The Maple Leaf as Maple Leaf: Facing the Failure of the Search For Emblems in Canadian Literature

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Scholars like to think of themselves as intellectuals above the influence of popular fashion, but there are pace-setting trends, it seems, in any field that determine the main thrust of current thought and innovation. In the field of literature, contemporary theorists have urged readers on to a heightened awareness of language, ideology, and the reading process itself. One of the effects of these developments in critical thought for the reader of Canadian literature is the general denigration of criticism that groups and finds emblems for works demonstrating common narrative or thematic patterns. The word "theme" has become an embarrassing pejorative, and to use the expression "thematic criticism" without an emphatic negative is worth one's place in a graduate seminar.

As part of this movement away from the critical search for emblems, Canadian critics have founded and fostered what has become an industry in its own right: anti-thematic meta-criticism. Frank Davey, Bruce Powe, and Paul Stuewe are among those who have taken a stand against the search for emblems and written persuasively of its weaknesses and dangers.[1] A recent example is I.S. MacLaren's review of *The Wacousta Syndrome* by Gaile McGregor which he facetiously entitles "The McGregor Syndrome; or, the Survival of Patterns of Isolated Butterflies on Rocks in the Haunted Wilderness of the Unnamed Bush Garden Beyond the Land Itself."[2] Given this wealth of anti-thematic writing, the reader may be tempted to decide that the thinking has been done, the search for emblems is rightfully over, and now we can get on with our real work. But only last spring *The New Quarterly* sponsored a conference described as "Family Fictions in Canadian Literature: An inter-disciplinary conference for

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[1] Frank Davey, *From There to Here: A Guide to English-Canadian Literature Since 1960* (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1974); Frank Davey, *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature* (Winnipeg: Turnstone P, 1983); Bruce Powe, *A Climate Charged: Essays on Canadian Writers* (Oakville: Mosaic, 1984); Paul Stuewe, *Clearing the Ground: English Canadian Literature After Survival* (Toronto: Proper Tales P, 1984).

[2] I.S. MacLaren, *Canadian Poetry* 18 (1986): 118-30.

writers and scholars interested in discovering the particular ways in which the general theme of the family is portrayed in Canadian Literature." Invited to make a contribution to the special issue of *The New Quarterly* that accompanied the conference, W.J. Keith[3] felt called upon to respond with a vituperative letter which has become the last word in the Family Fictions issue. This letter is simply the most recent in the continuing series of anti-thematic manifestoes and does not raise any new arguments. My point in mentioning the conference and Keith's reaction to it is to demonstrate the persistence (in spite of all trends and innovations in critical thought) of interest in and discussion about this type of criticism—and to justify my own participation in this discussion. I am concerned about the continuing impact of the critical search for emblems on the reading, criticism, and teaching of Canadian literature—activities which do not always share common goals. Obviously, the case is not closed yet. These things, however, are clear to me: the choice of individual literary emblems is fraught with problems; the application of emblems has serious implications for the reading of a text and the development of a canon; the search for such emblems results from an unselfconscious ideology which itself needs careful scrutiny; and the continuation of the search, in spite of its failure in the eyes of many critics, indicates an unfilled need in the study—and particularly in the teaching—of Canadian literature.

Emblems for Canadian literature fall into two general categories, each of which reflects a slightly different approach to literature and to the use of the emblem. One of these categories focuses on narrative: Margaret Atwood's survival pattern, Northrop Frye's image of garrison mentality, and D.G. Jones' sleeping giant archetype[4] address the specifics of narratives and find ways to group them according to common elements. Critics such as those I mentioned earlier have spent a great deal of time analyzing the weaknesses of emblems of this kind, and I will refer to both the emblems and their critiques again later.

Other emblems frequently proposed for Canadian literature, and especially for the relationship between the two major Canadian literatures, are geometric figures. Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauvreau's double spiral staircase, Jean-Charles Falardeau's horizontal and vertical axes, and the periodical *el-*

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3 W.J. Keith, "'To Hell with the Family!': An Open Letter to *The New Quarterly*," *The New Quarterly* 7.1-2 (1987): 320-4.

4 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972); Northrop Frye, *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971); D.G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of the Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: U of T P, 1970).

lipse's ellipse[5] are all intended to represent the connections and diversities between French and English Canadian writing. These emblems function at a more abstract level than does the narrative or archetypal emblem, representing each literature as a cohesive whole and illustrating it within its larger context—the combined Canadian literatures. Such emblems focus attention on relationships between groups of works, rather than between individual works.

In the Introduction to his comparative work *All the Polarities*, Philip Stratford reviews the examples I gave above of this second type of emblem, along with Ronald Sutherland's "mainstream," and demonstrates their inadequacy to accurately represent the two literatures.[6] Falardeau's juxtaposed axes attempt to keep separate what even he finds insightful to compare, while Sutherland's concentration on common traits denies the existence of real differences (Stratford 4). The ellipse, as Stratford points out, acknowledges the duality with its double centre but assumes that the two elements are equal (Stratford 5). This review of alternative emblems clearly reveals the limitations of a model held too rigidly. The remaining example, the double spiral, along with the double helix of DNA fame, Stratford incorporates into his own geometric emblem: two parallel lines which never meet but which fix and define each other (6-8). From within this model, he struggles to allow for pluralities, for a fundamentally dynamic relationship of similarities and differences:

> Whatever figure is chosen as a guide for comparison, an element of paradox is involved that must be acknowledged and used. Canadian comparatists themselves are condemned to maintain a parodoxical duality: though blinded by proximity to their subject and swayed by politics and history, they must strive neither to unify nor to divide; they must practise subtle and unspectacular arts; they must translate while knowing that full translation is impossible; they must try to acquire the other culture while knowing that it will never become their true heritage . . .; they must encourage a difficult bifocal view while knowing that it will never be adopted by more than a small elite and will never represent the full reality; when they draw parallels they must always look beyond separateness

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[5] Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauvreau, *L'Instruction Publique au Canada: Précis Historique et Statistique* (Québec: A. Cot, 1876) 335; Jean-Charles Falardeau, *Notre Socit et son Roman* (Montral: Edition H.M.H., 1967) 58; D.G. Jones *et al*, ed. *Ellipse* 1 (1969): 3-5.

[6] Philip Stratford, *All the Polarities: Comparative Studies in Contemporary Canadian Novels in English and French* (Toronto: ECW P, 1986); Ronald Sutherland, *Second Image: Comparative Studies in Quebec / Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New P, 1971).

> to see how disparate and distant elements condition each other. They must, in short, respect all the polarities. (8-9)

Unfortunately, however, it is never clear how Stratford visualizes these polarities on a pair of parallel lines. This vagueness in his choice of emblem allows him the freedom to have something of both worlds—the simple elegance of a model, along with the necessary pluralities to account for what the model drops off—but it ultimately undermines his project by raising questions about the usefulness of any emblem. He goes on to compare six pairs of novels and to draw certain specific parallel conclusions about the two literatures with respect to their representation of time, space, and community. Although he intends these conclusions to be provisional (108), they are further weakened by his admission that comparison will work only between texts which are judged "compatible" (96), a judgement apparently made by intuition before the comparison can be undertaken and impossible to explain in rational terms. His desire to find parallel likenesses and differences in the two literatures has predetermined his findings. At the same time, his effort to balance his own emblem with his awareness of what it does not account for turns back on itself to such an extent that, by the final paragraph, he is denying the conclusiveness of his own findings and hoping only that the reader will have come to a "fuller appreciation of all the polarities" (109). He would do well at this point, it seems to me, to recall these cautionary words from his own Introduction which describe an earlier geometric emblem: "it represents a . . . view of this complex reality, the comparative view, but not the reality itself. It is important to remember that there is something artificial about treating the two Canadian literatures comparatively" (5). Stratford makes a serious and consistent effort to consider all the poles, along with the parallels, and provides some interesting and useful analysis in the body of his work, but the self-contradiction evident in his general conclusions is a direct result of his commitment to his emblem and to the search for emblems as a critical enterprise.

Stratford's discussion brings to light the weakness, not only of various emblems, but also of discussion of them. There is, in other words, the grave danger that debates on this level will self-perpetuate and detach themselves completely from the study of literature. James Watson's double helix model is a way to talk about DNA; it is not DNA itself. Modern linguistic theory reiterates the distinction between map and territory: with emblems we are one further step removed from the signified territory. Discussions of the relative merits of various emblems all too often focus attention on the emblems rather than on the liter-

ature. Meta-criticism is always vulnerable to accusations of this kind, my own paper included. While criticism searching for an emblem claims to ground itself in practice and illustrates its validity in copious examples found in the literature itself, the critics' countless proposals and counter-proposals of literary emblems can easily become incestuous petty squabblings, forming wholly unselfcritical tangents from the field they wish to study.

In "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem," the opening essay in *Configurations*, E.D. Blodgett[7] in his turn reviews the implications of the simplification and binarism which accompany comparative studies. He is especially attuned to the ideology motivating the choice of an emblem which "unifies the Canadian literatures through a metaphor by which their plurality is subsumed by a singularity that neither share" (Blodgett 33). This "centrist position" approaches the actually hierarchical relationship between the two literatures and neutralizes "the power relations sustaining and reinforcing" it. He goes on:

> What we need is a model that refuses to overlook the fragility of the metonymy that relates and separates our two major literatures. Knowing what risks I run, I want to propose the title of one of the late Paul Celan's books of poems, that is, *Sprachgitter.* A *Gitter* is a lattice-work fence, a grid of interwoven strands whose common threads relate and distinguish but do not unify. The grid divides according to language, distinguishes according to culture, history, and ideology. A "language-grid" is precisely what runs between the nations of Canada. It is a fence that no amount of metaphorical imagery will change, for as metaphor it has a metonymical limit. (33)

Most significant is Blodgett's awareness of the need to balance metaphor with metonymy. This results in a model which he uses judiciously and provisionally ("Good fences . . . do indeed make good neighbours," 34), and which he leaves behind without regret when a new one becomes more useful ("We are on the threshold of [a comparative Canadian criticism] as all literatures and their criticisms are on the threshold," 35). He avoids, in this way, the single-mindedness that has distracted critics such as Stratford from valid analysis to superfluous defence of their chosen emblem.

In other words, the only good emblem is a dead emblem, one which surrenders itself to critique and replacement rather

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[7] E.D. Blodgett, *Configurations: Essays on the Canadian Literatures* (Toronto: ECW P, 1982).

than fiercely defending what it sees as its empire. The emblem is, because of its very simplicity, always inadequate for its task of representing a multiplicity of works in relationship to one another. The emblem becomes most whole, most descriptive of the reality it is meant to represent, only in the moment of its death at the hands of someone who, seeking to replace it with something else, offers a critique of what it does not account for. In this way, Philip Stratford's analysis of earlier emblems places each emblem in a more complete and accurate context than its original application. This paradox exists for any model, whether it is an emblem or the binary opposition of native versus cosmopolitan or hinterland versus baseland that critics such as A.J.M. Smith and D.M.R. Bentley have devised. Models are seductive because they offer explanations and patterns which order an amorphous whole, but they are most useful when they are challenged to allow for what contradicts their neatness and symmetry. Models of any kind are arbitrary constructions and can always be rebuilt in some other shape. The best emblem for Canadian literature, then, is one that is held provisionally, perhaps even playfully—constructed, deconstructed, and set aside.

However, even a universally accepted emblem would have a profound and destructive impact on the reading of a given text. The critic furthering the cause of his or her own particular emblem necessarily focuses on a narrow range of comparison, thereby providing a narrow reading of the texts under consideration. In *Survival*, for example, each chapter comes supported with a pair of reading lists of texts reflecting the aspect of the victim-survival pattern that Atwood is formulating, yet even those on the "Short List" are rarely the subject of more than a page and often are dealt with in only a sentence or two. Passages of poetry quoted by Atwood are frequently longer than her commentary on them. Works of fiction are reduced to a plot summary and a list of characters. This brevity and narrowness is to be expected in a work that attempts to compare hundreds of texts, but it is also dangerous when the same work presents itself as a fair-minded introduction to the field. New readers in this field come away from Atwood with the conviction that the texts she lists are about no more than the various victim positions she uses them to illustrate. In the same way, Laurence Ricou's *Vertical Man / Horizontal World*,[8] while it provides much more comprehensive readings of its prairie works, focuses on the juxtaposition of man and land in each to the exclusion of other significant relationships, such as those among individuals or between an individual and society. For example, Ricou's discussion

[8] Laurence Ricou, *Vertical Man / Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Vancouver: UBC P, 1973).

of Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*, interesting though it is, is only tenuously pulled back into his thesis through a juxtaposition of creativity, both artistic and sexual, as a source of order and self-knowledge in Kroetsch's text with landscape as the source of self-knowledge in Wallace Stegner's (Ricou 135). Of course, no critical approach can account for all aspects of a text, but the implication is always that the selected aspect is an important one and significant in the creation of meaning. This is the same danger faced by that early form of feminist criticism which concentrated on locating and describing images of women. To the uninitiated reader—Atwood's intended audience—images criticism, whether it looks at women, victims, or land, implies that the texts are "about" the images. It is exactly this type of reader who will settle for the "relative passivity and inertness" in his or her reading experience that Bruce Powe describes in his essay "Fear of Fryeing" (Powe 48). A work such as Atwood's, if used as a high school guide, leaves a legacy of young readers who feel convinced they understand the fundamentals of Canadian literature and either never read another word or arrive in undergraduate courses with closed minds and rigidly held convictions about explorers, settlers, bears, and Indians.

This single and closed definition of meaning also limits the formulation of the canon. Stratford selects only those texts which are "compatible;" Atwood gives only passing reference to Lampman and Crawford and ignores the very existence of Robertson Davies, Robert Kroetsch, and Howard O'Hagan, among others. These works nominate texts for the canon, not for their literary excellence, but for their consistent representation of the critic's emblem. As Paul Stuewe points out in *Clearing the Ground*, it seems to be a small step from the observation of the frequency of a particular element to the conclusion that that element is therefore important (Stuewe 13). The canon developed by this means is a very narrow slice. It in no way represents the breadth of the whole literature, and it makes no claims as to the literary quality of its texts. Here is a clear indication of the extensive impact of the search for emblems: criticism devoted to a literary emblem results in a canon structured around the emblem, including works (regardless of literary merit) simply because they are illustrative and excluding others (which may be well worth reading) because they do not fit the pattern. This new canon is then read, not for influence or evolution, let alone for any other linguistic or literary interest, but for conformity.

This demand for conformity, visible in every aspect of the search for emblems, springs directly out of a group of strongly—but not always consciously—held assumptions. At the most fundamental and least conscious level, this critical search

is motivated and marked by modernist ideology. Frank Davey has written much on the modernist mentality affecting Canadian literary criticism. It is clear that these notions have implications far beyond the scope of this paper, but even a brief consideration reveals their impact on the search for emblems. The "rather arrogant humanistic assumption of corporateness of society" which Davey describes in *Surviving the Paraphrase* appreciates individual works of literature only for what they share with the larger body—valuing, in effect, the derivative and mundane over the unusual and original (4). Here is the source of conformity and prescriptiveness in canon development. In the Introduction to *From There to Here*, Davey also points out the humanist bias of modernism and its desire for control rather than participation (20-1). At the simplest level, this bias is evident in the belief that an appropriate emblem can be found to represent groups of texts, since such an emblem would allow control of the unorganized mass that is Canadian literature. For all their conviction that they come to the literature with open minds, critics searching for literary emblems are under the persuasive, if unconscious, influence of a modernist ideology which urges the critic to find a neat, clear, and permanent answer to all questions. In this context, the provisional and the pluralistic suggest threatening as-yet-unanswered questions which must be answered and fit into the pattern. While the rigidity of this assumption and approach is well suited to the reading of modernist literature, it clearly cannot accommodate or tolerate the fragmentation, playfulness, and multiplicity of post-modern literature and criticism. If only in these superficial ways, the modernist ideology marking the search for emblems throws its validity and applicability into serious doubt.

Other underlying assumptions accompany this search, as a number of dissenters have been quick to point out. For example, as Paul Stuewe stresses, the judgement that Canadian literature will not stand the test of real literary study grounds Northrop Frye's approach to it, as it does the work of later thematic and myth critics (Stuewe 10). The resulting transformation of text into document further limits the possibilities of meaning. Myth criticism—the notion of pastoral myth Frye develops in his Conclusion to Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*,[9] for example—tends to reduce all texts to a single story. Similarly, interdisciplinary approaches (such as are called for by a conference in an area like "family fictions") frequently make use of texts as data or case studies to answer questions about reality. With both of these forms of criticism, the danger is aggravated

[9] Carl Klinck, ed. *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English.* 2nd. ed. 3 vols. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1976).

if critics are engaged in a quest for an exemplary emblem. When critics assume that a text, because it is Canadian, lacks literary merit, they implicitly decide not to consider that text in terms of challenging literary issues such as language, structure, and narrative technique. In the analysis they do perform, they either fragment the text in search of common images or condense it to a common pattern. These critics have, I believe, abandoned the essential critical task of elucidating the development of meaning. The problem is not with the approaches themselves, particularly not in the case of interdisciplinary work where studies examining the points where history contacts fiction and linguistics meets literature continue to offer the most stimulating contemporary theory and criticism. Rather, the problem is the perennial one of balance: critics approaching the text from any angle must remember that it is first and foremost a work of literature and its use for extra-literary studies should never imply a reduced value as literature or a limitation of literary meaning. On the contrary: the text as literary fact should always imply the inability of any extra-literary analysis to do it full justice. As responsible critics, we need to be overt about the arbitrary, fractional nature of any work we are able to do on the plural potentialities of a text. Perhaps even more importantly, as discriminating readers, we need to beware of the power of any thesis which furthers itself by simply plowing under all objections and alternatives.

Finally, critics searching for emblems are at the same time committed to a nationalistic quest. Atwood, Jones, Sutherland, Stratford, Ricou, and Frye are all engaged in the articulation of an identity, either regional or national. They assume, to begin with, that such an identity exists, in a form stable and singular enough to be definable. Furthermore, they do not question that an identity of this nature is desirable. By the same token, it goes without saying that the literature will offer a demonstration of this identity and will, at the same time, profit from being organized around it. Then, in locating and promoting this identity, these critics take part in a propagandizing enterprise which seeks to create a nation in its own image by transforming everything that can be fit into the mold and tacitly rejecting everything else. This drive to establish a Canadian identity is rooted in the historical experience of Canada as a fragmented, colonized culture. Literary critics, from the time they first began to treat native writing as an even marginally serious venture, have struggled to define what is and should be peculiarly Canadian about it. Clearly, this kind of attention to literature is politically motivated and coloured; what is involved is definition of the whole culture, not just the literature. Understanding the infiltration of politics into literary study, critics must subvert this nationalistic project

and find an approach that is both more self-conscious and less predetermined. To generalize from E.D. Blodgett's statement about the difficulties inherent in comparative analysis of the two major but unequal literatures: "what we have been reluctant to assert is not only that literary theory is ideological, but that any theory that tries to resolve the problems of nation-states . . . must be clear about its ideology" (Blodgett 32).

The fact is that the search for a national identity reflects a need at the broadest and most basic level of cultural self-confidence and, properly, has no place in the study of literature. Individuals reading for pleasure or interest may be unaware of the Canadian-ness of what they read, or be quite unaffected by it. Similarly, the discriminating scholarly reader will read for individual literary interests. But this search for an identity persists in students who are being introduced to the literature, whether or not they have cut their cultural teeth on Margaret Atwood. Canadian students of Canadian literature bring with them a special desire to learn about themselves and their environment through their literature. This craving for self-knowledge has, at most, a secondary impact on courses in other literatures (such as English or American) but it plays a primary role in how students read Canadian texts and what they expect from a Canadian literature course. The temptation to identify literature with life, to read for recognizable images of oneself and one's society, can effectively perform Frye's devaluation of the text as literature—completely outside of the student's awareness. In this largely unconscious activity, critical works participating in the search for emblems may appear as god-sends, offering a crystallized rendering of the whole body of literature organized around a single operating principle. Perhaps not so coincidentally, works such as *Survival* are overtly intended for this very audience. The danger is that readers who find the emblem they thirst for may fall passively into the closed, narrow definition of the text and the literature implied by that emblem, and never reconsider what the literature offers. At the most practical level, in terms of teaching, it may mean that these readers do not see this literature as available to literary analysis, that they settle for a sense of what a text means rather than seeking to understand how it means. All of this creates a serious challenge for the instructor. As always, of course, the brightest and most energetic students will quickly rise above any impediments if they are offered alternative reading styles. But it is important, I think, for instructors to be aware of the agendas students bring into the classroom and of their vulnerability to the search for emblems.

It is not enough to say that studies searching for literary emblems are inadequate or even dangerous, to publish condes-

cending refutations, or even to remove them from reading lists. It seems to me that the prolificacy of these studies, along with theme and myth oriented criticism, clearly indicates a glaring omission in the tools available for the study of Canadian literature—that is, we lack a comprehensive introductory overview. Works such as *Butterfly on Rock*, *Second Image*, and *Survival* are, by virtue of their participation in the search for emblems, narrow and biased in their presentation of the literature as a whole, but they do make an effort to fill this gap by offering themselves as surveys of Canadian literature. Indeed, most works that are available to answer the student's need for an overview are organized around an emblem or some other narrow thesis. For example, Tom Marshall's *Harsh and Lovely Land*[10] finds a peculiarly Canadian form of the obsession with space and W.J. Keith's *Canadian Literature in English*[11] argues that there is a clear linear movement of tradition and influence in the literature. The best alternative to these thesis-oriented surveys are Klinck's *Literary History* and Toye's *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*,[12] both of which avoid the bias of a single writer and thesis by assigning different writers to each topic. The *Literary History* attempts to deal with literature in a broad cultural context and so devotes many sections to writings in disciplines generally considered to be outside the field of literature, such as history, religion, science, and politics. Those essays which concentrate on literature divide their subject by genre and period, then cluster texts by common elements, such as setting or subject. In these essays, only works or writers considered to be major are the subject of more than a single paragraph; most of the commentary consists of brief plot summaries with some very generalized attention to technique. Although the overviews on historical developments in each genre are useful, the illustrative references to specific works are frequently little more than annotated bibliographic entries strung together in sentence form, overwhelming for the beginner and unrewarding for the expert. These problems, along with the fact that the last revision, published in 1976, is now out of date, make this work less than ideal as an introduction to Canadian literature. The *Oxford Companion*, which is much more recent and is encyclopedic in its scope, comes close to solving most of these problems by providing sections on individual works and writers which can be accessed either by title or name, or through cross-reference from the longer survey sections. The survey essays on "Novels

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10 Tom Marshall, *Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition* (Vancouver: UBC P, 1973).

11 W.J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (London: Longman, 1985).

12 William Toye, gen. ed. *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1983).

in English," "Humour and Satire in French," and so on, like the articles in Klinck's *Literary History*, are committed to finding connections between various texts reflecting historical development, and they are, necessarily, so brief that they can contain only the narrowest suggestion of a reading on a single text. In many cases, this difficulty is partially corrected by the entry on the individual writer, where more information is available, although at the expense of an understanding of where this writer fits into a broader framework. In this way, the *Oxford Companion*'s dictionary format is its greatest drawback: the lack of a linear structure makes this what Margaret Atwood calls "the kind of book you look things up in" (Atwood 23), in other words, not the kind of book you sit down and read from cover to cover. Invaluable as it is as a resource, it fails as an introductory overview by demanding that readers have some idea what they want to look up before they start. There is a need, then, for a practical overview that has a linear structure but not a thesis.

I am aware that, with our contemporary concern for language and ideology, what I am calling for must be recognized as either impracticable or retrogressive or both. Surely nothing can be written without an at least implicit thesis and informing ideology. Yet I persist in claiming this as a real and significant need in order to point out what seems to me to be further implications of the continued interest in literary emblems. With the current critical awareness of ideology and the arbitrary nature of language, the study of Canadian literature has arrived at a curious impasse. It is no longer possible for thinking critics to be unaware of their participation in an ideology, of their need to be as selfconscious as they can. In line with this new self-awareness, such critics recognize the political motivations behind the development of a canon and the inability of any criticism to be comprehensive or objective. In criticism, the result has been a conscientious and widespread effort to acknowledge the largely undefinable impact of ideology on thought. In teaching, as far as I can see, the result has been chaos. Some instructors have attempted to defy the authority of their status and have resisted giving direction to students in need of it. Others have retained traditional teaching styles and have reserved their incorporation of post-modernist issues for direct explanation of specific topics such as post-modern literature. Either case is an uneasy compromise. It appears, at this point, that students' needs and critical theory lead in opposing and irreconcilable directions.

Here again, I am skirting the edges of an area which is far too broad for the reach of this paper. What I wish to do is identify a practical critical vacuum in the teaching of Canadian literature which continues to leave students vulnerable to the seductive-

ness of works such as those searching for emblems. This is a matter which deserves serious attention. A literature course is in many ways a practical exercise in comparative criticism and needs no less clear a methodology. A course using such a method might, for example, begin by helping introductory level students to become aware of the limitations and implications in any thesis-oriented approach to the literature. It might, in addition, focus quite overtly on the needs (such as I have mentioned above) that students bring into a course and on the course's inability to respond adequately to them. And it might, finally, structure itself encyclopedically and set its goal as the development of students' familiarity with the area, rather than the imparting of any pure distillates of essential knowledge. In terms of my specific topic, it would appraise and use criticism that searches for an emblem by performing explicitly the checking and balancing that often takes place only implicitly at present. Rather than banning it completely and leaving students without any kind of overview, it would consider these works as failed or provisional overviews, acknowledging the impossibility of a successful end to the search for emblems. It seems to me that a course taught along these lines would work towards the closing of the current gap between criticism and teaching.

I have been examining the implications of the critical search for emblems in Canadian literature in terms of its impact on the reader, the critic, and the instructor. There are points, as I have mentioned, where these three streams diverge. Overall, however, the search for literary emblems has been made obsolete by contemporary trends in critical theory. What remains is for these new modes of thought to fill in constructively the gaps they have created in their deconstruction of the earlier form of criticism.

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