

The *Lumpenproletariat* in *The Golden Dog* and *Roger Sudden*

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The mass of uninspired historical fiction written in Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has caused many critics to shy away from the genre entirely. Two notable exceptions are Robert Sorfleet among critics and Richardson's *Wacousta* among historical novels. Although William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* and Thomas Raddall's *Roger Sudden* are readily conceded to be a cut above the average they are usually mentioned only in rapid surveys of Canadian fiction, or in preambles to more extensive studies of other works. Both novels show evidence of substantial historical research and make at least a gesture toward a realistic treatment of their subject, yet retain the inflated language and obligatory love-interest of "historical romance." As such, it is the affront to the principles of realism, especially in *The Golden Dog*, that has received most of the critical attention. Ronald Hatch, for example, quickly dismisses Kirby's novel from his study of "Narrative Development in the Canadian Historical Novel": it "hardly qualifies as serious historical explanation: he exaggerates his characterization and incorporates eccentric moralistic explanations in place of genuine historical determinants" (80).

There seems, however, to be a revival of interest in historical fiction among postmodern critics. The main point of Hatch's essay, in fact, is not to use the conventions of modern realism to brow-beat pre-modern fiction. Rather, it is to show that modern realism itself has been challenged by postmodern historical novels, specifically novels by Rudy Wiebe, Timothy Findley and Mavis Gallant. Postmodern historical fiction, argues Hatch, subverts all privileged accounts of history, including those of

modern realism. Similar arguments appear in Marie Vautier's analysis of novels by Wiebe and Godbout, which illustrate "current ontological questionings of history, fiction and myth." They "flaunt" their "conditions of textuality," and the textuality of historical sources (62, 71). Linda Hutcheon therefore seems to have a point when she proclaims that "history is now, once again, a cultural issue" ("Postmodern," 365).

The December 1988 issue of *English Studies in Canada* features a statement on the subject by Hutcheon and a response by Len Findley. By way of introduction, the editor of the issue, R.D. McMaster, asserts, as a *fait accompli*, that "the simple notion that history is an accurate reflection of the world of things has been destroyed or much modified." The writing of both history and historical fiction has become self-consciously "problematic." Hutcheon posits a "New Historicism" that finds "the mean and shape [of the past] not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those events into historical facts." Both postmodern historiography and postmodern historical fiction insist that the past does not exist for us aside from its "entextualization." The past confronts us as already "semioticized" or encoded; it is "always already" interpreted ("Postmodern," 367-375).¹

To date the revived interest in historical fiction has been selective, confined to works written in the last three decades. However, the postmodern challenge to the principles and conventions of realism invites a fresh look at novels like *The Golden Dog* and *Roger Sudden*, from perspectives less likely to balk at the first tremor of a pure heart. What follows in this essay is not a post-modern analysis, but I have attempted a somewhat oblique reading of the two novels, one that focuses on the *lumpenproletariat* rather than the heroes and heroines. From this perspective, the novels suggest a more speculative, if not quite "problematic," treatment of the historical facts.

The significance of the *lumpenproletariat* in Kirby's and Raddall's novels was suggested to me by a reading of *The English Historical Novel* by Avrom Fleishman. He examines the role of the *lumpenproletariat* in two historical novels by Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The term applies to the

lowest portion of the urban poor, "the proletarians in rags: criminals, beggars, chronically unemployed, the mental, physical and moral rejects of society" (104). Marx described them as "the 'dangerous class,' the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society" (19). They are opposed to the "real" proletariat, the productive, socially cohesive workers. They regularly became the pawns in any class struggle, often as the instruments of reactionary forces. They are unruly, intolerant, "the readiest resource of the demagogue" (104-105). In neither *Barnaby Rudge* nor *A Tale of Two Cities*, however, is the *lumpenproletariat* simply a negative force. Rather, Fleishman argues, the *lumpenproletariat* is the "symbolic embodiment of the transitional character of English society," an image of Dickens's sense of "the sheer persistence of the past even amid change, which makes for social permanence" (113). Dickens may not have had a sociological term for this class but he probably gave it more visibility than Marx, at least to English readers.

The Golden Dog and Roger Sudden both portray the decline of New France and the events leading to the conquest of 1759, but each novel treats the social and historical forces affecting this period in Canadian history very differently. In *Roger Sudden*, the *lumpenproletariat* does bear some resemblance to its appearance in Dickens's novels. Transplanted to the shore of Nova Scotia it becomes, in spite of itself, the embodiment of a new emerging society. Its very lack of purpose and industry paradoxically assures the permanence of the settlement. In *The Golden Dog*, the *lumpenproletariat* indeed evokes a sense of "the sheer persistence of the past even amid change," but its function is very different from that of the *lumpenproletariat* in either Raddall's or Dickens's novels, or in Marx's social analysis. It functions comfortably on the fringes of an old, established society, whose traditions it honours and identifies with the cause of the *honnêtes gens* against the greed of the French court and its agents in New France, the Friponne.

The hero of Raddall's novel is an officer and a gentleman, a veteran of the Battle of Culloden—on the Stuart side. After a period of exile in France, he finds himself back in England,

restless and penniless, and scornful of righteous causes. He teams up with a former seaman, Tom Fuller, and engages in a bit of highway robbery. The two find refuge and lodging in the slums of London, in a boarding house on Tooley Street, where they make the acquaintance of the local "denizens."

London's *lumpenproletariat* seems to be concentrated in Southwark: "South'ark's a thieves' rookery, sir," explains Tom Fuller, "Dirty Lane, Foul Lane, Blackman Road, Stony Street, Dead Man's Place, Bandy Leg Walk, Love Lane, Maid Lane—and that's a joke No place for gentleman like you" (31). The borough is divided by a highway, and Roger Sudden is "amused to find that Tooley Street looked with a sense of superior worth and even virtue on the people on the other side" (38). Tooley Street "prided itself on working for its living." In the Trope boarding house, the lodgers are ostentatiously introduced according to their "trades"—Bob, the hackney coachman; Ned and Jack, a pair of chairmen; Little Bob, a pickpocket; Maggs, a chimney sweep; Vace, a journeyman barber; Killick, a waterman; his wife, an oyster-woman; and Sally, a whore (38). But their pride and superior airs are clearly specious. In spite of their various "trades," they comprise a veritable *lumpenproletariat*.

When the opportunity arises to emigrate to Nova Scotia, it is seized by Roger and Tom, along with half the population of Tooley Street. Here their *lumpen* quality is again evident as they are processed by the clerks of the Lords of Trade and Plantations before boarding ship. The advertisement had called for "husbandmen" and "artisans"; Tooley Street clearly qualifies under neither heading, but fortunately the screening process is a sham:

The cunning cockneys, listening to the questions asked and answered in the line ahead, had soon discovered what was expected of them. Each man in turn answered glibly "carpenter," "shipwright," "smith," "mason," "joiner," "brickmaker," or "husbandman" and passed on his way rejoicing. (49)

After five years in Halifax, the former denizens of Tooley Street remain "a clot of English exiles living a hand-to-mouth existence

on the side of a hill at Chebucto." Compared to Louisbourg, Halifax is still "nothing but a palisaded almshouse" (192-193). They are briefly contrasted to the "furriners," German, Dutch, Swiss and New England settlers "that knew a bit o' farmin" (197). These seem to be the truly productive group in the struggling colony, but their role in the novel is minimal. This may illustrate Raddall's ethnic bias, but it also reflects his attempt to identify an elusive essence of the new society, distinct from its functioning agents.

The *lumpenproletariat* in *The Golden Dog* clearly has a lesser role. Indeed, here the terms must be used somewhat playfully. On two occasions an unruly crowd gathers in front of the Golden Dog, once when it threatens to attack Bigot and his followers en route to the Castle after their drunken debauch at Beaumanoir, and secondly, when it gathers in the market-place on the fated St. Martin's Day. The crowd is made up largely of the honest *habitants* of the city and surrounding countryside, most of them partisans of the Bourgeois. They are not the *lumpenproletariat*. The term best describes a "class" represented by four individuals: Max Grimau and Blind Bartemy, the two beggars; Jean La Marche, the fiddler; and Master Pothier *dit* Robin, the itinerant notary. They appear individually or in pairs throughout the novel, and they are all together at the Fleur-de-Lis tavern where Master Pothier presides at the head of the table, over "a lot of fellows, plainly of the baser sort" (267).

The *lumpen* status of the two beggars is readily apparent. As for Jean La Marche, the fiddler, he is a *centsitaire* of the Manor Tilley, but he seems to belong with the *lumpen*, in whose company he is most often found. In the crowd scene in Chapter XIII, "The Chien d'Or," the narrator points out that "Jean had brought his violin under his arm, in place of a spade, to help build up the walls of the city," for he knew "that in his violin lay a power of work by other hands, if he played while they laboured" (138). Master Pothier also seems to be a *lumpen* in spite of his alleged professional status. The nature of the legal services he renders is at best ambiguous:

Master Pothier's *actes* were as full of embryo disputes as a fig is full of seeds, and usually kept all parties in hot water and litigation for the rest of their days. If he did happen now and then to settle a dispute between neighbours, he made ample amends for it by setting half the rest of the parish by the ears. (53)

His clients have "a genuine Norman predilection for law and chicanery, and respect amounting to veneration for written documents, red-tape and sealing-wax" (53). There seems to be a tacit understanding among all parties that his primary function is not to provide legal security but to confer status, a semblance of middle-class legal literacy. Moreover, Master Pothier certainly dresses like a *lumpen*:

He wore a tattered black robe, shortened at the knees to facilitate walking, a frizzled wig, looking as if it had been dressed with a currycomb, a pair of black breeches, well-patched with various colours; and gamaches of brown leather, such as the habitants wore, completed his odd attire and formed the professional costume of Master Pothier *dit* Robin. (53)

It is apparent that the two beggars, Max Grimau and Blind Bartemy, regard him as one of their own. Max describes the "work" of the notary as "foraging among the fat wives of the south shore," and Pothier himself readily confides to the beggars that he has been "fleecing the King's subjects to the best of my poor ability in the law" (245).

These four, then, represent the *lumpenproletariat* in *The Golden Dog*. They are wholly sympathetic, shrewd and crafty, but without any sinister or disruptive quality. They exist in perfect harmony within the feudal society of New France. Although they may be found among the angry crowd assembled in front of the Golden Dog, it is not they but the *honnêtes gens*, the working and middle classes, who press for change and reform, who oppose the mismanagement of the colony by Bigot and his patrons at the court of Versailles. These *lumpens* stand in sharp contrast to the Tooley Street *lumpen* in *Roger Sudden*, whose relation to the larger society is not harmonious but provocative. Whether in

London or in Halifax, they are a helpless unruly mass, buffeted by social and economic forces beyond their comprehension. Although they themselves have no articulate demands for reform, their ominous presence provokes urgent, even desperate action by those in power, yet their amorphous mass deflects the intended results of any action taken either for or against them.

Roger's relations to the Tooley Street *lumpen* changes in the course of the novel.² At the beginning he is, to some extent, identified with them, yet he is not like them. He has a shadowy past, he seems to be socially adrift, cut off from any supportive fellowship with his own class, in fact, a *déclassé*, but he retains an aura of the adventurer—which they clearly lack. He sees the earth as "a great golden woman, many breasted like one of those heathen Hindu goddesses, and about her all these brutal and thirsty children swarmed to suck, to explore, and to suck again" (39). Roger is determined to lay claim to a full teat while the *lumpen* seem destined to forever quarrel over the dregs. In Halifax he becomes their leader. They instinctively gather around him as their "captain," a role that he resists as a "confounded nuisance" because it complicates the single-minded pursuit of his fortune: "they clustered about him; they looked up to him; there was an air of relief about them as if—as if they had found an ass to carry their burdens" (97). They seem to him the least likely to give shape and permanence to the struggling colony; they are putty in the hands of others, totally dependent upon the meagre rations of the commissariat.

By the end of the novel this has all changed. When Roger and Tom first arrived in Tooley Street and began searching for lodging, Roger remembered a rhyme concerning nine poor tailors of Tooley Street who called themselves "We, the People of England." He found the absurdity of the rhyme amusing. In Chapter 6, which is entitled, "We, the People of England," the Tooley Street *lumpen* are again portrayed, through Roger's eyes, as a ridiculous parody of the English people. It is only toward the end of the novel, after his return to Halifax from Louisbourg, that Roger gradually discerns a positive quality in the *lumpen*, and finally, in the last chapter, he begins to see the profound truth of

the rhyme, to see that the Tooley Street *lumpen* are in fact a "people" rather than shiftless outcasts. Thus, at the beginning of the story he is amused and occasionally exasperated by them; at the end, facing the firing squad, he is inspired by them:

Who could have foreseen it? That mob! Tooley Street! Men laughed at that old tale of the nine tailors of Tooley Street who inscribed themselves, "We the People of England." By heaven, they *were* the people, the common people of England. And that was what made the Halifax settlement unique in all America, for its founders were not soldiers or sailors disbanded abroad to save the cost of transport home, no pious band of religious outcasts, no sorry throng of political exiles, no company of gentlemen adventurers, no trading post of some great merchant enterprise—simply the common people of England set down upon a wild shore in the West. The wilderness had purged them swiftly and terribly. The weak had died, the shiftless fled. In Halifax there remained only the unconquerable. (358)

The aimless passivity of the Tooley Street *lumpen* emerges, paradoxically, as their strength, and this is particularly evident in their failure to build walls. In a letter to Thomas B. Costain (1942), Raddall described his novel as "a sort of 'tale of two cities,' the story of Halifax and Louisbourg," each symbolic of the national character of the two great rivals (Young, 28). The genius of the English was that, unlike the French, they did not shut themselves in against the forest; "The English settlers never had a 'garrison mind,' nor did their descendants" (Sorfleet, "Raddall," 53). When Roger returns to Halifax after five years with the Indians in the forest and with the French at Louisbourg, he still sees the settlement as "a hopeless enterprise, . . . nothing but a few rickety blockhouses and a rotten palisade." Compared to the stone solidity of Louisbourg, Halifax has "the look of a great migration at a wayside halt." Nevertheless, Roger admits to "a strange impression of permanence" (192-193). At the end of the novel, awaiting his execution, he is still troubled by the question:

That old comparison of Halifax and Louisbourg disturbed him like a voice, a question demanding an answer.

Somewhere in the story of the two towns was concealed the secret of French failure in America. What was it? The French built better ships, trained better soldiers; they understood the art of fortification as no other nation did. They had made alliances with the savages from Nova Scotia to the Great Lakes and all down the muddy reaches of the Mississippi. The continent was theirs, the English a scatter of interlopers clinging to the coast. And their American Empire functioned with a brain at Quebec and a strong sword hand at Louisbourg, while the English had no unity and no strong arm anywhere. Yet what was Louisbourg now, and what would Quebec be when another season passed? It was easy to say that a mighty English fleet and army had come across the sea, and charge it all to that. But was that all, a tussle of red coats against white on the edge of a continent? (355-356)

As he faces the muskets of the Artois firing squad, the truth comes home to Roger:

Walls! That was it! That was the difference and that was the secret. None of the English settlements had walls. Halifax had even let the first crude palisade go to rot. What seemed a weakness was in fact a strength, the spirit of men who would not be confined. (357)

Earlier in the novel, the French trader Gautier had mocked the huddled coastal settlements of the English:

Besieged by phantoms! It is the forest they fear. That is a big enemy. Long ago we discovered, we French, that the forest is a friend to the swift and the bold and is merciless to all others. *Voilà!* We range the great forest from Quebec to Mexico and the continent is ours, while you English sit with your tails in salt water like the butcher's cat. (139)

But Roger begins to see a crucial difference: it was merely a few *coureurs de bois* and priests who had penetrated the continent, not the French "people" themselves. The point is a bit dubious, since there are references in the novel itself to extensive French settlements, namely the Acadians, whose expropriated property

helps to make Roger rich. Nevertheless, in an interview with J.R. Sorfleet, Raddall called *Roger Sudden* an "allegory":

Why was it that the French failed in America and the Anglo-Saxons won? Simply because the French shut themselves within the walls and the English didn't. They refused to be confined. They were always heading further west to get over the hill and see what was on the other side, and taking their own women with them. ("Raddall," 53)

This resembles what is usually thought to be the American, not the Canadian, pattern of settlement, but Raddall defines the crucial distinctions differently. Roger therefore seems to be speaking for Raddall when, at the end of the novel, "that mob! Tooley Street!" is hailed as the true "people of England," that "unconquerable" race which refused to be "confined" (358).

This is an intriguing theme, but in the novel, and in the interview with Sorfleet, Raddall interjects another reason, one that is much less intriguing, dramatically less compelling, and rather distasteful, why the French failed and the English triumphed: "They didn't breed with the Indians as the French did: ("Raddall," 53). When Roger is held captive by the Indians, the beautiful Wapke offers him pleasure and love. But immediately an intuition of the danger of submission holds Roger's desire in check: "the *coureurs de bois* had mated with savage women and spilled their seed in the wilderness, and the priests were wedded to God. They had not left a mark" (357). The allegedly self-defeating French view is again argued by Gautier when he counsels Roger to accept his good fortune, to mate with Wapke and become a forest nomad:

Listen, my friend, it is a good life out there in the forest. It is the way a man was meant to live. When you have spent a year with these people you will never to wish to leave them. There are hundreds like you, mated to savage women in the woods between here and the great lakes of the St. Lawrence. (149)

But Roger resists the "plunge into darkness from which there was no return." The whole notion seems nightmarish to him:

To mate with this wild thing, to produce hybrid things, half beast and half himself, and to live year in year out among these mockeries, like a man shut up in a room hung with distorted mirrors . . . ugh! Darkness! Darkness! (166)

This passage is both racist and inconsistent with Roger's character. One of this more engaging qualities is his amused disdain for pomposity and prudery, yet when he declines Wapke's seductive overtures he resorts to orotund, archaic, "Indian" language:

Look there at the Big Water. It is clean and beautiful like thee. And there is the river, clean and strong. Yet where they mingle . . . is mud and a stink. (173)

To decline gallantly is doubtless difficult in any circumstance, but Roger fails miserably. Wapke rightly suspects that his real reason for rejecting her is that there is "another woman." The "Big Water" rhetoric is therefore as gratuitous as it is offensive.³

The Tooley Street *lumpen* certainly show no inclination to mate with the Indians; in this regard they show as little enterprise as in any other. In this regard as in any other, their strength is not an active virtue. Yet the case Raddall makes for racial purity stains the purity of his theme, which rests upon a rather daring paradox—that it was precisely the social class that seemed most alienated from English society, and most helpless and most dispirited, that held the promise of renewal and the persistence of a national character. The more compelling image of the *lumpen* shows them discharging their historic function anarchically. They provoke bold action on the part of the authorities because society cannot long endure this shiftless menace in its midst. The scheme to provide free passage and land in Nova Scotia had been proposed to diffuse an explosive social situation. As Tom Fuller explains, "Knowin' ones down that way say the whole thing's a plot o' the Lord Mayor's to ship a couple o' thousand Lunnon poor across the Western Ocean where they can't come back. It's to take the edge off o' the city mob afore there's any trouble over the hard times" (47). In Nova Scotia they no longer threaten anarchic violence, but they continue to subvert or passively thwart

the "rational" and often silly policies of the colonial administration. It is their persistent and perverse unruliness that seems to permit the gradual evaluation of a rooted, organic society. When Raddall's narrative focuses upon these unheroic qualities of the *lumpen* he does evoke a sense of the *lumpenproletariat* as "unconquerable," while he challenges some of the textbook clichés about English supremacy.

There is no sense that the *lumpen* in *The Golden Dog* will evolve into something else or have declined to their present condition. Here they simply occupy a settled, permanent state. They are somewhat cynical, but without bitterness. They seem neither the victims of society nor of the "bad times"—in fact, the "bad times" hardly touch them. Although they are beggars, they seem to want for little: "No Finance Minister or royal Intendant studied more earnestly the problem how to tax the kingdom than Max and Blind Bartemy how to toll the passers-by, and with less success, perhaps" (139). They have a gourmet's palate and they regularly seem able to indulge it, whether it is Easter pie at the Bourgeois' banquet, or in the kitchen of the Tilley Manor, or at the Fleur-de-Lis tavern where their day's earnings afford them a sumptuous dinner of eel pie and a gallon of Norman cider (268).

The impression that the *lumpen* in *The Golden Dog* therefore convey is that they are an integral part of an harmonious society where even its parasites have a worthy function; as Blind Bartemy explains, "It is *pour l'amour de Dieu!* We beggars save more souls than the Curé; for we are always exhorting men to charity. I think we ought to be part of Holy Church as well as the Gray Frairs" (245-246). The *lumpen* are also guardians of the songs and folk traditions of New France. At the Fleur-de-Lis tavern, Varin is scornful of the old ballads; he wants "a madrigal, or one of the devil's ditties from the Quartier Latin." Jean La Marche, the fiddler, refuses to humour him. He is "jealous of the ballads of his own New France," and declares that he knows no "devil's ditty, and would not sing one if I did" (269). In this scene, two of Bigot's henchmen, Varin and Cadet, are distinguished from each other and from the mass. Varin's preference for devil's ditties" illustrates the decadent, infectious corruption of Versailles while

Cadet, who shares the *lumpen* preference for the old ballads of New France, becomes a more sympathetic figure. This scene develops his character to the point where his loyalty and compassionate service to Bigot—at the burial of Caroline—are dramatically credible.

Kirby's effective use of the *lumpenproletariat* stands in contrast to his uninspired handling of some of the more conventional elements of historical fiction. Long stretches of the novel are occupied with the very proper courting of Amélie de Repentigny and Pierre Philibert; there are several passages that revel in pomp and costumery; the introduction to La Corriveau and the murder of Caroline amply provide gothic horror; and there is no shortage of inflated hearts and inflated language. Nevertheless, J.R. Sorfleet has presented a strong argument that *The Golden Dog* is generically an historical novel rather than merely an historical romance, that the "love plots" are subordinate to the "political plot," and that the social and political forces that shaped a crucial period in Canadian history are examined seriously. He suggests that Kirby's acute sense of history is evident in the fact that he chose to represent the event of the summer and winter of 1748 when the power struggle between La Gallissonière and the *honnêtes gens* against Bigot and the Friponne came to a head. By 1759, the *honnêtes gens* had been routed and the outcome of the issue had already been decided ("Fiction," 132-138).

In New France, Kirby seems to have found a feudal society whose traditional codes of chivalry and religious devotion he greatly admired, and lamented. He presents an enchanting image of the *ancien régime*, infused with a good measure of Tory nostalgia, but not to the exclusion of economic issues. At one point in the novel Kirby explains the central issue in liberal economic terms, as a conflict between the state-supported trade monopoly of the Friponne and the more open economy demanded by the *honnêtes gens*:

The Friponne . . . claimed a monopoly in the purchase and sale of all imports and exports in the colony. Its privileges were based upon royal ordinances and decrees of the Intendant and its rights enforced in the most arbitrary

manner—and to the prejudice of every other mercantile interest in the colony. (35)

The conflict between the Friponne and the middle and working class *honnêtes gens* resembles a class conflict, and its class basis is the more evident in that the role of the Governor, La Galissonnière, is notably suppressed. In fact, in the struggle against the Friponne the military administration is reduced to an onlooker, hamstrung by Versailles. It is the Bourgeois Philibert who, in the novel, leads the *honnêtes gens*, not La Galissonnière. The Bourgeois represents the "old money" interests in the colony; the Friponne represents the entrepreneurial class of merchant-adventurers under the imperial patronage of La Pompadour. They are *arrivistes*. The novel emphasizes the solidarity of all the other classes, the military establishment, the seigneurs, the *habitants*, and the *lumpen* against the economic expansionism of the Friponne. It is a class struggle to restore feudalism; but it is also a national struggle. In Europe, the decay of the old order may be far advanced, infecting all levels of society; in New France feudalism and the spirit of chivalry are in youthful, robust good health.

One of the problems in the novel is that the Bourgeois is dramatically too weak to sustain his role in the conflict, as leader of the *honnêtes gens*. He is referred to often but he figures prominently only in his title chapter (Chapter 46) and the chapter in which he is murdered. Moreover, when he does appear, he hardly enhances the spirit of the novel. The weary righteousness he exudes grinds against the aura of grace and gaiety Kirby ascribes to the society of New France, a society that, except for the greed and intrigue of decaying imperial powers (and the destructive passions they spawn), could have gone on forever under the guardianship of its seigneurs and merchants.

Near the end of Raddall's novel, Roger reflects upon the meaninglessness of history:

All-powerful Munitoo stirred the soft heap of the world with an idle foot, and all the ants ran to and fro, and no one knew the meaning—not even Munitoo himself, who doubtless studied them with interest. Sometimes the scurryings approached a pattern and you thought you saw

the purpose, but then the great moccasin swept across the heap again and all was changed in a moment. One thing was certain—that it would go on. Ants would perish in twos or threes or thousands as the great foot fell; the rest would drag the dead aside and take up their frantic pursuits again—and again. (342-343)

This image of the historical process is, however, rejected when Roger discovers the profound truth that the Tooley Street *lumpen* do represent "the people, the common people of England." At the moment of his death, Roger sees that history does have a design and purpose; he experiences a "rush of exaltation" as he envisions "this march of the English across the great north wilderness that had begun at Halifax that day in '49" (358). When the focus is on the hero, Roger Sudden, the novel seems to endorse the Whig view of history that civilization does not develop according to conscious, rational plans but is the result of individuals or groups pursuing their own self interest toward ends which they may not have desired or imagined, but which emerge, unfailingly, as Progress. As a ruthless entrepreneur, Roger appears to illustrate the Whig principle that private vice makes public virtue.⁴ But when the focus is upon the *lumpenproletariat*, a more "organic" view emerges. The *lumpen* manifest a larger, autonomous historical force, an imminent life-idea, a national essence that resists the designs of those who wield power. History happens in spite of the bungling and short-sightedness of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, or the incompetence of the British Army, or the rapacity of cynical fortune seekers. There is little evidence in *Roger Sudden* of a zeal for reform. The novel hardly suggests that the Lords of Trade or the officers of the army should have acted more responsibly; rather, their historical function is to be bungling and incompetent. This assures the subversion of their vision of the colony as merely a commercial venture or a military outpost, and permits the evolution of the *lumpen* toward their destiny. In his memoir, *In My Time*, Raddall calls the novel a tragedy, "every chapter a step towards the death of Roger Sudden before a French firing squad," but he then adds, "if any reader cared to look deeper, my story was an allegory showing why the French failed

in their attempt at empire in America and why the Anglo-Saxons won" (218). If Roger is central to the "tragic" structure, the *lumpenproletariat* is central to the "allegorical" structure, and that structure is comic, showing the evolution of a disgruntled mass into a new social order, a true "people."

In *The Golden Dog* history does not happen according to "logic" either, that is, according to the designs, good or bad, of those in power. Early in the novel, Kirby declares that the world is ruled by "dreams of impassioned hearts, and improvisations of warm lips, not by cold words linked in chains of iron sequence,—by love, not by logic. The heart with its passions, not the understanding with its reasoning, sways, in the long run, the actions of mankind" (51). Kirby's ardent language may obscure the polemical point of his argument. He is rejecting the prevailing views of history held by his contemporaries, however vaguely he may have identified them. Among his specific targets is Francis Parkman's acclaimed account, *The Old Régime in Canada*, which portrayed the ignorance, superstition, and "deformities" of feudal society, buttressed by an absolute monarchy, yielding inevitably to a more enlightened imperial power. Kirby's argument is illustrated by Le Gardeur whose passions are certainly a volatile element in the historical equation, but more significantly, it is Bigot's quite reckless passion for Caroline, for example, that impedes his rapacity, jeopardizes his cultivated favour with La Pompadour, and ruinously compels him to bring his conflict with the Bourgeois to a crisis. The *lumpen* have an intuitive sense of the eruptive force of passion, whether for love, for money, or for power, but they have no influence upon its course. Their fondness for the old order, for its folk traditions and songs, illustrates their attachment to a society under threat of dissolution, but they can render only droll witness to a reckless drive toward calamity. Thus, Kirby's novel is a lament for the *ancien régime*, while Raddall's proclaims the triumphant transformation of social outcasts into a "people."

Ronald Hatch's complaint that Kirby "exaggerates his characterization" has good cause. Kirby does ladle virtues and vices upon many of his characters in large, black and white dollops. But it can also be argued that some of his characterization, notably that of Bigot and Angélique, is psychologically complex. The relation between them thrives upon a subtle mixture of pleasure and cruelty, eroticism and power, an enticing challenge to any Freudian critic. It is also true, as Hatch suggests, that Kirby portrays corruption and moral depravity as factors in the fall of New France. The greed and debauchery of Bigot and his followers has weakened the colony and made it vulnerable to conquest. Society is sustained, if at all, by traditional codes of honour, and therefore "François Bigot might have saved New France, had he been honest as he was clever" (68). But again, it can also be argued that "eccentric moral explanations" (Hatch, 80) account for less than they appear. The competing forces acting upon history obscure the imprint of any individual or "great man," whether greatly good or greatly bad. The novel emphasizes that when Bigot agrees to manipulate Le Gardeur to murder the Bourgeois Philibert, events are already beyond his control. He acts under pressure from the *honnêtes gens*, and the murder is a desperate attempt to engineer public opinion. "Eccentric moral explanations" do not preclude shrewd political analysis.

There is also evidence in the novel of the Victorian anxiety about the decay of private morality, especially sexual morality, and the consequent decline of empires. In Chapter VII Kirby does ascribe a "bacchanalian frenzy" to the entertainments at Beaumanoir, which matched "the wild orgies of the Regency," but again, this stands in contrast to "the simple manners and inflexible morals of the Governor-General" (66-67). Except for Beaumanoir, Angélique and La Corriveau, private morality in New France is thriving. This is apparent in the conduct of the *lumpen* whom one might expect to be employed as agents of the Friponne, as spies or provocateurs. They have no role of this sort whatsoever. They prey upon what is good in society, or at worst upon its harmless foibles. That they thrive in this suggests a

society of radiant good health, not a society wracked by decadence.

Hatch's major complaint, however, is that the novel is innocent of "genuine historical determinants." By "genuine" he means "inexorable autonomous forces" acting upon society in conformity with the "historicism of realist conventions" (81). Certainly no *Zeitgeist* has declared the doom of feudal society in New France. But one of the merits of postmodern criticism, the criticism that Hatch himself applies to the historical fiction of Wiebe, Findley, and Gallant, is that it encourages scepticism toward "the historicism of realist conventions," and not only when it is applied to allegedly postmodern novels but to all historical fiction. As Linda Hutcheon points out, the problematization of history is not a "discovery" of postmodernism. Historians, novelists and critics have long been aware of the "provisional, indeterminate nature of historical knowledge" and questioned the "ontological and epistemological status of historical 'fact'" ("Postmodern," 366). What distinguished postmodernism is that it problematizes history "self-consciously" and flaunts its "contextuality," such that "facts are made to seem fiction and fictions are made to seem factual," but "what we witness is a self-conscious problematization of what has always been a truism of the novel as a genre" ("History," 181-182).

In other words, the major distinction of postmodern historicism is not that it reads historical texts sceptically but that it is "wilfully unencumbered by nostalgia." The postmodern historian, novelist or critic recognizes no privileged account of the past, and no privileged periods, ideology, or social order. To evoke the past in prophetic rage against the present is a quixotic exercise. The modernist struggle to discern "genuine determinants" of history is rendered ingenuous. "Nostalgia" may also appear in postmodern fiction, but it "is always turned against itself—and us" ("Postmodern," 367). Where modern realism and earlier forms like those of Raddall and Kirby, "nostalgically" used the past to critique the present, whether as progress or catastrophe, post-modernism maintains a coy detachment toward rival texts. Where modern realism nostalgically aspired to unity

and the resolution of contraries, postmodernism encourages a medley of "discourses." Modern realism confronts the inaccessibility of the past, the impossibility of certainty, the disintegration of culture, and cries "woe"; postmodernism confronts the same phenomena and cries "whee."

Occasionally the exuberance of postmodern critics is not quite catching. A provocative scepticism toward the conventional accounts of history is certainly apparent among the novelists Hutcheon cites to illustrate her arguments, but it is at least questionable whether they share their critics' impartiality toward all texts, whether a novelist like Rudy Wiebe does not "encode" in the structure and rhetoric of his novels yet another privileged version of the past. It may be that the prevailing nostalgia of postmodern historicism is merely as yet unnamed. (Hutcheon does assure the detractors of postmodernism that self-conscious scepticism need not imply a cavalier disregard for what "really" happened, and in fairness, the gleeful detachment I have ascribed to postmodern criticism is coloured by my reading of other sources.)

Although the technical language of postmodern criticism can obscure as much as it reveals, some of the theoretical constructs used by critics like Hutcheon have undeniably provided useful tools for understanding fiction. Specifically, they have challenged some of the tenets of realism by which much Canadian historical fiction, including *The Golden Dog and Roger Sudden*, has been relegated to marginal references. Secondly, the postmodern friendliness toward a plurality of "discourses" accommodates the baroque structure of some of these works more readily than did the rigorous demands of modern realism for structural and thematic unity. Ornate language and improbable plotting, which seemed to invalidate whatever serious purpose these novels might have, may now appear a less insurmountable problem. Furthermore, because postmodern criticism readily enjoins a more oblique approach to fiction, it may reveal aspects of these works that realism rendered obscure, and it may discover flaws that are more instructive than recurrent complaints against extravagant plotting and characterization.

NOTES

¹ In another essay, Hutcheon refers to Foucault, Hayden White and others to illustrate the "problematization" of history. In *Tropics of Discourse* White developed a complex anatomy of historical writing that echoes Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. He distinguished four "Modes of Emplotment," four "Modes of Explanation," four "Modes of Ideological Implication," four "Master Tropes" (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony), and four historiographies (romantic, realistic, symbolist, and modernist). These categories may be combined or serialized to classify all historical writing, all implicit or explicit "metahistories."

² J.R. Leitold reads the novel as a *Bildungsroman*. The hero, Roger Sudden, goes through three distinct phases, "from footloose rake and adventurer through cynical and opportunistic merchant to self-sacrificing hero" ("Introduction," n.p.).

³ The novel is narrated from the perspective of Roger Sudden and he is not always a reliable commentator. For example, when he explains to the outraged Mary Foy that "Fur is fur, whether you skin it from an Indian or a mink," he is not speaking for the author. This is the cynical merchant-adventurer talking, who will come to a more mature knowledge later in the novel. However, on the subject of mating with the Indians, Roger's intuitions do seem to reflect those of the author. In this interview with Raddall, Sorfleet suggested that Sudden's rejection of Wapke is inconsistent with his womanizing past. Raddall replied that he had made it clear in the novel that Sudden had decided to have nothing to do with women in his pursuit of fortune, and moreover, he had simply understood that nothing good could come of an inter-racial union ("Raddall" 53).

⁴ See, for example, Duncan Forbe's summary of the Whig view of history in "Scientific Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar," *Cambridge Journal* 7 (1953-1954): 653. Quoted by Fleishman, 45.

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