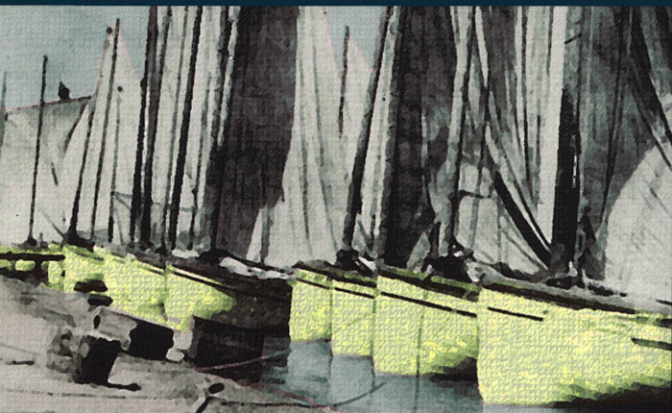


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REAPPRAISALS:
CANADIAN
WRITERS

BOLDER FLIGHTS

Essays on the Canadian Long Poem



Edited and with a preface by
Frank M. Tierney and Angela Robbeson

University of Ottawa Press

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the Canadian
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“This bolder flight of my adventurous muse”

—Oliver Goldsmith, *The Rising Village*

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Preface

FRANK M. TIERNEY and ANGELA ROBBESON

THIS BOOK EXPLORES the features of the Canadian long poem as indicators leading to a deeper understanding of our literary cultures in their local as well as their national contexts. According to the suggestion made by a growing number of literary historians and critics, the long poem is distinctively Canadian in its documentary aspects, often serving a topographical and memorial function. Accordingly, the essays collected here are structured along chronological and geographical lines of development. This study thus extends and revises previous analyses by the leading scholars in this field—including D.M.R. Bentley, Dorothy Livesay, Stephen Scobie, and Smaro Kamboureli—presenting the most recent findings and research into the underlying structures of this genre.

Contributors were selected for the excellence of their published work on the long poem. D.M.R. Bentley, for example, the leading authority on the development of the Canadian long poem in the nineteenth century, uses as points of departure his discussions in *Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada* and the “Bibliocritical Afterward” in *Early Long Poems on Canada*. In “Colonial Colonizing: An Introductory Survey of the Canadian Long Poem,” Bentley focuses on the academic selection of the long poem as a distinctively Canadian genre in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. He argues that the long poem is a site of tension between the lyric and the epic, between personal and communal expression, a discursive place in which Canadian poets from Thomas Cary to Robert Kroetsch have given individual expression to a community, be it a colony, a region, a city, or a nation. He also draws attention to the critical and editorial endeavours that brought the Canadian long poem to academic prominence in recent decades.

Adrian Fowler argues that Adam Hood Burwell's *Talbot Road* exhibits most of the characteristics of the topographical poem, including historical retrospection, incidental meditation, and futuristic consideration of the society located by the landscape described and celebrated, indicating that Burwell was familiar with the genre as it was developed in England by Sir John Denham, Alexander Pope, and others. The poem also reveals unmistakable echoes of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Pope's *Essay on Man* and English eighteenth-century landscape writing that turned on the assumed sexuality of the land. Fowler asks—and answers—the question: Does Burwell's undoubted engagement with the Talbot settlement project emerge in any creative way, or is the poem merely an ill-contrived pastiche of borrowed tropes and styles?

Despite the differences between *Talbot Road*, *The Rising Village*, *Tecumseh*, *The Huron Chief*, and *Acadia*, Wanda Campbell suggests that they all present an essentially masculine vision. Whether the Indian or the settler is given the role of Adam, his first love is always the land, which is invariably portrayed as female. Campbell suggests that sexual politics governed the attitudes of eighteenth-century gardeners toward the landscape, and examines four aspects of the patriarchal relationship to "the garden as the repository of female mysteries" described by Carole Fabricant: man to woman, artist to model, spectator to spectacle, and possessor to possession. Campbell's careful reading of these early poems reveals an ecological awareness that, though tentative and patriarchal, was ahead of its time.

Margot Kaminski examines the absence of early women writers from the Canadian long poem canon and raises the question: If a Canadian woman had written *Goblin Market* in 1862, would it be in the canon? Would the lack of "Canadian" content and the presence of Old World myths condemn it as derivative, as not "distinctively Canadian"? Isabella Valancy Crawford, securely in the canon, seems to have entered primarily through one poem, *Malcolm's Katie*. But, if Crawford had only written poems set in the Old World, would she have made it into the canon, and would she have survived the focus on "nationalism" that has been carried through the Canadian literary world in anthologies, literary history texts, journals, and academic publications? Interestingly, the search for a national identity and a national literature in America and Australia also seems to emphasize a version of nationalism that excludes women.

Sandra Djwa argues E.J. Pratt's centrality to the development of the Canadian long poem and suggests that it is doubtful if the long poem would have emerged as a distinctive Canadian genre without Pratt's example. Djwa identifies Pratt's position as a modernist, as a postmodernist, and

his location in the history of the long poem. His influences are twofold: the direct example of his long poems documenting social reality, often in a mythic way, reflected in poems by A.M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney, Louis Dudek, James Reaney, and Al Purdy; and indirectly as mediated through Reaney and *Alphabet*. Pratt influenced younger writers like Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, and Michael Ondaatje. Djwa also reveals Pratt's influence on Northrop Frye and numerous other major Canadian literary figures. His letters demonstrate that he saw himself as part of a continuing tradition in the long poem; his interest in documentary and myth is traced through *Alphabet*, and his combination of narrative and myth may have influenced the contemporary novel.

Gwendolyn Guth confronts those scholars, particularly Smaro Kambourelli, who picture Pratt "hovering on the outskirts of genre." Guth presents the case that Pratt's shortcomings, including his Christian Humanist ideology, his naive choice of "grand themes," and his politically incorrect politics of representation, have resulted in the uncritical rejection of poems such as *Brébeuf and His Brethren* from the "archaeology" of the long poem. The essay examines the weakness of the poststructuralists' approach to genre, theme, and history, and concludes with a discussion of the limitations of Eldon Garnet's 1977 rewrite of the Jesuit missionary story.

Reinhold Kramer explores the notion that the long poem is outside the law of genre, indeterminate in its positioning of the self. The notion identifies the lost-consensual *intentions* of some "long poets," but it is a mystification to discover "someone else" in poems by Kroetsch, Arnason, Atwood, and Friesen. These poets share the same tenets: history is a dream of facts, authority is everywhere and lacerates without end, the poet speaks in many competing discourses, the subject is an imaginary unity, the world is purely parodic, and in the beginning was repression. For Kramer, the very consistency of these tenets limits alterity, and the limits are most clearly seen when one compares the works by the aforementioned poets to David McFadden's *Gypsy Guitar*.

Karen Clavelle explains that in the Canadian long poem there is a certain and noticeable reluctance to reveal all so there is not really any danger of the story ending. Neither is there any danger of all being concealed, as there are myriad beginnings. Myriad beginnings, however, challenge the narrative, because they spoil the linearity of the story, disrupt the linearity of time; the result is that the poets of the twentieth century have been moving away from narrative in the way that narrative has been formerly understood. Frequent beginnings force the narrative to fragment and the telling of the story becomes different. Clavelle discusses the elements of the Canadian long poem as observed in David Arnason's *Marsh*

Burning, with attention being given to the repetition of the beginnings in the poem.

Using Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, in which Brooks speaks of the "narrative motor" that moves the text and the readers forward toward understanding and fruition, Gary Geddes explores the construction of Sharon Thesen's long poem *Confabulations*. Central to that poem is the mystery surrounding the death of Malcolm Lowry. How does the concept of reader desire apply to long poems and poetic narratives? What are the connective tissues that hold the pieces together? Geddes demonstrates Thesen's narrative shorthand and how the text is seeded with elements of the story, "with the ghost of a plot (or plots)," and how she makes creative use of *Under the Volcano*, *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, *The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, and Douglas Day's biography, *Malcolm Lowry*. Geddes concludes that *Confabulations* "is a rich and complex linguistic structure."

"Rooting," "breath," "auto-bio-graph," "present tense," "death," "free radical," and the self in contact with its surrounding—this is the territory Fred Wah marks out in *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh*. Charlene Diehl-Jones identifies Wah with the Black Mountain poets and demonstrates how Wah has embraced and enacted a respect for the complexity of lived experience, for the subtleties of the present and of presence, of language and self and world. For Diehl-Jones, all the moments of Wah's writing encounter one another, connected by a complex system of subterranean rhizomes. He writes from his life and with his life. His long poem is an endless and irrevocable circling around presence and presentness. For construction of the long poem, the absence Wah inscribes is the radical discontinuity signalled by death. The poem is experiential: its spatial and temporal dimensions collapse into one another in the moment of reading.

Stephen Scobie examines *Keep That Candle Burning Bright*, a posthumous volume of poems by the Ontarian writer Bronwen Wallace. The title poem is a tribute to the American country and western singer Emmylou Harris. Scobie considers the multiple levels of loss and displacement implicit in this juxtaposition. Country music is a genre characterized by loss and the urban setting of contemporary America (a displacement then doubled by its position within Canadian popular culture). At a general level, Scobie explains, country is the popular music of a society in transition; at an individual level, it is the music of personal hurt, survival, or tragedy. The voice of elegy dominates Wallace's long poem. Though Harris herself is still alive, the deepest chords in her music have always been those struck by the death of her partner, Gram Parsons, for whom she has written a quasi-fictional, quasi-documentary elegy, "The Ballad of Sally Rose." Scobie

shows how Wallace's poem sets up a multiple identification—herself, Harris, Parsons, “Sally Rose”—that defers and displaces the themes of mourning and identity along a complex intertextual chain.

In many ways, the contemporary challenge to passionate discourse is taken up and worked out in the poetics that indirectly addresses a meta-physical Other. In this context, Meira Cook explores Kristjana Gunnars' *Carnival of Longing* as an example of a text in which passion is inscribed as abjection and suffering. To a large extent, the repressed acoustic of Gunnars' female subject provides the site of an inscription in which the liberation of the body as meaning intersects with its annihilation as matter. In other words, she is only experienced as body if she is a suffering body. As well, Cook argues, the passionate discourse inevitably presents those devotions that are privately conceived as public declarations, the reader is indirectly implicated in this transaction, inserted as third term in a lover's discourse structured as triangle. As Other, the reader is constructed variously as confidant and interlocutor, the one both to whom and against whom the lover writes in her writing of the beloved. Cook's essay articulates the position of the reader as implicated in the writing act, the witness in the presence of whom love becomes articulate.

Through its ongoing dramatization of its relationship to its authoring, Dennis Cooley's *Bloody Jack* portrays its continuing coming into existence as a concrete artefact, as a book (“a book by Dennis Cooley”). Andrew Stubbs shows how the forms of violence that this work exhibits thus become codifications of narrative movement itself. *Bloody Jack* extends the concern of Michael Ondaatje (*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*), Paulette Jiles (*The Jesse James Poems*), and others with how the antithetical motive to engage in criminal action is transcribed into a social desire to produce a literary text.

These thirteen essays advance significantly our understanding of the long poem in Canada and how it has enriched and still enriches our literary culture. In addition to the scholarly work of the thirteen contributors, this book is the result of the collaborative effort of members of the Department of English of the University of Ottawa—Gerald Lynch, Camille La Bossière, John Moss, Seymour Mayne, Peter Stich, and David Staines—and of the Faculty of Arts, which so graciously supported this undertaking.

Colonial Colonizing: An Introductory Survey of the Canadian Long Poem

D.M.R. BENTLEY

Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way...

—GEORGE BERKELEY,
“America or the Muse’s Refuge” (1726)¹

We have but one choice between two different imperialisms,
that of Britain and that of the Imperial commonwealth to the
south.

—WILLIAM WILFRED CAMPBELL,
“Imperialism in Canada” (1904)²

SINCE ITS PUBLICATION in 1929 in *The Kelsey Papers*, the Jonsonian verse epistle in which Henry Kelsey recounts his journey in 1690–91 from York Factory (Churchill) to the Canadian plains has increasingly attracted the attention and imagination of Canadians whose interests include literary history and literary forbears. Pre-eminent among the poets and scholars who have been drawn to “Now Reader Read . . .” by its prelusive position in Canadian poetry is the late Jon Whyte, who records in a note to *Homage, Henry Kelsey* (1981) that his reading of the explorer’s journals in 1967–68 in preparation for a (centennial?) “Poem about muskoxen”—a “pleistocene relic” that “Kelsey had been the first to describe”—led to the recognition of “an ancestral voice” and a re-enactment of the colonial project: Kelsey “took over the poem about the muskox” and it “began to shape itself into epic. My academic work on the medieval poem *Pearl* started to inform what I was doing: I would, like the jeweller in that poem, put his

poem in a new setting. Hence ‘homage’” (81). Whyte’s remarks do more than confirm his participation in the nationalistic ancestor-hunting of the Centennial years.³ In the issues of poetic primality, power, and genre that they moot, they speak to the late twentieth-century reader of fundamental characteristics of the long poem on Canada that are embodied in “Now Reader Read . . .”

An instrument of British imperialism like Kelsey himself, the three manuscript pages of “Now Reader Read . . .” enact most of the tasks that would characterize Canadian long poems in the ensuing three centuries: (1) *comprehension* (they provide an inclusive commentary on “the Country” and its inhabitants); (2) *commemoration* (they memorialize the “Journey” that Kelsey hoped would distinguish him in the minds of his Hudson’s Bay Company superiors); and (3) *construction* (they describe the “set[t]ing up [of] a Certain Cross” near what is now The Pas, Manitoba, as a “token” of the Company’s active presence in the area [1–4]). Moreover, Kelsey’s decision to present his “Relation” (1) in the form of forty-five couplets—as a poem neither epic in scope nor purely lyrical in quality” (Dixon and Grierson vii)—attests, not only to the affinity between accretive poetry and imperial appropriation, but also to the appropriateness as a vehicle for the celebration of colonial achievements of a genre that situates itself between the great narratives of imperial civilizations and the brief utterances of solitary individuals. If confirmation were needed that “the defining tradition of Western epic” and a classical precedent for British imperialism reside in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, it could be found in David Quint’s *Epic and Empire* and in the chapter on “The Empire and the War” in David Jenkins’ *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, and perhaps Lionel Kearns’ answer to the question of “[W]hat is the nature of lyric”—“[a] fine line of the single voice alone” (np)—is sufficient to confirm the identity of lyric and individual expression.⁴ In the precarious and vacillating “betweenness” that Charles Altieri sees as a salient quality of the modernist long poem and Smaro Kamboureli extends to the contemporary Canadian long poem (75–77), the “middle-sized poem” (Frye, *Anatomy* 256) provides a generic equivalent for colonial experience—an appropriate vehicle for the stylish and persuasive communication of the liminal experiences, memorable achievements, and constructive activities of colonials engaged in the process of colonization. As insistent in its presentation of a “single voice alone” as it is in its pursuit of the Golden Fleece (see Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 13–24), “Now Reader Read . . .” is the primal poem of colonial colonizing in Canada, and it is just as well equipped to coerce Whyte’s poem about the muskox toward “epic” as to impress him with its “ancestral voice.”

An immediate effect of situating the Canadian long poem both generically and ideologically between the epic (imperialism) and the lyric

(individualism), is to foreground and polarize aspects of the genre that might otherwise appear transparent or insignificant. Located between the encyclopaedic ambitions of the epic (Frye, "Encyclopaedic Form") and the self-ish concerns of the lyric, the long poem is modestly catalogic in its comprehension of external reality and tends to use the catalogue and its more pictorial cognates (the panoramic survey and the picturesque *tableau*) either to order the subject environment (and thus to indicate its successful colonization) or to suggest its immense expanse (and thus to suggest its openness or, perhaps, resistance to colonization). Located between the mythic time and *la longue durée* of the epic and the personal time or *la durée* of the lyric, the long poem is local, regional, or, at most, national in its historical scope and tends to restrict itself to the commemoration of events that have occurred in the preceding fifty or so years, that is, within the memory of living generations. (In fact, fifty years is precisely the period covered by both *The Rising Village* [1825, 1834] of Oliver Goldsmith and *The Emigrant* [1861] of Alexander McLachlan.)⁵ If an epic embodies the myths and ideals of a civilization (see Bowra) and a lyric stands as a "Memorial"—"a moment's monument"—to individual experience (Rossetti 74), then a long poem is the record or chronicle of a cultural unit that exists in or beside a civilization and provides its constituents with a comforting sense of their identity and difference. If for no other reason than the presence of local space, local time, and local community at the heart of the Canadian long poem, Dorothy Livesay is fully justified in seeing it as the most poetically "interesting" and culturally "representative" genre in English-Canadian literature (269). The argument could even be made that in its continual assessment and negotiation of the claims of liberty and authority, individuality and community, independence and interdependence, the Canadian long poem is the literary equivalent of the Canadian political experiment and its fabled art of compromise.

Notwithstanding the medial position of the genre to which they belong, most Canadian long poems tilt toward either epic or lyric in accordance with the ideological orientation of their author. This can be most readily appreciated by looking at two extreme examples of poems on Canada from the pre-Confederation period: Thomas Moore's "Poems Relating to America" (1806) and William Kirby's *The U.E.: a Tale of Upper Canada* (1859). Moore, who visited Canada in 1804 while returning to Great Britain from the United States, was an Irish patriot, an associate of Shelley and Byron, and the "darling" of the English "Whig aristocracy" (Eldridge 54). Anti-American in 1804–06 because of American support for Napoleon, he was a strong advocate of personal and political liberty whose sympathies lay with the oppressed Black and Native peoples of the United States and resulted in his perception of Canada as a haven of British freedom beside

"America's empire" (Moore 10:341). Predictably, therefore, Moore's "Poems Relating to America" comprise a sequence of loosely connected lyrics that attempt to give voice to "other" than Anglo-Saxon racial and linguistic groups: the most famous of the Canadian poems—"A Canadian Boat Song"—purports to be sung by *voyageurs* and the longest—"To the Lady Charlotte Rawdon from the Banks of the St. Laurence"—provides a survey of Upper Canada from the perspective and in "words like th[o]se" of an "Indian Spirit" (Moore 10:328). In contrast to Moore, Kirby, whose loathing for social and political reform brought him to Canada a year after the unsuccessful Rebellions of 1837–38, was throughout his life a "spokesman, interpreter and bulwark of the Tory and Loyalist idea" (Pierce 17)—a devoted admirer of Scott and an adoring correspondent of Tennyson, who produced numerous long poems in establishment blank verse to flatter and commemorate his conservative and loyalist heroes. To give just one example from his *Canadian Idylls* (1884, 1894), in "On the Sickness and Retirement of His Excellency Lord Metcalfe from the Government of Canada, Nov., 1845," Kirby's "spurring memory[,] recall[ing] anew/ The panoramic picture of the past," sees the Rebellions of 1837–38 as "a haggard night-mare" upon Canada's heart and makes the man whose "master hand/ Cast down the misshaped idols worshipped there" an embodiment of the virtues of "The sage, the christian and the statesman" (156–58). Not surprisingly, Kirby's most ambitious attempt to express and transmit his Tory and Loyalist myths and ideals is a Virgilian epic. As well as being divided into the traditional twelve books, *The U.E.* hails Virgil ("glorious Maro") as the "Chief of Song" (5–6) in its Introduction, alludes at one point to Homer's account of the founding of Troy in the *Iliad* (31), and throughout its grand narrative makes extensive use of *Paradise Lost* (see Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 225–47). At a time when literary theorists were regarding epic as a genre of the distant past that was not to be expected in a new country like Canada,⁶ Kirby's "Canadian Epic Poem" (*Annals* 85) reflects the conservative desire to forge a distinctly British North American identity in Canada and, in doing so, provides the most concrete, not to say leaden, Canadian example of the affinity between the epic genre and the imperial ethos.

Further evidence of the homologies of genre and ethos exemplified in the extremes of *The U.E.* and "Poems Relating to America" can be found in the work of Moore's most ardent Canadian admirer, Adam Kidd, and in several of the topographical poems that were written in and about Upper and Lower Canada in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A Rousseauian Irishman who apparently yearned for the unconstrained freedom and love (as he thought) of the Canadian wilderness and its aboriginal inhabitants, Kidd dedicated *The Huron Chief, and Other Poems* (1830) to

Moore as “the Most Popular, the Most Powerful, and Most patriotic Poet of the Nineteenth Century” and composed his desultory and episodic title poem as a series of lyrics expressive of the personal moods, chance encounters, and philosophical insights of his wandering narrator and various, mainly Native, characters. In addition, he decentres his text with copious footnotes (some of them scurrilously anti-establishment) and deploys allusions to the *Odyssey* and *Paradise Lost* on the side of liberty against authority (so that, for example, three villainous American aggressors are referred to as Milton’s unholy trinity of Satan, Sin, and Death). To mount his challenge against oppressive authority generally and American imperialism especially, Kidd tilts *The Huron Chief* away from the classical epics of imperialism (the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad*) and orients it toward the modes of personal expression and episodic adventure (lyric, romance, the *Odyssey*). More than this, he aligns it through its amatory subject-matter and its citations of the *Metamorphoses* with the Ovidian tradition of transformation and hybridity, which, as Quint repeatedly demonstrates (77, 82–83, 140–41), runs counter to the Virgilian epic in its preference for “constant digressions . . . interwoven episodes” and unofficial history over “rhetorical unity,” “linear narrative,” and state mythology. “Et sunt, quid credere esse deos?” reads one of Kidd’s footnotes from the *Metamorphoses*: “And there are those who believe there are gods?” (1501n.).⁷

It is symptomatic of the imperial orientation of topographical poetry on Canada that the first poem in the genre—Thomas Cary’s *Abram’s Plains* (1789)—begins with a syntactical allusion to the opening lines of Dryden’s translation of the *Aeneid* (“Arms, and the man I sing” [14:231]: “Thy Plains, O Abram . . . Grateful I sing”) and proceeds to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Wolfe’s victory by providing a comprehensive survey of the material resources of Lower Canada and the constructive achievements of its British inhabitants. Much the same emphases recur in Cornwall Bayley’s *Canada. A Descriptive Poem, Written at Quebec, 1805* (1806) and in Adam Hood Burwell’s *Talbot Road: a Poem*, published in the *Niagara Spectator* in 1818, both of which, like *Abram’s Plains*, draw extensively on *Paradise Lost* as well as on a plethora of English poems in the highly conservative topographical tradition (see Bentley, *Mimic Fires* and Mazoff). *Paradise Lost* also looms large in the background of *The Rising Village*, John Richardson’s *Tecumseh* (1828), and Joseph Howe’s *Acadia* (written in 1832–33), adding a touch of epic sublimity to their depictions of pioneer heroism and, *mutatis mutandis*, Native noble and ignoble savagery in defence or defiance of Britain’s colonial interests.⁸ Richardson was alone among these poets in describing his commemorative and celebratory efforts as an “Epic Poem” (183), but for all six of them the long poem with epic resonances was clearly the appropriate form for the commemoration and celebration

of colonial victories and achievements in the military and agricultural spheres. As Derek Walcott wryly remarks, "provincialism loves the pseudo-epic" (qtd. in Daymond and Monkman xiii).

In addition to confirming that it was the most admired and emulated poem in nineteenth-century Canada as well as Britain (see Hyman 129), the presence of *Paradise Lost* in the background of so many early Canadian long poems indicates that Samuel Johnson was only partly right in asserting that the subject of Milton's poem is "not the destruction of a city, the conduct of a colony, or the foundation of an empire" (7:126). *Paradise Lost* may not treat of imperial themes directly but, of course, it is very much about the process of starting and running a colony: as it opens, the fallen angels are faced with the task of exploring, assessing, and accommodating themselves to a new environment, as also, at its dramatic heart, are Adam and Eve. In Hell and in Chaos, Satan and his followers are enterprising strip miners, city builders, and road makers, and, after the Fall, Adam and Eve are taken by Michael to the "subjected plain" (12:640) where they will make a new home and their offspring will eventually found colonies and empires. It may well have been *Paradise Lost* that Mary O'Brien was reading on the verandah of her new home in Vaughan Township, Upper Canada, in June 1830 while her husband "superintend[ed] the making of the road by [their] lot" and she herself "stirred a bowl of cream into butter" so distractedly that she "ground off one of her nails" (118). Certainly, *Paradise Lost* would not have been incompatible with O'Brien's favourite book—Scott's novel of British India, *Guy Mannering* (see 125).

Between Confederation and the First World War, *Paradise Lost* continued to be a major presence in the background of the Canadian long poem, but now as a means of giving resonance to the expansive ambitions of the new dominion. Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie: a Love Story* (1884) is a Tennysonian domestic idyll and medley poem that interweaves a romantic narrative with lyric elements, but it also uses establishment blank verse to describe the settlement of the West and the subjugation of nature by Max Gordon, a hero reminiscent of Hercules both in his physical stature and in his pioneering activities (see Bentley, *The Gay/Gray Moose* 217–33). Near the poem's beginning and at its conclusion, Max and Katie are given speeches that establish agricultural development as distinct from commercial exploitation as a guiding principle of colonization, and in the course of their love story each develops in a way that permits the emplacement in the West of a resonantly Miltonic family hierarchy consistent with the Victorian middle-class ideal of the self-made man (see Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 272–91). A similar ideal, but with an intellectual rather than a pioneering (but still Herculean) hero at its apex, emerges at the conclusion of Archibald Lampman's *The Story of an Affinity* (written in

1892–94), a “small novel in blank verse” (Lampman, *Annotated Correspondence* 120) that employs aspects of the Tennysonian domestic idyll and the Wordsworthian growth poem (“spots of time”) to chart the progress of its hero and heroine, Richard Stahlberg and Margaret Hawthorne, toward a semblance of the mutuality enjoyed by Milton’s Adam and Eve before the Fall and after the expulsion. Like *Malcolm’s Katie*, *The Story of an Affinity* balances lyric and epic, individual and social elements in a way that reflects the Victorian domestication of Romanticism and, indeed, holds temporarily in suspension the potentially contrarious drives toward self-realization and civic responsibility that fuelled the debate over Canadian independence and imperial federation in the post-Confederation period. It is a measure of the balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces that they achieve that the heroes of both poems are Ulyssean as well as Herculean and that, in the end, the two are safely united with faithful and Penelopean wives.

But in other ways *Malcolm’s Katie* and *The Story of an Affinity* seem scarcely to be products of their late Victorian milieu, for by the final decade of the nineteenth century the atomizing and alienating forces of modernity were already giving rise in Canada and elsewhere to a type of long poem—the lyric series—that would foreground the isolation of the individual in a fragmented and heterogeneous but, as Herbert Spencer was one of the first to appreciate, increasingly unified and homogeneous world.⁹ It is tempting to see Charles Sangster’s movement from the straightforward (albeit sometimes mysterious) narrative of *The St. Laurence and the Saguenay* (1856) to the labyrinthine meditations of *Sonnets, Written in the Orillia Woods. August, 1859* (1860) as a precursor of the submersion of plot in a poetic sequence (see Rosenthal and Gall, and Dickie) that makes Bliss Carman’s *Sappho: One Hundred Lyrics* (1903) so engaging and germinal (see Bentley, “Threefold”), but, baffling though they may be at times, Sangster’s poems are quite conventional deployments of Romantic and Victorian models and themes (the river poem, the sanctity of human love, and so on). A marked shift in sensibility and technique can be detected, however, in the early long poems of Charles G.D. Roberts: both *Orion, and Other Poems* (1880) and *In Divers Tones* (1886) contain epyllions or “miniature epic[s]” in the manner of Theocritus (Bush 204)¹⁰ by way of Tennyson’s “Oenone”—“Orion” itself and “Actaeon”—but the *Songs of the Common Day*,¹¹ *New York Nocturnes*, and *Book of the Rose* volumes of 1893, 1898, and 1903 are series of lyrics with submerged metaphysical plots that anticipate *Sappho* not only in their erotic syncretism but also in their quietistic avoidance of social and political issues. The precedents for *Sappho* in Carman’s own work are, of course, *Low Tide on Grand Pré* (1893) and the *Vagabondia* volumes (1894, 1896, 1901), the former, according to its Prefatory Note (and much to the distress of at least

one conservative critic) a “Book of Lyrics” unified by “a single theme” and a “similarity of tone” (n.p.) and the latter, like Carman’s soporific *Pipes of Pan* series (1902–1905), a therapeutic celebration of the freedom and camaraderie of the open road and adjoining taverns and terrain (see Bentley, “Carman”).¹² Surely it can be no coincidence that all of these volumes by Roberts and Carman were written either just before or not long after they moved from the Maritimes to the United States, leaving behind them the “fetters” (Roberts, *Collected Letters* 140) of family life and, in Roberts’ case especially, a political commitment to furthering Canada’s collective identity either as an independent entity or, failing that, as a central component of a federated British Empire.

With the exhaustion of the *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism that helped to shape the volumes of Roberts, Carman, and other Canadian writers around the turn of the century and the destruction of the remnants of the Romantic-Victorian sensibility that came with the First World War, Canadians were ripe for literary movements that would speak to the sense of national achievement and international recognition embodied in Canada’s signature on the Treaty of Versailles and its seat in the League of Nations. Given the inherent incompatibility of nationalism and internationalism, it was inevitable that not one but two literary movements would emerge in Canada in the twenties and thirties and that, eventually, they would come into vigorous conflict. As regards the Canadian long poem, the first of the movements to emerge—the Romantic-Victorian Revival that brought Roberts and Carman back to Canada in the late twenties—was the more textually productive, generating several poems that seek to foster national consciousness by bathing heroic individuals from the country’s literary and historical past and present in the awe-inspiring light of the egotistical and epical sublime. In *The Wanderer: a Narrative Poem* (1930), for example, Nathaniel A. Benson follows a potted history of English literature from Shakespeare and Milton to the great Romantics and high Victorians with a paean to Roberts as “the patriarch of our native tongue” and to Carman as “the sweetest singer of our western world” (4–5), and in *Verendrye: a Poem of the New World* (1935) A.M. Stephen finds in the “organic rhythms and the freedom of irregular verse” a style answerable not only to the “elemental vastness and beauty” of North America’s “wide open spaces” (vii) but also to the heroic activities chronicled in Laurence J. Burpee’s 1927 edition of *The Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de La Verendrye . . . Touching the Search for the Western Sea*, one of several archival and historical works of the period—including *The Kelsey Papers*—that reflect the assumptions of Romantic historiography in their emphasis on great men, momentous events, and national issues.¹³

The second movement that emerged in the post-War period in response to Canada’s new national and international confidence—the

"aesthetic modernism" (Trehearne) of A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, and their fellow cosmopolitans—could have little truck with all this literary, scenic, and historical nativism or, indeed, with the aggrandizing genre in which it found expression. As the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation were underway in 1927, Scott lashed out at the nativists and their heroes in "The Canadian Authors Meet," and Smith's "Wanted—Canadian Criticism" followed a year later. Neither poet would attempt a long poem until Scott, always much more engaged in the civic and political spheres than Smith, assembled "Letters from the Mackenzie River" in his *Collected Poems* of 1981. The long poems of the one member of the McGill group who worked in the genre—A.M. Klein—largely succeed in avoiding national themes and epic resonances in favour of pan-national and intensely personal subjects such as those of "Portraits of a Minyan" (1940) and "The Psalter of Avram Haktani" (1944). There is surely no more anti-national use of epic conventions than the allusions to *Paradise Lost* and the *Aeneid* in the opening lines of the *Hitleriad* (1944): "Heil heavenly muse . . . Adolf I sing but only since I must" (*Collected Poems* 2:581).¹⁴

But not all Canadian modernists held themselves aloof from national and local concerns as the internationalists of the McGill group. In the early-to-mid thirties, Livesay used the fragmentary form of *The Waste Land* to represent the parched physical and social landscapes of the Depression in "Queen City" and "Depression Suite," two lyric and documentary sequences that are open to the charge of pastiche and superficiality, not merely because of their simplistic Marxism, but because they lack the understanding of the mythic method that Anne Marriott would bring to similar subject-matter in *The Wind Our Enemy* (1939) and Sheila Watson would transfer to poetic prose in *The Double Hook* (1959), a work that, despite the claims of Barbara Godard and other fanciful genealogists of Canadian postmodernism, does not treat, except tangentially, of Native peoples but, like its high Modern models, refers local landscapes and mythologies to assumedly universal archetypes.¹⁵ Only marginally less epical in its resonances but much less so in its ethos is Louis Dudek's *Europe* (1954), a re-enactment of Pound's pilgrimage to Europe that nods repeatedly toward the *Odyssey*, particularly while its itinerant narrator is travelling down the St. Laurence and when he returns, disillusioned with Europe, to affirm the potential of the New World. By and large, then, the long poems of the thirties, forties, and fifties run true to form in concentrating on the cultural work of comprehension, commemoration, and construction, and in tending toward lyric when describing personal and quotidian subjects and toward epic when addressing national or universal themes. At the genre's extremes during the period stand the shapeless records of ordinary experience that Raymond Souster collected in *The Colour of the Times* (1946) and

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