

The Confessional Revisited: Laura Salverson's Canadian Work

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Laura Goodman Salverson is best known for her first novel, *The Viking Heart*, first published in 1923 and since reissued in the New Canadian Library series, and for her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (referred to below for convenience as "Confessions"). The autobiography won her a Governor General's Award in 1939 and has been reissued twice, most recently in K.P. Stich's 1981 edition by the University of Toronto Press. Between those two dates, 1923 and 1939, she placed a large number, perhaps as many as 150,¹ short stories in such magazines as the *Western Home Monthly*² produced two more novels and one serialized novella about Scandinavian immigrant life in North America, and three non-Canadian romances of lesser quality. After 1939 she published only one book of fiction (more a saga than a novel), about Viking exploration of North America.

Born in 1890 in Winnipeg to Icelandic immigrant parents who turned to their Norse culture for consolation in their new world difficulties, Laura Goodman Salverson became a fervent traditionalist. While many Icelanders were assimilating into Canadian society, in her fiction and in her journalism she protested against such tendencies and argued strongly for the preservation of old ways. She did so from what she saw as a position of cultural superiority, believing that Icelanders, with their remarkable history of exploration, parliamentary government, and inspiring sagas, could only be the poorer if they assimilated into the vulgar and materialist society she saw in the Canadian West. While protecting Icelandic social standards in Canada, in her early fiction she was also determining her personal identity, a

¹ In a note (c. 1944) to Clara Thomas, Laura Salverson referred to a "sketch done for Biographical Encyclopedia of the World" (no author given; possibly written by herself): this accompanying two-page "sketch" claims, after a list of ten short stories, that there are "many others (totals 150)." The "150" seems to refer to other stories, but possibly refers to all her published works. "Portfolio of Questionnaires, Clippings, etc. gathered while compiling 'Canadian Novelists 1920-1945'" By Clara Thomas, Special Collections, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.

² After Feb. 1933 retitled the *National Home Monthly*.

process of self-definition which was eventually to develop the autobiographical "state-of-readiness" that resulted in "Confessions." Both the 1939 autobiography and her first two novels (of 1923 and 1925) were built upon prefabricated cultural definitions which preceded self-definition while contributing strongly to it.

Salverson's "Confessions" is interesting, not because she led an unusually interesting life but because, on top of her detailed snapshots of urban and pioneer scenery, three major motives for her writing can be identified. Her autobiography is in part an adequate and modest explanation of the background of *The Viking Heart*. In addition, two other motives are strongly apparent. One is her own adjustment to two greatly different parents; the other is her desire to present the Icelandic settlers to the English-Canadian community in such a way as to do away with the barriers of prejudice that surrounded all "foreign" or "alien" groups in the West. She certainly felt that it was very unfair of English-Canadians to look down upon Icelandic immigrants.

Salverson is not well known, and some details of her life seem a necessary introduction for those who have not read her autobiography, if only to provide the real contexts in which the apparently realistic novels were written. The daughter of Icelandic immigrants who came to Winnipeg in 1887, Laura Goodman was raised in a domestic atmosphere of erudition and culture even if it was also one of crushing poverty and itinerant insecurity. Her father moved his family back and forth from Canada to the U.S.A. in search of work more suitable than the harness sweat shop in Winnipeg where his health was undermined. Laura was frequently ill for long periods as a child, and, although she physically accompanied her family on its excursions, she often retreated into a private world of largely Norse fantasy to escape the unpleasant realities of her unsettled and depressing life. Eventually discarding many of her dreams, including her ambition to become a teacher, she married a railwayman and undertook work to support them while he slowly advanced his career. Her nighttime writing became a profitable sideline both as a serious if not desperate attempt to earn extra income and as a partial escape from the pressures of the day. Her fiction soon made her almost as famous as her mentor, Nellie McClung, whose autobiography, *Clearing in the West* (1935), probably encouraged Salverson to assess her own life so publicly in 1939.

Even more than her contemporary, F.P. Grove, Salverson concentrated on Scandinavian and Germanic characters in her fiction. Her first novel, *The Viking Heart*, was the first insider's

account in fiction of "alien" immigration in the west, and is almost as much about the island the people emigrated from as it is about the seemingly empty land to which they immigrated. In later novels, especially *Lord of the Silver Dragon* (1927) and *Immortal Rock* (1954),³ she connected North America with the Vikings in an almost fanatical manner, asserting in the latter book (on slim evidence discredited by most experts) the "Kensington Stone" theory,⁴ that Norsemen had penetrated overland from Hudson's Bay as far as modern Minnesota as early as the 16th century. In her books set in more modern times, her Icelandic immigrants were portrayed as continuing this saga of settlement: her people and not Columbus had discovered America. All of her twentieth century Scandinavian characters were presented as heirs of this pre-Columbian tradition of colonization in North America and as therefore having no need to take second place to anyone, as if the order of arrival had something to do with subsequent ranking. She served willingly as an interpreter or middleman, bringing Norse history and culture to the attention of Canadians who were unknowingly dismissing Icelanders as only additional aliens requiring civilization and education.

It was with this attitude that she set out in 1923 to introduce her people to Canada at large. In her first and best novel, *The Viking Heart*, Salverson drew heavily upon her own family's experiences as immigrants to depict the larger drama of Icelandic immigration. (This debt would be in part acknowledged and in part obvious in "Confessions.")⁵ In *The Viking Heart* she fictionalized the story of the mass movement of some 1400 Icelanders to Canada in 1875. By starting her story in Iceland, as she did for the 1924 edition, she was able to refute the myth that some English-Canadians entertained of all aliens being rhapsodically ecstatic about leaving their filthy, impoverished, and oppressed homelands to move to Western Canada. She showed the Icelanders content and happy in their native land, unwilling to leave even when forced to by volcanic catastrophe and economic necessity. Showing the alien immigrant at home, comfortable in the midst of his own culture and language, before transplanting him to Canada where he would inevitably look out of place, is an obvious device to establish the worth of alien culture and, by

³ Full title: *Immortal Rock: The Saga of the Kensington Stone Based on the Paul Knutson Expedition to Greenland and America in the Fourteenth Century; Commissioned by His Majesty King Magnus Erikson of Norway, Sweden and Skaane: his Letter of Authority Executed at Bergen, October 28th, 1534, By Orm Ostensen, Regent.*

⁴ See "Kensington Stone" in Norah Story, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (Toronto: Oxford U.P., 1967) 401.

⁵ Laura Salverson, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, (London: Faber, 1939) 462-53.

extension, an alien people.⁶ Salverson also attacked the ludicrously exaggerated rhetoric of Canadian recruiters overseas, which had misleadingly enticed immigrants, many of whom might have been better off remaining at home. The stories she retells of the harrowing experiences of Icelandic settlers, particularly the quarantining, for their first winter, of a group in a swamp near Gimli because of smallpox, are intended to support her claims that Icelandic immigrants had earned their right to be accepted as Canadians in full measure.

In *The Viking Heart* Salverson recreated in fiction the history of one immigrant family, the Halssons, whose troubles in the New World were considerable. They persevered and suffered and at length came to terms with the land and with established Canadians by sharing bereavements. Death, and especially the burial of loved ones in Canadian soil in so many books by or about immigrants, marks the total acceptance—the decision point of no return—by them of Canada as their new homeland.⁷ Second generation Icelandic-Canadian Thor becomes a medical doctor and dies in France during World War One. His memorial service back in Canada is taken by an English Methodist minister, who comforts Thor's mother afterwards. In a single sentence backgrounded by the emotions raised by Thor's death, the author claims that such experiences unite Canadians: "He was an Englishman and she an Icelander. But they looked each into the other's soul and found they had a common heritage."⁸ Linking a methodist cleric and a first generation alien immigrant in this way seems to be Salverson's answer to the enforced assimilationist policy proffered by the well-known Methodist minister and writer in Winnipeg, Rev. Charles Gordon ("Ralph Connor") in *The Foreigner* (1909).

Salverson did not pursue the religious argument. Her vision of God as the "Dark Weaver," an intimidating balancer of events and indifferent guardian to man, makes conventional religion almost superfluous in her novels. *The Viking Heart* defends Icelanders from prejudice because they were Icelanders: it neither links them with non-Scandinavians against common discrimination nor does it seriously criticize English-Canadians for their attitudes to any but Scandinavians. She wrote as if to rectify a simple mistake which could be made up for by admitting Icelanders into the inner circle of power where they had a

⁶ The first chapter of Frederick Niven's *The Flying Years* (1942) is set in Scotland to show the harsh circumstances which drove the immigrants to Western Canada, and is similar to chapter one of *The Viking Heart* (1924 edition).

⁷ For example, McCourt's *Home is the Stranger* and Kiriak's *Sons of the Soil*.

⁸ Salverson, *The Viking Heart* (Toronto: McClelland, 1929) 322.

right to be. She bitterly noted the prejudice directed at the first generation group. One of her characters, Bjorn, recounts it:

You know the attitude that the people had towards us. Suspicion, distrust and contempt. A little of that faded when we proved our worth in the rebellion. . . . But we Icelanders are still a curiosity to many. They think us creatures of doubtful habit and uncertain intelligence. They tolerate us because we are useful—because we are doing what they refuse to do, being of such superior clay.⁹

Salverson's resentment concerning the class her people were funnelled into on their arrival, including her bitterness at her own family's having been allocated to the lowest stratum in the Canadian social hierarchy, is clear in such passages and was obviously a motivating factor behind her fiction. She wrote to claim a place in the sun for herself and for her people.

In her third novel of Scandinavian immigrant life, *The Dark Weaver* (1937), war again is used by the author to prove the immigrants' value to Canada as they volunteer to fight for Britain. While Salverson hated war, she seemed unaware of the dichotomy of praising it in the sagas of the Viking past. She also must have recognized (perhaps from Gordon's bellicose war novels) that English-Canadians judged "Canadianness" in part as the willingness to fight for the British Empire, and that if Icelanders were ever to gain their respect they must participate, as indeed they did. Pacifism was sacrificed to her ethnic ambitions, but even so she emphasized the senselessness of the war and its destructive effects on "a young peace-loving continent, betrayed into carnage by the duplicities of the old world."¹⁰

Salverson's immigrants in *The Dark Weaver* are good pioneers as she understands the word. There is, however, little sense of farming in the Canadian style. Urban and commercial careers were what her fictional characters aspired to. Although in fact the Gimli Icelandic community was agricultural and truly pioneering, her personal experiences were urban and transient, leaving her with little knowledge of farming. She presented her immigrants as monied, capable, courageous, little different from the ancient Viking nobility of her *Immortal Rock*. They come as European speculators, never expecting to be made to start out at the bottom. They end up as much Canadians as anyone else,

⁹ *The Viking Heart* 107-08.

¹⁰ Salverson, *The Dark Weaver* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1937) 373.

having paid their dues to the graveyard and done their "bit" in the war. They are shown as having earned the respect of their neighbours of all origins.

Salverson's attitude to ethnicity was very similar to that of the English-Canadians she aspired to join. Her immigrant novels and her autobiography were in large part trying to establish Icelanders and other Scandinavians in the same superior category as Britons, if not in fact superior to that "type" of Briton found in Western Canada. She deplored the pressures of assimilation and yet was forced to record them as part of the history of Icelanders in Canada. Her view of Icelanders was very one-sided and positive. Although at times they were shown as childish, they seem on the whole to have stepped in splendor out of the Norse sagas which had been so important to Salverson as a child. Their nobility, courage, and sense of honour are constants. It is clear that she believed that instincts developed and integrated over centuries accumulated to form the ethnic character she presented as Scandinavian. In her novel *When Sparrows Fall* (1925), which, although set in the U.S.A., could with the omission of two or three sentences just as well be set in Canada, the stalwart Ephemera reacts stoically to the news of her friend's accidental injury:

All her Viking ancestry, manifested in her emotional restraint and clear courage, reacted to the thought. She was proud, as her forbears had been proud when their warrior dead were carried home on the shields of respectful retainers.¹¹

It is this ethnic pride which, prompted by Salverson's unpleasant experiences of being personally looked down upon, led to self-justification and over-compensation by the excessive gilding of her own type with virtues that seem absurdly out of place in North America. She was writing out of a sense of ethnic and cultural superiority that segregated Canadians according to origins and that uplifted her own discrete group at the inevitable expense of others. Salverson wrote to claim kinship with the élite, the English-Canadians who so obviously administered to the West politically and economically. Her democratic principles were not very socialist, and were doubtless inspired by the suffering (which she was spared) of the first generation pioneers on the land and her own personal poverty which continued after her marriage. Her feeling of being cheated permeates all three of her novels of Scandinavian immigrants.

¹¹ Salverson, *When Sparrows Fall* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1925) 232.

With her reputation as a popular writer firmly established by these novels and her many serialized stories, Salverson published her autobiography in 1939. This autobiography is odd in that it covers her life only to 1923 (when she was thirty-three) and her first excited look at *The Viking Heart* in a bookseller's window. It explains the background of *The Viking Heart* and her literary concerns, but halts without even attempting to explain away the gap between 1923 and 1939. One naturally wonders why she sliced her life in half so abruptly, especially when one learns that she lived on into her eighties. It was as if she saw *The Viking Heart* as the changing point in her life: after 1923 she was public property as a writer; before 1923 was the private life that supplied the material for the immigrant novels. While we never learn more from her about her later life, we certainly can go back and pick out pieces of her earlier life from her fiction, using "Confessions" as a guide. Salverson became a successful author by writing fiction, but that fiction was never far from the facts of her own life and led, through refinement, to the finer version of the autobiography, which looks backwards, while her fiction had struggled to look forward into what too often seemed a vacuum.

The Governor General's Award notwithstanding, "Confessions" has faults which weaken its effect. Apart from the unexplained missing years, vagueness is probably its most serious weakness, particularly with regard to dates. Yet, for all its vagueness and contradictions, the book remains a valuable historical document and literary apologia. Told in chronological order, it is a straightforward story of the events of her transient life—principally the worrisome moves of her family, her brothers' deaths, her parents' perseverance and indomitable spirit, and her own developing consciousness of the work world. It is a remarkable story because of its detailed depiction of the unremarkable—the commonplace matters of daily life in the first two decades of this century. No Viking heroine herself, on the Norse Saga model, she must have realized that her own story was subservient to the stories of the people and places which had formed her. She illuminated these ordinary people and places with a surprising wealth of detail that contributes much to our understanding of those times, from the muddy and malodorous rounds of the swill wagon in Winnipeg to the secretive tragedies of her aunt's private lying-in hospital in Duluth. The practical sense of the lives of the urban poor then in both cities is valuably provided by one who lived such a life with senses alive to the impressions. It contrasts very obviously with two other views of Winnipeg at this time: J.S. Woodworth's statistical and liberal analysis of Winnipeg's poor immigrants in *Strangers Within our Gates* and Charles Gordon's patronizing and melodramatically unrealistic novel, *The Foreigner*: both are clearly

outsiders views when set beside "Confessions." Her own progress in life structures her larger view of a developing society, seen from the bottom. Perhaps that is why it seems so convincing.

This realism is achieved on three levels, as she discusses the Icelandic immigrant community, her parents, and herself. Her bitterness at the community level is equal to her resentment at the failure of her father to find success in the New World, and this bitterness too is found first in the two early novels.

In "Confessions," after the initial five short chapters of her first recollections of life in North America, Salverson provides two chapters detailing her parents' lives in Iceland. These chapters, significantly entitled "I meet the august ancestors" and "Introduction to exile," provide the bedrock for her life story and contrast with the optimistic myth of immigration, what could be called the Canadian Dream. Her personal experiences in the cities, as well as her second-hand knowledge of the Gimli community's terribly tragic beginnings gained during research for *The Viking Heart*, had taught her that most non-English immigrants had little to look forward to except hard manual labour.

Salverson's father had swallowed whole the line of one recruiting agent and transplanted his family to find only labour of a type which quickly wore down his frail physique. An important theme of "Confessions" is the author's attitude towards her parents, and especially the extended apologia she provides for her father's failures, and for his romantic and impractical impulses which too often accompanied them. While admitting his unsuitability for manual labour, she puts most of the blame on the sweat shop system, and in explaining by arithmetical rhetoric the inability of her father to prosper she provides a detailed description of the financial demands on the urban poor of Winnipeg. Her ultimate point is antithetical to the Canadian version of the American Dream, and is simply stated in her own words: "But without money, the man who had dependents stood no better chance of attaining financial security in old Winnipeg than did his fellow workers in the other cities of the world."¹²

Salverson does seem more attracted to than repelled by her father: certainly she shared to some extent his romantic temperament and physical frailty. Yet she gained a strong sense of healthy pragmatism and learned the value of hard work and cheerful endurance from her long-suffering mother and her aunt

¹² Salverson, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* 110-11.

Haldora, both of whom operated as counterweights to her father's temporary enthusiasms. While recognizing, in an oddly sympathetic yet softly mocking manner, her father's weaknesses and her need to rise above them, she worked overtime in "Confessions" to justify the man's efforts in the face of a relentless economic system which had first seduced and then ruthlessly exploited such as he. As she tells it, he father was a fated victim of a system he could not even communicate with. It is hard to remain patient with this pathetic father figure in "Confessions," despite the ambivalence of his daughter. Her two views can be seen separately in the two novels in which characters modelled on her father appeared, and thus the later "Confessions" can be seen as an attempt to fuse the conflicting feelings already defined on paper.

In the autobiography Salverson admits that she borrowed heavily from friends and relatives for the characters of *The Viking Heart*. It is not hard, therefore, to recognize her own family history in Chapter Seven, where the economic details of the exploitation of Mr. Hafstein match exactly those of her father in the Winnipeg harness plant. Yet, in *The Viking Heart* this overworked father dies, leaving the widow to endure and through unceasing toil honourably pay off her husband's medical expenses. The pathetic struggle of this widow to maintain her family with honour is half this story: the pathetic defeat of Mr. Hafstein is the other half, and there is only pity for him. Except for the dogmatic statements against a system that could permit, let alone encourage, such exploitation without providing relief, Salverson provides no answers. Mr. Hafstein is a helpless cog in the machinery, and it is the machine and not the man which is blamed for the human tragedy.

Shortly afterwards in *When Sparrows Fall* another side of her father was mined to supply the characterization of Stephen Freeman. The story follows the growth of his daughter, Ephemina, as the family travels in search of success. Certain events of the plot resemble or match events in Salverson's own life as described in "Confessions," notably the failure of Stephen's attempt to settle in the American South and his penniless return after a malarial attack. In this novel the author stops just short of ridiculing the inadequacies of this character, but he remains preposterously pathetic and is certainly an absurd handicap to the family. The only job he can hold down is a night watchman's, and Salverson removes him from the story by having him shot. The women carry on without him, certainly better off for their loss. Ephemina sums up her father's attitude to his material failures in life with: "For there are as many sunsets and goldfinches and tanagers as formerly, and these, together with the contrib-

utions of a few philosophers, constitute fortune in father's opinion."¹³

This statement, which derives from love as well as exasperation, seems also to be the author speaking of her own life and, as Ephemera struggles to succeed as a teacher, aided by the practical advice of Stephen's pragmatic sister, Aunt Caroline, who is obviously modelled on Salverson's real father's sister, Haldora, we can see the author putting herself into the novel. The fact that Salverson's father was as good as dead to her, as far as materially providing for her future, may have led her to erase both father figures in the two early novels. While she doubtless resented the fact that her life of subsistence had precluded the formal education that could have satisfied her dream and made a teacher of her, she still resists overly condemning a father whose non-material ideas she recognized as valuable. Thus the ambivalence which persists in the autobiography as late as 1939.

Salverson did continue to work personal experience into her fiction after 1925. For example, *Johan Lind*, the Gothic novella which appeared in seven installments in the *Western Home Monthly* in 1928, refers to one event which had great significance in her mother's life, as we later find out in "Confessions." The passing reference to "a frocked priest flitting by on an errand of mercy. . . ." brings to mind her mother's experience with a Catholic priest on her arrival in Quebec, an anecdotal heirloom which became one of the valued confessions.¹⁴ More importantly, the protagonist and title character is an immigrant followed from Norway by his unfavourable fate. The threat of fate was a reality to Salverson, who used it as another scapegoat for her father's failures.

However, while all her novels deal with Scandinavians in one way or another (she even considered the people of Normandy to be Viking descendants, for example), after 1925 we can see a broadening out of her interests and a movement away from herself until 1939 and the return to introspection. In this sense her work is circular: the novels which started her writing career and the autobiography which celebrated its success both demonstrate to different extents a devotion to the same goal of self-definition, and both efforts defy personal limitations and hardships to pursue freedoms. Perhaps that is the best explanation for the open-ended nature of "Confessions."

¹³ Salverson, *When Sparrows Fall* 147.

¹⁴ Salverson, "Johan Lind" (2nd installment), *Western Home Monthly* (April 1928):10.

One can still question "Confessions" as autobiography. It is as much the generalized biography of her family or of the Icelandic experience in North America as it is of her. In the young author of 1923, earnestly researching the Icelandic pioneers' stories for material that would ground *The Viking Heart* in fact, we can see a second generation immigrant who was writing her way out of a strong sense of social alienation, battling the reasons for that alienation directly and intelligently, searching to locate a people and then a family and then herself on the map of a nation which seemed indifferent to all of them and which to them sometimes seemed unworthy of their efforts. Once we understand the close relationship between her fiction and her autobiography, we can assess the implications, as they help us to understand her work, and as they explain characteristics of immigrant literature.

Salverson's fiction suffers most from the same over-romanticism that afflicts work such as Gordon's—but hers is a romanticism derived from the Norse sagas, which is clearly seen in the example mentioned above of Ephemias in *When Sparrows Fall*. It is her weakness for melodramatic confrontation and spectacle, for mystery, for idealism and devotion, and for heroism. This romanticism is least apparent in the first two North American novels of Scandinavian settlement, which depend so heavily on the facts of the author's own background. When one looks at her work as a whole, one sees a strange vacillation between historical realism and melodramatic fantasy. One of her most fanciful books, *The Dove*, is based on facts taken from a saga, and most of her novels contain some historical touchstones that are obvious and functional. Yet such work as the insipid novel *Black Lace* lessens her literary reputation because of its stereotypical and fanciful style. However, Salverson was aiming for a via media emphasizing emotional impact which could be as real as fact. In a 1960 article in *Canadian Author and Bookman* she claimed: "At least I fail to see any artistic advance in the works of James Jones and Norman Mailer, whose realism is as untenable as the romanticism of the Sheik was ridiculous."¹⁵ Literature that appealed to the heart was her stated goal, a goal that could mix the facts of autobiography within a light framework of fictional characters and dialogue. Her fiction is best when she stays close to home, close to her own heart, mainly because the known facts restricted her romantic impulses: her autobiography benefits similarly, for romance is ostensibly kept at a distance within it.

¹⁵ Salverson, "On Writing the Novel," *Canadian Author and Bookman* 35, no. 4 (1959-60):

On a wider level, these novels and autobiography can be described as immigrant literature. Her novels fall into line with Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots*, which uses Bukovinian material in much the same way as Salverson uses Icelandic material. Other semi-autobiographical works come to mind, such as Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* and, to a lesser extent, Magdelana Eggleston's *Mountain Shadows*. These present immigrant experiences from the inside, but all are later than Salverson. F.P. Grove, however, was publishing short stories about Russo-German immigrants in *The Winnipeg Tribune* and magazines of wider circulation at the same time as Salverson was achieving popular success for her stories and novels. They might well have been raiding each other's work. Some of Grove's stories, such as "The Heir" and "Water" reveal Grove's concern for the plight of alien immigrants, and especially the discrimination the German-Canadians suffered during World War One. These stories are less autobiographical than *In Search of Myself* and *A Search for America*, but still indicate the immigrant authors' needs to retain contact with their past (even, in Grove's case, when he might be seeking to conceal it). Autobiography, at least for these writers, transcended the personal to celebrate and protect the cultural and national. Clearly Canadian immigrant literature, autobiographical or not, expands and sometimes rudely ignores conventional Canadian boundaries, repudiating a would-be culture that was, in the twenties and thirties, ignorantly snubbing others. As much as she tried to anchor herself in Iceland, Salverson did succeed in introducing Anglo-Canadians to one of the so-called "foreign" civilizations in a way that did appeal to the heart but which also depended on fact. She would not have become a novelist without this passionate desire to translate her people's experience into the Canadian social idiom, and she could not have written the autobiography without the success of the novels. The process of constructing or, in this case, reconstructing, the ideological structures of civilization, which constitute part of the self-definitions found in each of the autobiographies mentioned earlier, is perhaps most obvious in such immigrant works because of the obvious differences in detail between Canadian cultures and others. At some point, these authors had to choose between continuing to explore culture, and thus remaining in either fiction or sociological history, or of making the transition from the now established culture to the establishment of self—thus producing autobiography. In Salverson's literary career as a whole, this enthusiastic definition of a civilization had to be accomplished before she could begin to define herself by those primary standards. She was inseparable from her Icelandic past yet alienated in her Canadian present. The novels which contain the seeds of the autobiography

and "Confessions" itself were her way of synthesizing two of the polarities which ruled her life.

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