera

> ity. That was the adventure in life. The adventure of life. To close it off was to close off life. So he had to embrace that vulnerability . . . or live dead. (*PA*, 273)

This vulnerability means that suicide is an ever-present alternative. In the back of Hugh's mind throughout his mission is the thought of the knife he has seen in an army surplus window. As he comments to his friend Pierre, "What gives me courage is what I call my life insurance . . . the fact that I am at any moment prepared now to kill . . . and to kill myself, to suicide — citizen's absolute *présence*" (*PA*, 215). *Place d'Armes* is, in this military context, the place where Hugh takes up arms against a society he perceives as overwhelmingly threatening to his inner life. It is also, in a missionary context, a place where one can embrace and be embraced, spiritually and physically. Yet Symons' presentation of Hugh's military and missionary quest is charged with irony and paradox. Hugh's search, as a military endeavour, is aggressive, but the 4-D experience for which he thirsts is one in which he will be passive, the square "insiting" him. Symons shows Hugh veering dramatically away from the situations he "controls" towards those in which he is "out of control" or, as Hugh puts it, "vulnerable." From a military point of view, this "vulnerability" is a disadvantage, but to the missionary, it represents the state in which he is open to the immanence of spiritual grace.

Hugh's struggle to find a language and a form in which to represent this 4-D immanence is also highly ironic. The novel form, as we have seen, is inimical to the "open-ended adventure" Hugh wants to record. It is seen as synonymous with that "electronically controlled order" he deplores in social conditioning. Like Joyce and Barthes, Symons is concerned to show us the "flow" of life through the form he uses. The word-play in *Place d'Armes* ("fédérastes," for example, or "iconspasm," "assoul," and "televictims") is not mere sophistry. As in Joyce, it is part of the breakdown of fixed forms which recreates the cosmic flux of experience. Those sections of *Place d'Armes* which are closest to 4-D experience break into a stream-of-consciousness style such as this:

> I've been had I've been had I've been had I start to hue and cry, but stop in full halleluia — the Church, the Church . . . I've just penetrated my Church and it is
>
> La Place d'Armes!
>
> and being in La Place I have been in the Church all the time. In the Church in La Place in the Rosegarden of Eden Rock in New-Old Montreal. Holy Mary Mother of God!
>
> roses still trumpet
> Brownstone still broooms
> Gros Bourdon still thunders (*PA*, 205)

Although these 4-D moments are outside of time, Symons recognizes that ironically only through language can they be communicated. He yearns simultaneously for a pre-verbal culture in which grunts, groans, and sighs would be simultaneous with visceral responses and for a civilization so sophisticated that it moves beyond form into spiritual grace. Thus, the

conclusion of the book is the point at which Hugh abandons his novel for life, moving into 4-D:

> . . . taking the Host [he] ate it alive till he embraced the Place and then turning to the first person he could see ran with his right hand outstretched, his forefinger out, to touch, to give this blood that spurted fresh out the open act as he ran to embrace them in this new life he held out at fingertip to touch they (*PA*, 279)

Ultimately, 4-D experience cannot be reproduced. However, Symons suggests with this final passage — in which Andrew has *become* Hugh in the fledgling novel — that he can lead us into it.

Taken as a whole, the various literary forms — notes, journal, letters, novel — comment on one another by juxtaposition. Hugh's "novel" is abandoned, as we have seen, on the grounds that a "preconceived schema is doomed" (*PA*, 149). Seen next to the journal which includes the impressionistic notes and letters, the novel *is* a distortion of the quality of experience Symons would have us see. To order experience is to sacrifice the confusions, half-thoughts, inconsistencies which are, for Symons, essential to the "open-ended adventure." But to set *any* sequence of words on the page is an act involving selection, choice, deletion; and it is a profound irony in *Place d'Armes* that Symons' move into the journal form is but the discovery of a different kind of structure. Although Hugh's journal attacks fictional form, it is itself fictional.

Symons' three-fold perspective in *Place d'Armes* illustrates in its final form the *process* of moving out of 3-D experience towards the 4-D "Total Sensorium." Like Davies, Atwood, and Cohen (indeed, like so much contemporary writing everywhere), Symons wishes to strip away the overlay of cultural conditioning and to be re-born into the full glory of spiritual, physical, and emotional life. He illustrates well Robert Kroetsch's thesis that recent writers in Canada are engrossed in "unhiding the hidden."[10] Symons' method is his content. As the notes and journal gain in importance, the "novel" form atrophies, a formal device which corresponds to the shrivelling up of that imposed personality (Blandman) Hugh has rejected in his move from Toronto. After *Place d'Armes*, Symons was to take this principle even further in *Civic Square*, by publishing a box of loose sheets of fictional letters addressed to the reader. Eventually, he was to maintain, "insofar as I'd like to see any of my writings published, I would like to see a book of my letters published."[11] In deciding to include the material either normally deleted from the novel or altered to suit a "preconceived schema," Hugh simply discovers another form underneath the structure he dismisses. But this preference for the journal form says a great deal. Symons identifies the novel with a decadent society that is over-civilized. Hugh's choice of the journal represents a move back to simplicity and directness. It is as if Symons were to say, "Let's go back and start again." The journal form is more open-ended than the novel, which Hugh identifies with "still-life"

[10] Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden: Recent Canadian Fiction," *JCF*, 3, [illegible] (1974), pp. 43-45.

[11] *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 319.

Through this more primitive literary form, Symons demonstrates the flow and dynamism of life just as many contemporary poets (Purdy, notably, but also Ondaatje and Bowering) look for forms which will render the immediacy of experience.

Like the traditional journal, *Place d'Armes* records the exploration of new territories —not of the land but of the soul. The physical journey has metaphysical overtones, and it is equally unnerving. Although no natural disasters or wild Indians await the unlucky or ill-prepared invader, it is still a life-and-death venture. "Detonation" is always a possibility, and suicide or madness are real alternatives to victory. The journal form, in this context, is a touchstone for sanity. The simple, declarative sentence functions as a positive, structured assertion in the face of unbearable danger or fear. *Place d'Armes* offers this simple linear style as a base from which variables indicate a less controllable experience. Those sections which approach 4-D experience break into a stream-of-consciousness blurting reminiscent of the hurried jottings which are characteristic of journal entries made in haste or under stress. Hugh, in his novel, writes: "I know that not to hear is not to see, is to go blind, is to die inside me, is to be a living death. While to see —is to go mad" (*PA*, 129). When madness threatens, Hugh "closes down [his] perceptor set" and reverts to the journal. In part, the journal exists as a record, like those of early explorers, in the event that the writer is lost or killed.

By harking back to the unsophisticated journal form, Symons also establishes a connection with his heritage as a Canadian and asserts the continuity and contemporary validity of "Christian soldiers." Part of what has been lost in contemporary Canada is, in Symons' view, a meaningful link with the past. Hugh recognizes at one point that he is

> at the mercy of a world that is not mine . . . and with only one slender tendril deeprooting me still to an age-old culture back through Vimy, Confederation, the War of 1812 v. the damned Yankees, the American Revolution of 1776, the Boyne, the Restoration, Charles Martyr, Henry's harem, the Field of the Cloth of Gold . . . right back to Adam . . . tiny tendril, unable to withstand completely this deliberate disorientation now . . . . (*PA*, 170)

The journal form suits well the struggle to maintain these fragile connections with the past. Symons greatly admires the tradition of letters of which he says "this tradition was the vehicle for something fine in being Canadian and it helped me write."[12] Symons' use of the journal form is among the first in a series of such contemporary adaptations: Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Laurence's allusions to C.P.T. in *The Diviners*, Fennario's *Without a Parachute*, Butler's *Cabbagetown: A Diary*, Engel's *Sarah Bastard's Notebook*. These sophisticated journals remind us, as has so much recent Canadian literature, that evolution is preferred to revolution, that what is great in the past can be adapted to give strength to the present.

Loyola College
Concordia University

[12]*Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 314.