

Seaward Vision and Sense of Place: The Maritime Novel, 1880-1920

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The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of remarkable literary activity in Canada—one in which Maritime writers played a prominent part.[†] During the 1880s and 1890s, the first generation to be raised Canadian reached maturity, many of them caught up in the promise of Confederation and the spirit of imperialism, which, as Carl Berger has argued, was a form of nationalism.¹ Another contributor to the burgeoning of literature² was technological change which resulted in the cheaper production of books, including paperbacks, and created a demand for more material, as did an increasingly educated, leisured, and culture-minded, reading public.

As is well documented by Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook in *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*,³ this was a time of social transition, of the metamorphosis of Canada from a country of farms and small towns to a more urbanized society, of a change in the manufacturing base from wood to steel. These changes were reflected in Maritime communities, particularly those along the railway lines. The industrialization of parts of the Maritimes was tempered, however, by the precarious nature of the post-Confederation economy. Traditional trade with Great Britain and the West Indies declined, and the region failed in its competition with central Canada for the lucrative western markets. Thus the Maritimes experienced simultaneously both the rise of manufacturing towns and the periodic takeovers or closures of industry that resulted in waves of emigration.

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¹ *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1919* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1970).

² Gordon Roper, in the chapter "New Forces: New Fiction 1880-1920," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klink (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1965) 260-83, documents the dramatic increase in Canadian fiction during the period.

³ (Toronto: McClelland, 1974).

A study of the literature of the period by Maritime writers may tell us something about the concerns and values of Maritime society as it responded to this erratic and tentative industrialization with its accompanying social changes. Scholars have looked at the more significant poetry of the period—that of Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, and Francis Sherman. Influenced by the English Romantic and Victorian traditions and by New England Transcendentalism, their writing is introspective, a record of the poets' spiritual musings in the world of nature. Little is seen of society. But what of the fiction? It has received very little critical attention.

There are several reasons why this substantial body of fiction has been neglected. Literary critics of the period, with few exceptions, tended to see Canadian literature in general, and Canadian fiction in particular, as imitative and inferior. They considered fiction, furthermore, to be of a lesser artistic and moral order than poetry and not to merit the same kind of serious attention. Perhaps most important, many of the writers of fiction were women, writing for a female audience. Recent feminist criticism has pointed out that there is a relationship in the period between gender and judgement; women writers were not taken as seriously as men. In the modern period this fiction has suffered, too, as a result of a general reaction against sentimentalism and romance. The works of only a very few writers—Charles G.D. Roberts, whose animal stories were very popular until the second world war, and Margaret Marshall Saunders and Lucy Maud Montgomery, who wrote classics that have kept their names alive—continue to be read. For all these reasons, as well as Canada's general cultural insecurity in the first half of the twentieth century, a considerable number of Maritime Canadian writers have passed into oblivion, except for cataloguing in such compendiums as Watters's *A Checklist of Canadian Literature* (1959) or brief mention in the *Literary History of Canada* (1965). This is despite the fact that some (Carrie Jenkins Harris, Alice Jones, Susan Carleton Jones, Frederick William Wallace) wrote a respectable half dozen novels, some (Basil King, Hiram Cody) as many as twenty novels, and some (James MacDonald Oxley) about thirty.

For the most part, these writers of fiction came from, or soon gravitated to, the larger Maritime cities—Halifax, Fredericton, Charlottetown—although they may have been born in Douglas or Cody's or the Annapolis Valley. And, in almost all cases,

they had a connection with a church and a university:

King	Anglican minister	King's College, Windsor
Cody	Anglican minister	King's College, Windsor
Roberts	son of Anglican minister	University of New Brunswick and King's College, Windsor
Saunders	daughter of Baptist minister	Dalhousie University and Boston University
Montgomery	married to Presbyterian minister	Dalhousie University

Travelling and living outside the Maritimes was also the norm after a literary career had been decided upon. The writers found it convenient or even imperative to be near other writers, their publishers, and the larger American or English audience; and they responded to the spirit of internationalism that was in the air. Some of the places they lived include:

Roberts	New York and London
Saunders	Boston
Fytche	London
King	Cambridge, Massachusetts
the Jones sisters	France

Some writers, such as Cody and Montgomery, left the Maritimes to live in other parts of Canada. Most of the writers returned to Canada (although not necessarily to the Maritimes) towards the end of their writing careers.

Admittedly, much of the fiction is not of the first rank—although at its best it stands up to the fiction of American writers of the period, such as W.D. Howells, who do have a place in a literary tradition. For the most part, the novels are romantic; their themes, love and adventure. Most portray life in rather idealized terms, present wholly good or wholly bad characters, are sentimental, and are directed at a popular audience. No doubt many novelists felt the temptation to conform to popular taste, but the lure must have been particularly strong for writers from Canada who published outside the country. There would have been little encouragement from a New York or Boston publisher for a writer who submitted a novel that dealt in depth with regional life in an obscure area—Beaver Harbour,

New Brunswick, or Guysborough County, Nova Scotia, for example.

Evidence to support this view comes from the publishing career of Margaret Marshall Saunders, who constantly courted her American audience in the choice of her settings and characters. Her study of small-town life, *Deficient Saints, A Tale of Maine* (Boston: Page, 1899) is set, not in the Annapolis Valley or Halifax where she grew up, but, as the title tells us, in Maine. Her novel *Her Sailor: A Love Story* (Boston: Page, 1900) is a rewrite, with a New England heroine, of a novel that originally had a Nova Scotian girl as its central character. These compromises may have resulted in part from an American review of her novel *Rose à Charlitte: An Acadian Romance* (Boston: Page, 1898) which criticized it for being too expansive about life in the Clare District of Nova Scotia, a region that has little interest for the reviewer except as exotic background. This suggests something of the pressure exerted on Maritime and other Canadian novelists not to look too closely or seriously at their native land:

The growing popularity of the summer trip to Evangeline country no doubt explains the existence of 'Rose à Charlitte,' a "novel of locality," as the phrase now is. Its inordinate length is more difficult of justification even from an advertiser's point of view. Five hundred pages of flabbiness, while they allow one painfully to realize the long years of waiting for the final happiness of Rose à Charlitte and her lover, are rather more than the [my italics] cares to undertake. The enthusiasm of the author for her theme is evident, but its more judicious application might have resulted in a wider audience for her descriptions of the excellence of Acadian inns, the beauty of Acadian landladies, the spirit of romance so easily invoked by the Basin of Minas.⁴

In fact, Saunders's novel is quite good, hardly "flabby" by the popular fiction standards of the day. It attempts a serious presentation of the day-to-day life of the Acadian community—the character of its people, its history, folkways, and vision. There are mythic qualities evident in its structure and in some characters and events. But small wonder that, with this kind of critical response to her early attempt at presentation of Maritime society, Saunders subsequently found it more satisfying (or less devastating) to churn out her repetitious and sentimental animal stories.

⁴ Rev. of *Rose à Charlitte*, *The Nation* 6 Oct. 1898: 265.

As well as being sentimental and romantic, turn-of-the-century Maritime novels, for the most part, have a moralistic tone—not surprising given the high seriousness of the Victorian age, the popularity in the period of the social gospel movement and “muscular Christianity,” and the church affiliations of many of the writers. The novels also tend to be conservative in character, focussing on the individual rather than on society, and not advocating social change either implicitly or explicitly. The Maritime setting, when it is used, tends to be the small town before industrialization, and it is presented in fairly idyllic terms. The focus of the novel is seldom on the lower classes of society, although they may appear for atmosphere and authenticity. However, there are occasional signs of society in transition: although the majority of the novels adhere to traditional values centred in family and church, some contain new images of women, describe technological and industrial change, or trace social dislocation. A few are even openly rebellious, such as Susan Carleton Jones’s *The Career of Mrs. Osborne* (New York: Smart Set, 1903) and *A Detached Pirate: The Romance of Gay Vandaleur* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1903).⁵

Taken together, the novels form some fascinating patterns that seem to define a distinct Maritime place and vision. Three kinds of novels are particularly notable: the historical romance, the international novel, and the regional idyll.

I Historical Romances

One of the most distinctive features of Maritime fiction of this period is the prevalence of the Evangeline myth. Longfellow’s poem⁶ cast a long shadow through the period, influencing both fiction and poetry, seizing the imagination of men and women alike. The stories of the French-English conflict and of the expulsion of the Acadians, of Grand Pré, Beausejour, and Louisburg are told many times in novels such as Maria Amelia Fytche’s *The Rival Forts; or the Velvet Siege of Beausejour*,

⁵ *The Career of Mrs. Osborne*, a remarkably badly written novel, tells the racy tale of two American sisters living with relatives in England. Bored beyond endurance with English country life, they take two flats in London, one where they keep their bona fide identities, the other where the married sister assumes another identity, becomes the social hit of the season, and dates a former beau. They ride on omnibuses, smoke cigarettes in public, and go to the music hall unescorted by males. In the end, largely because their lives of duplicity become too complicated for them (and, one suspects, for the author), they confess all, are forgiven, and go back to being happy with who they are.

In *A Detached Pirate*, a married woman living in London becomes frustrated that she cannot travel about the city unchaperoned. To remedy the situation, she takes a flat where she goes occasionally, changes into men’s clothes, and thus gains freedom to go where she will. George Sand style.

⁶ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Boston: Ticknor, 1847).

Charles G.D. Roberts's *The Forge in the Forest, A Sister to Evangeline, By the Marshes of Minas, and The Prisoner of Mademoiselle*;⁷ Reverend David Hickey's *William and Mary: A Tale of the Siege of Louisburg, 1745*; J. MacDonald Oxley's *Fife and Drum at Louisburg*; Edward Payson Tenny's *Constance of Acadia*; and Arthur James McLeod's *The Notary of Grand Pré*.⁸ Indeed it would seem that if Maritime writers wanted to seize the attention of their audience, local or American, they needed only to write a book that incorporated in its title some hint of Acadie. Even works with a contemporary setting might exploit the popularity of the Acadian theme with titles like Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Rose à Charlitte: An Acadian Romance*, Grace Dean (McLeod) Rogers's *Stories of the Land of Evangeline* and Carrie Jenkins Harris's *A Modern Evangeline*.⁹

There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that the central myth of the region was first made famous by an American. Further, most of the novels of this kind are little better than costume dramas with stereotyped separated lovers and black abbés; they offer little serious analysis (although some writers, like Fytche, did extensive historical research in an attempt at accuracy). However, even if *Evangeline* did foster a lot of mediocre writing, she allowed Maritime writers the opportunity to look at themselves, to "populate [their] imagination," however superficially, with their own place and history. Also, the large quantity of "Evangeline fiction"—of historical novels set during the French-English wars—suggests the extent to which Maritime writers and society responded to history and also, during the vulnerable post-Confederation period, valued the stability that tradition provides. The fascination with *Evangeline* represents a tendency to take refuge in romantic conservatism, to turn back in time to a more "noble" and exciting era, as a release from social change and economic uncertainty. Indeed it might not be entirely inaccurate to claim that *Evangeline* provides a myth of tragic proportions commensurate with the decline of the age of sail and of the Maritime region after Confederation.

⁷ *A Sister to Evangeline, Being the Story of Yvonne de Lamourie* (Boston: Lamson Wolfe, 1898)—also published under the title *Lovers in Acadie* (London: Dent, 1924); *By the Marshes of Minas* (New York: Silver Burdett, 1900); *The Prisoner of Mademoiselle. A Love Story* (Boston: Page, 1904).

⁸ *William and Mary: A Tale of the Siege of Louisburg, 1745* (Toronto: Briggs, 1884); *Fife and Drum at Louisburg* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1899); *Constance of Acadia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886)—there is no reference to this novel in Watters; *The Notary of Grand Pré. A Historic Tale of Acadia* (Boston: Author, 1901).

⁹ *Stories of the Land of Evangeline*, (Boston: Lothrop, 1891); *A Modern Evangeline* (Windsor, N.S.: Anslow, 1896).

II International Novels

A second kind of fiction that responds to Maritime experience is the "going down the road" or international novel which follows the life of a character who leaves the region. This kind of novel is a response to several things. It reflects the vulnerable social and economic condition of the Maritimes during the period, when many people had to leave the area to find employment. It represents, too, the authors' responses to the pressure of publishers to use settings familiar to an American or English audience. In some cases it represents the authors' interest in the international novel popular at the time. An advantage of the international novel for Canadian writers was that they could use a Canadian character who travels to a foreign setting, usually the United States or Britain, and could define the Canadian type in relation to other regional or national types. In this manner they could write, however indirectly, about their own country.

While one might deplore the pressures that resulted in so much of the fiction's being set outside the region—for superficiality of treatment of both setting and character often resulted—these novels have some redeeming qualities. In the first place, many of them reflect a powerful Maritime reality: "going down the road" in search of a livelihood. Moreover, rather than suggesting a deferential attitude to the rest of the world, the novels present the Maritimes in a very positive light. This is achieved by the authors' portraying Maritime characters who prove themselves and take their place in the larger world. Indeed the novels often present the outside world as displaying shortcomings with which the Maritime character must contend, often in almost heroic terms. This is achieved by the authors' stressing moral themes. While they concede that the larger world (Britain, Europe, or America) possesses greater wealth, a richer cultural tradition, or more brilliant society, the Canadian Maritime character is more innocent, has a stronger sense of right, greater vigour and promise, and is less artificial and corrupt than his or her counterparts from other countries. In other words, the "myth of the north," which scholars have found in other Canadian writing of the period, and which is a product of its nationalism and imperialism, is very evident in the Maritime novel.¹⁰

One thinks in the national sphere of the novels of Sara Jeannette Duncan, perhaps the strongest novelist of the period,

¹⁰ See Carl Ballstadt's *The Search for English: Canadian Literature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1975), which contains excerpts from contemporary nationalistic writing that illustrate this.

which derive so much of their piquancy from foreign travel and cultural contrast. Duncan's observations made during her own travels in the United States, England, and India helped to provide her with the clear vision of Canada and Canadians presented in her finest novels, *The Imperialist* and *Cousin Cinderella*.¹¹ Of the Maritime novelists, Basil King seems to have profited the most demonstrably from expatriation. His early *In the Garden of Charity* (New York: Harper, 1903), set on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, is static and dull; but his *The High Heart* (New York: Grosset, 1917), set in New York and Newport and written after he had moved to Massachusetts, is full of drama and interest. The contrast of Nova Scotian, American, and English sensibilities in this novel provides a tension that grips the reader. Exile brought into sharp focus the moral and national issues King believed in passionately.

It is remarkable how many novels take us away from the Maritimes; how many of the characters step into a train or, more often, onto a boat. It is also remarkable how similar the overall structural patterns of the novels are. For the most part, they may be said to conform to the structure of romance: the central character is a solo wanderer in a foreign land who has to struggle against hostile forces; the contest is often a moral one, with the foreign setting corrupt, a kind of hell. After misadventure and travail, by remaining true to themselves and their origins, the protagonists triumph. Their usual reward is, not the Heavenly City, but love, marriage, and sometimes a return home to the place that has shaped their character and to which they are faithful.

Brief plot descriptions of some of the novels that conform to this pattern, while they risk the danger of oversimplification, may serve to clarify these main lines. Works by Alice Jones, her sister Susan Carleton Jones, Maria Amelia Fytche, Carrie Jenkins Harris, Frederick William Wallace, and Basil King all provide variations on the central theme.

Alice Jones, who was raised in Halifax, the daughter of a lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia, but who was educated and lived much of her life in Europe, wrote several international novels. Her *Bubbles We Buy* (Boston: Turner, 1903) is a romance in which the central character, a doctor and a self-made man, raised in Ontario by parents who come from Nova Scotia, has been disappointed in love in New England where he has gone to study and work, specializing in nervous disorders. He takes for

¹¹ *The Imperialist* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1904); *Cousin Cinderella* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1908).

his patient the husband of a woman he loved when they were both struggling students in New England. They could not marry because they were poor and dedicated to their careers. She pursued her career as an artist and eventually married a wealthy native of New England. Unfortunately, her husband becomes manic depressive and, for this illness, receives treatment from the Canadian doctor. The doctor prescribes a rest cure in Nova Scotia, but the condition is hopeless. The husband is institutionalized in New England, and the wife goes to Britain to pursue her career. After a time, the doctor goes to Britain where he discovers a very wealthy branch of his Nova Scotia family and also learns that he is entitled to part of their fortune. However, when he finds out that the money was made by his grandfather from privateering and slave trading, he renounces it. In the meantime, the husband of the woman he still loves dies, and she and the doctor return to New England to start a new life together.

The pattern can be discerned: the Maritimer/Canadian is a healer, a self-made man having to survive against the difficult odds of penury and disappointment in love; the New Englander/American is wealthy and privileged and enjoys more power. The moral pattern is there as well: in the end, the American succumbs to the very forces that made him strong—his wealth and heredity—and the Canadian, the slow starter, is the victor. Europe contains a degenerate and dissipated branch of the family whose allure is resisted, and the Canadian remains true to his principles—he will continue in his profession rather than live on tainted wealth.

Jones's *Gabriel Praed's Castle* (Boston: Turner, 1904), again follows the lives of Canadians abroad: a wealthy Canadian and his robustly beautiful daughter tour Europe. They are socially gauche by European standards, and the daughter is aware of her shortcomings, but she never pretends to be what she is not. Father and daughter are preyed upon in Paris. The daughter realizes her father is attracted to a bohemian artists' model, who, it is discovered later, is part of a gang. She poses as an impoverished aristocrat wanting to dispose of the contents of her family castle—in fact, forged art treasures. Fortune and honour are saved as a result of the ingenuity and pluck of the daughter after the discovery of the deception. In the meantime, the daughter, fresh, natural, and genuinely interested in art, wins the love of a wealthy American artist living in Paris. The central motif in this novel is the innocence of the Canadian characters and the duplicity and corruption of Europeans.

In a third novel by Jones, *Marcus Holbeach's Daughter* (New York: Appleton, 1912), much the same pattern is evident,

although in this novel the author makes more deliberate use of setting to contrast her Canadian and European types. The Canadian action is set in a pristine, sparkling, pure white world of ice and snow, which shapes the character of the Canadian heroine. The European setting is the Mediterranean shore, bleached, dry, and glaring. An aging, calculating, and artificial European woman, the mistress of the Canadian woman's father, presides there. The Canadian girl resists her father's desire to have her make a brilliant European society marriage and chooses instead to marry a robust Canadian—for love.

Susan Carleton Jones, the sister of Alice Jones, sketches an interesting variation in her novel *A Detached Pirate*, although it is very shallow and not well written. In it, Canada becomes a refuge for the heroine, an English woman who has suffered the trauma of an unhappy marriage and divorce in London. In that city she has felt stifled and constrained by the limited freedom of movement and experience for women (see also note 5 on page 23). Her ocean voyage to Halifax, the social life she finds there, and rustic excursions into the surrounding countryside—where she stays in log cabins and sleeps on spruce boughs—all have a restorative effect. When her past catches up with her, she moves on to New York, where she is reunited with her husband. The change of venue and the wholesome period in Nova Scotia make it easier for the two to talk honestly and openly of their feelings and to realize there have been misunderstandings that led to the separation.

Susan Carleton Jones's *A Girl of the North: A Story of London and Canada* (London: Greening, 1900) is a better written novel. In it, the archetypal Canadian couple, wholesome and nature-loving, fall in love. However, the woman overhears gossip that he has fathered a child by another woman. Because her ideal of him is shattered and because she thinks that women have to support one other, she leaves him and Canada to rebuild her life in England. There she finds a very sophisticated and cynical society of unfaithful marriage partners, ennui relieved by love affairs, tarnished reputations, and "modern" ideas of marriage, such as living apart. Disappointed in love herself, the heroine accepts this society and also a marriage proposal from a titled aristocrat. Just before the marriage, the man she loves arrives from Canada, and she learns it was not he, but his cousin, who fathered the child. Ashamed of her actions, she breaks her engagement and returns secretly to Canada. Her Canadian lover follows her on snowshoes to her home in the woods, "Solitude," and amid the purifying cold and snow they agree to marry. At the end of the novel, the heroine says to her lover: "I am glad we are 'born Canadian,' aren't you?"

In Maria Amelia Fytche's *Kerchiefs to Hunt Souls* (Boston: Arena, 1895),¹² a Nova Scotia woman gives up her successful girls' school and goes to Europe in search of romance. She finds instead very hard conditions for the working woman and a degenerate aristocracy that catches her in a web of deceit. After she is duped into a marriage that is not recognized in France and after the convenient death of her bohemian, aristocratic husband, she moves to England with an honourable suitor to start a home for dispossessed and needy women. Fytche's novel is studded with social criticism of Europe, its employment agencies, homes for working women, and the exploitation of women as governesses. Her Maritime character is an agent for exposing injustice and a figure of redemption.

All of the novels of Carrie Jenkins Harris focus on characters from the Maritimes.¹³ Separation from family and loved ones, and the tension and misunderstandings that result, provide their interest. Usually the outside world lures her travellers into some form of unfaithfulness to their origins, but eventually they see the error of their ways and atone. In *Mr. Perkins of Nova Scotia*, for example, the members of a Nova Scotia family make their fortune and decide to send their son on a continental tour to complete his education. The son becomes a snob in Europe, keeping only the "best" society and hiding his "colonial" origins. However, in Europe he is preyed upon by a gang of fortune hunters and returns home, penniless, humbled, and with an acquired respect for the simple life and wholesome values of Nova Scotia.

A fourth Maritime writer whose work sheds light on central regional motifs through an exploration of the international thesis is Frederick William Wallace. His novel *Blue Water: A Tale of the Deep Sea Fishermen* (Toronto: Musson, 1935), in which the central character is a lad from a Bay of Fundy fishing community who goes off to Boston to join the schooners that fish off the Grand Banks, shares elements of both the international novel and the regional idyll. Wallace proudly presents his young hero as an outstanding member of an exemplary breed. In a very short time, his navigational skills prove so exceptional that he becomes the youngest skipper on the Banks. Two other members of his community also go to Boston: the woman he loves, to train as a nurse, and his rival for her affections, to become a seaman

¹² Also published in the Mount Allison University Maritime reprint series (Sackville, N.B.: 1980) with an introduction by Carrie MacMillan.

¹³ *Cyril Whyman's Mistake* (Toronto: Bryce, 1894); *Faith and Friends* (Windsor, N.S.: Anslow, 1895); *A Modern Evangeline* (Windsor, N.S.: Anslow, 1896); *Mr. Perkins of Nova Scotia* (Windsor, N.S.: Anslow, 1891); *A Romantic Romance* (Windsor, N.S.: Anslow, 1893).

on trading ships. In Boston the nurse who had pledged her love for the fisherman in Nova Scotia becomes ashamed of him, preferring instead the flashy clothes and acquired city habits of the rival. She is reluctant to leave Boston for Nova Scotia, which she knows would be her fate if she were to marry the hero. He goes through a period of despair, but then rebuilds his life in Nova Scotia, using his native vision and energy to introduce the latest technology to the fishing industry in his coastal community in an attempt to transform it. A key investor in this venture is the uncle of his rival, who disinherits his nephew for turning his back on his homeland and who supports the vigorous native with all his resources. The pattern of reward and happiness for the faithful Nova Scotian and of ignominious exile for the others makes Wallace's proud statement about his country.

Perhaps the best novel for illustrating the "going down the road" theme in some detail, finally, is Basil King's *The High Heart*. In it, Alexandra Adare, a Halifax woman of good Loyalist stock whose family has fallen on hard times, accompanies an American society woman, Mrs. Rossiter (who has been vacationing in Nova Scotia), back to her homes in New York and Newport, to serve as both governess and companion. What ensues is the first-hand observation of wealthy American society. Alex describes herself as a kind of Galileo or Copernicus charting an unknown world; a pleasant world it is not. The members of Mrs. Rossiter's family include the patriarch, the domineering and authoritarian J. Howard Brokenshire, captain of industry, a financier who sees life entirely in terms of increasing his fortune and social prestige. His name, "*Brokenshire*," and a nervous tick in one eye suggest his crippled moral and spiritual character. His offspring also illustrate his impoverished spirit. They are Mrs. Rossiter herself, decorative, indolent, and shallow; the cold automaton Jack, who also has made a prestigious and loveless society marriage; the invalid Mildred, locked away in her room; and the feckless Hugh, whom Brokenshire Senior has designed for a brilliant marriage into the English aristocracy.

The novel quickly comes to life and becomes very intense when Hugh falls in love with Alex and earns his father's wrath. In several sharply dramatic scenes, Brokenshire Senior meets Alex and attempts to cow her into renouncing the relationship. He argues that Alex is of no consequence in the scheme of things, being a servant and a Canadian, having neither wealth nor position. Alex makes the case that she does have some value, that there is merit in her country, her family, her character, and her love for Hugh. Evidence of her moral principle is found in her promise to marry Hugh only after his family has agreed to it.

Life becomes intolerable in the Brokenshire home, and Alex takes a position as librarian in the New York library of a financier who, she learns later, is a rival of Brokenshire. She is astonished to find as visitors one day the beautiful young Mrs. Brokenshire (the magnate's second wife) and the rival financier himself. She learns that the two were lovers before her marriage and that Mrs. Brokenshire's mother had forced her to marry Brokenshire when her lover's finances suffered a reversal that only later proved temporary. Alex watches uncomfortably as the relationship develops and comes to a crisis: Mrs. Brokenshire decides to leave her husband and travel by train to Boston, where she will meet her lover. In a very tense scene, Alex takes the same train as Mrs. Brokenshire and persuades her, by a strong moral argument, to get off before Boston and come away to a New England resort to recover her perspective on things. She wires Brokenshire that his wife is well and in her protection. Brokenshire, beholden to Alex for saving his marriage (such as it is) and, perhaps more important, winning him reprieve from scandal, tells her she is welcome to marry Hugh.

King does not leave things in this state, however. After having his Canadian girl triumph over the American giant, he has her break her engagement and renounce the giant's son. This comes about after a dinner party at which Alex has expressed herself strongly on the subject of the Great War, which has broken out during her stay in New England. As a Canadian, Alex feels a strong obligation to support Britain in its hour of need. Both Brokenshire Senior and Junior disagree, the former because he is making a lot of money out of the status quo, and the latter because he cannot see that it has anything to do with him. The war underlines the dramatic cultural and moral differences between Alex and Hugh, and it serves as a touchstone for testing the Brokenshires and finding them wanting. Mrs. Rossiter, who knows Alex's feelings intuitively, states that Alex does not love Hugh, but rather loves Larry Strangways, a former tutor in the Brokenshire home. In a burst of clarity, Alex realizes that she does indeed love Strangways—that she had thought she loved Hugh (or should love Hugh) because he had been the one member of the family to acknowledge her and to be kind to her.

By the last chapter, Alex has married Larry Strangways and is living on the South Shore of Nova Scotia in a modest frame home very different from the splendid estates they have recently known on the Atlantic to the south. They have returned from service as soldier and nurse in Britain and Europe. Alex's reflections on this pure, early spring morning reveal her peace of mind and happiness:

I am writing in the dawn of a May morning in 1917. Before me lies a sickle of white beach some four or five miles in curve. Beyond that is the Atlantic, a mirror of leaden gray. Woods and fields bank themselves inland; here a dewy pasture, there a stretch of plowed earth recently sown and harrowed; elsewhere a grove of fir or maple or hazel copse. . . . In the woods round me the birds, which have only just arrived from Florida, from the West Indies, from Brazil, are chirruping sleepily. They will doze again presently, to awake with the sunrise into the chorus of full song. . . .

In this room my baby is sleeping in his little bassinet. It is not the bassinet of my dreams, nor is this the white enameled nursery, nor am I wearing a delicate lace peignoir. It is all much more beautiful than that, because it is as it is. (406)

The simple, wholesome images of rural life and the hopeful, regenerative images of the baby and the spring contrast strongly with the artificial, overly sumptuous, and very unhappy images of American society that have prevailed throughout the novel.

The High Heart is a very good novel, only marred at times by a strident moral tone, no doubt influenced by its having been written during the war. Narrated in the first person by the very strong and attractive Alex Adare, and using to advantage contrasting characters and settings, as well as the moral touchstone of the first world war, it defines the Canadian sensibility at this time. Ignored or considered of little or no consequence in America and England, the young Canadian demands recognition. In the end, although she has proven herself in the American establishment, she goes her own way, remaining true, through service in the war and a return to Nova Scotia, to her history and tradition. The novel also offers a sympathetic, convincing, and memorable study of the working woman, for Alex is surely representative of those myriads of Maritime women who went off to the "Boston States" to make something of themselves.

III Regional Idylls

A third kind of novel that defines a distinct place and tradition is the novel set in the Maritimes, almost inevitably in a small town. It attempts to record the day-to-day activities, values, and vision of the region. Although there are usually a contrived plot and some stereotyped or sentimentalized characters, the writing tends to be realistic, on the whole. Novels of this

kind are much rarer than those belonging to the other two categories. Apparently there was a relatively small market for this kind of novel; publishers tended to favour more exotic settings and idealized characterization. It would appear, then, that these novels are labours of love, novels in which their authors present a world for which they have affection and respect.

The best—indeed almost the only—representatives of the regional idyll are Charles G.D. Roberts's *The Heart That Knows* (Boston: Page, 1906), set in Westcock, New Brunswick; Frederick William Wallace's *Blue Water: A Tale of the Deep Sea Fishermen* (Toronto: Musson, 1907), set partly in a fishing community on the Bay of Fundy; and Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Rose à Charlotte: An Acadian Romance*, set around the turn of the century in the Clare District of Nova Scotia, as mentioned earlier. All three novels portray small, traditional, rural or seafaring communities whose inhabitants enjoy a simple, quiet existence in tune with the seasons and the sea, but there are also images of social and technological change and of interaction with the outside world. In Roberts's novel, seafaring takes the hero away from the heroine and creates a tragic situation; the sympathetic treatment of the heroine, an unwed mother, is a measure of the novel's liberal approach.¹⁴ Wallace introduces modern fishing methods, including a processing plant, in his novel, and Saunders portrays changing images of Acadians—women in particular—as well as the strong cultural links and social movement between Nova Scotia and New England.

Roberts's *The Heart That Knows* is a tribute to Westcock, New Brunswick, where he was born and spent his first fourteen years. The setting and people are delineated in detail and with a beauty that conveys nostalgia, respect, and affection. Here is Roberts's Tantramar landscape: the warm, upland fields, the wind-blown marshes, the tide-washed and dyke-lined coast, and the romantic prospect of Beausejour and Minudie. Here, too, is the generally wholesome, social world of the town: the rectory with its kindly and much-loved pastor; the little church and the general store, focal points of the community; the day-to-day farming, fishing, domestic, and practical activities; and the winding, dusty little road that links it all together.

However, it is clear that Roberts holds a dual vision of his birthplace, for the happy pastoral qualities are offset by less

¹⁴ Roberts is not the only Canadian novelist of the period to treat unwed motherhood sympathetically; see also Joanna E. Wood's *The Untempered Wind* (New York: Tait, 1894).

benign characteristics.¹⁵ Roberts employs his central character and plot to present a critique of one trait in particular: the community's narrow-minded, puritanical vision. The heroine is a woman who is "a mother but not a wife." In his sympathetic treatment of Louella Parsons and the ostracism she endures, Roberts offers a strong social critique of the Maritime small-town vision. The novel starts with Louella's abandonment on her wedding day by the man she loves, who has been tricked into thinking her unfaithful, and ends when their son has grown to manhood, found his father, and reunited his parents. The body of the novel is concerned with the long, difficult years in between, in which Louella and her son encounter the cold, censorious attitude of the community. Roberts accuses the society of lacking Christian charity and forgiveness. He also presents its hypocrisy; at the meeting of the sewing circle early in the novel, when Louella's condition becomes known, the narrator tells us that many of the women in the room had once found themselves or their daughters in similar situations. The only difference is that their men had not gone permanently to sea; therefore they had been able to marry and save their reputations.

The Heart That Knows is a study of both love and hate and explains in part Roberts's departure from the Maritimes for New York in the late 1890s. On the one hand, it illuminates his deep affection and appreciation for certain qualities of Maritime life: the beauty of the landscape, its resistance to time and change, and the essential goodness and simplicity of its people. But it reflects, too, what, for the artist, is a more sinister side of the closed little communities that make up the region: a narrow-mindedness that can lead to a poverty of the soul and cripple the spontaneous, creative spirit. His novel anticipates others critical of the puritanical or narrow spirit of the Canadian small town—novels by Ernest Buckler, Sinclair Ross, W.O. Mitchell, and Margaret Laurence, to name those who are best known. It is archetypally Maritime, though, in three details: the sea that separates Louella and Jim Calder, the long period of suffering after Jim has "gone down the road" to pursue his seaman's career all over the world, and the eventual (improbable) reuniting of the separated lovers well after their days of youth, in yet another version of *Evangeline*.

Frederick William Wallace's *Blue Water* (the plot of which has been described), like much of his writing, is a celebration of the Nova Scotia sea tradition and of the men who, in Wallace's

¹⁵ Fred Cogswell, in *Charles G.D. Roberts* (Downsview, Ont.: Essays in Canadian Writing, 1983), has most convincingly documented this trait. See also articles by David Bentley, Joseph Gold, and Fred Cogswell in *The Proceedings of the Sir Charles G.D. Roberts Symposium*, ed. Carrie Macmillan (Halifax: Nimbus, 1984).

vision, bring distinction to the region. The novel follows the life of Frank Westhaver from youth to manhood, starting with his warm, happy, magical, small-town Maritime childhood and following his development into a naturally skilled mariner, captain of a Grand Banks schooner at an unusually (even heroically) early age. Wallace's close understanding of the life of sail makes this the best Maritime novel of the sea for its detail and accuracy. The novel moves us from the days of foreign masters and ship-owners to more recent times when Maritime fishing society has become modernized and self-reliant. In his strength and vision, Frank, who raises local capital and starts a fish-processing plant, buys schooners, and starts related businesses, is Wallace's agent for presenting his idea of what the Maritime region might be if it weds technology to its native confidence, initiative, and hard work. Wallace's point is brought home by his contrast between the success and prosperity of his native hero and the relative failure of the couple who lack faith in and betray their Nova Scotia home. *Blue Water* is a celebration of native pride, vision, and industry—a very proud Maritime novel.

One of the most interesting regional novels of the period is Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Rose à Charlitte*. Although the central characters, Rose à Charlitte and Vesper Nimmo, are idealized and the plot contrived, the novel has strong, compensating, mythic qualities. It tells the story of a native of Boston, Vesper Nimmo, a wealthy and rather lethargic young man, who discovers some old family papers that tell of the role his eighteenth-century ancestor played in the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia. The papers animate Vesper in a way nothing heretofore has done, so much so that he feels he must visit Nova Scotia and try to discover the descendants of an Acadian killed by his cruel ancestor. The novel follows the pattern of ancestral sin and atonement and is reminiscent in this, and in its New England beginning, of Hawthorne.

Vesper's voyage by sea and train to western Nova Scotia is one of initiation, of symbolic death, and of rebirth into larger understanding. The train deposits him in a dark forest in Clare from which he makes his way to an Acadian inn. Not long after he arrives and begins to sympathize with the people and their tragic past, he becomes ill and remains so for several weeks. He is aided in his quest by Rose à Charlitte, the saintly, long-suffering Evangeline character who thinks her husband Charlitte, an older man and a ne'er-do-well who has been more a father than a husband, is dead, but later learns he is living with another woman in Louisiana. Vesper is aided in his quest also by Rose's cousin, a self-taught Acadian scholar embittered by his people's treatment by the English.

Vesper falls in love with Rose, who nurses him back to health, but he must wait several years, until Charlitte dies, before he can claim her. In the meantime, Vesper atones for his ancestor's sins by befriending and helping two members of the Acadian community—Rose's son, who forms an intuitive, mystical bond with him, and the young girl Bidiane, who, he discovers, is the only remaining descendant of the wronged eighteenth-century Acadian. Vesper introduces Bidiane, whom he finds living in poverty and ashamed of her French blood, to Paris where she is gradually educated into her magnificent French heritage and a better way of life. When she returns to Clare, she is happy to claim her people. After the passage of several more years and the death of Charlitte (again one notes the Evangeline pattern), Vesper returns to Clare and claims Rose.

If Rose represents the long-suffering past of the Acadians, Bidiane represents the emergent new woman and new society. On her way back to Clare from Paris, she overhears in a Halifax hotel an English Nova Scotian talking critically of the Acadians. Later, in Clare, she discovers to her horror that this same man is none other than the representative for Clare in the provincial legislature. Not one to let something like this go by, the resourceful and strong Bidiane organizes with the other women what she calls a "feminine electioneering campaign" which she takes up and down the Clare coast (and which includes distribution from her cellar of "spirits"—Saunders knew her Maritime politics well). Of course, the women do not have the vote, so they exercise their influence on the menfolk and are successful in getting elected as their representative an Acadian, Rose's cousin, the erstwhile bitter historian.

Throughout the novel, the terrain—lake and forest—is animated by Acadian myth and legend. Saunders takes us into Acadian homes and captures examples of folk humour through pranks and jokes. She also adds to the local flavour and tradition by sprinkling her text with poetic quotations from the Nova Scotia poets J.F. Herbin and Cornelius O'Brien, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Halifax. She uses local material to heighten her important themes. When one considers the unsympathetic reception of her novel in the United States and observes the direction of her publishing career after the rebuff of her early attempts at social realism, one is filled with a sense of near tragic loss for Maritime Canadian literature.

Although it might not have been easy for Saunders or other Maritime novelists of the day to write about their own society, it is apparent that the Maritime novels discussed here provide evidence of strategies for literary survival. In the historical ro-

mance or "Evangeline" novel, the international or "going down the road" novel, and the regional idyll set in the Maritimes, Maritime novelists found ways of defining themselves, of creating a sense of place, of articulating an identity. They rarely described the effects of industrial and social change, except for that of emigration. Instead, they remained true to the traditional verities within the region of land and sea, and the people who lived in relation to them. They did this while maintaining a dual vision—one that reached inward to embrace a sense of all that had shaped them and which they held true, and outward to the distant places dictated by necessity.

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