Destination Nation:
Writing the Railway in Canada

by

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Canada

for Debbie and Connor

and in loving memory of Gershwin,
who nearly made it to the end

Contents

Acknowledgments

This project began, in a sense, in Mrs. Justason's eighth-grade Social Studies class, when I started to write an essay on the Canadian Pacific Railway but threw in the towel after I realized that I would never be able to do in ten neatly written, double-spaced pages what Harold Innis, Pierre Berton, R. G. MacBeth, and John M. Gibbon, among many others, had done in thousands of pages of printed text. (I wrote an essay on a more manageable topic instead: Canadian history in the 10 years before and 15 years following Confederation.) Exploring Canada's literary response to the railway has proved to be a smaller task, but not much smaller. And it is a task that I could not have completed without a lot of help.

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Abstract

Since the completion of the CPR, the railway has held an important place in the Canadian imagination as a symbol of national unity, industry, and cooperation. It would seem to follow, given the widely held belief that national literatures help to engender national self-recognition in their readers, that Canadian literature would make incessant use of the railway to address themes of national community and identity. This assumption is false. With a few notable exceptions, Canadian literature has in fact made very little deliberate effort to propagate the idea that the railway is a vital symbol of Canadian unity and identity.

Literary depictions of the railway do, however, exhibit a tension between communitarian and individualist values that may itself lie at the heart of the Canadian character. Some of the earliest representations of the railway, in travel narratives of the late nineteenth century, make explicit reference to the notion that the railway was a sign and a product of a common national imagination. But poets of this period virtually ignored the railway for fear that its presence would disturb the peaceful contemplation, and thus the identity, of the individuals who populated the pastoral spaces of their verse. Modern poets did eventually manage to include the train in their work, but used it most often as a vehicle to continue the private musings of their individual lyric speakers rather than to explore the terrain of the national consciousness. One prominent exception to this tendency is E. J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, in which imposing individuals such as Sir John A. Macdonald and William Van Horne and thousands of unnamed rail workers combine their efforts in order to construct the railway, which stands as a symbol of

how individuals and communities can work together in the national interest. Canadian fiction demonstrates the same impulses as Canadian poetry by using the railway as a means of depicting the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individuals, but it also challenges the myth of the railway's creation of a unitary national culture by showing how diverse communities--of race, class, and region--imagine their relationship to the railway in very different ways.

The varied character of Canada's literary treatment of one of the country's central national symbols suggests that a tension between individualism and communitarianism also informs Canadian literature itself, whose writers have used the railway to fulfill their goals in individual texts but have rarely employed it as a symbol of national community.

Résumé

Depuis que la société Canadien Pacifique (CPR à l'époque) a établi la première ligne ferroviaire transcontinentale en Amérique du nord, le chemin de fer fut, dans l'imagination canadiaenne, symbole de la cooperation, de l'industrie, et de l'unité nationale. Vu ce phénomène, on croirait que la littérature canadianne soit pleine d'exemples où des auteurs se servent du chemin de fer pour exposer les thèmes de communauté et d'identité nationale. Cette hypothèse est fausse. On trouve rarement dans la littérature canadienne des constations à l'effet que le chemin de fer soit symbole importante de l'identité canadienne ou de l'unité nationale. Toutefois le chemin de fer sert à illustrer le conflit entre les valeurs de communauté et celles de l'individualisme--un conflit au fond du caractère canadien.

Les histoires narratives du fin du 19e siecle suggèrent que le chemin de fer soit la réalisation d'une imagination nationale et commune. Par contre, les poètes de cette époque n'ont presque jamais mentionné le chemin de fer. Des poétes modernes mentionnent le chemin de fer dans leurs oeuvres--mais rarement en tant que quelque chose pour explorer la conscience nationale. Une exception imortante est *Towards the Last Spike* de E. J. Pratt. Ce dernier parle de l'effort d'individus importants tels que Sir John A. Macdonald et William Van Horne ainse que des milliers d'ouvriers anonymes qui, ensemble, ont créé la ligne ferroviaire transcontinentale--symbole des possibilités quand les communautés ets les citoyens coopèrant dans l'intérêt national.

Au Canada, les livres de fiction ressemblent ceux de poésie quant au traitement du chemin de fer--il sert à illustrer les pensées et les expériences des individus. Par contre, des livres de fiction démontrent comment les gens de certains classes ou races, ou

regions, voient différemment leur rélation au chemin de fer. Or, le chemin de fer comme instrument d'unité nationale est un mythe.

Vu le traitement varié du chemin de fer--un symbole national du Canada--on peut suggérer que le conflit entre l'individualisme et le sens de communauté soit présent dans la littérature canadienne en tant que tell, car les auteurs se sont servis du chemin de fer pour accomplir leur propres buts dans certains textes, mais rarement ils l'ont utilisé comme symbole d'unité nationale.

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Introduction:

Points of Departure

Scattered among the author biographies and schedules of readings in the program for the 1998 Ottawa International Writers Festival are the usual complement of advertisements—some for publishers, one for the Bravo! channel, another for a local Irish pub, and so on. On the back cover of the program, positioned beneath a conspicuous maple leaf, is a full-page announcement for "The VIA Rail Great Canadian Literary Tour." More invitation than advertisement, the page beckons the literate crowd attending the festival's readings at the National Arts Centre to "Be a Part of Canadian History":

> Beginning in St. John's, Newfoundland on November 4, [1998] and ending in Vancouver on November 30, VIA Rail will host the most extensive celebration of Canadian literary excellence in the history of our country. Fourteen major centres and scores of smaller stations will collaborate in a remarkable display of national cooperation—a literary tour along the historic rail lines that link this vast country and remains [sic] one of the most enduring symbols of our national dream. (n. pag.)

The tour, coordinated by the organizers of the Ottawa festival, would (and ultimately did) assemble a rail caravan of Canadian writers to conduct public readings on board the train, at stations, and in small venues along the way of their cross-country adventure. The progress of the train from the east to British Columbia would be a symbolic reenactment of the westward push of railway construction and

Canadian settlement, but it would also symbolize the progress of these writers to their present station. Even before they embarked, this train's passengers had arrived; they were part of a fully formed literary community that would eat, sleep, read, and be Canadian together as they rolled across the country.[1]

By celebrating Canadian literature through this kind of tour, the organizers of the event availed themselves of some of the distinct advantages of rail travel. The train was well suited to the event for a number of reasons. Perhaps because of the deceptive leisureliness of its pace—its sluggish start out of the station and its gradual acceleration to a smooth, steady speed—the train lulls its passengers, encouraging them to settle in, relax, and become familiar with the people around them. Certainly the train is still, even today, one of the most social modes of travel available. There is no equivalent by bus, plane, or car to the VIA Rail dome car, in which passengers congregate to have a drink, read a book, and talk to perfect strangers; and the guitar-accompanied singalongs that often take place in the VIA Rail bar car are not a common feature of air travel. The comfortable atmosphere on board the train creates an ideal, intimate performance setting for readings. In addition, traveling by train still provides one of the best ways to see the country. The railway's route bridges rural spaces and urban centres while passing through expanses that at times can seem, but for the train's presence, to have been left untouched by human hands. The train transforms its passengers as it transports them, situating them in time and space and moulding them into a temporary community.

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[1] Complete details on the VIA Rail Great Canadian Literary Tour can be found on the website of the Ottawa International Writers Festival: www.writersfest.com. Highlights from the tour, complete with

Of course, the railway in Canada has long been a symbol of community in a larger, national sense, a fact that the rhetoric of the advertisement for the literary tour takes into account in its reference to "our national dream." By staging this "remarkable display of national cooperation"—a phrase that echoes the hyperbolic rhetoric used to describe the construction of the railway itself—the organizers of the tour posit a connection between train, text, and nation in this country. On the level of simple intuition, this connection makes perfect sense; the railway was crucial to Canada's ascent to nationhood and as numerous thinkers have argued—Benedict Anderson perhaps most persuasively—literature plays a fundamental role in engendering national consciousness. But this connection also raises a question: if the railway is one of Canada's great national symbols, and if literature is one means through which we manifest and maintain our national consciousness, then how does Canadian literature represent the railway?

That question is the starting point for this dissertation. What my research shows is that, after a flurry of exceedingly nationalistic representations of the railway in late nineteenth-century travel literature, and with the notable exception of E. J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike* and a few isolated moments in twentieth-century poetry and prose, the railway has only very rarely been deliberately employed as a national symbol in Canadian literature. In the vast majority of cases, our literature depicts an immediate and personal relationship between poetic personae or fictional characters and the railway, one that generally precludes overtly nationalist ruminations. Yet the large number of individual works of Canadian poetry and prose in which people think about the train, or travel in it, or

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photographs, are available on the site.

imagine finding a better life somewhere along its long steel line, do seem to reveal something about our national character when they are considered as parts of a common body of work. They point to a Canadian identity grounded in a profound ambivalence, a tension between individualist and communitarian values that Robin Mathews traces to social, political, and cultural forces that "have raged for Canadians in the last 150 years" (14). The expression of this dialectical identity through Canada's ambivalent literary response to the railway will be the focus of this study.

* * *

When Donald Smith drove the ceremonial last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway at Craigellachie, BC on 7 November 1885, he officially completed construction of a transcontinental line that already had practical and symbolic importance to Canadians. On one hand, completion of the CPR to its west coast terminus was one of the conditions on which British Columbia had agreed to become part of Canada in 1871, and the railway would facilitate western expansion, bolster Canada's economic independence from the United States, and provide a rapid means of trade and communication between distant parts of a vast country. On the other hand, the railway was, for two reasons, a tangible symbol of the union and achievement of the fledgling nation. First, the brute fact of these rails, attached to the earth and literally connecting the entire country, was a powerful statement of national unity—even if, during the planning, construction, and subsequent use of the CPR, not everyone smiled upon it.[2] The act of building the railway became

[2] Den Otter notes regional opposition to the railway, particularly in the Maritimes and the North-West, where the railway was perceived by some as "an instrument of imperialistic domination,

inextricably linked to the idea that industriousness was a fundamental part of the national character, a belief rooted in narratives of the hard work of settlers who developed the country's land during the period of its ascent to nationhood and manifested, most obviously, in the adoption of the beaver as one of Canada's national symbols. Second, the train was a tremendous symbol of progress in the Victorian period, and a cornerstone of the liberal faith that "technology promotes human excellence and power" (den Otter 10). That a nation not quite 20 years old could boast of possessing the world's longest transcontinental rail line was a declaration not only that Canada was united, but that it was strong, modern, and ready to take its place among the world's great nations. In the Canadian narrative of the railway, as Douglas Jones has written, "the romance of technology is joined to the epic theme of the founding of a nation to produce a national myth" ("Steel Syntax" 33).

Despite some obvious shortcomings,[3] Jones's essay, "Steel Syntax: The Railroad as Symbol in Canadian Poetry," does make a significant point about the way that representations of the railway have transformed it from a simple "fact of life" into "an imaginative symbol of Canadian culture":

> In verse, in prose, on film, the accomplishment of such men as Macdonald and Cartier, Smith and Stephen, Van Horne and Fleming,

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forcing their local economics to operate for the benefit of the central provinces" (11). Other aspects of the railway's history--the Pacific Scandal, the use of the train to quash the Métis rebellion of 1885, the heated arguments over whether it should follow an all-Canadian route--also made it a flash point for public debate.

[3] Jones incorrectly says, for instance, that the railway "has no great attraction for the twentieth century muse" (34), an assertion that is contradicted by American and British anthologies of railway poetry, the novels of Thomas Wolfe, and, most importantly, by the abundance of representations of the railway in Canadian literature. Jones's essay on Canadian railway poetry draws on a pitifully

> plus a host of ordinary labourers, becomes identified as that of the nation. Their virtues are our virtues: vision and daring, technical prowess and ingenuity, determination, a willingness to give one's all, to risk one's life and fortune for a large and seemingly impossible goal—with little popular support and in the face of organized political opposition "to build a Road over that sea of mountains," thus transforming a wilderness into a civil order, a collection of divided states into a single nation. (34)

What Jones refers to here is the idea that individual texts can perform the same function that Robert Lecker attributes to the Canadian literary institution writ large. They contribute to "self-recognition and national recognition" (Lecker, *Making* 5) by readers who may find in them reflections not only of their own personal knowledge and values but also of their sense of community identity; a sense, in other words, of how their individual experiences are related to their Canadianness.

An abiding faith in this connection between literature and citizenship has been fundamental to much of this century's thinking about history, culture, and nation, and dates back in Canadian literature at least as far Edward Hartley Dewart's statement, in his introductory essay to *Selections from the Canadian Poets*, that "a national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character" (ix). This faith is connected, no doubt, to the fact that most definitions of the nation and nationalism (as opposed to the state and obedience to it) seem ultimately to rest on appeals to the kind of feelings that literature and the other arts

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small sample of texts, and spends nearly as much time discussing Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* as E. J. Pratt's long poem *Towards the Last Spike*.

seem so well suited to arouse. Hugh Seton-Watson arrives at this conclusion in *Nations and States*, his important history and typology of nations: "A state is a legal and political organisation, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens. A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness" (1). It has long been accepted that, as Sarah M. Corse says, "[n]ational literatures are the cornerstones of national cultures" (1). Indeed, our usual classification of the world's literature according to its nation of origin is both a sign and a product of this fact.

But how does literature help to create the "sense of solidarity" that Seton-Watson mentions? For thinkers such as Benedict Anderson, print-capitalism in general is a necessary condition for national consciousness because it provides the means for a nation's citizens to imagine themselves as a coherent whole sharing a common language and identity (44). For Timothy Brennan, nations have, since their rise in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "depend[ed] for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role" (49). For Simon During, literature plays a practical role by depicting a nation's social existence and thereby creating what he calls a "civil Imaginary": "representations of manners, taste, behaviour, utterances for imitation by individual lives" (142). In the case of Canada we might want to add "representations of land and landscape" to that list, given our apparent literary-critical fixation on these,[4] but During's general idea of the instrumentality of literary depictions of social space nevertheless holds true in this country—even if contemporary critics sometimes

[4] See, especially, Surette, "Here Is Us"; and New, *Land Sliding*.

seem intent on denying that Canada even possesses a coherent social space to which our literature could refer.

Most Canadians living outside the ivory tower are not burdened with doubts about whether Canada exists, although they may have anxieties about whether it will continue to do so in its present form. Creeping Americanization, increased globalization, and the constant threat of Quebec separation all trigger a protective instinct in many Canadians who do believe that we possess a distinct national culture and social space worthy of preservation--even if we find it difficult to define this space and culture to everyone's satisfaction. Although those moments at which we do get our cultural backs up are also those in which we seem to think most deliberately about the Canadian nation--recall, for instance, the reaction to Lucien Bouchard's claim that Canada is not a real country--the truth is that we rarely think about, or even notice, the things that make us Canadian. Yes, there are differences among Canadians of various communities, regions, groups, and classes, but despite these differences we still use the same currency, are governed by the same statutes, depend on the same weather reports, and reside within the same legal borders. We may not think of these things as symptoms of our national culture, but they are. Leslie Armour demonstrates the importance of understanding the distinction between overt and subtle nationalisms in *The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community*:

> When we speak of "national consciousness" and "national identity," we may have in mind one of two very different things. We may be referring to the state of mind of those who think of themselves as

> Canadians at those times that they are thinking about what it is to be Canadian. Or we may be thinking of those ideas which, whether anyone consciously attends to them or not, are dispositional states which large numbers of Canadians have in common and which shape [. . .] our communal life. [. . . .] [W]hen it is complained that Canadians lack a strong sense of national identity or an effective one, the complainant is usually thinking about national identity in the first sense. [. . . .] National consciousness in the second sense is another matter, and in Canada I suggest that it exists and is strongly influential. It is perhaps wise to remind ourselves that we do act as if we had a national identity. (107-08)

One of Armour's aims is to shift the burden of propping up our national culture from the shoulders of national symbols--"a new flag or a more expensive celebration on the first of July or a poem in praise of maple syrup"--and appeal instead to these "dispositional states," which I take to mean the everyday practices and experiences which, were we to stop and examine them, would focus our feelings of what it means to be Canadian. What he describes is national consciousness as collective unconscious. But if he is correct in his assessment that being Canadian is not, "except accidentally, a condition of being aware of some particular object or set of objects" (107), then by what accident has the railway managed to become an object to which Canadians' dispositional states seem to be attached? And what role, if any, does literature play in facilitating this attachment?

Before attempting to answer these questions, it is necessary to mention one other aspect of Armour's "idea of Canada." Just as he seeks to disavow the influence of single objects on national consciousness, so does he seek to disavow the influence of "exceptional individuals" on the Canadian community: "The common response to events [. . .] is the one to be trusted, and exceptional individuals can be sent to the National Research Council or to other places where they can do no harm" (109). In his recent book *Citizens and Nation*, Gerald Friesen argues a similar point, writing that ordinary citizens perform the heroic tasks that help build a nation and that "[. . .] Canadian-ness resides in the ties *among* people, not embedded within the brain cells or bloodstreams of each individual [. . .]" (225). Armour's desire to oppose individualist and communitarian approaches to national identity--he makes no attempt to show how they might exist in a fruitful tension--contrasts sharply with the views of, for instance, W.L. Morton, who argues that although "the individual citizen [. . .] is the object of the justice the state exists to provide and of the welfare society exists to ensure," the individual's "ultimate autonomy" "carries with it a sovereign obligation to respect and safeguard the autonomy of his fellows," resulting in "an organic unity of state, society, and individual" (113).

Morton's attempt at synthesis is eschewed by Robin Mathews, however. Mathews, along the lines of Armour, insists with his characteristic passion that Canadian identity is trapped "in a process of tension and argument" (1) and that a dialectic between "a balanced communitarianism and an unleashed competitive individualism," as yet wholly unresolved, is constitutive of Canadian identity and,

indeed, "has been present, in a sense, in each Canadian" for nearly two centuries (14). Throughout this dissertation I will be referring to Mathews's dialectic repeatedly; however, while Mathews's discussion of individualist-communitarian tensions is anchored in economics (his book is largely a response to debate about the Free Trade Agreement in the late 1980s), I wrest the terms of his dialectic from their economic context in order to employ them as a way of understanding Canada's ambivalent literary response to the railway, which at times seems to eschew contemplations of community in favour of self-examination and at other times quite deliberately to meditate on how the train facilitates a sense of belonging and community.

Considerations of whether Canadians' national consciousness has its roots in individualism, communitarianism, or some mixture of the two are important here because they help shape one's perspective on whether Canada is the product of evolutionary or, for lack of a better term, revolutionary forces, which in turn affects how one regards technology in the Canadian context. From the evolutionary perspective, which is fundamentally conservative, national consciousness is founded upon communitarian values and is imagined as the product of "a slow process of organic growth and natural structural extension" to which technology is hostile because technology "defines politics in terms of wilful human action" (Aster 60, 68) that does not correspond with the organic metaphor. Technology may also have the effect, as Armour argues (on a page of his book that immediately faces an illustration of a demonic CPR engine and its workers), of uniting people behaviourally by compelling them to "go through the same motions" but ultimately

turning their searches for meaning inward, which contributes to "the fragmentation of culture" and a resultant "crisis of community" (33). So although the railway might unite people physically and behaviourally in Canada in ways that Anderson claims are fundamental to a people's ability to imagine themselves as a community (he notes, for instance, that "technological innovations in the fields of shipbuilding, navigation, horology and cartography" facilitated such imagining between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries [188]), it also threatens to isolate a nation's citizens from one another. It is perhaps to counter early fears that technology would interfere with the organic growth of the nation that corporeal images of the railway --as the "backbone for the [nation's] limbs" (Lorne 13) and "the artery of the body of the Dominion" (Vincent 40)--appear in early travel narratives of the Canadian Pacific Railway. These images (the former penned by Canada's then-Governor General) testify to the railway's ability to complement, rather than disrupt, the national community's organic development.

From the revolutionary perspective, which is fundamentally liberal and sees national consciousness as, at least in part, the product of the sort of wilful human action of which technology is an expression, individualism is the basis for the national character. One strain of this individualist thought follows along the lines suggested by Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, in which she writes that Canada's national metaphor is survival, the simple act of "hanging on, staying alive" that is obviously related to the individualism of the frontier myth in the United States (33). Morton also appeals to "endurance and survival" as roots of a common national psychology (113). By overcoming (or simply enduring) Canada's environmental

obstacles, then, individuals embody the national character. For Mathews, however, the individualist model of national consciousness has less to do with survival than with survival of the fittest.

Whereas the communitarian model has its roots in a gradual development from colonial origins that results in "a country that acts in concert" and "care[s] about community," its opposite, rooted in an "'anti-colonial' argument," complains that a revolutionary departure from British influences is necessary if Canada is to achieve its "true, North American nature," which is based in "competitive individualism and entrepreneurship." Canadians are "Americans 30 (or 50) years behind people the U.S.A." who, "[l]eft alone, [. . .] would express ourselves as a people who want to be freed as entrepreneurs" (Mathews 9). In this view, technology does not threaten community, but neither, except accidentally, does it create it. So although the CPR may be seen by some as a symbol of national unity, it was, as historian A. A. den Otter says, the product of liberal economics rather than grand nation-building ideals. After all, "the primary purpose of railway companies was not nation building but profit earning" (159).[5] In other words, if the railway has become an important national symbol for Canadians, it is so because of a simple accident of history or, worse, because we have long ignored the profit motive of its backers and mistaken its success in granting Canada "sufficient commonality to justify its political union" (Charland 205) for the real power to unite its citizens culturally and engender a common national consciousness.

[5] Profit motive was not a feature only of Canadian railway construction. As Alan Trachtenberg points out, the railway "fulfilled inner necessities of capital, and it is this alone that accounts for its unhindered development in the nineteenth century" (xiv).

What we have, then, is a railway which has been adopted as a national symbol of unity by a people that, from one perspective, is profoundly split between individualist and communitarian ideals. And the question, a little more refined now, is this: if one function of a national literature is to articulate visions of the nation for replication by its citizens, whether it be through the novel's objectification of "the 'one, yet many' of national life" (Brennan 49) or through any narrative's potential "to block other narratives from forming or emerging" (Said xiii), then how does Canadian literature represent the railway in such as a way as to affirm its prominent symbolic position in the national consciousness and, at the same time, reflect the dialectical identity that I have so far discussed?

The first step in answering this question is to acknowledge the fact that, as Daniel Francis has shown, texts have played a role in the creation of this symbol from its very inception:

> The myth of the CPR as creator of the country is [. . .] as old as the railway itself, which is not surprising given that it was the railway itself which created the myth. Once the CPR had built the line, it set about promoting its achievement in countless books, pamphlets, stories, and movies [. . .]. The mundane act of constructing a railway was transformed into a heroic narrative of nation building. After a while it was almost impossible to imagine one without applauding the other. (17)

Today, the great textual testaments to this narrative are probably Harold Innis's *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* and Pierre Berton's two-part epic *The*

Great Railway (*The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*). But in the 1880s, the CPR's publicity machine was already spinning out a narrative of its own in long, advertisement-laden travel guides such as *From Ocean to Ocean Via the National Highway*.

Because the railway made perhaps its largest contribution to the country's development by attracting settlers to Canada and transporting them across it--particularly to its fertile western regions--it is fitting that the first thing one sees upon opening the front cover of *From Ocean to Ocean* is an advertisement for the Beaver line of steamships, which offered weekly round trips between Montreal and Liverpool (n. pag.). The rest of the publication makes its connection to nation building even more apparent. Odd-numbered pages describe the scenery and settlements along the line between Halifax and Vancouver, and even-numbered pages feature advertisements that supplement that narrative. For instance, Calgary, "centre of the trade of the great ranching country and the chief source of supply for the mining districts in the mountains beyond" is also notable because "[e]xcellent building materials abound in the vicinity" (27). And for those readers interested in building, the following page contains advertisements for the Ontario Lead and Barb Wire Company and the Western Canada Loan and Savings Company, which offers "Money To Lend on Real Estate" (28)--these in addition to the brochure's other advertisements for furniture, roofing, hardware, and so on. If step one in building the nation is building one's home, the CPR did its level best to pitch right in and help by pointing individual settlers specifically to the tools and materials that they would use to build the nation.

From Ocean to Ocean also enacts the dialectic that Mathews describes, and not just in its play between the overt entrepreneurship of its advertisements and the narrative's glowing description of a Canada in whose "industrious communities" resides "the raw material for a future great nation" (51). Indeed, the dialectic lies at the very heart of the entire brochure, in its twin appeals to settlers and investors who can make their personal fortune in Canada and make *Canada*, all in one fell swoop. This early account of the fruitful relationship between individualist and communitarian impulses bears no marks of the anxiety that prompts Mathews to portray them as "locked in combat [. . .] for internal power in Canada" (113), and Mathews, an avowed Marxist, would no doubt be eager to suggest that this absence of marks testifies to the predominance of capitalist culture in the late nineteenth century. But it is also true that the Victorian fascination with progress and the image of the nation as a naturally evolving form precluded all but the most persistent of such musings.

This is not to say, however, that early Canadian literature of the railway did not betray some uncertainties about the relationship between settler and community, or citizen and nation. In this dissertation's first chapter I survey narratives of travel aboard the CPR in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to show that the push and pull between individualist and communitarian values was manifested in our literature soon after the railway's completion and, interestingly, in the very literary form that depended on the railway for its own existence and success. Far more than most Canadian poetry and fiction has done to this very day, these travel narratives seized upon the railway as a public symbol of industriousness

and national unity, positing a connection between citizens, nation, and the machine that still endures in the public imagination. The other, and perhaps not entirely unintended, effect of these books was to demonstrate concretely how texts could work to engender a faith in this connection. As I explain in chapter one, this faith was rooted in admiration of human industriousness, of the individual and communal will and effort that brought the railway and the country into being.

Each of the five books that sit at the centre of my opening chapter--Stuart Cumberland's *The Queen's Highway from Ocean to Ocean* (1887), J. W. C. Haldane's *3800 Miles Across Canada* (1900), Mrs. Arthur Spragge's *From Ontario to the Pacific by the C. P. R.* (1887), Douglas Sladen's *On the Cars and Off* (1898?), and Edward Roper's *By Track and Trail* (1891)--employs the railway as a vehicle for describing Canada as a nation founded upon individual and communal industry. Great men such as Macdonald and Van Horne had their hand in building the railway and the country as surely as did the unnamed masses who settled the land and laboured on the railway, and Canada was thus a country founded upon the interplay of individual vision and communal effort. As rosy as this version of history might be, however, it was already being questioned by some of these nineteenth-century travel writers. Roper, in his book, interrogates the role of the individual in the creation of the community, wondering whether Canada has been developed at the expense of unwise settlers, many of whom sought personal fortune--or at least security--but ruined themselves instead. Dissent from Canada's version of *e pluribus unum* was as present in the nineteenth century as it is today,

but Roper's is a rare example of this dissent being given voice in the travel literature of the period.

Far more common in these narratives is a vision of unity achieved through the construction and use of the railway, both of which helped to usher Canada into full nationhood. The traveler's tale is, intentionally or not, allegorical, with his or her progress across the country (usually from the east coast to the west) reenacting and reinscribing the westward progress of settlers. The settler's labour was an expression of individualism (its ultimate goal, after all, was personal betterment) that was inevitably subsumed into the larger, communitarian, project of building the nation. Similarly, the travel writer's labour is an expression of individualism that itself unites these settlers' communities textually and rhetorically. As the travel narrative unfolds the country before its reader's eyes, it constructs Canada not just geographically, or historically, or culturally, but imaginatively for individual Canadians who "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" but in whose minds "lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Of course, even when the author strains to create an air of objective reportage, the authorial "I" inflects every description and account of Canada's history, landscape, and culture. But even though "travel writing depends on conventions of self-consciousness and inward scrutinizing" (Fussell, "Beginnings" 21), travel literature of the CPR seems willing to set aside those conventions to some degree, so that its narratives are not just about the discovery of the self but about the discovery of a nation. The narrators of these tales, dynamic and articulate

individuals in their own right, refer constantly and conspicuously to the railway's importance to the burgeoning national community they see all around them.

The interaction between individualist and communitarian interests manifested in the travel narratives dissipates in Canadian poetry, where the authorial "I," intent on self-expression, makes scarce reference to the community and the railway's relationship to it. As I show in chapter two, Canadian poetry has, strangely, in both its early pastoral and later modern modes, made little effort at all to explore how the railway connects individuals and communities in the national context. For pastoralists such as Archibald Lampman and others of his period, writing about the train was almost out of the question because the train was an expression of progress and mechanical development that threatened to defile the very landscape to which the pastoral consciousness attached its notions of self-worth; rail technology thus disturbed not only the organic metaphor of the community, but the actual organic world itself.

Although Dickens might have used the train to show how "a changed landscape was in the process of creating a new consciousness, a new vision of life, even a new concept of time" (Duff 450), Canadian poets of the nineteenth century were having no part of any of it. The same ideals of progress that excited the travel writers upset the notions of timeless communion with an undisturbed landscape upon which the pastoral "I" grounded its identity, and poetic representations of the railway and its construction were practically forbidden by "nineteenth-century conceptions of certain piously exalted themes as alone proper for serious verse" (Wells and Klinck 183). Still held under the sway of Arnoldian poetic values,

Canadian poets before the modern era were perfectly willing to write verse in praise of nature and the nation, but were rather more reluctant to include the railway in their poetry.

By the 1930s and 1940s, the train was more appropriate fodder for verse. Canadian poets who had ignored the train were now riding it, seeing the world through its windows, letting its rhythms become their own. The railway itself, however, was still very rarely the subject of verse. There are very few Canadian poems even in the twentieth century that treat the train as a discrete aesthetic object in the way that Whitman had in the nineteenth century, with his description, in "To a Locomotive in Winter," of its "black cylindric body, golden brass and silvery steel, / [. . .] ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods" (4-5). What we get instead are poems that seem at times merely to change the setting of the self-examination conducted by the lyric "I" familiar from the pastoral mode.

Modern poets might not spend much time describing the train, but they certainly do seem to spend a lot of time riding it and describing their fellow passengers, the thrill of motion, and, inevitably, the landscape as it appears through the windows of their passenger car. Like their pastoral predecessors, these poets are still most interested in examinations of the landscape and, in particular, the self; however, they are willing, as their forerunners were not, to employ the train and the railway as a medium for these examinations. The sound of the train, a glimpse of one's reflection in a train window or of the passing landscape through it, the sight of rail cars flashing past at a level crossing, an appreciation of how the train imparts its motion to its passengers--all of these are integrated into the modern

consciousness in its search for meaning. But again, like its counterpart in nineteenth-century poetry, the lyric "I" of the modern poem tends to be an individualist who carries out this search in isolation, detached from the concerns and, even when surrounded by fellow rail travelers, the presence of a community.

Although the poems I discuss in my second chapter are selective, accounting for only a small number of the railway poems I uncovered while leafing though hundreds of magazines and books of Canadian poetry, I also believe them to be representative; confronted with the literary data (and my own growing realization that it was not going to meet my original expectations that I would easily find a vast body of poetry that celebrated the train's importance to Canada), I simply followed that data where it led. Hence my conclusion that the lyric "I" of Canadian poetry has never been very good at, or at least very much interested in, representing the railway as an important symbol of Canadian nationalism. This circumstance suggests that, whether or not Canadian society itself is caught in a dialectic between individualist and communitarian values, a tension may exist between poets whose use of the train is private and interiorized and Canadians who view the railway as an important public symbol of unity and community.

There are, of course, a few Canadian poems that prove exceptions to this rule, and I do discuss these (Edna Jaques's poems "An Old Woman Cleaning a Station" and "Station in the Mountains" in particular) in chapter two. But the most defiant challenge to claims of Canadian railway poetry's inability to unite individualist and communitarian interests is made by E. J. Pratt's long poem *Towards the Last Spike*. I dedicate my entire third chapter here to Pratt's poem for

two reasons. First, given its length and complexity, it is a poem that demands solitary attention. Second, it is a poem so different both in form and theme from the vast majority of Canadian railway poetry that it truly does stand alone in our literature. From a formal standpoint, *Towards the Last Spike* is unique because its documentary narrative--distinct even from other long poems of the railway such as bpNichol's *Continental Trance* and "Trans-continental"--allows Pratt to circumvent the limitations of the introspective "I" of lyric poetry. Pratt's blank verse is not particularly experimental, and despite the poem's obvious interest in technology and the "new particles of speech" ushered in by science (*Towards the Last Spike* 346) it actually contains very little of the scientific language that Pratt, almost alone among Canadian poets, found so musical. But by treating the construction of the railway as a narrative, divorced from the workings of the private mind except insofar as Pratt depicts the imaginings of individual characters such as Sir John A. Macdonald and William Van Horne, Pratt is able to approach his subject with an objectivity absent from most Canadian railway poems.

This is not to say that Pratt is a poet without passion. However, whereas his fellow railway poets write most often about private passions, Pratt in *Towards the Last Spike* depicts national ones. His objectivity is crucial to his thematic project in the poem. Simply by depicting the construction of the CPR--the vision, the labour, and the political wrangling that led to its completion--*Towards the Last Spike* takes on a monumental task. A number of critics of the poem have, like James F. Johnson, compared Pratt's work to that of the railway builders themselves:

> As Van Horne laid steel rails over some of the most intractable regions of mountains and muskeg in the world, so Pratt, on the level of the poetic imagination, surveyed the terrain, discovered the passes, and made accessible to the imagination vast expanses of Canadian history that must have seemed, at first glance, very uninviting to poetry and myth. (150)

As daunting a project as this is, Pratt sets an even more difficult task for himself in the poem. He labours to express a vision of the nation, and indeed of humanity, that accounts for individualist and communitarian impulses and attempts to resolve them in a way that Mathews, maintaining a strict division between these two halves of his dialectic, does not. Pratt recognizes that the nation, like the railway, is the product of a partnership between individual and corporate efforts. To that end, he takes care to represent the vision and energy of individuals such as Macdonald and Van Horne, who emerge as epic heroes in the poem, and the massed will and effort of the thousands of Canadians who helped build the railway through their tax dollars and their backbreaking labour. Moreover, he insists on integrating these two sides, on demonstrating that they are mutually dependent: without the vision, the labour cannot take place; without the labour, the vision cannot be fulfilled. Without each other, there can be no nation to which the individual and the community belong.

The individual's need to belong to a community, be it one of race, region, class, or nation, and the way that the train can either fulfill or frustrate this need, is fundamental to depictions of the railway in Canadian fiction. In my fourth chapter I try to show that the formal and thematic impulses of Canadian fictions in which the

railway plays a prominent role express the terms under which imaginings of the nation may be negotiated; the novel's realism provides a reflection of local and national communities which its reader, for better or worse, finds familiar and can choose to emulate or resist, and its thematic interest in problems of belonging reinforces the importance of how individuals and communities interact in the national context. The split between pastoral and modern conceptions of the nation that I discuss in chapter two returns here in a slightly altered form, as fictional contemplations of the railway's role in the national identity enter into a struggle between more localized and individualized inscriptions of community and a national model of community to which all other, smaller communities are expected in some sense to defer. In this final chapter, which surveys a dozen works in order to show the range of Canadian fiction's response to the railway, I examine the way that books such as Alan Sullivan's *The Great Divide* and Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* construct a narrative of nation around their representations of building and riding the railway, and then illuminate ways in which this narrative is countered by novels such as Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown*, and Geoffrey Ursell's *Perdue: or How the West Was Lost*, which question the railway's validity as a symbol of unity from racial, social, and regional perspectives, respectively.

The questions that these and other novels raise do not disrupt the narrative of national unity so much as they complicate it by rethinking what it means to belong to a nation such as Canada and the way that the train figures in our imagined community. Although many of them wonder aloud if the national centre really can

hold, they do not exhibit a desire to deny that the nation exists or that the train is fundamental to its existence in both an actual and an imagined sense. Instead of doing away with the nation, the texts I study in chapter four testify to the possibility that although Canada may be a political, cultural, and imaginative construct, it is a construct in which, Lecker writes, "everyone can participate":

> Everyone can make it real, which means that the country can become a collective fiction that is constantly renewed. After all, Canada is nothing less than a dramatic narrative about community. The strongest expressions of this community will be those that recreate the country by imagining it anew. (*Making* 10)

Like the souls of the two lovers that John Donne describes in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," the nation, pulled this way and that by fictions that compete to refigure its character, "endure[s] not yet / A breach, but an expansion" (22-23). In much the same way, the tension that Mathews describes between individualism and communitarianism does not threaten to pull the country apart; instead, it is part of the crucible in which the identity of the nation and its citizens is forged.

Canadian literature, like Canada itself, is a pluralist construction; it is the product of work by citizens of diverse ethnicities, religions, and social circumstances and as such reflects the concerns of many communities. But it is also pluralist insofar as it, like other national literatures, is an amalgam of genres, each with its own conventions and thematic tendencies. It should come as no surprise, then, that there is no uniform literary response to the railway in Canada. Each of the broad genres I discuss in the following pages--travel narratives, poetry, and fiction--

represents the railway differently depending on how its individual practitioners and accepted conventions inflect the railway: as an exciting new means of transportation, a threat to Canada's rural character, or a simple reality of twentieth-century life in Canada. In a sense, then, Canada's literary response to the railway reflects and resolves Mathews's dialectic; although individual modes and works approach the railway and nation in distinct ways, they are part of a larger canonical whole which has helped to keep the railway front and centre in our national mythology.

What is slightly more surprising than the lack of a uniform literary response to the railway is the fact that Canadian literary criticism and history, which many scholars have commented has always been eager to search for signs of nationalist content in our literature, has displayed virtually no interest in how the railway functions in Canadian literature, which suggests that if Canadian poets have showed little evidence of being attuned to the popular conception of the railway as a vital national symbol, Canadian critics have shown just as little interest in hunting for such evidence. There is no lengthy study and only three modest articles on the topic. This dissertation attempts to redress this oversight. This being said, the work I have performed here is not exhaustive; I discovered many more examples of our railway literature than I could fit into the following pages, and there are no doubt even more poems and narratives that I did not come across in my research. Because of restrictions of time and space, the dissertation does not address the plenitude of songs, folk tales, biographies, histories, photographs, and advertisements that would supplement the study I have so far conducted. That work will have to wait for

another time. For the time being I have had to content myself with pursuing only a few of the many possible courses through this material, hopeful that my explanation of Canadian literature's response to the railway is true to the literary record and, moreover, to the vision of national consciousness that it embodies.

Chapter One

Destination Nation: Early Travel Narratives of the Canadian Pacific Railway

> Travel: a word repeated a thousand times in the streets, in advertising; it is seduction itself.
>
> --Michel Butor, "Travel and Writing"

> Usually I like riding on trains, especially at night, with the lights on and the windows so black, and one of these guys coming up the aisle selling coffee and sandwiches and magazines. I usually buy a ham sandwich and about four magazines. If I'm on a train at night, I can usually even read one of these dumb stories in a magazine without puking. You know. One of those stories with a lot of phony, lean-jawed guys named David in it, and a lot of phony girls named Linda or Marcia that are always lighting all the goddam Davids' pipes for them. I can even read one of those lousy stories on a train at night.
>
> --J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

They were not quite as cynical, but travelers who wrote of their journeys across Canada by train in the years immediately following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway were, like Holden Caulfield, fond of speaking their mind. Lured by the technological marvel of the CPR and its no less remarkable publicity campaigns, eager

nineteenth-century rail passengers were transformed into instant authors and authorities on Canada. They held forth in the near-obligatory travel narratives they produced on an encyclopedic range of topics, offering descriptions and opinions of everything from Canada's people and landscape to its politics and history, always with one eye on the train itself and the comforts it afforded them. As much as the brute fact of the CPR had already changed the nation by facilitating trade and immigration and granting its citizens a sort of symbolic permission to imagine themselves existing in geographical and cultural contiguity with one another, it also changed the nation's literature. The new railway had a noticeable effect on travel writing in Canada, which up until the time of the CPR had devoted itself largely to wayward expeditions through rugged terrain, spinning tangled yarns that had more to do with survival than travel. With the advent of the CPR, travel narratives started to represent the country as it had rarely been seen before, in a more or less straight line from east to west through the window of a speeding train.

While it is hardly remarkable that travel narratives written by a passenger on a train should differ from those written, say, by someone who had taken the more traditional paddle-and-portage route, it is remarkable how powerfully these narratives, most written by British tourists, invoked nationalist sentiment and evoked the same from their Canadian readership. One might expect, given a British touristic history rooted in the Grand Tour of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and its associations with personal rites of passage and the individual's enlightenment, that these travelers to Canada would occupy themselves with making grand statements of self-discovery in the New World: "Before the development of tourism, travel was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the transformation of

the judgement [. . .]" (Fussell, *Abroad* 39). Yet while these books about Canadian rail travel do contain autobiographical content, their stories of an individual's physical progress from east to west across the country are displaced in such a way that they do not just reenact the genre's familiar metaphor of psychological growth and change, but also become part and parcel of the master narrative of the community's progress from infancy to maturity, with the traveler's arrival at the west coast terminus seeming the proper occasion on which to contemplate Canada's arrival at nationhood. In this regard, these narratives resemble the CPR's own brochures, travelogues, and other publicity, in which the railway corporation "succeeded in turning the country into story":

> With the help of the company's promotional material, the rail journey unfolded like a book, leaving thoughtful travellers to contemplate the rise of civilization and the majesty of wild nature. The transcontinental trip became a narrative by which visitors interpreted the country as they passed through it, beginning in the settled East where cultivated farms and growing industrial cities gave evidence of a long history of occupation, and progressing onto the plains, which were being transformed into a world granary. (Francis 25)

In the travel narratives, which provide some of our earliest prose accounts of the relationship between railway and nation in Canada, we often see far stronger signs of constructive play between individualist and communitarian approaches to thinking about Canada than we find in later literary representations of the nation and its railway. The narrative and representative strategies of these texts, with their constant references to progress and industriousness, further make clear that they were intended as guidebooks

not only for casual travelers, but also for those who wished to participate in the building of a nation. Reading, like travelling, was a way of fulfilling the individual's quest for a national community. Perhaps as much as the CPR itself, the profusion of travel narratives written by those who traveled along its line in the first decades following its completion reflected, and perhaps even shaped, the way that Canadians thought and spoke about their country.[1]

The exact mechanism of this influence is, like its actual breadth and depth, difficult to trace with certainty. One problem lies in determining how widely even the best works of a body of texts whose literary quality is spotty at best--books such as Dean Carmichael's *A Holiday Trip* (1888), Edward Roper's *By Track and Trail* (1891), and Douglas Sladen's *On the Cars and Off* (1898?)--were read. Elizabeth Waterston, far and away the expert in the field, can only say of travel narratives from this period generally that "most were read by a very small audience" but that "Canadian readers probably formed the largest part of this audience, showing early and always an anxiety to know how the country had affected her visitors" ("Travel Books" 363). The books written by these visitors bear out Waterston's conjecture; Mrs. Howard Vincent's *Newfoundland to Cochin China by the Golden Wave, New Nippon, and the Forbidden City* (1892) and Bernard McEvoy's *From the Great Lakes to the Wide West* (1902) note this anxiety, the latter saying pointedly, "There are two questions that people always ask

[1] One important point of clarification: I have decided not to include texts written under the auspices of the CPR Company itself here, in part because they were primarily intended as advertisements rather than literature. This is not to deny that privately authored texts had promotional aspects to them, nor that CPR publications made use of literary devices; however, because my chief interest here is in the public rather than the corporate (in the financial sense) imagination, I have limited my focus in this regard. For more on the aims and influences of literature produced by the CPR, see Francis.

in the West. The first is, 'Is this your first trip?' and the second, 'How do you like the country?'" (183).

In fact, if one is to judge from Roper's charmingly curmudgeonly *By Track and Trail*, this enduring Canadian hunger for validation from non-Canadians could even be a little annoying:

> If the Canadians thought any remark made went to show that there was any place or people under heaven more beautiful, civilised, or refined than Canada and its inhabitants [. . .] they were angry. What a blessed thing it must be to have the usual Canadian's power of flattering oneself into the belief that the spot where one has for the time being settled is, therefore, the best place in the world. (106)

So, as far as the matter of influence goes, it might seem at first that it was Canadians who influenced travel literature, and not the other way around. And given the adoring tones in which the majority of these travelers described Canada, it might seem further that this influence was a powerful one. But ascribing this eagerness to hear how their young country had affected its visitors to a desire to sway international opinion is overly cynical, and reduces flesh-and-blood Canadians to improbable cultural agents. Far more likely is that encounters with these travel books and their writers made manifest to Canadians the fact that, largely due to the attraction of the CPR, they were the focus of increasing international attention, a circumstance that exerted an influence of its own because it compelled individual citizens, perhaps for the first time, to consider how their national community was perceived by the rest of the world and to concern themselves with how Canada measured up. After all, as Waterston rightly says, "For contemporary

readers, these reported perceptions *became* 'Canada'" (Introduction vii; emphasis added), and no doubt set the conditions for one of those moments in which Canadians "[thought] about what it is to be Canadian" (Armour 107).

But their readership aside for the moment, who was reporting these perceptions? Who was the typical author of these CPR narratives, or, for that matter, the typical passenger on the CPR? The first thing to understand is that writer and rider were not always one and the same. The majority of those who published accounts of their trip were representatives of England's upper classes or various learned societies, travelers who could afford the journey across the Atlantic[2] and then the continent and who, when they were not dropping names of assorted British lords and ladies, might be travelling in a private car arranged for them by none other than Donald Smith or William Van Horne. Rudyard Kipling summed up the experience quite well: "What would you do with a magic carpet if one were lent you? I ask because for a month we had a private car of our very own--a trifling affair less than seventy foot long and thirty ton weight" (20). Not all of the CPR's ticket bearers were necessarily so well-to-do, especially if they were passing the time in one of the ubiquitous colonists' cars for which many well-heeled passengers could not disguise their disdain. The travel writer's distaste for the huddled masses with whom he or she was sometimes forced into close quarters is a sign that class discourse lies at the heart of most nineteenth-century travel narratives--which were, as I. S. MacLaren notes, written almost exclusively by and for the upper classes (92)--and, perhaps, at the heart of the "process of tension and argument" between

[2] The ocean voyage could be an adventure in itself. Shirley Foster notes that trips to the New World generally began in Liverpool and ended in Halifax, Boston, or New York, and averaged 30 days under

individualism and communitarianism that Mathews says marks the Canadian identity. Many more travelers than ever wrote a line about their experiences on the CPR rode the line as a means to a very different end: to the west, settlement, and the future. They had not been loaned a magic carpet, and were presumably concerned more with staking claims to land than to literary reputation.

As different as the travelers may have been from one another, the difference between writers, so far as it may be gleaned from their travel literature, is slight. Yes, many of these texts reveal distinct narrative personalities--so much so that it is hard to dispute Paul Fussell's description of travel literature as "a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data" (*Abroad* 203) or Charles Grivel's materialist claim: "Writing about a journey means writing about the subject. Someone constructs himself, his I, during his journey" (256). The robust narrative egos of E. Catherine Bates's *A Year in the Great Republic* (1887) and David Christie Murray's *The Cockney Columbus* (1898) certainly provide plenty of fodder for an autobiographical approach to CPR travel literature of the period. But that is not the approach of this study, and for two basic reasons. First, narratives of self-discovery give way here to narratives of discovery of the North American other (which is, admittedly, often defined in relation to the traveler's own sense of an imperial self). And second, for all the heterogeneity of riders and writers, the relative homogeneity of their travel narratives is unmistakable, an actuality that seems infinitely more worthy of study for what it may reveal about the shared experience of individuals riding the train together through Canada to discover a national community.

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sail, 15 days under steam (75). The travel narratives verify this information, but add that many travelers

A certain lack of variety is perhaps to be expected; after all, these writers, whatever their backgrounds and agendas, were travelling the same route in more or less the same way, sometimes, presumably, even at the same time.[3] But the genre of the travel book itself can also account for this. Conventions governing form (an episodic structure reminiscent of the romance, the diary, or the epistolary mode and a use of interpolated texts or anecdotes), narrative voice (objectivity and denotative language), and even intent (careful documentation and pedagogy) are shared, if not by all travel narratives, then by enough at least to identify them as a distinct genre.[4] Some critics of this genre have found in these shared characteristics the possibility that travel literature is actually of a "dauntingly heterogeneous character" in that it "borrows freely from the memoir, journalism, letters, guidebooks, confessional narrative, and most important, fiction" (Kowalewski, Introduction 7). Depending on one's perspective, then, the travel book would seem to be either a cypher or, as Elton Glaser more usefully imagines it, "a hydra: as soon as we have narrowed the genre to a few characteristics, along comes

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landed in Quebec; Honoré Beaugrand points out that Halifax was used primarily as a winter port (8).

[3] Because their precise dates of departure are not always provided, it is difficult to know with certainty how often these writers may, knowingly or unknowingly, have shared a rail car or perhaps even described one another casually in their books. A tantalizing inkling of such connections is given in Dean Carmichael's description of the first daily CPR passenger train to depart Montreal for the west coast on 28 June 1886: "The writer saw that train start, and as he joined his voice in a spreading cheer, he realized that Canada was at last developing--and that boldly and bravely--a new born faith in its own destiny as an important factor in the enterprise and trade of the world" (3). Little did he know that Mrs. Arthur Spragge, having left Toronto on a branch line and crossed Lake Huron and Lake Superior on the steamer *Alberta*, was rushing to meet that train in Port Arthur (which merged with Fort William to form Thunder Bay in 1970). She boarded this first through train there and was "soon rushing along at full speed, bound for Winnipeg and the Far West" (19).

[4] I. S. MacLaren attributes much of this homogeneity to the control, dating back to the eighteenth century, exercised over travel writers by their publishers: "It made little business sense for a publisher to allow a book to diverge in style or convention any more than absolutely necessary from the profitable norms that the purchasing public tolerated" (81). For more detailed explanations of the characteristics, rather than the production, of travel literature, see Glaser 51; Adams 164, 247, 279; Foster 18; and Fussell, "On Travel" 15. For an account of the history of travel writing in relation to the novel, see Adams. For history of the development of the genre, see Fussell, *Norton*.

another book that challenges the limits of our definition. Rearing its multiple heads, travel writing is a difficult subject to handle, a genre with a knack for slipping loose just when we think we have a firm grip on it" (48).[5] This may be more true of travel books writ large than it is of subsets of the species. Travel narratives of the CPR are rather more amenable to being wrestled down and examined as a body because of the convenient limitations of time, space, and subject matter placed upon their authors, whose vision rarely strayed too far for too long from what was visible through the windows of their rail car.

A quick inventory here should satisfy questions about the other interests and literary techniques common to most of these texts. One shared feature is, predictably, the description of landscape and familiar points of interest. Few travelers on the railway failed to record their impressions of the Chateau Frontenac, Lake Superior, the grain elevators and vast wheat fields of the prairies, or the mountain scenery of the Rockies and points west, nor of the various feats of engineering that facilitated their travel: the St. Lawrence River Bridge, the Kicking Horse Pass, and the loops that eased their descent through the Selkirks. They could also be depended upon to mention less breathtaking sights during their voyage, including the great piles of buffalo bones that were heaped beside railway stations and often inspired passengers to muse on the ecological costs of westward expansion.[6] The subjects on which these writers held forth

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[5] About the only thing that critics of the genre seem to agree on is that the guidebook and the travel book are separate entities (see Fussell, "On Travel" 15); Fussell, *Abroad* 203; and Glaser 48), through Robert Foulke resists the division between "travel books by and for the select and guidebooks for the mass of the damned" (94). Guidebooks will not be discussed here because they eschew narrative form and are purely informational, rather than literary, in their design.

[6] Few of these writers failed to remark, if not lament, the passing of the buffalo; Mrs. Algernon St. Maur understands that "[w]ith the march of civilization, they were bound to disappear, but the wanton

also become somewhat predictable before too long. They could be expected to pay homage to the great men of England, Canada, and the CPR; to comment on Canada's climate; to engage in amateur Indian ethnography; to catalogue resources region by region and to proceed in the same manner with accounts of history, government, economics, and agriculture; to make exhortations to industrious settlers; and, fittingly, to express their faith in CPR technology.

Each of these texts also sampled from the same repertoire of narrative devices, making use of prefatory apologia to explain their lack of literary motives; laying out brief preliminary itineraries of their travels and interests; employing conventional episodic structures; filling gaps in their narrative by appealing to anecdotes and intertexts; buttressing the objectivity of their observations with maps and statistics; deferring disclosure of the CPR's impressive technology until the approach to the Rockies; surrendering rhetorically to the sublime western mountain landscapes in remarkably purple patches; and, finally, closing with a grand flourish on the young nation's greatness not far removed from Oliver Goldsmith's panegyric to his "rising village":

> Then blest Acadia! Ever may thy name,
> Like [Britain's], be graven on the rolls of fame;
> May all thy sons, like hers, be brave and free,
> Possessors of her laws and liberty;
> Heirs of her splendour, science, power, and skill
> And through succeeding years her children still.
> And as the sun, with gentle dawning ray,

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destruction of these noble creatures seemed ruthless waste. See also W. G. Blaikie 130; Carmichael 14;

From night's dull bosom wakes, and leads the day,

His course majestic keeps, till in the height

He glows one blaze of pure exhaustless light;

So may thy years increase, thy glories rise,

To be the wonder of the Western skies;

And bliss and peace encircle all thy shore,

Till empires rise and sink, on earth, no more. (547-60)

Goldsmith published *The Rising Village* some forty years before Canada's confederation in 1867, some sixty before the CPR's completion in 1885. But his long poem's expressions of the importance of "patient firmness and industrious toil" (103) by settlers working to tame the land and its proclamation of the nascent nation's indelible connectedness with England ("May all thy sons [. . .] / [. . . .] through succeeding years [be Britain's] children still" [549-52]) were to be echoed throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and beyond by Canadians who saw in these twin concerns a compelling basis for Canadian nationalism. Here was an early and important example of how Mathews's dialectic could be resolved: individual labour contributes to the corporate venture that is the nation. During the imperialism-federalism debate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which parties squared off over whether Canada "could attain nation status only by maintaining the connection with the Empire" or whether "imperialism was incompatible with Canada's national interests, internal unity, and self-government" (Berger 1), it was not uncommon for people to contend in the same breath--or at least in the same speech--that industriousness and allegiance to

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Cumberland 176; Hogan 91; Roper 117; Sladen 238, 258; Spragge 34, 39; and Vincent 60.

empire were the cornerstones of Canadian nationalism. That is the stand taken by John Boyd in a speech entitled *Canadian Nationalism*, delivered in Montreal in 1911, at the height of public arguments about Canada's contribution to the empire's navy. On one hand, he appealed to "the union of all Canadians [. . .] for the upbuilding of our common country and the development of its vast resources" (9); on the other, he stressed that that union might be grounded in admiration of England: "Who, sir, that has read British history or studied the careers of its great men [. . .] can fail, whether he be of British, French, or any other blood, to admire that great empire and to love that flag which is the symbol of justice and liberty!" (15). Sir John A. Macdonald himself, it is to be remembered, was speaking in the shrill voice of Canadian patriotism when he stood in support of maintaining national-imperial ties: "I am a British subject, and British born, and a British subject I hope to die" (qtd. in den Otter 197).

Macdonald's words are an expression of the evolutionary and communitarian model of Canadian identity, in which, as W. L. Morton writes, "Whatever the restraints empire might impose, the restraints were for the common good. However long Imperial sovereignty might endure, in the end membership in the Empire was the means by which Canadian freedom would be perfected" (32). Populist and political nationalisms--the two cannot be separated--rooted in industriousness, affiliation with empire, and an evolutionary model of national identity combined in Canada to create a hybrid of the sort described by Benedict Anderson: an "official nationalism" (he borrows the term from Hugh Seton-Watson) that "can best be understood as a means for combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power [. . .] or, to put it another way, for stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire" (86).

Although the individual would seem to disappear from this formulation, Macdonald's insistence on "I" shows how absolutely vital the single citizen's being and effort is to the community's achievement and identity.

Because it was capable of serving national and imperial interests simultaneously, the railway was uniquely suited to carry out the "stretching" that Anderson describes. Ronald E. Robinson recognizes this truth in his introduction to Clarence B. Davis and Kenneth E. Wilburn's excellent collection of essays on British involvement in international rail construction, *Railway Imperialism*: "In the quasi-colonial societies of European origin, railway loans often made the difference between boom and slump. They opened new lands for settlement, attracted more immigrants from Europe, and accelerated colonization. They were used as agents of nation-building as well as empire building" (4). Robinson later discusses this general circumstance, which was tied to colonial dependence on Britain for trade and investment, in a more specific context: "The extent of informal empire has been disputed, but so far as it operated in Canada, it surely steamed along steel rails" ("Conclusion" 179).[7] So too, then, did Canada's national identity.

Or so the story goes. What numerous theoretical accounts, post-colonial and otherwise, suggest is that textuality, and not just technology--or history, or politics, or economics--is crucial to the formation of national consciousness. The lines of argument in support of this idea come from myriad directions, including Anderson's inquiry into print languages, Ernest Gellner's appraisal of the concomitance of widespread literacy and the age of nationalism (126), and Timothy Brennan's belief that the rise of the novel

[7] For a detailed discussion of railway imperialism in nineteenth-century Canada, see Roman.

and the "cult of nationality" in the nineteenth century were not simply coincidental (49). Recent attempts to deconstruct national literary canons have produced particularly virulent strains of this theorization, most of which toe a party line so familiar as to have become self-evident: "national literatures exist not because they unconsciously reflect 'real' national differences, but because they are integral to the process of constructing national differences" (Corse 12). What all such analyses boil down to, however, is one very simple rule, stated in clear language by Edward Said: "We live of course in a world not only of commodities but also of representation, and representations--their production, circulation, history, and interpretation--are the very element of culture" (*Culture and Imperialism* 56). This is distinctly true of national cultures, and in the case of Canada a specific set of representations seems elemental to the formation of a national culture for which the railway is one of its great symbols. By textualizing what might loosely be termed a communications "commodity," early travel narratives of the CPR exhibit, if not an absolute origin, then at least the most firm and easily recognizable roots of a Canadian nationalism embedded in the might of the machine and the special power of the book to propagate it among its community of readers.

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Scores of these travel narratives were written between the completion of the railway and the early years of the twentieth century, but I will direct most of my attention to five of the most representative of these, supplementing my discussion with references to other travel texts of the period as the need arises.[8]

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[8] My strategy for paring this body of works down to a more manageable size has been governed by three principles. First, because understanding the effect of the traveler's experience of the contiguous nation rather than just of discrete regions is one aim of this study, the text's author must have traversed a

Stuart Cumberland, author of the mammoth book *The Queen's Highway from Ocean to Ocean* (1887), was commissioned by newspapers in India, England, and his native Australia to describe the country along Canada's new "Queen's Highway," better known in Canada as the Canadian Pacific Railway. As his use of the imperial nickname for the railway implies, his chief concern is to demonstrate the commercial value of the CPR and Canada to the British Empire. An opponent of US annexation, he is especially fond of stressing the fact that travelers on the CPR need never set foot on American soil to complete their transcontinental journey: "From the moment the traveler arrives in Victoria until Liverpool is reached he will have been under no flag other than the British" (5). His book's style might best be described as workmanlike, a journalistic approach that privileges objectivity and statistics and only occasionally wanders into literary territory, as when he describes the train's progress through the treacherous terrain heading east out of British Columbia. What sets *The Queen's Highway* apart from other accounts of rail travel in this period is its representation exclusively of west-east travel. Whereas the majority of CPR travel texts, following an east-west route, build

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significant portion of Canada by train, and cannot just have made a local journey or passed through, for instance, parts of Quebec and Ontario on the way to the United States; works such as Lady Howard of Glossop's *Journal of a Tour in the United States, Canada, and Mexico* (1897) and William Thomas Crosweller's *Our Visit to Toronto, the Niagara Falls, and the United States of America* (1898) will thus receive scant attention here. Second, the narrative has to demonstrate some sense of motion, of the feeling of being moved through the landscape by the train, though I do not obey Fussell's edict that "[t]o constitute travel, movement from one place to another should manifest some impulses of non-utilitarian travel" ("Beginnings" 21). Texts whose authors are, like W. G. Blaikie in *Summer Suns in the Far West* (1890), magically whisked from one city to the next with no mention of travel through the intervening spaces are thus also disqualified. The third criterion for inclusion here is that the text must possess, if not high literary quality, than a richness of expression in its narrative that sets it apart from the guidebooks and primers on Canada that dressed themselves up as travel literature. Newton H. Chittenden's *Settlers, Miners, and Tourists Guide from Ocean to Ocean by the C. P. R.* (1885) and J. McCowan's *A Tour in Canada* (1894) are excluded from close consideration on this basis. As for my decision to limit this examination to texts published, for the most part, up to the beginning of the twentieth century, this spawns from my interest in thinking about the origins of railway literature's

in narrative momentum as they move through the prairies and points west, Cumberland's tale seems to peter out as it continues east, suggesting that the western frontier excited not only the individual's pioneering impulses, but also literary ones. Then again, sustaining narrative energy throughout a 400-plus page travel book might be too much to expect of any writer.

Equally longwinded is J. W. C. Haldane, a British civil and mechanical engineer who visited Canada in the summer of 1898 and published *3800 Miles across Canada* in 1900. Like Cumberland's, Haldane's chronicle is coloured by his vocation, which in this case means that he tends to show more interest in feats of technology and engineering than in natural scenery and, like Cumberland, to resort to statistical description as often as possible. Fortunately, though, he does make a greater effort to infuse his book with literary qualities, even if his chief means of doing so is to quote other more accomplished writers to complement his facts and measurements and employing the persona of the Happy Traveller, whose confident, even vain, personality is amply revealed in his description of Miss D____ of Toronto: "[. . .] I never in my life met anyone who more thoroughly enjoyed what I had to say than she did" (154).[9] Whatever its literary shortcomings, the book argues convincingly, as I will discuss in detail later in this

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influence on the discourse of Canadian nationalism, so it is the first set of impressions of Canada as seen from the CPR that are of paramount concern here.

[9] Another typically hilarious instance of Haldane's uppity demeanour comes in his description of a woman at a lawn tennis tournament in Victoria, BC. What begins, literally, as a "their eyes met from across a crowded room" type of tale quickly and comically evaporates:

> How different must have been our thoughts as our eyes met! What *mine* were she will know if ever she reads these lines, which contain nothing but lurking amiability and humorous but truthful criticism. My dear young friend, you and I may never meet again, but, as a lover of elegant taste at every point, may I be permitted to ask if you do not think that your otherwise beautiful costume would have been improved by the wearing of a lovely white straw hat, trimmed with the richest white silk ribbon? I fancy so. (271)

chapter, that train travel is the only way truly to grasp Canada's sheer immensity and offers weighty insights concerning the importance of a strong work ethic to prospective settlers. This latter emphasis provided a necessary corrective to other travel narratives, such as Charles T. Ford's *From Coast to Coast: A Farmer's Ramble* (1899), whose exaggerated claims about the effortless cultivation of Canada's fertile land were designed to lure settlers from England and other countries.

Mrs. Arthur Spragge offers a very different kind of insight in *From Ontario to the Pacific by the C. P. R.* (1887). A Canadian passenger on the inaugural daily transcontinental train, she was among the first travelers to report on the railway and its services, and expresses what might best be called a stupefied faith in the wondrous engine that pulled her through terrain that seemed at times--especially in the Rockies and Selkirks--to be actively impeding the train's progress. Unlike Haldane and Cumberland, she is not terribly interested in the commercial prospects offered by the railway, preferring instead to point out the wonderful opportunities for sightseeing along its route and recognizing that the train had redefined the Canadian landscape, probably forever.[10] Her particular stroke of genius here, though, is her realization that by mediating the traveler's experience of the landscape, the train also limited his or her access to it: "The Canadian Pacific, in its course over the mountains, runs up one narrow valley and down another to the Coast, affording, it is true, unsurpassed beauties of scenery, but at the same time no real idea of the interior [. . .]" (121). A number of travel writers refer to

[10] This was, in some cases, quite literally true. On her way to the summit of the Selkirks, she notes how the train has redefined that topographical term, "'summit' being the expression generally used in the country for the elevation at which the railroad crosses that range" (164). Hugh Bryce similarly points out that the summit of the Rockies "is so in an engineering sense" only; thousands of feet of mountain towered above the railway stop at Stephen.

other texts in order to broaden their discussions of what they saw through their train windows, but Spragge stands apart in this regard, quoting from Sandford Fleming to describe Portage la Prairie and to heighten her anticipation of the Rockies (28-29, 41) and, more to the point, occasionally escaping the strict linearity of the railway by reading about what lay beyond her mobile vantage point. Her book is indispensable to an understanding of the circle of influence set in motion by writers whose travel experiences were to varying degrees shaped by what they read before and during their trips, and whose own subsequent writings perpetuated this influence on travelers and writers to follow. This influence is fundamental to the nexus between text, technology, and nation in Canada.

The importance of textuality--or, to be more precise, literariness--to the young nation was taken for granted by Douglas Sladen, who in the opening pages of *On the Cars and Off* (1895) cannot complete his description of the maritime provinces without paying homage to its literary luminaries: Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, and Thomas Chandler Haliburton. In fact, he maintains that one of Canada's chief virtues, apart from its climate and prospects for sportsmen, is that "almost any part of it is within a few days', if not one day's, post of New York, one of the world's great literary centres" (x).

Sladen's own literary contribution here, apart from his quite rare focus on Atlantic Canada, which was largely ignored or treated as an afterthought by other travel writers, lies primarily in his idealized depictions of the Canadian landscape. Nature tends to trump technology in Sladen's book, as it does in much of Canadian poetry of the period as well. Like the Canadian poets of the day, and true to the nineteenth-century

American experience that Leo Marx describes in *The Machine in the Garden*, Sladen seems reluctant to accommodate rail technology in his essentially pastoral vision of landscape. More interested in sport than transport, he sees the railway simply as a means to an end, and praises the CPR for providing sportsmen with access to, for instance, Lake Superior's north shore, "a place where one can land lordly fish and watch the greatest of all the world's lakes in its swiftly changing moods" (197). That he is assuredly a man most happy out of doors becomes clear when he expounds on the "astounding" view from the CPR bridge at Nepigon, Ontario, a view that he savours while strolling, rather than rolling, across the bridge during one of his many excursions off the train. Because he sees on foot what Spragge and many others only read about, his book is an excellent tourists' guide. But it is also, in its interweaving of historical material on Canada and the CPR with fervent descriptions of the countryside, one of the best written travel narratives of its time and place.

Even Sladen's literary effort pales in comparison, however, to Edward Roper's spirited--yet unrelentingly grumpy--book. Perhaps the most self-consciously literary of any of the travel narratives considered here, *By Track and Trail* (1891) rivals Cumberland's and Haldane's books in length, but far outstrips them in technique. It begins *in medias res*, or, more specifically, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, five days out of Liverpool and heading full steam toward Canada on the *Parmesian*, with Roper introducing his fellow passengers (a captain, a priest, a performance troupe, a businessman, etc.) in the manner of a Chaucerian pilgrim to Canterbury. Roper adopts the persona of sage advisor to the Selby family, who are pondering settlement in Canada, and structures his book around their experiences and a love story that wends its

way alongside his narrative as he heads west from Montreal to Victoria. But for all his fascination with the Selbys and the other people he meets during his journey, it is Roper himself who emerges as the most interesting character here, his constant complaints about the difficulty of getting fed at hotels in the middle of the night and the perils of mosquito attacks in the northwest making his book as entertaining as its author is ornery. Its perhaps unintentional comic effect aside, this orneriness serves Roper well in his efforts to dispel the myth of Canada as a northern El Dorado for settlers. His grudging admission that "no better country to settle in can be found under the British flag" only comes, along with a warning that prospective settlers had better brace themselves for backbreaking labour, when he finally arrives at Victoria at the end of his narrative (455).

The majority of these narratives begin, though, in a very different vein--and in a very different place. Their authors having stepped off the steamers from England and into the pandemonium of an eastern Canadian harbour, most of these books begin by registering first impressions of North America.[11] Precious few signs of "wonder," Stephen Greenblatt's term for the "initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual response in the presence of radical difference" (14), can be found here, the very simple explanation being that, perhaps apart from the landscape itself (which still would have been familiar enough to travelers through the

[11] I am, of course, not addressing American travelers who rode the CPR here, although James Doyle does mention two such narratives from the period: W. H. H. Murray's *Daylight Land* (1888) and Charles Dudley Warner's *Studies in the South and West* (1890). He does note, however, that "[e]ven in the extremely popular genre of the travel narrative, the Northern country was not especially prominent as a subject" for American writers (15).

books and pamphlets they would have devoured before leaving England), there was nothing radically different about the culture in which they were suddenly present.

This is obviously the case for travelers who landed in the Maritimes. Gliding into Halifax harbour, Sladen waxes rhapsodic at "the sight of the beautiful white ensign, which guards the commerce of England in Earth's many waters, floating over the stern of the Queen's ships, and the Union Jack shining over the summit of the citadel. British soil again" (2). Similarly, his high praise for Saint John, New Brunswick, is rooted in his admiration for the Empire Loyalists who settled there. The surest sign that this part of the country was imagined to be thoroughly British--and thus thoroughly familiar--comes in Cumberland's complaint that Nova Scotia's small but spirited secessionist movement risked turning that province into the "Ireland of Canada": "Halifax claims to be British; but, judging by recent events, its claims are none too well founded" (405, 404). This comes, of course, from someone who is just completing his 6000-kilometre trip across the country, and who must now compare Halifax to Victoria, BC, the site of his own first encounter with a Canadian city and a place he loves for being so "distinctly British, [. . .] the people [. . .] more in the habit of looking towards England than to Canada [. . .]" (8).

Cumberland's comments are in line with communitarian perspectives on Canada, and perfectly in keeping with that philosophy's emphasis on the value of continuity and a slow evolution to nationhood to the betterment of the common wealth--and, indeed, the Commonwealth. In this view, the Canadian identity "is conceived of as the natural extension of shared meanings, values and symbols from a given group or association of people"--in Cumberland's case Mother England--"to their successive generations and

the maintenance of the structural characteristics of the original group to its generative descendants" (Aster 60). He is to be forgiven if he simply cannot summon up the energy to lavish compliments on Halifax, which has shown dangerous signs of a contrarian individualism, at the end of his trip. It is less easy to understand why writers who had followed the more usual east-west coast should relegate the Maritimes to a few brief words at the end of their texts. Haldane does so to "avoid wearying the reader [. . .] with unnecessary descriptions" of provinces "devoid of any special natural features" (329), while J. P. Sheldon mentions quickly that few settlers remained long in the east before heading west (70).[12] Still, these writers do at least *mention* the Maritimes, something very few of their contemporaries bother to do at all, perhaps because, as J. G. Colmer points out in *Across the Canadian Prairies*, few travelers seemed to pass through that part of Canada at all (78). Summer tourists were more likely to dock in Quebec than Nova Scotia, Halifax being the preferred port during winter.

It also happened that the maritime provinces held little special appeal for tourists whose focus was the new railway itself, and who looked forward to departure from its well-known Montreal station. Touring these provinces by rail meant boarding smaller lines such as the Intercolonial, a railway that was perfectly serviceable but "lacking in many of the essentials"--and much of the drawing power--"which distinguishes the more progressive railways in the Dominion, especially the Canadian Pacific" (Cumberland 380). But these travel writers were intent on making their readers understand that in

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[12] Frank Yeigh does cover the Maritimes in his 1910 travel narrative (19-31). Mrs. Howard Vincent gives a rare touristic account of Newfoundland and describes the 1500-mile trek between Cape Breton and Ontario as "beautiful but monotonous. There are two features that repeat themselves over and over again to the eye, the ear and the sense: they are that Canada is a land of many forests, and that Canada is a land of many waters" (27-28).

Quebec, as in the Maritimes, there did not seem to be much about the New World that could be called new; in fact, more than a few travelers were surprised to find it quite old: "Quebec exercises a curious fascination on the visitor; it transports him into the past whether he wills it or no. [. . . .] It is strange that the emigrant to the New World should make acquaintance with it first in this old-world city, full of associations and traces of the past [. . .]" (Gordon 11-12). Cumberland is less flattering in his appraisal, saying that the "continual putting back of the hands [in Quebec] has practically caused the clock to stop" (374) and that the province's agrarian population has an "aversion to progress" (375). Mrs. Algernon St. Maur does him one better by declaring Quebec to be positively "retrograde" (8).[13]

In the context of the period's travel literature--and, indeed, of the Victorian period itself, with its faith in the virtues of progress--comments such as these are damning. It is doubtful, though, that these responses were bred of unfamiliarity. If anything, these and other travelers had a familiarity with Quebec that bred contempt. Nearly all of the travel books of the period demonstrate some knowledge of Quebec history, detailing with varying levels of proficiency the exploits of Champlain, Cartier, and Maisonneuve. Of course, globe-trotting subjects of Queen Victoria were most interested in the points at which Quebec and British history intersected, so descriptions of the Plains of Abraham and its surrounding history were practically obligatory. Before launching into a reverent retelling of Wolfe's victory over Montcalm, Sladen explains

[13] Petty disdain, rather than wonder, seems at times to have been the prevailing response to first contact in Quebec. Lady Theodora Guest groused that farmers' fields looked "very senselessly small" to her on her way to Montreal, and that Mont Royal was "objectionably steep" (206, 204). And then there is Mrs. E. H. Carbutt's admission of her own initial reaction to the country: "Lord Stanley was amused at my disappointment on finding Canada so French" (14).

Quebec's proud (if ironically so) place in British hearts and history: "An Englishman is apt to be affected; for to him Quebec brings back so much--the brilliant conquest of Canada, the proud day when England won an empire as large as the United States, and the banner of St. George's waved from Oglethorpe's colony of Georgia to Rupert's Land and Hudson's Bay" (35). Even Cumberland is moved to offer a compliment, albeit a backhanded one, when he considers Britain's role in Quebec history; he jibes, with what can only be presumed to be malevolent glee, that the change to British rule brought French Canadians out of the middle ages and into the present (344). One does not have to look too far to find at least one source for these derisive attitudes toward Quebec. Nearly 150 years after the Battle of Quebec, British travelers were afforded an increasingly rare opportunity to dust off their imperial swagger in an era when, as Sladen says, their own empire was on the wane. How better to do that than to take pot shots at a society that seemed never to have waxed?

There is something ironic about this disparagement of Quebec, and it points to one basis of the "conflict of opposites" that Mathews claims is fundamental to the Canadian identity (1). Although these travel writers express a deep affinity for conservatism and an evolutionary model of national development rooted in the traditions of English culture, they are resolute in their unwillingness to value Quebec's affinity for a similar model of organic community, preferring to see Quebec corporatism, rooted in religion, as "a repressive, backward, stultifying force" (Mathews 98). Part of the problem for these travel writers was that the culture with which these Quebecers identified themselves was French instead of English, and British commentators seemed to have a hard time getting past this. They had an easier time getting past the apparent

contradiction between their own culture's conservative determination that the Commonwealth and its members evolve together "naturally" and its reliance on technology, which augured the sort of sudden, revolutionary transformation associated with the individualist model but which also proved itself an incredibly effective instrument of imperialism. To some extent, then, attributing Quebec's "backwardness" to its refusal to worship the machine was really much the same thing as acknowledging that Quebec's refusal to conform to English rule was a thorn in the side of British imperialism.

Still, if Quebec, and, by extension, Canada, appeared at first glance to be frozen in the past, anyone who looked around for very long was bound to notice that this "mediaeval" portion of the country also boasted tendrils of iron reaching into the west and the future, "the tracks, stations and warehouses suitable to the eastern terminus of a railway stretching hence in one unbroken line more than three thousand miles to the Pacific coast of the continent" (Ingersoll 5). And even though, as Shirley Foster claims, the railway would have been "the least novel mode of transportation" for most tourists of the period (80), it still exercised considerable sway over the British imagination. It remained, from the Industrial Revolution and well into the Victorian period, "the most pervasive and compelling symbol of the new age"--the machine age--and a reliable gauge of a culture's level of advancement (Adas 222). Colonial rail construction was vital to the imperial mission of creating free, civilized, and loyal societies around the world and, one suspects, to the self-esteem of the British, whose guaranteed loans backed railway

construction in Canada and around the world.[14] Riding the railway itself may not have been a novel experience for late-Victorian travelers, but riding it through the colonies was. Not least because the spread of the railway and the spread of empire were by this time virtually indistinguishable, initial responses to the CPR were fairly more enthusiastic than were responses to Canada itself.

One strain of the praise lavished upon the CPR by its first passengers was devoted to the most practical and immediate of its amenities. Not too surprisingly, comfort and efficient service were front and centre in the minds of transcontinental travelers. Fortunately, the new railway did not disappoint, and favourable reviews (frequently augmented by sketches) of its cars, routes, schedules, meals, and personnel abound among the first impressions divulged by most of these writers.[15] Mrs. Spragge reminds her readers that cross-country expeditions had not so long ago been rather more perilous propositions; she is happy to report not only that she had "never performed a more comfortable journey," but also that "no casualty occurred" (19) during her trip. The railway provided more than just safety; perhaps more importantly, it and other advances created what Fussell calls a "comfort revolution" for European travelers

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[14] For more on this and the role that British loans played in the construction of railways around the world, see the essays collected in David and Wilburn's *Railway Imperialism*. The importance of these loans is urged in the travel narrative of James Francis Hogan, MP (2-3).

[15] The broad claim made by Ishbel Gordon (who published her travel narrative in 1897, the same year that she founded the Victorian Order of Nurses), that "if you hear the Canadian-Pacific Railway has undertaken to do anything, whether it concerns the piercing of the Rocky Mountains or the making of good soup, you may be sure that it will be well and thoroughly done" (94), is supported more specifically by plenty of writers who single out the line's comfortable cars (Ford 10), smoothness of travel (Edwards 10), sociability (George Bryce 8), punctuality (Carmichael 5), and, of course, cuisine: "it must be confessed that though the railroad has cost the country a million or two, it gives you good meals" (McEvoy 89). That is not to say that some passengers did not suffer the kind of "désagrements" that Lady Howard of Glossop did during her rail travels in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century (she also made quick forays into Quebec and Ontario during her tour). But mentions of these are few and far between and, with the resounding exception of M. P.'s surly *A Winter Trip on the*

("Heyday" 272). This is certainly true for Sladen, who calls the CPR passenger service "a first-class hotel on wheels" (70), and Cumberland, for whom luxury, rather than security, is of the first importance:

> The saloon car on the 'Atlantic Express' is a marvel of elegance, as well as containing every convenience, even unto a bath-room. Travelling in it is very comfortable; and as one lolls at ease on the stamped plush sofas, sipping a cup of delicious Java--real coffee--the scenery and general surroundings can be taken in without effort. (148)

Roper is just as impressed: "Nothing can be more luxurious than the sleeping-cars on the C. P. R. For the first few miles we were fully occupied in examining thoroughly and admiring greatly the many appliances for comfort, as well as the great taste displayed in the decoration of this carriage" (29). He does admit, however, that he would have enjoyed his trip more "if the motion had been easier. This car shook and heaved and rolled and pitched like a ship in a heavy sea" (29-30). Roper's (for him) minor complaint should not be regarded merely as one of his many exercises in irascibility. His emphasis on the clash between comfort and practicality points metaphorically toward the great theme of his book, which is that settlers, and British settlers in particular, should be wary about sinking their assets into a parcel of land just because it might be "picturesque": "Just as though a man could live on the picturesque in Canada!" (2). The ease with which a traveler could now cross Canada was not to be confused with the difficulty in achieving prosperity there--another reminder of the importance of individual will and industriousness in the new national setting.

Canadian Pacific Railway (1886), are virtually never presented as the first or prevailing impressions of

As appealing--and potentially misleading--as were the comparatively modest material advantages that the CPR lay close at hand, much of the traveler's initial enthusiasm was for the sheer scope of the railway project itself, which could best be understood by contemplating its superstructures. Sladen, for example, tells of "gazing at the great steel Canadian Pacific Railway Bridge which leaps the terrible rapids" at Lachine, employing the bridge as a synecdoche for the entire railway itself: "Throughout their gigantic line the Canadian Pacific Railway have acted up to the latest scientific ideas" (133). The most profound expressions of appreciation for the technical accomplishment of the railway were, as we shall see, reserved for the trip through the Rockies, but introductory comments of this sort were still common. William Fream called it "a monument of engineering skill" (2); J. P. Sheldon wrote that the world was "dumb with admiration of such a great achievement" (8); and Alexander Begg, having returned to London to read a paper to the Society of Arts in 1886, made his views on the railway's achievement clear to his rapt audience: "The successful carrying on of this great enterprise, so far as its physical features are concerned, is quite unparalleled in railway construction. It is in magnitude and difficulty one of the greatest, if not the greatest, achievement[s] of human labour that the world has ever seen" (11).[16] In the

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the CPR.

[16] Although Begg was something of a different case, having lived in Canada for over 20 years, Waterston notes that "[. . .] British scientists who had been treated to a trip along the C. P. R. as a climax to the first Canadian session of the British Association added reports on Canada 'as seen from the cars'" ("Travel Books" 366). Because they fall outside the range of the travel narrative proper, these accounts are not treated here. But all such texts and reports issued by the various British learned societies and associations were important, if unofficial, documents of empire. They presented to their readership a Canada that, having been decoded by the scholarly traveler, was made both familiar and potentially useful. For more on this, see David N. Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* (50) and John M. MacKenzie's *Propaganda and Empire* (158).

cult of progress that existed in nineteenth-century Europe, a statement such as this approached the level of sacred utterance.

Historian A. A. den Otter maintains that progress in science and technology led to an "optimistic, pragmatic faith" in it that was expressed with an "evangelical fervour": "Partly the grace of God and partly the product of human endeavour, progress possessed a strong religious overtone and reflected a deep belief in the efficacy of science as well as," in British North America, "the frontier ideal of equality and the opportunity to conquer a vast wilderness" (28). Interestingly, given Aster's description of Canada's "dread of our southern neighbour" (52), den Otter uses the individualist language of the American frontier experience to describe a process that Begg obviously views as a communitarian effort. Travel narratives that praised the CPR's technological achievement testified to science's ability to "civilize" an entire continent and, moreover, foretold of the future greatness of the civilization whose citizens, united by that technology, could in turn employ that science to the nation's advantage.

These narratives also told of, and contributed to, a particular political and cultural achievement: the affirmation of Canada's ascendance to nationhood. Notwithstanding Homi K. Bhabha's sensible warning of the futility of searching for a nation's origins, which "lose [themselves] in the myths of time," and not wishing to replicate the tendency to "produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress" ("Introduction" 1), it seems difficult to escape the conclusion that if Canada became a country with Confederation, it became a nation--a community sustained by the imagination of its citizens--with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Lord Lorne, Governor General of Canada from 1878 to 1883, suggests this

transition from political entity to nation when he celebrates the completion of the CPR in *Our Railway to the Pacific*:

> The object was a national one, for how can a country live in isolated sections, barred each from each, except by passage through a foreign land? How can a political whole be cemented together, when there is no backbone for the limbs? [. . . .] Completed, [the railway] would give new life and hope to the enormous territory, would carry emigrants direct to the place where they would be settled, would give to the farthest communities a pledge that their interests were not to be neglected or sacrificed, and would brace with the invigorating influence of national feeling the cohesion and solidarity of Canada. (13)[17]

Apart from pointing out the CPR's contribution to the more tangible aspects of building a nation, such as facilitating settlement, Lorne, more importantly, invokes the railway to speak of a communitarian *feeling* of nationalism that I discuss earlier in the Introduction, the sense of sharing in a common purpose. The helpfulness of such appeals to feelings to students of nationalism is open to debate; if pinpointing the exact origins of a nation is difficult, then pinpointing the exact origins of a people's feelings of nationalism is most likely impossible. But it is clear, in any case, that the Canadian feeling of nationalism was, early in the nation's history, inextricably linked to the completion of the CPR.

There have been arguments with this conclusion, and some of them are almost overwhelming. Almost. In his fascinating book *The Philosophy of Railways*, den Otter launches a formidable and finely nuanced offensive against a Canadian nationalism

rooted in the power of the machine--a Canadian technological nationalism. Without claiming to account fully for its force and subtlety, a summary of his argument might reduce it to three major points. First, because technology does not respect national borders, it cannot be depended upon to respect national cultures, either. Den Otter's best example of this is handily contemporary; he suggests that "if communication is the primary cause of its nationhood"--and it is important to remember, even though Harold Innis is unlikely ever to allow us to forget, that the railway is a communications technology--"Canada is vulnerable to domination by the more powerful cultural industries of the United States, which deploy the same communication techniques to assert their own self-serving messages on the Canadian people." In this scheme, technology, as any Canadian who prefers CNN to CBC Newsworld knows, is more likely to contribute to post-nationalism than to nationalism. Den Otter shows that this was the case with the building of the railway: "Even while the CPR's bonds of steel were securing the plains and British Columbia to central Canada, the railway's managers were building branch lines to the United States" (9).

Second, technologies invariably become obsolete, and anything that can become obsolete "cannot provide a lasting sense of community." The abandonment of passenger lines and stations in recent years tends to support his point. Third, and perhaps most pointedly, is that technological nationalism "failed to produce a common Canadian culture":

> Discontent in both the Atlantic and western regions of the nation attest to the fact that railways were not unanimously accepted symbols of national

[17] See also Colmer 5-6 and Chittenden 5. Lorne's use of an organic metaphor--the railway as backbone

> unity. For some, railway technology posed a threat; it represented a dangerous vehicle for creating a national identity because it favoured centres of power and promoted the suppression of marginal communities. (30)

For den Otter, the railway's practical political and economic motives and functions override--in fact, preclude--its effectiveness as a national symbol. This tension between perceptions of the railway as a symbol of national unity and as a symbol of filthy lucre (a tension which receives its fullest expression, as I will discuss in chapter three, in E. J. Pratt's long poem *Towards the Last Spike*) perfectly encapsulates the tension between "a balanced communitarianism and an unleashed competitive individualism" that Mathews traces throughout Canada's history (6).

Even in this reduced (though hopefully not too reductive) form, den Otter's argument is compelling. But it falls just short of being convincing, and a quick look at its third part will show why. It is no doubt true that pockets of resistance to the CPR existed even as it was under construction, and that the passion fueling this resistance ran deep. Whether this disqualifies the railway from functioning as an effective national symbol is another matter. For one thing, dissent is not a very reliable measuring stick if one wishes to understand an entity's symbolic resonances, because all it can ever really measure is the volume of the dissent itself, and not the silent foundations of the more widely held beliefs of those whose views the dissidents would presumably wish to change. Furthermore, expressions of resistance to a thing that has become a national symbol seem rarely to be directed against its symbolic worth; instead, they are usually

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for the nation's limbs--is replicated in McEvoy 102; Murray 150; and Vincent 40.

aimed toward a certain policy or undertaking by the agency governing that actual thing. The burning of a nation's flag, for instance, is most often done in protest of some decision or action of that nation's government, and not to protest the symbolic value of the flag itself. In fact, it is precisely because the flag functions so powerfully as a symbol that it is likely to be burned.

Regional arguments against the CPR are likely of the same character. The railway's fitness as a symbol of industriousness, for example, is much less likely to be the object of a public protest than is a decision of the railway's management to run a line through, or close a station in, one stretch of land rather than another. And just because people disagree with the railway's routes or policies does not mean that they have not benefited from its services. Den Otter's "centres of power" and "marginal communities" were, as J. M. S. Careless shows throughout his historical study *Frontier and Metropolis*, as "reciprocally connected" as are individuals and the communities to which they belong (36). The frontier supplied goods to the metropolis (of which there were many, each with its own sphere of influence), which provided transportation, technology, and money in return. The problem with this pragmatic line of reasoning is that it is too literal, and thus too limited. It most likely would not have swayed the opinions of those opposed to the railway because it grasps for its persuasive power in objects--the railway and the goods it could deliver--rather than by appealing to the subjects who invest such things with significance beyond their material value. Because it is fixated on objects instead of people, this argument could never appeal to citizens' passions. And this is precisely the problem with den Otter's argument as well. Regardless of whether it respects national borders, regardless of whether it is destined

for obsolescence, regardless of whether some citizens have been opposed to its policies--in other words, regardless of its many actual failures and inadequacies--the railway's symbolic power is perhaps unmatched in Canadian mythology because of its close association with the building of the nation.

To be fair, den Otter never really disputes this power; his quarrel is, more exactly, with how the CPR was deemed a worthy repository for it.[18] And he seems instinctively to recognize that texts have played some part in this process. The epigraph to his book's first chapter is from E. J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, which he says contributed to "the mythology that envelops the Canadian Pacific Railway, the backbone of the Canadian nation" (3). Other texts, such as Pierre Berton's ubiquitous *The Great Railway*, "in [their] own way reinforced the tenet that the CPR's primary mission was the creation of a nation-state and implicitly bolstered the notion that the earning of profits [by the CPR Corporation] was but an incidental objective" (8)--a view that runs counter to den Otter's profit-motive narrative, which is informed by his expertise in liberal economics. It is clear that travel narratives would have performed the same function as Berton's text, but at a much earlier date and with the unique sense of immediacy that a first-person narrative can provide. This is not to say that these texts engendered Canadian nationalism itself, that they somehow narrated the nation into

[18] Den Otter endorses Maurice Charland's view that "the rhetoric of technological nationalism is insidious, for it ties a Canadian identity, not to its people, but to their mediation through technology" (Charland 197). "Insidious" seems a strong word, especially in the context of the crimes against humanity committed in the name of other nationalisms in their century. It is hard to see who, exactly, Canada's rhetoric of technological nationalism actually harms; in the case of the railway, at least, it is a rhetoric that points toward the value of unity and industriousness. Charland does at least admit that the CPR's "mythic rhetoric of national origin," though grounded in technology, "is necessary to the realization of Canadian nationhood" (200). His larger target, the CBC, does not fare quite so well in his analysis.

existence. Geoffrey Bennington cautions against this method of searching for national origins:

> we undoubtedly find narration at the centre of nation: stories of national origin, myths of founding fathers, genealogies of heroes. At the origin of the nation, we find a story of the nation's origins.
>
> Which should be enough to inspire suspicion; our own drive to find the centre and the origin has created its own myth of the origin--namely that at the origin is the myth. (121)

The inevitable result of this search for origins (and thus for the nation as an organic form) is that the investigation merely becomes an extension of the narratives it examines.

A far more prudent course would be to say that narratives communicate the idea of origins and propagate certain rhetorical modes that become familiar ways of speaking of the nation and expressing one's national identity. Nineteenth-century travel narratives of the CPR are exemplary, and to some extent originary, instances of this. Mrs. Spragge emphasizes the railway's actual and symbolic value when she writes that it "was a National Enterprise, is a National Highway, and will be a National Heirloom" (5). As if anticipating Hans Kohn's observation that "[a]lthough objective factors are of great importance for the formation of nationalities, the most essential element is a living and active corporate will" (10), Haldane says that the CPR's material advances created the conditions necessary for the activation of a national will: "Canada's steel built roads have given such an impulse to all her industries that the modest colony of the past is now an energetic nation, with great plans, and hopes, and benefits to confer upon her ever increasing population" (42). In their seamless shifts from reporting on the railway's

concrete advantages to contemplating its more abstract significance to the Canadian people, Spragge and Haldane perform a rhetorical gesture, reproduced in countless literary and historical narratives since, that is vital to the CPR's status as a national symbol of individual and corporate industriousness, progress, and unity. The train ride itself became a performative romantic-nationalist epic of sorts; to travel was to read was to find the nation.

It was not only the idea of the train in Canada, or the sight of its impressive technology as seen from a station platform or beneath a CPR bridge, that stirred the imagination; seeing Canada from the train could also excite passions fundamental to the stimulation of a national consciousness. If there was one thing that was universally known about Canada, it was that it was big. *Really* big. And, probably owing to the lingering influence of imperial acquisitiveness, size mattered. In a variation of the process through which what Edward Said calls "imaginative geography" facilitated the Western othering of the Orient by "dramatizing the distance between what is close to it and what is far away" (*Orientalism* 55), the dramatization of Canada's size transformed geographical impressiveness into a basis for national pride. This feeling is certainly at the heart of Haldane's suggestion as to how his readers might attempt to understand the country's immensity:

> Make an outline tracing of all the continental European countries, excluding Russia, but including the British Isles. Now make another outline sketch of Canada to the *same scale*, and, placing the former over the latter, it will be seen that the area of the Dominion is fully double that

> of [Europe], which, perhaps, is not quite what some people would expect.

But this is not the only, or even the best, way to appreciate Canada's size:

> A more practical way of ascertaining this fact is to traverse the country by the Canadian Pacific Railway from Montreal to Vancouver, either in frequent stopover fashion, or by going straight ahead from end to end, which will enable people to learn very much of which they at present have no conception. (36-37)

J. P. Sheldon seconds Haldane's opinion: "A man way wander, indeed, in that vast country for weeks on foot and scarcely have passed its fringes; with horses he will practically achieve but little more, even where horses are able to go; and it is only by the aid of steam that he can, in any reasonable time, fairly grasp its immensity" (4).

Interestingly enough, panoramic descriptions of Canada as a whole are infrequent in the travel literature of the period, an oddity that Waterston notices but does not attempt to explain ("Travel Books" 373); perhaps their scarcity is due to the fact that the country's immensity dwarfs and thus threatens the individual, who must perforce wrap him- or herself in the reassuring embrace of a community to confront this vastness. Plenty of writers take a moment to describe generally the railway's connection of Canada's east and west coasts,[19] but sustained portraits of the intervening landscape are few. Cumberland makes an attempt at this, but the result is a catalogue of resources rather than a representation of the geography: "Looking eastward from the Strait of Georgia, if the eye could carry so far it would rest upon nothing but British land for

[19] See also Carmichael 1, 2; Edwards 25; Hogan 43; and Vincent 40.

close upon 4,000 miles. It is through this vast tract of country, comprising timber limits of unexhaustible extent, mineral belts of untold wealth, and millions upon millions of corn-producing acres and rich grazing lands, that this new railway runs [. . .]" (5). On those rare occasions that a true transcontinental perspective is offered, it usually comes at the end of the narrative, as a way for the author both to retrace his or her tracks and to suggest, perhaps, how the traveler's continuous narrative of progress mirrors the process through which Canada has evolved to its present state as a great nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Although she omits the Maritimes and Quebec from her overview, Mrs. Spragge does describe how travelers aboard the CPR pass through "the fertile districts of Ontario, [. . .] soon pass on to the iron-bound, rocky shores of Lake Superior, and leaving these behind, cross the boundless prairies of the North-West, to revel in the beauty and grandeur of the Rocky, Selkirk, Gold, Cascade, and Coast Ranges, and [. . .] end this journey amid the rural English surroundings of Vancouver Island [. . .]" (185-86). Sladen performs an even more impressive (and effusive) province-by-province survey of the country in his narrative's closing pages, covering the terrain "from where the sunrise is hailed by the most westerly drum-beat of the British Army to where the sunset lingers on the broad white banner of St. George trailing from half a dozen Queen's ships in the pine-girt haven of Esquimault" (403).[20]

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[20] Sladen's long transcontinental rhapsody, which depicts Canada's east-west contiguity in geographical, historical, and cultural terms, continues as follows:

> We started in the golden Cersonese of America, Nova Scotia; we part at the end of the great island which bears the name of Captain Vancouver, who sailed these seas when every British man-of-war down to the tiniest frigate was a knight-errant, riding the waves in search of a foe to break a lance with. To use Keats's fine line,
>
> "Much have *we* travelled in the realms of gold."

Sladen's obvious imperial slant aside for the moment, it is clear that one aim of the panoramic representation of the country was to contain it rhetorically through the expression of a "visual authority" which "acts as a concrete sign of the writer's privileged point of view in the larger political sphere" (Spurr 19); in other words to make of Canada a single community stretching uninterrupted from one ocean to the other (north and south, where the train did not range, simply were not important) and existing under the mastery of a single, imperial proprietor. Canada was so large that it had to be contained in some way. Otherwise, it would be impossible to write about, much less understand. The more commonplace means of doing so, however, was to describe the country piecemeal, with the travel narrative's reader assuming responsibility for connecting the dots, as it were, to draw a full picture of the country.[21]

After meandering their way through the historical landscape of Quebec, travel writers started, tentatively, to pay closer attention to the physical landscape of the country, with this attention increasing further as the train headed west. Accounts of the

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> --through fabled Acadia; through the first Canada, the province of Quebec, for ever romantic with the deeds wrought and the sufferings borne for the White Flag, by Cartier and his blue-eyed Breton sailors, by the nuns of St. Ursula and Villa Maria, by generations of picturesque seigneurs, culminating in the tragedy of Wolfe and Montcalm; through fair Ontario, with the world's great lakes in her bosom, round the busy heart of the Dominion--Ontario, under her old name of Upper Canada, identified first with the heroism of the United Empire Loyalists, and afterwards, like the older province, with the great victories over overwhelming numbers of Americans; through Manitoba and Assiniboia, whose waving prairies are becoming the granary of the earth; through Alberta, with its turquoise and its glittering crown of Rocky Mountains; and lastly through British Columbia, land of stupendous mountains and stupendous forests, guarding a treasure to which the hoard of the Nibelungs would be a fly-speck, hereafter to fill her two great seaports with a commerce like the commerce of the Great South Land before it fell on evil days. (403-04)

[21] Readers did get some help from the fold-out maps included in many of these books. These maps, with their frequent representations of the steamer lines to and from Britain, helped to shape, as Anderson says all such maps do, "the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion--the nature of human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry" (164). The maps assured

trip through Ontario, with stops in Ottawa and Toronto, generally included at least some reference to the nation's government and economy, and certain natural landmarks, such as Niagara Falls and Lake Superior, were described fairly closely. The overwhelming, and overwhelmingly general, impression of the Ontario landscape was that it was bleak, rugged, almost forbidding. Roper, who covers 1423 miles of terrain in just twelve pages, describes the scenery west of Ottawa as "mile after mile of rough, rocky land covered with shabby, scraggy trees, old rotting logs, and bushes" (30); Mrs. Spragge complains about the "dreary, barren country that extends between Lake Superior and the prairie region" (19); and Cumberland, heading east across the province from Manitoba, calls the area around Thunder Bay "one of nature's reservations," numbering it among those "portions of this world which nature reserves to herself, they, in consequence of their sterility or inaccessibleness, being unfitted for the uses of man" (302-03).[22] Apart from fixing this unwelcoming image in the minds of their readers as a means of establishing beyond a doubt that this was not a region that anyone should think of settling--and thereby reminding them, as Bernard McEvoy does less subtly in his travel narrative, to follow the path of his own Canadian travels and "'Go West, young man'" (7)--these depictions of a forbidding landscape also served as reminders of the CPR's technical achievement in carving a rail line through the kind of terrain that E. J. Pratt refers to in *Towards the Last Spike* as "the Laurentian monster" (369). Sladen, to this point in his

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Canadian readers of this last point most forcefully, reminding them that they were still connected--physically, economically, and culturally--to Mother England.

[22] W. H. New describes how the language used to describe a landscape is inextricably involved in "an ongoing history of a culture's relation with place and space" (8) and that conventions of the period dictated that English travelers not identify too closely with a land whose wildness might corrupt its observer (*Land Sliding* 15). Richard C. Davis traces the history of the term "barren" (which Spragge uses in her description) in depictions of Canada from its early use by exploration writers and says that a

journey nearly immune to the lure of the railway's technology, calls the portion of line between Peninsula and Nepigon "the most stupendous undertaking the engineers had to tackle" (203). Cumberland boasts that "frowning promontories have been tunnelled and blasted, bridged and spanned, in a manner most wonderful to behold" (303).

The ring of victory in Cumberland's voice is unmistakable, and points toward one reason why the CPR figures so prominently in Canadian mythology, and why these early travel narratives are significant constituents of the discourse of Canadian nationalism. Grounded, again, in an appreciation of the material accomplishment of the railway, praise for its achievement became celebrations of the symbolic and revolutionary triumph of technology over landscape, the claiming of actual rural (and especially western) space in the service of the idea of the nation. While it is true that stories of surviving, or even modestly thriving, in this landscape abounded--the exploration narratives of Samuel Hearne and David Thompson spring immediately to mind, as do the books of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill--none of them communicate the feeling of grand cultural conquest in quite the way that later travel narratives do.[23] When, a century later, Leon Surette coins the term "topocentrism" to describe the Canadian literary critical fixation on validating the study of a distinct Canadian literature that would somehow "*formulate*" the "collective genius of the nation out of which it arises" (46)--an activity he describes, in his essay's title, as proclaiming that "Here Is Us"--he inadvertantly suggests a useful means for understanding the symbolic importance of the railway's construction. "Topocentrism" might also be used

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"common descriptive vocabulary points to the strong influence of a tradition" (149)--a tradition that continued to influence travel writers in the nineteenth century.

to describe the preoccupation with the physical character of the country, and not just with the idea of place (*topos*) itself. In this sense, much of Canadian literature and culture--from the poetry of Al Purdy to the art of the Group of Seven, and in countless instances beyond--could be called topocentric.

Surette's contention that the version of topocentrism he examines results from the cultural complaint that "we have had no revolution, no civil war, no Indian massacres, in short, no spilling of blood to stir the imagination and create a *Canadian* story or myth" is also suggestive (51-52).[24] He immediately dispels the illusion that Canada has had anything other than a "violent history," but he emphasizes that that history, including among other events the War of 1812, was largely about fighting "wars that were not *our* wars" (52), and thus did little to engender a national consciousness. But one answer to his complaint is that the victory of the CPR over the country's greatest and most omnipresent "enemy"--the landscape itself, as it has been famously formulated by Frye and Atwood, among others--was "ours." And this victory, recognizable to individual citizens in their own travails in and with the land and rapidly textualized in nineteenth-century travel narratives, did stir the imagination enough to create a Canadian myth.

But the railway did not just conquer the landscape. It also mediated people's experience of it. The impact that the train had on the traveler's perception of the Canadian countryside might best be called epiphanic; no one had seen *this* Canada

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[23] For a sampling of other depictions of the railway's successful battle with the Canadian landscape, see W. G. Blaikie 126; Colmer 21; Hogan 92; McEvoy 135; and Yeigh 133.

[24] Earle Birney made the same point nearly 20 years earlier in his poem "Can. Lit.": "we French&English never lost / our civil war / endure it still / a bloodless civil bore." His speaker's disdain

before the railway ran through it. Beyond the practical changes it made in trade and communication, the railway, as Michael Kowalewski maintains is true of all new forms of transportation, also changed "thought, feeling, behaviour and human consciousness" by placing "new demands on travelers' eyes, nerves, and viscera" (3). For some travelers, this change could be unpleasant. Sladen, for example, recommends the open observation car to anyone "who wishes to find out what good the sparrows get from a dust-bath" (225). For others, the manner in which the train opened new vistas for its passengers was exhilarating. Despite his distaste for the observation car, Sladen does praise the railway's route on the northern shore of Lake Superior, which is "almost always in sight; sometimes right at the foot of the line" (203). This part of the country was quite popular among travel writers, apparently because the rail line revealed the lake and its surroundings in such dramatic fashion. Charles Elliott thrills at the "sudden bend [that] brings us to the shore of Lake Superior" and the "magnificent scenery that bursts upon the traveler at every turn" (70); Dean Carmichael agrees: "The curves and twists and turns of the rail are wonderful, giving a ceaseless variety of scenery, with the lovely lake or inland ocean always present" (6). After precious little attention to landscape in the preceding pages of his narrative, Haldane describes "enter[ing] upon a scene of splendour [. . .]. From this point forward, over many curves and bridges, the views of mountain, and lake, and sky [. . .] appeared in the most exquisite and never-to-be-forgotten beauty under the rays of the declining sun" (63). If the construction of the railway allowed the nation to imagine its mastery over nature and bridged individual and community experiences of overcoming the obstacles of the land, then travelling along its

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for Canadian literary history extends back to the CPR: "too busy bridging loneliness / to be alone / we

line further brought this feeling of mastery down to a more tangible, personal level, affording passengers the opportunity to take in, and thus possess, symbolically, a country that had such a short time ago seemed resolutely resistant to being possessed.

Travel writers enhanced their own sense of mastery over Canada's landscape by employing the conventional (and thus reassuring, in this New World context) aesthetic discourse of the nineteenth century, itself a remnant of the aesthetic of the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque left over from eighteenth-century travel writing. (The rhetoric of the sublime will become even more apparent as these writers pass through the Rockies and Selkirks.) They were also, apart from procuring the practical benefit of being able to "commit notes to paper with perfect ease and legibility while running at the rate of thirty miles an hour" (Elliott 70), granted the chance to communicate this sense of personal mastery to those who had not yet ridden the line. By gaining familiarity with distant parts of the vast country, the individual reader could more fully imagine the national community to which he or she belonged, so that the travel narrative became a way of convincing individuals to thinks of themselves in a national geographical, political, and cultural context. If crossing the country by rail was, as Haldane says, the best way to understand its size, then reading the account of such a trip was, perhaps, one of the best ways of understanding its varied character.

One of the best ways of understanding the importance of textuality to the conception of the nation is to see how travel writers themselves rounded out their narratives by appealing to other writings, which allowed them to escape the limitations placed upon their observations by the strict east-west course of the railway. The train

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hacked in railway ties / what Emily etched in bone" (9-12, 5-8).

altered its passengers' perceptions of Canada's scenery by adding motion to the equation, showing them the landscape at what was, back then, a dizzying speed. But not everyone was convinced that this alteration was an improvement. The most frequent complaint of travelers was, in fact, that the train's speed denied its passengers a clear look at a stable, easily capturable landscape: "the train went so fast: there were numberless spots where one wanted to linger and gaze" (McEvoy 229).[25] Gaps in a cross-country narrative could also result from the writer's having missed certain parts of the country during the train's overnight passage; Haldane admits that he is unable to describe part of Lake Superior for this reason (67) and Cumberland expresses his regret at having slept his way through Calgary and Kamloops (153, 173).

The scope of a traveler's literal vision was additionally constrained by the route of the main line itself, which traced one unswerving path from east to west, and even by the position of his or her seat on board the train; passengers seated on one side of the train, for instance, were likely to have a much better view of the north shore of Lake Superior than those on the other. In a sense, travelers on board the CPR were like pampered inmates in a rolling panopticon, able to look about in many directions but, unless they strayed from the line, denied the freedom to see what lay beyond the railway's horizon. This was not a difficulty for those who, like Sladen, spent time *On the*

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[25] See also George Bryce 23; Colmer 33; Field 32; and Gordon 134. The CPR turned the "problem" of speed to its own promotional advantage in an inventive way; Ernest Ingersoll's *An Excursion to Alaska by the Canadian Pacific Railway*, on in a series of Canadian Pacific Primers, suggested a practical (and, for the CPR, lucrative) way of alleviating the distancing effect of the train's speed:

> To attempt to see all this at the high speed of a transcontinental express train, is a mistake. Stop off, therefore, at two or three points at least, and take time to *understand* the mountains. Pleasant hotels have been built by the railway company at suitable points, where one may dwell in perfect comfort, within the very heart of the alps [. . .]. (16-17)

Cars and Off; indeed, because he ranged freely off the line to go fishing and camping, he seems oblivious to this concern altogether. But to Roper, the railway's restrictions presented a danger to travelers and, especially, settlers. Thus his response to a young man whose cross-country rail trip has inspired him to settle in Canada: "'But you don't know Ontario at all . . . nor anything of Manitoba, except just what the C. P. R. passes through, so you cannot really tell'" (115). The traveler's vision is narrowed, Schivelbusch argues, by a technology that "'knows only points of departure and destination" (38).

Mrs. Spragge also notices that the narrow path of the railway provides scarce glimpses of the country's interior, and so she supplements her knowledge, and her narrative, by acquainting herself with much of the country through the texts she has brought along with her on her trip: Sandford Fleming for an account of Portage la Prairie and to prepare her for the Rockies; a CPR pamphlet to describe Banff and the medicinal properties of its spring waters; an 1886 report on mining in British Columbia to help her describe that industry, and so on. Sladen likewise refers to his handy Baedeker guide (246), Cumberland to *The Great Fur Land* and *The Great Lone Land* (190, 197), and Roper, apparently, to the title of Cumberland's book when he suggests ways of making "the 'Queen's highway from ocean to ocean' a favourite one with travelers" (187).[26] Adams notes that textual interpolations are common to the travel

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The encounter with nature that the train facilitated might be personal, but it was also, now that hotel stops were along the way, profitable.

[26] See also Colmer 13, 63; Henry Coupland 133-34; and St. Maur 29. Perhaps the most intriguing instance of a travel writer's appeal to an intertext occurs in J. Ewing Ritchie's *Pictures of Canadian Life* (1886). While in Toronto, Ritchie meets Susanna Moodie, "whose 'Roughing It in the Bush' did so much to help English people to understand the hardships of Canadian life some forty years ago" (91). He then goes on to quote *Roughing It* to emphasize that members of the upper class were still "'perfectly unfitted by their previous habits and standing in society for contending with the stern realities of

narrative generally (279), and it should come as no surprise that these and other travel writers make frequent appeals to other texts; if they were anything like the exploration writers who preceded them, they were unlikely to have "set out [. . .] without first becoming intimately familiar with the handful of accounts by previous explorers and travelers" (Richard C. Davis 154). And, as Waterston explains in romantic fashion, their reading activity continued long after they had left home:

> nine times out of 10, they beguiled their twilight hours en route with a reading of some of the travel books that had enticed them to Canada in the first place, or had helped them to choose what paraphenalia to pack, or had prepared them to try their own hands at yet another record of travel, a travel book to be polished and published when the trip was over. (Introduction vi)[27]

One effect of all this reading was that a traveler's reactions to Canada could be preconditioned by the texts that he or she consumed prior to departure (a point already raised in reference to Davis's and New's historical discussions of the shared vocabulary, much of it rooted in nineteenth-century British aesthetic discourse, used to describe the Canadian landscape). The influence of these texts is aptly characterized by Heather Henderson, who calls them part of the "giant that accompanies every travel writer," "condition[ing] travelers' choices and shap[ing] their perception" (230, 231). But an

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emigrant life in the backwoods'" (100), showing not only that Moodie's book still had cultural currency in England, but that travelers were, indeed, well acquainted with textual representations of the country.

[27] The causes and implications of reading while traveling are studied by Schivelbush, who observes that "[b]y the mid-nineteenth century, reading while traveling has become an established custom" (64). He describes how British railway compartments, in which passengers were completely closed off from one another, compelled reading as an escape from boredom, and how English booksellers capitalized on this by setting up shop in railway stations to "meet the general demand for things to read while traveling"

equally notable influence may well have been on the broader conception of how literature and technology intersected in Canada. Following the example of writers who had an obvious confidence in the book's potential to acquaint them with Canada, successive generations of readers could acquaint themselves with their nation not just as a political ideal or a geographical entity, but also as a textual construct, and travel narratives foregrounded the railway's role in facilitating that construct. As a result, train, text, and nation coalesced further in the Canadian imagination.

Idle contemplation of Canada was not, however, a virtue preached by these narratives, and as the train moved into the prairies, the travel writer's vision shifted from scenery described for travelers to land displayed for settlers. Prolonged description of the prairie landscape generally gives way to a focus, as much as this was possible, on its apparent boundlessness. Haldane's panoramic vision allows him to take in a landscape of infinitely more beauty and variety than that described by his contemporaries, but he too is compelled to note how it stretches beyond the limits of physical sight:

> Here we were passing over not an uninteresting plain which many people expect to see, but a great billowy ocean of grass and flowers, at one time swelling into low hills, and at other times dropping into broad basins studded with lakelets and lagoons of various sizes, and broken here and there by valleys and irregular lines of trees marking the water courses. The horizon only limits the view, and as far as the eye can reach, the prairie is dotted with new made as well as with old established farms, and with herds of cattle. (159)

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(65). In "The American Railroad as Publisher, Bookseller, and Librarian," Tom D. Kilton conducts a

Mrs. Spragge also writes of the land "roll[ing] away as far as the eye could reach in an unbroken line to the horizon" (37-38), and Sladen notes the "illimitability" of the prairies (261). The most impassioned response to the region's terrain comes from Cumberland: "The immensity is almost terrifying, and I frequently, with no landmarks to guide me, felt as if I were on an uncharted sea, out of sight of land" (226); he complains soon after that the lack of points of reference makes it difficult for him to judge the distance and size of objects (228). The impossible expansiveness of the prairies was dumbfounding to many travelers.[28]

On the other hand, the prairie's size and apparent emptiness also suggested the limitless potential of its farmlands--and the limitless opportunities for its settlers. Western Canada was a place ready to be filled up with immigrants. The individual's response to this emptiness was to populate it and mark it as a human possession, which fit perfectly with the broader goals of the burgeoning national community. After he is sufficiently recovered from his initial awe, Cumberland proclaims Manitoba "the garden of the North-West" (240). Sladen and Roper also dwell on the region's, and thus the

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detailed study of the relationship between reading and railroading in the New World context.

[28] The literary response to this boundlessness in later prairie fiction is explored by Laurence Ricou (*Vertical Man/Horizontal World*) and Dick Harrison (*Unnamed Country*), both of whom argue, though in slightly different ways, that various tropes of prairie fiction are manifestations of the jarring collision of Canadian landscape and European imagination. In a chapter from his travel narrative entitled "The Boundless Prairie," Bernard McEvoy devises an ingenious--and humorous--method of dealing with the prairie's vast size and lack of reference points, which frustrated attempts at measurement. He measures distance by conversation:

> In the smoking-car we tried to talk the prairie out, like they talk a bill out in the House of Commons and though we had the [travelling Cabinet] Minister to help us out it did not come to much. The Californian made a speech on California, sixty-five miles long, and we agreed that everything in that state was taller and bigger round than anywhere else. Yet, when we looked out, there was the prairie. [. . . .] The Minister made a series of speeches. [. . . .] Yet there was the prairie. [. . . .] The doctor made a longish speech. [. . . .] Yet there was the prairie. If it had not been for a hypochondriac who began telling us about his symptoms, like a patent medicine testimonial, it's my belief we should be there now. (93-94)

nation's, agricultural richness: the former calls it "*the great fertile belt of Canada*" (237) and the latter devotes an entire chapter to his travels "Across the Wheat Country." Other travelers were less restrained in their responses. Henry Field, an American travel writer, calls the prairies "a plain of boundless extent, which is one of the granaries of the world" (30). J. P. Sheldon writes that the land around Brandon is "rolling, the soil black, and as far as one could see there was wheat, wheat, wheat--nothing but wheat, but plenty of that" (22). J. G. Colmer finds it "impossible to adequately describe the fields of golden grain that are seen to be stretching away on either side, as far as the eye can reach" (28). One reason for these paeans to the fertility of the prairies may have been to counter the widely circulated reports that Canada's climate forbade successful agricultural pursuits, and that it was thus less a nation than a very big--and very cold--wide open space.[29]

Travel writers' tendency to focus on crops specifically, and not just the fertility of the region generally, also points to the cultural value of wheat itself, which was, Doug Owram notes, the "basic staple of the Anglo-Saxon and European world" (112):

> Wheat [. . .] assumed racial, historical, and almost mystical overtones as a source of both individual and national strength.

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[29] Carmichael writes that the Hudson's Bay Company was instrumental in fixing the idea of Canada as an arctic wasteland in the minds of the English, and that it did so in order to keep the country and its resources to itself for as long as it could (2). Efforts to counter this image included a railway tour arranged by Lord Lorne for four reporters from the *Times* of London, whose editorial pages had been suggesting that Australia offered more fertile land for settlers (Berton 35) and an odd little pamphlet titled *Is Canada a Land of Sunshine or Snow?*, which took Rudyard Kipling to task for calling Canada "Our Lady of the Snows" in a poem and announced a contest for the best poem or essay on the topics "Is Canada a Land of Sunshine or Snow?" and "How is Canada Important to the British Empire both from a Political and Domestic Standpoint?" (16). Amidst the pamphlet's bad poetry and bad fiction is a brief --but still quite bad--play in which children sample and compliment Canadian food products, with one of them, after tasting some beef, uttering the immortal lines, "I like Tongue. I don't think you can have too much of 'Miss Canada's' Tongue" (6).

> The elevated place assigned to wheat in determining the fate of nations put Canada in an enviable position. If wheat was the staple of the world's dominant nations, then Canada, as a foremost potential producer of wheat, could expect to assume an important position in world trade. (113)

Of course, all the wheat in the world was not worth much unless there was easy access to it, and the CPR, by transforming the west into an efficient granary, is the one great proof of New's claim that "technology can alter the mode and site of production, and it can reconfigure the artifice of 'landscape'" (162). Haldane anticipates New's argument by telling his readers, 100 years before New, that through the railway's advances "the prairies has largely been turned into a garden" (148). Den Otter sums up the railway's vital role in western settlement by saying, "In the nineteenth century mentality, [it] was the prerequisite tool for transforming empty wilderness into productive fields, industrious towns, and bustling cities" (160-61). As in the eastern portions of the country, the railway could only assert itself as a national symbol after first proving that it was of practical value to the lives of Canadians. Travel narratives helped to accelerate this process by focussing on the CPR's connection to the farming and distribution of wheat, the crop that, with the help of the railway, would allow individual farmers to make a living and enhance Canada's reputation and economic clout among other nations.

These narratives also participated in the actual nation-building process in a more direct way by encouraging settlers to pack up their belongings and strike out for western

Canada, where, Haldane says, the impact of the railway on Canada's growth was already being felt:

> The extent of this may be gathered from the fact that at the census of 1891 it was found that while the population of the Dominion as a whole had increased by eleven per cent., that of the province of Manitoba alone had increased by no less than 148 per cent. Of course, one great cause of this has been the opening out of the province by the C. P. R., and the accessibility thus given to farmers for easy transport of their produce to market, or to a shipping port. (103)

The appeal to settlers perfectly combines individual and communitarian interests in its promises of economic advancement for individuals and its larger objective of attracting the population and industry that would create a national community. Books that began as personal stories of travel could often end up bearing close resemblance to the official settlers' guides produced by the CPR itself, whose glowing accounts of the prospects for western settlement did much to help populate these nineteenth-century "Elysian fields" (George Bryce 3). In *National Dreams*, Daniel Francis discusses how CPR publicity "extolled the Canadian West as a paradise where newcomers would find every opportunity to achieve the good life" (23). Ford and Hogan paint pictures of effortless harvest, the former calling Manitoba "the Eldorado of the wheat grower" (16) and the latter saying that it "present[s] no pioneering difficulties whatever, but [is] ready for occupation and cultivation the moment the settler arrive[s] in any part of it" (85). Charles Elliott goes so far as to cite the "well-known fact that the Canadian-born sons and daughters of European parents are taller and more robust than their progenitors"

and to tell the story of an astonishingly fertile woman to prove Canada's advantages (89, 90-91).

This sort of exaggeration is, to some extent, an occupational hazard for travel writers, who "have always been condemned as embellishers of the truth or as plain liars" (Adams 85). It may also suggest that some writers overcompensated in their attempts to cure Canada's reputation as a continental refrigerator. Whatever the case, just as many travel narratives tended toward restrained, though still positive, assessments of settlers' prospects. Cumberland, for instance, admits that "[. . .] Canada has no really 'bad lands' to speak of, but that she has a good deal of indifferent land no one can deny" (175-76).[30] Still others were plain in their cautions against the exaggerations of other travel writers--Foster notes that "travelers were aware of the often misleading reports circulated by previous visitors" (71)--and official agents.[31] Roper is particularly intent on dispelling any illusions as to the ease of life for Canadian settlers:

> These [one-sided reports of successful farmers] are the sort of instances I heard of time and again. Why repeat them? They can be seen in print in any of the Government and Railway pamphlets. There are nearly all true, these accounts, *but*, naturally, there may be another set of incidents quite

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[30] William Fream offers a similarly realistic evaluation:

> In no part of the world is agricultural entreprise [sic] likely to open up an El Dorado, but there are fair and reasonable grounds for asserting that in Canada a man is likely, after years of honest toil, to be in a considerably better position than he could ever have hoped to attain from the same expenditure of work, and it may be of capital, at home. (27-28)

The hope for improved circumstances in Canada for Britain's unemployed is also referred to by Colmer (84); Elliott (82); Ford (33); and others.

[31] One of the most stinging criticisms is delivered by Ritchie: "Deeply do I pity the poor emigrants tempted into this part of the world by the delusive utterances of sham emigration agents at home and in local journals--which, when they are not abusing one another, seem to delight in giving representations of the country by no means literally to be depended on [. . .]" (160-61).

> opposite to them. I met many in other parts of Canada who had left Manitoba and the N. W. T. in disgust. (406-07)

Such cautions were important lest the traveler's ease of progress be assumed to extend to the settler. Roper does, however, make it clear that blame for settlers' failures did not reside in the character of the land itself so much as in that of individuals who emigrated to Canada only to learn that they "were not fitted for the country" (407). As much as Canada needed settlers to help develop the country, what it really needed was the *right kind* of settlers, men and women "able and willing to work hard, to endure a certain roughness of life and loneliness" (449), the sort of individuals who would labour to create the community. What it often got, unfortunately, were people who,

> quite apart from their physical disqualifications for the work of farming, [had] generally such a want of even rudimentary knowledge of the conditions under which agriculture could alone be profitably carried out, that disappointment and failure were too often the result. Return to the homes of their youth followed, and, instead of blaming themselves, as in all fairness they should have done, Canada herself received the discredit. (Haldane 69-70)[32]

There could be little doubt that the most precious commodity any settler could possess was industriousness.

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[32] The difference between the Canada seen by the traveler and the Canada developed by the settler is summed up by Ritchie, who writes that the settler, "in his heroic efforts to [. . .] build up a grant nation in that quarter of the globe [. . .] has to renounce luxury, to scorn delights, to live laborious days. Canada is not the place for members of the British Association who long for the flesh-pots of Egypts or the champagne-cup" (4-5). Elliott (86); Fream (18); and Sheldon (5, 73, 75) also stress the settler's need for a strong work ethic. Even Kipling joined in: "The failures are those who complain that the land 'does not know a gentleman when it sees him.' They are quite right. The land suspends all judgment on all men till it has seen them work" (22).

From here it was a fairly short step to the belief that industriousness was a cornerstone of the national identity. Travel narratives reinforced the value of this trait, and the CPR's importance to the nation, by associating the two. After all, if they could span the northern continent with a railway, what could Canadians not do by dint of hard work?

Nowhere was the railway's example of the benefits of industriousness more forceful than in the Rocky Mountains, which were the focal point for many travelers, and the Selkirks. The CPR's stupendous achievement in spanning the Continental Divide baffled its passengers, who found the mountains to be nearly as much an obstacle to their own powers of description as it must have been to the technics of the railway's engineers. The same "vogue of the Sublime" that attracted tourists to Switzerland in the late nineteenth century (Fussell, "Heyday" 275) drew travelers to Canada, and their descriptions of the mountain scenery do not disappoint on this count. Although they should have been quite well prepared for them by the accounts of previous travelers--Sladen, expressing a common anticipation for the moment when they will come into view, calls the mountains "the long line [. . .] which you have been reading about and dreaming about since you were a child" (277)--these writers were, to use Edmund Burke's word, "astonished" by the Rockies. Published nearly 150 years earlier, Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* describes almost perfectly the response of these travelers who chugged through the mountains by train:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is

> that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. (53)

If the minds of these travelers were "entirely filled" with the Rockies, it was because the train's course through them conveniently shut almost everything except their jagged geometry out from view. "Peak towered above peak on both sides of the line," Mrs. Spragge writes, "carved and moulded by the hand of Nature in every possible form of crag and precipice [. . .]" (61). Roper, similarly, finds himself "surrounded by peaks and pinnacles" (129), and Cumberland adds a demonizing twist to the experience of the canyon of the Kicking Horse River:

> All is sombre-hued and forbidding, the rugged precipices not only shutting out light but warmth.
>
> The roar of the water, as with increasing impetuosity it rushes past us, is almost deafening. [. . .] It is just as if hell's flood were let loose; and the torn character of some of the precipices, with the rugged mass of fallen rocks below, increases the impression that some diabolic agency has been at work. (167)

Sladen's senses are so confused by this unnatural natural scenery that he does not seem sure whether he is in the presence of the sacred or profane; on one hand, he describes the peak of Mount Edith "soaring to heaven like an upturned whelk of virgin rock"

(278), but on the other he says that Mount Stephen resembles "an evil giant, guarding with supernatural terror its vast treasures of silver" (279). Like many of his counterparts, he finally throws in the towel, admitting that the mountain landscape that confronts him "baffles description" (282), much as did the boundlessness of the prairies a little further east. Rhetorical surrender to the Rockies and Selkirks was common, and Roper and Spragge also report being struck dumb. "Words," Roper writes, "fail me in trying to describe the grandeur [. . .]" (130), and to Mrs. Spragge they "seem too feeble to express or describe the grandeur and solemnity of such scenery; one could only gaze in admiration, and realise how small and feeble a thing man is beside the works of God" (62). The striking similarity of their expressions of awe is a reminder that travelers were aware of the linguistic conventions appropriate to the sublime landscape, which Haldane makes clear when he writes of scenery that becomes "more and more 'startling,' 'matchless,' 'terrible,' 'enthralling,' 'awful,' and so on, as people delight to call it" (246).[33] Foster maintains that the ready employment of such "conventional literary phraseology," which she finds to be of particular use to travelers describing Niagara Falls, is an attempt to familiarize the landscape to themselves and their readers (99). Whether this was true, or whether writers with sparse literary talent to begin with simply had their powers of description taxed beyond their limits, it is apparent that they were, indeed, moved by Burke's "irresistible force" (53).

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[33] Other notably rapturous proclamations of Canada's mountain sublimity can be found in Begg (9); *A Canadian Tour* (34); Carmichael (15); Ford (17); Kipling (57); McEvoy (98); and Murray, whose page-and-a-half, single-sentence rant is among the most breathless descriptions of geography to be found in these narratives (153-54).

The other irresistible force that moved them, this time more literally, was the train itself, and if the mountains themselves were sublime, then what could one say about the railway that seemed to have conquered them? Quite a lot, as it turned out, notwithstanding Wolfgang Schivelbusch's observation that in nineteenth-century Europe the railway robbed its passengers of the "intense [. . .] experience of traversed space" felt by travelers in horse-drawn coaches, and "put an end" to the traveler's ability to note "not only the formations of the terrain, but even details of the material consistency" of the ground over which he or she traveled" (53). Perhaps because the train was a fact of life for travelers in late nineteenth-century Canada, there is little sense of a lapse in the intensity of the experience of traversed space in the descriptions offered by these travel writers. For some, the railway did more than just provide passage through Canada's western mountains; its route and speed enhanced what was already an otherworldly experience. To Cumberland there was "nothing in the whole of the Canadian Pacific Railway to equal the Kicking Horse Pass," whose steep grades had given the engineers fits:

> In the narrow cañon which the train enters there hardly appears to be room for the railway and the turbulent waters of the 'Kicking Horse,' and as we groaningly ascend, it seems almost impossible that the train can for long keep the track, but that in due course we must be precipitated into the chasm below. (166)

The smoothness of the train's ride lulled its passengers into comfortable repose for most of the trip, but the mountain route snapped them back to attention because, at least momentarily, the landscape was matched by the technology that sent them "[f]lying

through the mountains" (Sladen 277). Whereas Cumberland emphasizes the wildness of his ride, Mrs. Spragge is grateful for the sense of security the train provides her in the same chaotic surroundings: "I must confess I held my breath as I gazed from the window and watched our engine snorting and groaning while it crept slowly and carefully along, as if feeling every step of the way. [. . . .] I was also aware of a sense of gratitude to the iron horse bearing us so steadily and surely down this apparently perilous declivity" (61). The subdued admiration for the CPR's engineering achievement that we saw earlier in travel writers' general impressions of the railway's superstructures gives way in the Rockies to an impassioned faith in the technology that could carve a path through this sublime terrain. James Hogan, a British Member of Parliament, shows that the railway's design was as unfathomable to the common passenger as were the mountains themselves:

> here, as elsewhere, man has proved himself more than a match for the most Titanic forces of Nature. Tremendous yawning abysses have been successfully bridged, pathways for the passage of the locomotive have been hewn and blasted out of the sides of appalling precipices; long, narrow, and sinuous gorges, environed by walls that shoot up straight for hundreds, in some place thousands, of feet, have been compelled to pay a significant tribute of territory to the conquering engineer; and the host of obstacles thrown in the way of his advance by rushing rivers, foaming cataracts, snow, ice, and colossal rocks have been overcome and removed by patience, perseverance, and scientific ingenuity. (92)

A favourite example of the CPR's technical ingenuity was the spiraling trail of the railway in its western descent of the Selkirks, a marvel of engineering that was known to most passengers by the rather commonplace name of "the loops." Roper, Cumberland, and Haldane all cite the loops as an example of the CPR's technical achievement, and Mrs. Spragge declares them "one of the greatest triumphs of engineering skill in the world" (170). Their recognition of the difficulty of the railway's construction did not just reiterate the importance of industriousness and the "victory" over landscape, it combined them. And although the industry and victory described here were understood by these travelers in the most concrete of terms, they were already becoming part of the national mythology that eventually found perhaps its greatest symbol in the train that they rode and wrote about in these early narratives. Again, the individual's movement through an imposing landscape stood as a viable metaphor for the community's progress to nationhood.

Travel writers did not only appreciate the CPR in starkly concrete terms. They were aware that surmounting these mountain obstacles was as important a political achievement as it was a physical one, for the completion of the railway was the condition under which British Columbia had agreed to enter the Dominion in 1871. As Sladen travels through the Eagle Pass, he contemplates the historic significance of his present position to the construction of the Canadian nation:

> At Craigellachie, in this gorge, the last spike of the railway was driven in on November 7th, 1885, when the rails from east and west met here. It was something more than the completion of a railway road; it was the knitting together of an empire: it was the Canadas and the Maritime

> Provinces grasping hands with the Pacific, on whose shores shall one day be the consummation of the Great Dominion. (310)

Simply put, there would be no nation without the railway, at least as far as these travel narratives were concerned. Arrival in Canada's westernmost province was thus a special experience for most travelers, whose east-to-west journey replicated the path of the railway's--and thus the nation's--development.

Little wonder, then, that some space in their closing pages should often be reserved for praise for the country's present condition and encouragement for its future hopes. Despite his repeated statements of the caution to be exercised before deciding to settle in Canada, Roper does an abrupt about-face, saying in his narrative's final words that he is convinced that there is no better country for settlers "than can be discovered in some part of the vast, the flourishing, the grand *Dominion of Canada*" (455). Charles Elliott ends his book with fond words for the Canadian people and an exhortation that they continue to welcome travelers and settlers who will "assist in developing the boundless capabilities of their most prolific country" (93); J. P. Sheldon exhorts the nation to continue its great development, closing with a valedictory moral to his story: "industry is the mother of plenty, and idleness will cover a man with rags" (75); Mrs. Howard Vincent finishes by saying that once Canada has the population sufficient to make full use of her vast resources, "she will become the finest country in the world" (104). And Sladen concludes his narrative with the final stanza from the hymn that prefaces his narrative, "God Save Canada" (sung to the tune of "God Save the Queen"):

> God save our Canada!
>
> Long live our Canada,

Loyal, though free!

Steering her own stout helm,

No storm shall overwhelm

A realm within a realm

That rules the sea. (405)

Sladen's hymn, like these other closing flourishes, is appropriate to the occasion, for even if they had not yet reached the CPR's actual terminus, these travelers had, by reaching British Columbia and writing of the railway's knitting together of Canada's peoples and regions, arrived at a far more deeply felt and imagined destination: the nation itself, a quasi-religious community in which individuals willingly congregated every moment of every day.

But Sladen's anthem, in its references to "our" (i.e., England's) Canada--a loyal "realm within a realm"--and even in its very tune, does depict a very particular sort of nation, one with imperial ties perhaps as strong as--perhaps strengthened by--those of the railway. Moreover, the energies of his narrative, like those of his peers, may have been directed less toward the creation of Canada's national community than England's international community. It is unlikely that any of these travelers believed that their own acts of writing contributed to the actual creation of the community they envisioned. Vancouver may have been the railway's (and Canada's) western terminus, but for the British it was a thoroughfare to cultural and commercial interests overseas, an advantage noted by Cumberland, Sladen, Haldane, and Roper in similar terms: "It needs no prophet to foretell the future of a city which is at once the terminus of the biggest railway in the world and the head of navigation for the trunk lines of steamships from Asia and

Australia" (Sladen 366).[34] Victoria revealed one of the most wonderful features of British Columbia: its Britishness. Cumberland relishes the sight and scent of "old-fashioned English flowers [. . .] keeping the settlers, in memory at least, in touch with the mother country beyond the seas" (13-14) and is quite pleased to see that so loyal are Victoria's citizens that "many have never got over the bitterness engendered within them by the incorporation of British Columbia with the Dominion of Canada" (8). Haldane pays tribute to British refinement of the city (270), Roper to "the intensely English feeling which pervaded society" (235), and Sladen to its resemblance to "the old home across the Atlantic" (388-89). Given the propagandistic character of much travel literature, it is not entirely shocking that British travel writers of the period should hearken back to the British Empire, especially when one considers that travel writing has been, as Jim Philip argues, "most practiced and most read among those peoples who, for the longest time, have exerted commercial or political power over others" (242). Neither should it be a surprise that the CPR was valued by these writers not just because it had helped individuals to settle and make their way in Canada, or helped to develop the nation they had just traveled across, but also because, in doing so, it had helped "to make 'Greater Britain' a reality" (Begg 12).

The railway might indeed strengthen England economically by improving her trade prospects, but it could never really strengthen her national identity the way it could Canada's. The British Empire was on its last legs, and could only realize a monetary return on its cultural investment in the CPR; on the other hand, Canada was strutting confidently about the world stage in a way that it would not do again until the Great

[34] See also George Bryce 44; Carmichael 25; Ford 23, 24; McEvoy 162; and Vincent 101.

War, seeming ready at any instant to thrust itself into the international spotlight. Canada's citizens had much more to gain from their own financial, physical, and imaginative investments in the railway. For England, the Canadian Pacific Railway remained only a railway. For Canadians, it was the means to their individual well-being and prosperity and, as Berton says, the culmination of a national dream. It may be that, as Daniel Francis puts it, "the railway no longer holds the country together in fact, but we suspect that it is one of the things which hold it together in our imaginations" (28). If this is so, then it seems apparent that the conditions for this suspicion were provided at first by the many nineteenth-century passengers aboard the train who took the time to set their experiences down on paper and thus set an example for subsequent Canadian writers--and readers--to follow. These travel narratives succeeded in transforming the railroad from a brute physical and economic fact into an important symbol of nationhood, thereby helping bridge the gap between individualist interests and communitarian ideals. Whether subsequent writers and other genres of Canadian literature would yoke text, technology, and nation as adeptly would remain to be seen.

Chapter Two

Hacking in Ties What Emily Etched in Bone:

The Railway in Canadian Poetry

> Superior to everything is--Art. A book of poetry is preferable to a railway.
>
> --Gustave Flaubert (qtd. in Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*)

> Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance
>
> Everybody thinks it's true.
>
> --Paul Simon, "Train in the Distance"

Despite having built up tremendous cultural momentum in the preceding twenty-odd years, travel narratives devoted to the CPR seemed to lose steam in the early twentieth century. The books were still being produced, and were still documenting the history and development of the country, but they, and the railway itself, were no longer novelties. For one thing, the CPR was not the only train in town anymore. In 1899 the Canadian Northern Railway was formed, and four years later, under the terms of the National Transcontinental Railway Act, the Grand Trunk Railway agreed to participate with the Canadian government in the construction of yet another national rail line. Both companies completed their transcontinental lines in 1915, and the CPR no longer had a monopoly on Canadian transportation--nor on the Canadian imagination. But there was another problem. The train itself, the great symbol

of progress in the nineteenth century, was being challenged by another machine. As early as 1904, the adulation of the locomotive in serials such as *The Canadian Magazine* began to be transferred to the upstart automobile, which promised its future owner a much greater individuality and freedom of movement than the train ever had.[1] The car would go on to revolutionize travel; by the 1950s the Canadian government had already begun working with the provincial governments to construct the Trans-Canada Highway for the country's "increasingly road-bound population" (Desmond Morton 240). As Canadians shifted gears and passed from the steam age into the automobile age, keeping pace with a society that was becoming increasingly urbanized in the 1920s and 30s, there seemed little call for the rambling rail odysseys of the nineteenth century. If the railway was going to continue to frequent the pages of Canadian books as a national symbol, it would be up to poetry, the most developed of Canada's literary arts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to pick up the slack. There was just one difficulty: surprisingly, Canadian poetry, which underwent its own shift from engagement in traditional to modernist versification in roughly the same period, showed little interest in picking up where travel literature had left off and employing the railway as a national symbol. The lyric "I" of Canadian poetry has

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[1] A. Grant Brown's 1904 article "Automobiles in Canada" sums up the advantages of the newfangled car over the suddenly passé train, stealing some of the railway's hyperbolic thunder as it does so:

> The automobile is a roofless street car, needing no overhead wires and no steel rails; it is a luxurious Pullman car which wanders over the country in the pure air instead of in a continual shower of cinders and a continuous cloud of smoke; it is a sanitarium on wheels. It was a luxury yesterday; it will be a necessity tomorrow. (327-28)

Of note here, in addition to Brown's prescience, is his deliberate representation of the train as a blight on the landscape, a notion that, as we shall see, has also coloured poetic renderings of the railway in Canada.

seemed resolutely unwilling, or perhaps just uninterested, in yoking train, text, and nation in the way that travel literature did, and has in turn has done little to articulate the way that the railway facilitates the relationship between individual consciousness and communal identity in this country.

There is good reason to think that poetry should have been up to the task. In addition to sharing travel literature's fondness for landscape description, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canadian poetry exhibited a patriotic impulse not far removed from the nationalist inclinations of its prose relative. There was just one catch: the railway was virtually absent from the landscape and nation that the poetry of the period described. George Bowering is correct in saying that "during the latter years of the nineteenth century, when the heroic steel was joining us coast to coast, or rather coasts to Montreal and Toronto, the poets were not celebrating the event. Their favourite mode of travel seems to have been the birchbark canoe" ("bpNichol" 7). Counterintuitive though it may seem, and despite the fact that they might not have been quite so busy paddling as Bowering suggests, there is scarce evidence in their verse that Canada's poets in this period were very much interested in the railway at all.

This is the case, in part, because Canadian poetry was still absorbed in ideals of god, landscape, and nation. As a genre, poetry was not seen as an appropriate vehicle to describe technical change. That sort of material was best herded into the preserves of non-fiction writing in order to keep poetry safe from its influences. Indeed, the pages of *The Canadian Magazine* are filled with dazzling technical descriptions of mechanical minutiae that nineteenth-century Canadian poetry simply could not treat as art. The

"dated formality and elevated subject matter" that Lecker finds throughout Watson and Pierce's *Our Canadian Literature* anthology ("Watson and Pierce" 57) is symptomatic of Canadian literature's strict adherence to an Arnoldian conception of poetry as the highest form of art, an adherence that explains Roy Daniells's observation that, despite poetry's status as the "supreme art" in Canada between 1880 and 1920, its attention to current events "hardly exist[ed]" (193). Leslie Armour extends Daniells's contention to the present day, when poets have had "a good time of late exploring our inner lives" but have rarely "celebrate[d] our public life" (37).

So although poetry might proclaim the greatness and sanctity of the nation, it did so within certain limits of poetic propriety. Nowhere in their eagerness to "paint the native maple" (F. R. Scott, "Canadian Authors" 23) during the period do such patriotic poems as J. K. Foran's "Canada Our Country" or the various poetic incarnations of "Canada" penned by George W. Armstrong and Katherine A. Clarke, among others, even so much as mention the railway. They were, it seems, too busy sounding the pleasant rhyme of the nationalism of the moment, the "vague resolve that somehow [Canada] will be something" (Binmore 5), to be distracted by an actuality.

One thing that could be counted on to command the poet's attention was the Canadian landscape. Saying that turn-of-the-century Canadian poetry had a fondness for landscape description is a little like saying that sun imagery occasionally turns up in Aztec art. Simply put, Canadian poetry had (some would say still has) a full-blown obsession with landscape, with depicting its minutiae and the mental and spiritual processes of its observer; an obsession, at its best moments, with creating an ideal landscape through which something so baldly real as the train was seldom allowed to

pass. Sir Charles G. D. Roberts's "The Tantramar Revisited" would be a much different poem if a train were suddenly to roar through it and disturb the "present peace of the landscape" (55), shattering the speaker's "darling illusion" (63) that "the hands of chance and change" (64) have not marred his beloved Maritime landscape. Its autumnal seaside setting does not conjure up the images of shepherds tending their flocks in verdant hills that one tends to associate with the pastoral, but this poem's nostalgic preoccupations with time and change in the rural setting--and, moreover, its speaker's urge to idealize this setting ("Only in these green hills, aslant to the sea, no change!" [8])--have clear pastoral resonances. Like the traditional pastoral enclosure, Roberts's rural setting is bounded on one side by a threatening wilderness ("long clay dikes" protect the meadows from "the turbid / Surge and flow of the tides" [17-18]) and on the other by "the road that has climbed from the inland valleys and woodlands" (9) and that leads, presumably, back to the city. This was no place for a train. Trains belonged in cities and travel narratives, not in the pleasant countrysides of poetry.

This opposition between the rural and the urban, and an accompanying opposition between traditional and modern poetic values, lies at the heart of Canadian poetry's treatment of the railway.[2] I suggested in the previous chapter that the railway had to prove itself to be of practical benefit to Canadians before it could be adopted by

[2] D. G. Jones's "Steel Syntax: The Railroad as Symbol in Canadian Poetry" suggests a similar tension, but for him the pastoral's opposite is the "imperial," which I take to mean, in the context of Jones's argument, an attitude toward the acquisition and development of land, as when he argues that Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* comments on "the imperial control of space" (39). Although my use of the opposition between the pastoral and the urban may suggest an affinity with Jones's study of railway poetry, my own model compares attitudes toward the train in these two spaces to show how verse perspectives on the railway have changed over the past 115 years. Research does not bear out Jones's claim, for instance, that "negative symbolism is more typical of Canadian [railway] writing for nearly a century following Lampman" (44), and one reason for this is that "urban" (modern) poetry embraced the railway in a way that "rural" (pastoral/traditional) poetry did not.

them symbolically and that travel narratives, with their realism and their concern for facts and figures, were exemplary bearers of this proof. But in order for the railway to become the proper subject of poetry, whose very essence is symbol and metaphor, something had to give. Either the culture's conception of the train or the poet's Arnoldian conception of his craft, still influenced by "the continuance of the romantic belief that art must be intuitive as well as expressive" and thus unable to see in the machine "a new form of beauty whose defining quality is regularity and the logical fitting of form to function" (Sussman 228), had to change.

As it turned out, both things happened in the twentieth century. With the completion of the transcontinental lines of the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern, the consolidation of these and other lines into the Canadian National Railway Company in 1923, and the amalgamation of some passenger services of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific in 1933, the public conception of the railway was no longer attached specifically to the CPR.[3] As this corporate hold over its identity was loosened, and as it was subtly transformed from a vehicle for nation-building settlers to a vehicle for pleasure-seeking passengers, the railway became personalized, an imaginative property. It also became perfect grist for the poetic mill, particularly so because during this time Canadian poetry was trading in its traditional features for the new language,

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[3] On the other hand, it may well be that the terms "railway" and "Canadian Pacific Railway" have simply become synonymous in the minds of Canadians. A recent television commercial for a set of coins from the Canadian Mint, for instance, boasts that the design on a new quarter depicts "the completion of the railway." There is no need to say "Canadian Pacific Railway," and no doubt that this is the railway Canadians are expected to think about in the context of the advertisement. That the railway does not need to be named specifically in this and other instances points directly to its currency as a Canadian symbol. Indeed, Edward Roper, in his 1891 travel narrative *By Track and Trail*, writes that he "need not explain that 'track' means the railroad in the west, and, from where I then was [the prairies], right away through to the Pacific, 'the track' means the C. P. R., the one line of railway, the one road, the one only way for men to communicate with each other" (100).

rhythms, and imagery of modernism. Anxious to preserve their romantic pastoral enclosures, Canadian poets of the previous generation regarded the railway as a threat to a way of life and a way of poetry. The train was a sure sign not only of progress, but also of the dread, implacable enemy of the pastoral idyll: time. Modern poets, on the other hand, embraced the railway as they would any other fit object of art, investing it with all the significance and employing it as artfully as a register of human consciousness and emotion as their precursors did the landscape.

This is not to say that all modernist poets wrote approvingly of the railway, nor that they necessarily eschewed the pastoral impulse in their work. But the generally stable oppositions between rural and urban, simplicity and complexity, timelessness and history, "naturalness" and artifice, and nature and technology correspond so perfectly to the oppositions between traditional and modern poetic interests--and, more pointedly, to the differences between their approaches to the railway--that it is impossible to ignore them.

It is also impossible to ignore the fact that, unlike the travel narratives of the nineteenth century, Canadian poetry of all stripes has played almost no deliberate role in engendering the railway as a national symbol in the mind of the Canadian public. Whereas the writerly "I" of the travel literature constructed a narrative of national discovery that could, at least for a time, pre-empt his or her narrative of self-discovery, the lyric "I" of both the pastoral and modernist poetic modes shows few signs of such ability or interest. In the case of the pastoralist (for whom the speaker of Roberts's "Tantramar Revisted," musing alone above his former home and never descending to revisit the community that lives there, is a model), the train is doubly dangerous

because it threatens to disrupt the pastoral idyll both through its presence and its ability to connect that speaker's solitary space to an inhabited, and probably urban, setting. This is why the railway so rarely appears in these poems, and thus cannot serve as a metaphor either for the nation or the individual's relation to it. In the case of the modernist, the railway is suddenly and emphatically present but is again held back from its possible nationalist associations in poems whose speakers ride the train or simply imagine it in order to explore their individual consciousnesses.

In both cases, the poetic response to the railway--whether it be the pastoralist disavowal of it or the modernist embrace of it--is so completely personalized, so perfectly individualized, that thoughts of a larger, national community get left behind. What I mean by this is that Canadian poetry, at least insofar as it treats the railway, manifests one half of Mathews's dialectic, albeit wrested from the financial context with which Mathews is preoccupied; the individualism of Canadian poetry is imaginative rather than materialistic, but stands no less in opposition to a communitarian model than does the individualist whom Mathews describes "compet[ing] against all others" to attain wealth" (5). It is true that some of our railway poems do address questions of nation, but these are surprisingly few and they appear to do so no more than their American and European cousins.[4] What Canadian railway poetry *does* do is highlight

[4] As a survey of the poems and songs collected in Robert Hedin's *The Great Machines*, Kenneth Hopkins's *The Poetry or Railways*, and Norm and David Cohen's mammoth study *Long Steel Rail* reveals, there is little in terms of content, tone, or attitude that separates Canadian railway poetry from its British and American counterparts. The same attention to the railway's impact on landscape, narratives of rail disaster, station scenes, the train's symbolic resonances, and so on can be found in Canadian, British, and American railway poetry; even Slavic railway verse demonstrates similar preoccupations to these and other nations' railway poetries (see Flaker). Canadian railway poetry is not, as A. J. M. Smith might have feared, merely imitative, but instead shows "that Canada could take her place in the main stream of American and English culture" (Smith, "Nationalism" 41). The presence (or early absence) of the railway in Canadian poetry is surprising only because we might

the tensions between rural and urban perspectives on nature, technology, and history and reveal the development of Canadian poetic attitudes within a highly circumscribed field of interest, a field in which the sound of the train can be both beautiful and threatening. What it reveals, ultimately, is not a nation, but a national literary tradition whose response to the machine is caught between pastoral influences and modern poetic practices that themselves embody competing visions of the nation.

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Before charting the course of my argument through specific references to and readings of Canadian railway poetry, I want to give some sense of the lay of the land, to account for the distinguishing features of railway poetry and the poets who have written it. So what is Canadian railway poetry? For my purposes, it is poetry whose primary thematic interest is, or is informed by, the railway. This includes verse that examines the railway's various structures (tracks, stations, engines, cars, etc.), contemplates its physical and psychic effects on Canada and its people, describes the landscape as seen from its cars or near its structures, studies the minds and attitudes of its passengers and workers, or employs it as a central metaphorical or imagistic device. This does not include poems whose interest in the railway is subordinate to other concerns. Although the railway plays an important role in Archibald Lampman's long poem *The Story of an Affinity*, for instance, it is not the focal point of that poem in quite the same way it is in Lampman's "The Railway Station." It is the latter of these two that will receive attention here.

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expect, given the privileged place the railway holds in our national mythology, that our poetry would do more to reflect and engender this national symbol. For further discussion of the railway's impact on other national literatures see Ceserani; McDougall; and Sealts, Jr.

As for the "Canadian" character of Canadian railway poetry, I take this to mean, in practical terms, poetry written by Canadian poets and (because of the difficulty of hunting down the citizenship of many of the more modestly accomplished poets here) poetry published in Canadian periodicals or by Canadian publishers. The United States and Canada might lay equal claim to Cy Warman (who was born in Illinois, worked as a journalist in Colorado and a locomotive engineer on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, and published poetry and prose on the American and Canadian railway experience), but when he publishes a railway poem in *The Canadian Magazine* he is publishing a Canadian railway poem. In terms of content, there is little use searching for an "identifiably Canadian" railway or landscape in much of this poetry. Few poets care to name the trains and railways they describe, and could as easily be Amtrak passengers as VIA Rail passengers. Furthermore, as anyone who has taken the VIA Rail trip from Montreal to Fredericton through the US knows, winter snow looks pretty much the same on both sides of the border. That being said, Canadian poems that address foreign railways and landscapes specifically--poems such as Raymond Souster's "The Train Past Auschwitz," Fred Cogswell's "In a British Railway Compartment," and Margaret Atwood's "(Train Ride, Vienna-Bonn)," to name a few--will not be considered here.

As far as the poets themselves go, Warman would be the closest thing we have to a bona fide Canadian railway poet were it not for the fact that he is not particularly Canadian, even if some of his poems are. However, plenty of our poets have at least tried their hand at a railway poem or two, and a list of those who have done so reads like a "Who's Who" and a "Who's That?" of Canadian poetry. Margaret Avison, Earle Birney, Erin Mouré, P. K. Page, and Al Purdy have all published multiple railway

poems, as have many more poets whose place in Canada's literary pantheon is less secure. Railway poems appear in books from Canada's biggest and smallest publishers and in periodicals ranging from *Contemporary Verse* to the *Valley Viewer*, the community newspaper of New Brunswick's Kennebecasis Valley. That so many and diverse poets have taken the railway as their subject, or employed it as a central image or metaphor, indicates its broad appeal. But it also suggests that railway poetry may be treated as a genre in a way that, say, bus poetry, which is nowhere near as common in Canada's literary record, may not. In other words, if one reason for the abundance of Canadian railway poetry, particularly in the last two-thirds of the twentieth century, is the sheer physical impressiveness of the train itself, or perhaps a lingering sentimentality for the railway's (by today's standards) simple technology and its link to national origins, then another reason may be the influence of "high brow" railway poetry (by Whitman, Wordsworth, and D. H. Lawrence, among others) and "low brow" folk songs and tales, particularly of the American railroad. From these traditions have emerged conventions for writing about the railway, conventions that Canadians poets consistently follow and respond to in their verse and that suggest that the community to which our country's railway poetry belongs is not simply national, but cosmopolitan.

There are, roughly speaking, four types of Canadian railway poetry: narrative poems, railroader's poems, station poems, and passenger poems.[5] The first of these, narrative poems, enjoyed a minor vogue around the turn of the century and includes

[5] The section headings from Kenneth Hopkins's anthology *The Poetry of Railways* will suggest how little difference there is between one nation's railway poetry and another's: "Rolling Stock"; "Mainly Railwaymen"; "Stations--Arrivals and Departures"; "Travellers and Commuters"; "Trainscapes and Journeys." His method of categorization--and my own--also reveals that however convenient this

occasional verse such as J. K. Foran's "The Aylmer Five Hundred" (which parodies Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" to tell of the first CPR train from Aylmer, Quebec to Montreal) and humourous passengers' tales such as Harry Amoss's "Parlour Car Pete" but is comprised mainly of short poems that tell the story of a rail tragedy or near disaster in order to demonstrate the great responsibility and heroism of train engineers, brakesmen, and so forth; Agnes Maule Machar's "Joe Birse, the Engineer" and Ray Palmer Baker's "Sarnia Tunnel" are examples of this type of poem.

This group of poems overlaps with the second type, railroader's poems, which strive to depict both the dignity of railway workers (most effectively, perhaps, in Erin Mouré's "What the Station Agent Never Says," which tries to fill the gaps in Tom Wayman's portrait of a "decorously, constantly and outrageously drunk" retired railwayman in "The Station Agent" [43]) and the community and continuity engendered by them. Edna Jaques's "An Old Woman Cleaning a Station" and "Station in the Mountains" depict people who have a great sense that their service in maintaining isolated stations helps to sustain the railway's national enterprise. Rail lines becomes lines of generational continuity, rooted in male labour, in poems such as Nadine McInnes's "Line-men" and Mark Henderson's "The Last Spike," whose nostalgia, so strong in so much of Canadian railway poetry in general, is also present in Allan Graham's "The Retired Railwayman," Robert Service's "Old Engine Driver," and the poems collected in the two slim volumes of Michael Gee's self-published *An Anthology of Steam Railroad Poetry*, which were written by retired railway workers. Each of these poems insists on the centrality of the railway experience to our national culture by

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naming of types might seem for organizational purposes, it really is powerless to account fully for the

rendering it familiar and immediate in the figure of people who have lived and worked among us. In the case of the Jaques poems in particular (which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter), some of these poems do try, like the travel narratives, to show how individual labour relates to the national community. Such poems furnish rare examples of the ability of the lyric "I" to see beyond its own borders to the spaces and people that exist beyond them.

The third type of railway poem contemplates train stations and the people and scenes that are commonly found in them. Perhaps the most famous Canadian railway poem, Lampman's "The Railway Station," defies the cult of technology described in my opening chapter in its description of the station as an assault on its speaker's consciousness: "[...] ever on my blinded brain / The flare of lights, the rush, and cry, and strain, / The engines' scream, the hiss and thunder smite" (2-4).[6] Lampman's study of his object here--the station scene--leads to considerations of the lives and minds of the people in it, but even these seem merely to be projections of his speaker's emotional state: "What threads of life, what hidden histories, / What sweet or passionate dreams and dark distresses, / What unknown thoughts, what various agonies!" (12-14). Ninety years later, Winifred N. Hubert depicts a similar scene in "VIA Ottawa Station," but with none of the grim imagery of Lampman's poem. Hubert's senses are stimulated,

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way many railway poems resist rigid classification.

[6] Lampman's scene is not far removed from a hell of the sort that Ian Duff says dominates in British railway literature: "The demonic and death connotations, the 'appalling rush and tremble' of the train explicit in nineteenth-century, internalized in twentieth-century writing, provide the overwhelming element in the metaphorical use of the railway, balanced by only a small number of self-justifying or machine-glorifying descriptive pieces" (463). These connotations are by no means as prevalent in Canadian poetry, particularly as it shows itself more able to accommodate the railway in its speakers' psyches in the twentieth century.

rather than assaulted, by the sight of "Luggage laden humanity" and the sound of the "sunlit ripple" of a laugh (1, 7).

This difference between these poems can be attributed in part to the difference between nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetic responses to the railway, but it is also rooted in the conventions of the genre. Hubert's is a poem about being greeted by friends and family at the station, and its imagery is appropriate to its expression of joy at this prospect; Lampman's poem admits that the station is also the site of severance and departure. The hellish imagery of "The Railway Station" is not common in twentieth-century poems, but the poem's depiction of alienation is echoed in the sadness of parting lovers and travellers in Patrick Anderson's "Railway Station," David Blaikie's "Departure," and Lewis Horne's "After Putting My 14-Year-Old Daughter on the Train to Toronto," among others. The railway station is an important setting in Canadian poetry: it is where immigrants begin their journey across the country (in Isabel Ecclestone Mackay's "Calgary Station"), women pause for a moment of self-examination before taking flight (in Atwood's "Evening Trainstation before Departure"), and the rest of us observe the comings and goings of complete strangers (in Alden Nowlan's "Railway Waiting Room, Truro, Nova Scotia"). Often, though, it is a space whose potential as a symbol of community is radically undercut by reminders that the people who meet here never really meet at all, but remain strangers whose fleeting contact few of them will ever even acknowledge.

The crux of the Canadian railway experience, however, takes place aboard the train, and our poetry reflects this. In the fourth type of railway poem, the passenger poem, the speaker adopts the perspective of a rail traveler. As with the station poem,

the passenger poem appears in a couple of distinct forms. Some, like Lilian S. Auty's "Travellers" and Irving Layton's "Excursion," concentrate on the train's interior and the movements and expressions of its occupants. There is little in these poems that is reminiscent of the sense of community apparent in the earlier travel narratives; Auty calls the train the place where "strangers touch without meeting" (3). In fact, a portrait of the traveler in contemplative isolation--Paulette Jiles's "Waterloo Express" is a good example--is just as likely. Like the pastoral "I" (who, incidentally, is quite unlikely ever to board a train in the first place), the train-riding "I" prefers to stand (or sit) apart, to be alone with his or her thoughts even when surrounded by a car full of passengers. Where a community is suggested, as in Elizabeth Brewster's "Coach Class," it is likely to be a pretty shabby one, where "unconscious inhabitants" are seduced by their own reflections in windows and begin to "see themselves as brave and seasoned travellers, / Adventurers in strange lands" (21, 23-24).[7]

When they are not looking at themselves or each other, this poetry's train passengers can be counted on to stare out their windows at the passing landscape, often noting how rail passage transforms the landscape by imparting motion to its observer. Douglas Lochhead's "Poems in a Train--Newfoundland" describes how "the shifting land / of this place envelops / and flashes by at the window" (52-54) and the passengers of Ron Fairley's "Prairie Sunset" turn from their conversations "To find a scene all changed, as by a shock, / From grassed and wheaten smoothness / To miles on miles of heavy light and shade in strong commotion" (8-10). The motion of the train, rocking its

[7] As its title suggests, Brewster's poem employs the train as a metaphor for class stratification. Seymour Mayne's "Passengers" and bill bissett's "The Canadian," which I discuss later, perform a similar maneuver.

passengers to sleep as "The countryside speeds and blends / into a solid memory" (Bruce Meyer, "Train Rides" 12-13), is one of the railway's most frequently romanticized aspects, seeming to lull poets in its warm and familiar embrace. This effect is perhaps a function of the nostalgia which colours much of Canadian railway poetry. S. Blumenthal's "Recollections of a Country Railway Station" and Elizabeth Gourlay's "Plea," for example, express nostalgia for the train and the railway as they once were, and Don Gutteridge's "Canatara" and Florence Randal Livesay's "'Amaranth Station!'" use the railway as a touchstone for nostalgia for one's childhood or hometown. This perspective is countered in poems such as Andrew Steeves's "A Slow Train" and Julie Beckett's "The Train," which dissent from this governing nostalgia by pointing out that the train is breathtakingly slow: "Whoever speaks of speed and trains / in the same sentence has never taken / the milk-run from Montreal to Moncton" (Steeves 1-3). This tension between romantic and realistic perspectives (the latter of which are more common in Canadian fiction) is a symptom of the broader tension between traditional (pastoral) and modern (urban) responses to the train and the landscape through which it moves.[8]

This tension is revealed in poems which exhibit the characteristics of the four types of railway poems outlined above but complicate them through abstract and imagistic poetic technique. There are moments, as in Ralph Gustafson's "Railroad Crossing" or E. J. Pratt's "The 6000," when Canadian poets describe the train in

[8] These perspectives are bred, Schivelbusch suggests, by changing social conceptions of space and time. Because "a society's space-time perceptions are a function of its social rhythm and its territory" (36), it is not surprising that nineteenth-century travelers who barrelled through unfamiliar mountain territory on the train would find its speed terrifying but that modern travelers such as Steeves, who are

concrete terms; Gustafson describes freight cars "Chalk-red streaked by the falling / Snow" waiting "where the trestle is, / Stuck with a green truck on the crossing" (3-4, 6-7) and Pratt is unmatched for his use of the language of the machine:

> For every vital inch of steel,
>
> A vibrant indicator read
>
> Two hundred pounds plus twenty-five,
>
> Waiting for the hour to drive
>
> Their energy upon the wheel
>
> In punches from the piston head. (58-63)

But these moments are few. Pratt, for instance, spends much of his poem mythologizing the train by bragging that its power would have overwhelmed the sensibilities of the gods. Had it existed in ancient times, the train would have "battered down the Martian walls, / Reduced to dust Jove's arsenals, / Or rammed the battlements of Thor" (21-23). The appeal to realistic description--technical or otherwise--is brief. More often than not, the train is treated in the abstract, either in the service of a metaphor (for war in Bob Vance's "There is a Train Called War," for womanhood in Theresa Shea's "Why Trains are Always Female," for the fleeting significance of human existence in Louis Dudek's "A Circle Tour of the Rockies") or the creation of a single image or set of images: Dudek's "Midnight Train" hurtles through a landscape that "Fall[s] pell-mell in a torrent past my eyes / like gigantic dream-fragments" (1-2) and James Reaney's "Night Train" "trails a stream / Of light brown hair / Until the curls come out finally / Into a fine tea-colored mist" (12-15). Armed with the new rhythms and vocabulary of

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accustomed to different modes of transport and the quickening pace of twentieth-century life, should

modernist verse, and a new attitude toward the railway, Canadian poets were by the 1940s incorporating the train into their own examinations of self and surroundings, so that the train's windows became what bpNichol calls on page 15 of *Continental Trance* "discrete frames in / a continuous flow," frames through which poets could see and construct a new, remarkably aestheticized, Canadian landscape and in which the lyric "I" could examine and reconstruct itself.[9]

* * *

Of course, this landscape had already been aestheticized long before the modernists laid artistic claim to it, dating back (in print at least) as far as Frances Brooke's 1769 novel *The History of Emily Montague* and the exploration narratives of Samuel Hearne and David Thompson. In the years immediately surrounding the completion of the CPR in 1885, it was being aestheticized in a very particular way. In his recent book, *Land Sliding*, W.H. New argues that the "language of *land*--the terms garden, valley, island, mountain, to mention some of the most obvious nouns--cannot [. . .] be construed simply as references to physical phenomena. [This language] constitutes, at the same time, an ongoing history of a culture's relations with place and space" (8). He goes on to say that the Confederation Poets, who wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, signaled a pivotal moment in that history by insisting that the landscape be "in some measure [. . .] perceived as *home*," thereby dispelling "the trope of the evil, godless, savage, grotesque, barren land" (96). Andrew

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find the train to be slow.

[9] Schivelbusch contends that by "display[ing] in immediate succession objects and pieces of scenery that in their original spatiality belonged in separate realms," the train compels its passenger to begin to see panoramically and thus to change his or her relation to landscape so that "evanescent reality

V. Ettin says that this feeling of being "at home" is "the dominant impression of the pastoral environment" (135), and it is clear that the home that Canadian poets of the period fashioned for themselves was a pastoral enclosure, one in which they could gaze contentedly upon peaceful rural scenery and, in some cases, achieve the "spiritual completion, usually beyond social or institutional endowments, perhaps beyond even time and change," that Harold Toliver says is typical of pastoralists still held under the sway of a romantic mindset (210).[10]

As much as the impulse to transform Canada's countryside into a rich pastoral landscape in verse might have been bred of an anxiety of influence, a desire to show that Canadian poets "could reflect the varying aspects of nineteenth century romanticism as sensitively and vividly as most of the poets who were writing in England in the [eighteen-]nineties" (Smith, "Nationalism and Canadian Poetry" 41), it was also an expression, familiar from the travel literature of the period, of the individualist's will to tame and thus possess the land. In leafing through hundreds of books of Canadian poetry published between 1885 and 1925 I found plenty of evidence of this yearning for an idealized union with nature--of what Munro Beattie has complained is Canadian poetry's habit of "peer[ing] into flowers, report[ing] on the flitting of birds, discern[ing]

[becomes] the new reality" (60, 64)--a circumstance would not have been attractive to the pastoral consciousness.

[10] As my earlier references to Roberts's "Tantramar Revisited" suggest, I am employing an inclusive definition of the pastoral here, one that does not follow Paul Alpers's dictum that "we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote to be herdsmen and their lives rather than landscape or idealized nature" (22). I prefer to follow the examples of Toliver, who is willing to "extend[] the principles of the old shepherd poem freely to literature that abandons many of its conventions while illustrating its themes and attitudes" (vii), and Ettin, who argues that adhering to an overly restrictive definition of the pastoral limits our appreciation of its influence on literature (2) and points out that "more modal than generic examples of the pastoral occur in literature of the last two centuries" (69). I am using the term "pastoral" here not just as shorthand for a rural setting, but to

mystic voices in the wind, [and describing] elves among the poplars" (724)--and little evidence at all of poetic interest in how the railway might connect the individual and this idealized space with a larger community.

Take, for instance, "A Night In June," by the Khan (Robert Kirkland Kernighan). Although he did write poetry of pioneering and national development (e.g. "Manitoba," "The Pioneer's Anthem," and "The Empty Spaces"), and included in this verse some references to the machine ("the joyous whirr / Of [the] driving-wheel and roaring cylinder" of the binders in "Manitoba" [18-19]), when he devoted himself to poetic, rather than agricultural, cultivation of the land the result was rather different. The noisome industry of "Manitoba" is replaced with the harmony of the countryside in "A Night in June," with its whippoorwill's "ventriloquial song" (2), the cock crane's "sonorous gong" (4), and the refrain of the setting's other bird and animal musicians, who "Croon, ejaculate, whisper, / Whisper, ejaculate, croon" throughout the poem. The only human sounds heard amid this natural orchestra are the hushed tones of two lovers who meet under a tree. There is no sense of dissonance here, of the human presence interrupting this performance. Instead, human and natural sounds blend seamlessly here on an idealized summer's evening.

A similar musicality colours Lampman's "Across the Pea-Fields," in which the entire landscape seems actually to "hum" (1). The speaker's dreamlike contemplation of the "grey-green sun-drenched mists of blossoming peas" does not blind him completely to the fact that the city, "murmurous with mills," lies just beyond the pea-fields' boundary (2, 6), an ever-present threat to the sanctity of this pastoral enclosure.

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encapsulate certain attitudes toward that setting--and toward time, history, technology, and the nation--

Lampman's speaker sounds a lot like Nathaniel Hawthorne's notebook-keeper, as described by Leo Marx: a man who has set out alone to seek sanctuary in nature, where he can experience "a state of being in which there is no tension either within the self or between the self and its environment" (13). W. L. Morton calls such verse the "art of the baseland" (of which he finds Lampman to be the exemplary practitioner), as opposed to the "art of the hinterland" (demonstrated in works by Lawren Harris and Emily Carr) (109). The title of Lampman's poem suggests movement, but it is clear that his speaker has no wish other than to stay where he is, to "lean and listen, lolling drowsily" and resisting the threatened incursion of the sounds of the city into his pastoral surroundings and sensibility (10). When he mentions his proximity to "blackening rails" (9), he is speaking of fence rails rather than train rails, rails that bound the landscape rather than enable transgressions between rural and urban worlds. Although these fence rails can protect neither this idyllic setting nor the solitude of its speaker completely--the sounds of the city are a reminder that even though the pastoral enclosure "is a spot for containment, that containment signifies an awareness of the menacing power outside" (Ettin 12)--Lampman, Canada's emblematic pastoralist, does all he can to create a natural preserve in his poetry and he is insistent on contrasting his peaceful dream of nature with the noisy reality of the city.

Douglas Jones points out that it is "the song of the white-throat registered on silence, note by note, not the clamour of the Grand Trunk or the Irondale, Bancroft, and Ottawa Railway, that inspires Lampman's best poems" ("Steel Syntax" 42). It is in his poem "The City," after all, that Lampman's speaker is subjected to "the roar of

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that will become clear as I proceed.

trains" and not just the distant sounds of urban life (24). Lampman confines the train to the city in order to protect both the pastoral enclosure and the speaker's mental and spiritual state while he is in it, and in doing so the poet helps to demonstrate the divide that exists between rural and urban, and traditional and modern, attitudes toward the railway.

The trouble for the traditional pastoralist was that the train could not just be wished away. It could not be relegated to the city or kept outside the observer's psychological boundary, neither in poetry nor in real life. It thrust itself mercilessly into the pastoral consciousness. Lampman's "At the Ferry" depicts much the same scorched landscape as his most famous poem, "Heat," but in an importantly different way. The landscape of "Heat" might be "droughty" (34), but its heat is as revitalizing as water might be. The "hills are drenched with light" (40) and the speaker is suffused with the spirit that the heat embodies: "[. . .] I think some blessed power / Hath brought me wandering idly here: / In the full furnace of this hour / My thoughts grow clean and clear" (45-48). The numerous images of confinement (the "heat-held land" [16]; the space "close beneath / The cool gloom of the bridge" [23-24]; the "sloped shadow of [his] hat" [43]; and the "full furnace of this hour" [47]) reflect Lampman's desire to create an enclosure in which his speaker can sit and commune not with his fellow citizens, but with nature's "blessed power," remaining still while the "idly clacking wheels" of a hay cart (8) are "the sole thing that seem[] to move / In all the heat-held land" (15-16). There is no sense of a nation here, or of a community, or really of any other human being at all, save the wagoner who is, tellingly, kept at a distance, "Half-hidden in the windless blur / Of white dust puffing to his knees" (11-12).

In contrast, "At the Ferry," which conveniently follows "Heat" in Lampman's *Lyrics of Earth*, is pandemonium. The heat here offers no sustenance. The "shrunken stream / Spends its last water and runs dry" (1-2) and "the parched sod / Yields to the crushing foot like salt" (7-8). The simple hay cart is replaced by a mechanized behemoth:

> At moments from the distant glare
>
> The murmur of a railway steals,
>
> Round yonder jutting point the air
>
> Is beaten with the puff of wheels;
>
> And here at hand an open mill,
>
> Strong clamour at perpetual drive,
>
> With changing chant, now hoarse, now shrill
>
> Keeps dinning like a mighty hive. (41-48)

This is a far cry from the landscape's hum in "Across the Pea-Fields" and the thrush's "leisurely" tune in "Heat." The assault on the observer's senses is also an assault on his imagination and his sense of himself as a private, self-contained individual who is free to dream in the pastoral landscape. The speaker of "At the Ferry" must labour to escape back into the peaceful solitude of "Heat":

> Beyond the tumult of the mills,
>
> And all the city's sound and strife,
>
> Beyond the waste, beyond the hills,
>
> I look far out and dream of life. ("At the Ferry" 85-88)

Lampman's Confederation confrère, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, writes of a similar spiritual disruption in "The Train among the Hills." The dead quiet of this poem's first four lines is interrupted by a slow crescendo, "till suddenly, with sweep / and shattering thunder of resistless light / And crash of routed echoes, roars to view, / Down the long mountain gorge the Night Express" (7-10). So much for the "Inviolate" "solemn valleys" of the poem's third line. The train, which Roberts calls "The dread form" (12), is a metaphor for death here, of how we are all "To goals unseen from God's hand onward hurled" (14). But it is also a symbol of progress without knowledge of one's destination, which is precisely the threat to rural values that machine technology might pose. The response to the train in these two poems is identical to what Marx finds in American literature after the mid-nineteenth century: "The sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image. It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to that myth" (229). In other words, the pastoral sensibility does not deal well with change, in large part because change is a reminder that the self is mutable and cannot remain hermetically sealed within a pastoral environment.

It was not only a sensibility, though, that the railway changed. The train altered Canada, perceptions of Canada, and, inevitably, the status of the pastoral "I" in relation to its changed surroundings. For some poets the practical benefits of the train could not outweigh its detrimental effects on the Canadian landscape. It is not entirely surprising that Canadian poetry was slow to embrace the railway, especially given that the literary response to the machine in Victorian England was a resounding ambivalence: "The

machine is both the unwearied iron servant and the sacrificial god to whom mankind has offered its soul" (Sussman 7). In his foreword to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey*, Alan Trachtenberg agrees with Sussman's assessment, commenting that while the railway was unrivaled as a "vivid and dramatic [. . .] sign of modernity" in the nineteenth century, it was also "never free of some note of menace, some undercurrent of fear" rooted in the "displacement of familiar nature by a fire-snorting machine with its own source of power" (xiii). Remo Ceserani, in his study of the impact of the train on the literary imagination in Europe, argues that this ambivalence is figured in a split between the interests of poets and society; he finds

> a substantial and persistent cultural tradition represented by the locomotive, the straight lines of the railroads, the tunnels, the bridges, and the smoking stations as an unfriendly and threatening creation, which brought to the new social landscape an element of unsettlement, forced acceleration, and derangement in the external and internal life of man. This view, that was widespread among philosophers and men of letters, was in explicit contrast to the more positive and progressive ideologies that were dominant among the ruling classes, and new industrial bourgeoisie, that emerged in Europe and America during the nineteenth century. (128-29)

The idea of this iron god getting in the way of the pastoral observer's Protestant "individualization of the relation to God, the compulsion to be able--individually--to manifest salvation" through interaction with the landscape (W. L. Morton 88), did not sit well with nineteenth-century Canadian poets. On one hand, as in the travel

narratives, the railway was a perfect symbol of progress; on the other, it was also, with its thick iron body billowing acrid black smoke, a perfect symbol of death and even the devil.[11] For every Mrs. J. C. Yule, who wrote of the train in 1881 not just as a sign of progress but as an actual vehicle of it, "Sweep[ing] proudly on in his exultant course, / bearing in his impetuous flight along, / the freighted car with all its living throng" ("Canada" 64-66), there were a dozen budding Canadian Wordsworths who would have joined in wondering whether there was "no nook of [...] ground secure / From rash assault" by the railway (1-2).

The meditation on "ruthless change" (6) that Wordsworth undertakes in "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway" becomes, in the hands of Canadian poets with a strong conservationist bent, a full-blown accusation that the train has disfigured the face of nature. Traditional pastoralists such as Lampman and Roberts were not the only ones leveling this accusation. Earle Birney's 1945 poem "Transcontinental," which implicates the railway in the destruction of landscape through its title and in the figure of the rail passenger who is oblivious to "this great green girl grown sick / with man" (5-6), has its roots in earlier indictments of progress. Wilson MacDonald's "A Song to Canada" and Clive Phillipps-Wolley's "A Contrast," neither of them railway poems *per se*, lament the pillaging of the land for natural resources generally, but each does take a moment to include the railway in its charges. MacDonald finds the "span of steel" little more than a token of the nation's greed (51)

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[11] See Duff, "Appalling Rush and Tremble." In his introduction to *The Great Machines*, Hedin comments on the "surprising" number of American railroad poems that "equate the railroad with death" (xvii). But such images of "the engine as an inflamed and smoking monster" and "the train that unwinds like a serpent or ejects fire and smoke like a dragon" (Ceserani 129) are actually quite rare in Canadian poetry, perhaps owing to the pastoralists' attempt to ignore the train altogether.

and Phillipps-Wolley compares the Vancouver of 1787 ("A world as its Maker made it --unpeopled, unspoiled, alone" [12]) to the Vancouver of 1887 ("The voice of Nature silenced [by . . .] / [. . .] / The scream of the locomotive, the voices and homes of men" [22-24]). Corporate disruption of the landscape through rail technology had profound implications for the pastoral observer. If the landscape that the pastoral "I" identifies with is altered, then the "I" is altered too. So the train might indeed be a valuable communications technology, connecting Canada's east and west coasts through all the rural and urban spaces in between in order to create a national community, but it still threatened the individual who had dared to believe that he could remain alone and untouched, his identity preserved in a pastoral enclosure of his own mind's making. Perhaps progress was not all that those travel narratives had chalked it up to be.

This is certainly the point of Birney's poem. In it, the real villain is industry itself, which has left Mother Earth with "ankles rashed with stubble / belly papulous with stumps" (8-9) and is responsible for "the scars across her breasts / the scum of tugs upon her lakeblue eyes / the clogging logs within her blood" (12-14). The railway is not the sole culprit of this defacement, but in the parasitic train passengers, who sit "like clever nits / in a plush caterpillar" (2-3), Birney finds the perfect image for a culture that scarcely regards the land from which it picks what it needs, leaving the earth's skin "creased with our coming and going" (17).

Mary Ainslie's "Northern Rail," on the other hand, is not content simply to use the railway as a symbol of industry. The first stanza of her poem depicts the land as it was and might still be were it not for the railway:

Here were two hills, and a valley green;

A placid pond might still have been

Had we not dug a ditch that went

Around one hill, and to the river lent

What moisture might have fed these trees

And greened the grass upon these leas. (1-6)

In the poem's second half the land becomes feminine, as it is in Birney's poem. But whereas Birney's train simply alters landscape, Ainslie's train despoils it, as her poem's sexual imagery suggests:

These two hills we have enlaced

By rails into a strange embrace;

[. . . . . .]

The thunder of a distant sound

Come[s] tumbling through this tunnelled mound. (15-16, 25-26)

It is not necessary to have a particularly Freudian outlook on life to see that Ainslie is taking advantage of the train's phallic form in these lines in order to depict a figurative rape of the land by rail industry. As in the American pastoral archetype that Annette Kolodny describes in *The Lay of the Land*, this feminine and (potentially) maternal landscape "fall[s] helpless victim to masculine activity" (24).[12] This imagery can also be traced to English poetry's ambivalence about the railway, a strain of thought and feeling that could at one turn praise the railway's achievement and at the other express

[12] Kolodny's *Lay of the Land* argues that a feminized landscape has been part and parcel of the ideal of American pastoral, which has always relied on the idea of "harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine--that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification--enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (4).

"strong feeling against [it] aesthetically for [its] supposed spoliation of the landscape" (10). With its workers digging ditches that drain water from the greenery and treating lilies as weeds which "from their hands they dangled, dead," the railway robs Mother Nature of her fertility (Ainslie 14). Production replaces reproduction. The railway, seemingly self-generating, makes its "gigantic high / Of power" felt throughout the landscape (18-19). The pastoral enclosure is split wide open, and with it the pastoral self, which is subjected to a sort of psychic rape in the mind of the observing "I" who identifies with the landscape.

Sustaining the image of an inviolable rural haven had been hard enough for the classical pastoralists, and was harder still for poets living in the heart of the machine age, particularly when the pastoral's agent of destruction had likely set up shop in the very locale they so lovingly described in their verse. The tracks and trains that cut through the poet's countryside were aggressive signs of the incursion of technology, modernity, and urban values into traditional rural landscapes and the presumably inviolable subjectivity of the pastoral "I"; however, the railway station, though more benign in appearance, also violated the pastoral enclosure. As much as the buildings themselves, their unavoidable associations with transience and departure from the pastoral space cast a long shadow over what were supposed to have been eternally bright Elysian fields. The pastoral ideal is grounded in space, but it is also grounded in time. It is, as Ettin says, based on faith in "a haven from the hazard of public places and the flow of ordinary time" (11). Unfortunately, departure from this haven is inevitable and the "critical moments of romantic pastoral are often those in which the poet discovers the cost and difficulty that his concept of paradise exacts and the loss of

specific, temporal content in the vision itself" (Toliver 218). In other words, as tempting as it might be to live in the state of perpetual bliss depicted on Keats's Grecian urn, living alone outside history only leaves one in a state of perpetual arrested development.

Yet the railway station, with its timetables and waiting trains, is threatening because it mandates the terms of departure and issues unnecessarily incessant reminders that time's passage puts an end to all things. The station was a manifestation of the way that "[p]erceptions of time and space changed dramatically between the 1840s and 1940s," in which time "there emerged a single standard of public time" whose "precise measurement became inescapable" and which bred, in turn a privatized public conception of time as a "social construction" which could affect the individual personally and profoundly (Gerald Friesen 139). Well into the twentieth century, Raymond Souster captures this theme perfectly in his poem "Leaving Montreal":

> There is something very evil
> about trains and stations,
> each clock has the look
> of an arch-conspirator. (9-12)

"Nathaniel A. Benson's "Station Platform" (1939) depicts two lovers who are doubly enclosed--first in a pastoral setting and then in one another's eyes:

> We stood alone in sunlight,
> Green fields and summer skies;
> For these and wind-blown buttercups
> We had no eyes. (1-4)

But then along comes the train to ruin everything:

[S]wiftly from the north roared down
The thundering train.

We stood alone as lovers,
Happy to all beholders,
And the bloody weight of this damned life
Hung on our shoulders. (9-12)

The illusion of permanence and the ability to close oneself off from a wider world, so fundamental to the pastoral, are completely dispelled by the sound of the train.

Railway stations just do not seem to belong in Canadian poetry's countryside, which is one reason why they are so often portrayed as embodiments of urban hustle and bustle, regardless of their location. The station's commotion gives rise, ironically, to a sense of isolation and alienation, a perversion of the willful solitude that the pastoral "I" flees such populated places to embrace. Nowhere in Canadian poetry is this sense of estrangement amidst the station's seething throng evoked more pointedly that in Lampman's "The Railway Station," which Jones notes is the focal point of Lampman's critique of the features of the urban world: "noise and commotion, aggression and alienation" ("Steel Syntax" 41). Lampman's speaker is deeply affected by the station scene--"the rush, and cry, and strain," "the hurrying crowds, the clasp, the flight," (3, 4). The station in his poem is a foreign land, and it compels Lampman to employ poetic diction that is foreign to most of his poetry. The peaceful repose of his pastoral verse does not often require him to use words like "scream" (4), "smite" (4),

"pain" (6), and "mournful" (10). This linguistic alienation from the diction of his nature poetry underscores the alienation from nature experienced by a consciousness which finds itself in a place where the familiar sight of the wheels of a horse-drawn cart is replaced by the jarring sound of the "hoarse wheels" of the train (7). Even the most dependable of nature's rhythms are rendered meaningless: "The darkness brings no quiet here, the light / No waking" (1-2). After studying his surroundings and meeting the eyes of the people crowded into the station--"mournful eyes," "eyes that are dim with pain" (10, 6)--the speaker's own eyes rebel against the scene and "grow fixed with dreams and guesses" (11). But turning to contemplative reverie does not prove as fruitful here as it does in the pastoral setting, where he can "From dream to dream [. . .] bid [his] spirit pass / Out into the pale green ever-swaying grass" ("Among the Timothy" 78-79).

Lampman's speaker is fully in control of the pastoral environment because he constructs it to suit his own mental and spiritual state. But the sounds and movements of the station cannot be controlled, or even held back. They assert themselves into his consciousness, disrupting his dreams and threatening to alter his identity as surely as the train alters the landscape. Here he can only muse on the "dark distresses" and "various agonies" of the people around him (13, 14), people with whom he has no sense of attachment whatsoever. This is a troubling set of circumstances for a consciousness that wants to set the terms for its own solitude and not be forced into feelings of isolation in an urban setting. The railway station is an affront to the spirit of romantic pastoralism that Lampman glorifies in his nature poetry, so it is little wonder that he, like his patron

saint, John Keats, escapes the "storm of particulars" encountered in the city through "dream-release" in his nature poetry (Toliver 219).

This image of the station as a site of alienation and severance resonates through Canadian railway poetry. Dorothy Livesay's "Railway Station" (1945) uses images of the "flak" and "punctured sky" of the war (15, 16) to make the station's attack on her senses and psyche palpable:

> Confused, embedded, over-turbulent world
> Whirling and swarming on outbound passage--
> In space churning; in ether resounding,
> Never ceaseless; never without sound. (1-4)

This is very close to the description of the station as a place of "desolation, confusion, damnation" that Ceserani suggests is a common expression of the railway's impact on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary imagination (129). All the whirling, swarming, and churning here induces a kind of psychic motion sickness that the pastoralists associate with urban life. But it is not just movement that causes pain and disorientation in railway stations, it is movement *away*--away from home, away from one's roots and familiar landscape, away from loved ones--that most affects railway poets. In "la gare centrale, montreal" (1970), Joan Finnigan calls the railway station "this place of torn flesh and the insufficient kiss" (17). Her poem's references to the traveler leaning like "a bent bough" (46) and the "faces crowd[ing] past" as "down the steps to the trains below / they descend like condemned to the underworld" (52, 58-59) are reminiscent of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," and nearly match the bleakness of Pound's famous two-line urban lament: "The apparition of these faces in

the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough." "[O]nce beautiful and believing" (Finnigan 60), the people rushing about in "la gare centrale, montreal" are hopelessly adrift, caught in "the netherlands between leaving / and arriving" (55-56). As in Lampman's poem, contact with other people here is fleeting and riddled with uncertainty, and contact with nature is impossible in a station whose sky, Finnigan reminds us, contains only "neon stars" (3, 41, 61) that "illuminate / our longing" for meaningful connection (62-63).

Whereas the connection that Lampman's pastoral "I" yearns for is with blessed nature, the one that Livesay's and Finnigan's modern, urban "I" seeks is with fellow members of a human community, a fact that points toward a subtle shift in poetic attitudes toward the self in relation to the railway that will be ripe for discussion a little later in this chapter. For now, it is worth noting that the pastoral enclosure and the railway station actually have something in common: both are liminal spaces where nobody stays for very long. The difference between them lies in the fact that whereas time spent in the pastoral setting can be restful and rejuvenating, time spent in the station is really only time spent trying to get somewhere else.[13] Physical separation from loved ones and a familiar landscape figures an estrangement from the traditional values of rural life.

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[13] Poems of return and reunion can also be found; however, they often address the pain of the return home. See Cate Friesen, "Going/Coming Home"; Edward Hagerman, "Eastbound"; Richard Hillman, "Last Train North from London"; Paulette Jiles, "The Nature of Trains"; Tom Marshall, "Christmas Travel Poems"; Joesph Pivato, "Return to Halifax"; Philip Roberts, "Just Passing Through"; and Heather Spears, "CN West." And although Sir Charles G. D. Roberts might be distrustful of technology in the pastoral setting, he has no compunction about including it in the urban landscape he writes about in "On the Elevated Railway at 110th Street" (1898) and "Brooklyn Bridge" (1899); indeed, Roberts, who rode the railway to New York in order to further his literary career there in 1897, is a good example of how Canadian poets might celebrate the train in the urban setting but still be reluctant even to include it in the rural setting.

In *The Poet and the Machine*, Paul Ginestier claims that poets view the railway station as the place where the observer can "unload the weight of his cares and even his misfortunes [. . .] in order to have them carried far away" (84-85). There is precious little in the station poems we have looked at so far that would support Ginestier's claim. If anything, the railway station in Canadian poetry is the place where people become burdened with anxieties about departure and separation or disoriented by the commotion all around them.

There are some exceptions to these negative representations, exceptions that actually integrate the train and railway station into the pastoral setting and in doing so yoke individualist and communitarian interests. Most notable are two poems by Edna Jaques, "An Old Woman Cleaning a Station" (1939) and "Station in the Mountains" (1941). The former begins as though it will participate in the grand tradition of portraying the railway as a dehumanizing force, describing a woman with "a little job that hardly pays / Her tiny rent and buys a bit of food" (1-2). But subsequent description of her forbids such an interpretation. She sings a tune as she "goes about her work in a happy mood" (4). Her "clean white apron" (9) and her careful arrangement of furniture to "face the street and catch the morning air" (6) indicate that she is lovingly keeping house rather than fitfully toiling in a cold, uninviting station. Indeed, she "mothers little folk" here (10), and "often tired women passing through / Waiting for trains and resting for a while / Are comforted and made to feel at home" (13-15). Her station is a resting place, not a point of departure. She brings to her work "loving service of immortal things" (54): comfort, companionship, and community. For Jaques, the station is not an isolated structure in which travellers are suspended

between home and away. It is, however briefly, a welcoming home away from home, a trackside community centre.

This idea is even more evident in her poem "Station in the Mountains," which employs the station as the setting for a family idyll. The poem begins with a description of a picture-perfect scene:

> A little boy runs gaily down the path
>
> A dog keeps close behind his flying heels,
>
> His overalls are blue and very clean
>
> He looks as if he's used to hearty meals,
>
> And runs with gladness in his little veins,
>
> Down the small hill where he can watch the train. (1-6)

The tension between the natural world and the station in Lampman's poetry is completely dissolved in the image of the child's mother standing at the open door of their station home, its windows "filled with flowers all abloom" (8). Importantly, the open door of the station house signals a relaxation of the boundary not only between natural and constructed worlds, but also between the individual and the communitarian; through this open door the traveler, a stranger, may pass in order to affirm his or her sense of community, of belonging, of being home.

It is no coincidence that so many of Canada's railway stations look alike and, moreover, look like homes. Like churches--and it is important to remember that railway evangelism was as powerful in Canada as in England, with its promise that railway technology "would bring a spiritual unity to North America" (den Otter 79)--these structures would, through their sheer physical form, reflect and engender communal

values. As Ron Brown writes in his illustrated history of railway stations in Canada, station builders deliberately used "familiar domestic styles" in an effort to dispel "the fears of English Canadians over an American-style railway and those of French Canadians over an English railway" (68). In much the same way that the construction of "retro" baseball stadia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is intended to invoke nostalgia and the sense of congregating for worship in (and of) the pastoral space, the railway station was designed to invoke a sense of the familiar: that this station is like other stations, that it is home, and that it is Canada.[14] However, despite the communal values suggested by such station designs, Canadian poetry has rarely consented to the vision of the station as home, preferring instead to see it as a site of parting and separation, not union.

Jaques does endorse the domestic vision of the station house in her description of the kindly husband and father in "Station in the Mountains," the station-keeper for whom the train is the "bright climax of his day" (14) and who feels the same "pride and sense of ownership" in his work that the old woman cleaning a station feels in hers (15). The poem's closing lines reveal the basis of his pride:

> How faithful to their jobs these people are
>
> How great a trust we put in their brown hands,
>
> The humble guardians of tie and rail
>
> That gird our country with its shining bands.
>
> Linking the little places each to each,

[14] Canadian railway stations tended to bear little resemblance to the "nineteenth-century steel and glass edifices" that were rendered as "palpably industrial building[s]" (172), and the familiar domestic

Bringing the whole wide world within our reach. (19-24)

In her references to "we" and "our," Jaques makes the leap from describing a pastoral railway station to framing a pastoral vision of the nation, each of its "little places," and the people in them, linked to each by the railway. She individualizes the station-keeper and his family with one express purpose in mind: to show how they are like us, even *are* us, and thus exist in community with us. Her "humble guardians of tie and rail" sound a lot like the shepherds of more traditional pastoral poetry, but here their flocks are rail passengers and their duty is less to a natural ideal than a national one; perhaps *this* is the "loving service of immortal things" that Jaques mentions in "An Old Woman Cleaning a Station." They are proprietors not only of stations or sections of line, but of the railway's place in Canada's national mythology. In these two poems, themselves rare instances in Canadian poetry of idealized portraits of the railway station, Jaques bridges the gap between the individual's pastoral enclosure and the community's shared space in order to suggest the railway's importance to national sentiment.

It is a particular kind of national sentiment, however, that Jaques has in mind. Even though she embraces the railway as a symbol of community, the community she imagines, even at the national level, is a rural one. Her poems, like the British rural landscape representations discussed by Elizabeth K. Helsinger in her book *Rural Scenes and National Representation*, "give the abstract conception of the nation a local, lived meaning" (19); in other words, they perform much the same function that Anderson ascribes to novels and newspapers in *Imagined Communities* and, moreover, go some

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architecture of the Canadian railway station is still visible today. For a comprehensive history of railroad station architecture, see Meeks.

way in their description of the railway station as domestic space to fulfilling Ettin's assertion that the feeling of being at home is fundamental to the pastoral environment.

There is no mention of the city in either of Jaques's poems, so in a sense she still abides by the same pastoral opposition between city and country that marks Lampman's verse. But whereas Lampman's individualist pastoral observer is merely (and painfully) aware of the community that lies outside his present sphere of interest, Jaques locates the community right here in the pastoral setting and asserts its connection with a broader community through the rails that bind these stations each to each. She frees the railway from its urban associations in a way that Lampman, 40 years earlier, did not, and in doing so is able to use it as a national symbol in a way that he, and countless other Canadian poets, could not. For Lampman, the railway has "betrayed the pastoral vision" (Jones, "Steel Syntax" 42). For Jaques, it connects Canada's separate rural spaces to create a national pastoral landscape, whereas in much other Canadian railway poetry--and in the travel literature I discuss in chapter one--the railway links cities through a wilderness landscape that is alternately empty and exoticized. Jaques's way of imagining the nation stands in stark contrast to the "northern destiny" model of nationalism appealed to by Prime Minister Diefenbaker in the 1950s (qtd. in Harris 27). Instead of a blank northern frontier, she envisions a cultivated national green space. Her vision is wholly communitarian, and although she imagines her secluded pastoral station to be a safe haven and home, she insists that it is one that seeks, rather than avoids, contact with what lies beyond it.

A small handful of Canadian poets spend less time worrying about the adverse effects of the machine in the garden than showing that the machine can, ironically, also

take one *to* the garden, that it actually facilitates, rather than threatens, the pastoral experience. In Jean M. Douglas's "Travelling West," written at roughly the same time as the two poems by Jaques, the train bears its passenger pilgrims to "another Lebanon" (8) far removed from the urban scene:

> The vales and hills stretched forth on either hand
> And rich with blossoming orchards the homestead
> Smiled in the sun, and life seemed fair and sweet,
> But when I thought of town and city street,
> Where loved ones stood and begged for work and bread,
> It made me sad to see so fair a land. (9-14)

The idea of a religious encounter with nature, opposed to the dreariness of urban existence, had been poetic stock in trade in Canada since the nineteenth century. But Douglas takes the train, which had long been one of the symptoms of urban blight, and turns it into a remedy. Sophie Kaszuba's 1996 poem "We Left the City and Moved North (Ontario Northland Railway)" traces the train's route from "the delicious poisons of the city" (9) to a place where its passengers can "climb up onto the granite / and open the green door / in the land" (40-42); her retreat from the city is located in the northern frontier and "dreams of the bush" (30) rather than in the customary green countryside of pastoral poetry. This reimagining of the train was no doubt easier in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth, but there are earlier poems which cast the railway in a similarly favourable light. Arthur Weir's "En Route" (1897) resists Lampman's image of the train tearing people apart by propelling its speaker through "field and wood, / Past glimpses of empurpled hills, / O'er many a broad, sun-smitten

flood / And many a myriad tinkling rills" (1-4) and actually reuniting him with his love in a pastoral setting. S. Moore's "The Laurentides and the Lake St. John Railway" (1887) spans vast geological, religious, and historical time frames in recounting the creation, peopling, and development of North America, and she brings God, land, and railway together in her national vision as very few Canadian poets have done. By including the railway in her nationalist creation story, she manages to grant technology a place in the evolved, organic model of national development to which Aster and Mathews subscribe. The railway not only "open[s] up a country where the sons / Of toil shall clear the forests and shall soon / Be blest with competence and happy homes" (87-89) but also grants access to a curative countryside:

> O! what a health-invigorating boon
>
> To go by train to these Laurentian hills!
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> The air is redolent with fragrant gums,
>
> And every breath inhaled is health renewed--
>
> For every grateful sense is satisfied. (90-91, 101-103)

This is not exactly the place, however, for wandering lonely as a cloud. As much as the railway might have facilitated the pastoral experience, it also transformed it, making it touristic and suggesting that the passengers who rode together on the train to this pastoral space shared not only a common experience but a common landscape. Indeed, like the travel narratives of the day, Moore's poem is as much advertisement as literature. There are poets in its landscape, but they are joined by the fishermen, sportsmen, and even botanists and geologists who can hop on the train and be whisked

off to a land of plenty ideally suited to their particular interests. Moore's depiction of the pastoral enclosure as tourist attraction manages to praise the machine's advances and the garden's purity in the same breath:

> [Travellers may] come and feast their eyes, and breathe the cool
> And fragrant air of these Laurentian hills.
> All honor to the men of wealth and skill
> Who planned and built this line which leads to scenes
> Of new delight; which, when completed, will
> Afford another proof of what our men
> Of enterprise and engineering skill
> Can do in overcoming hindrances. (133-140)

Nature, the railway, and the nation are all partners in the "COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE" trumpeted by Moore earlier in the poem (76). And because rail tourism was such a lucrative commercial enterprise, promotional literature of the day reflected the landscape and values that Moore identifies. The July 1885 "Tourist Edition" of *Along the Line of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, for instance, describes the land west of the Great Lakes in similar terms:

> you have a constant succession of lakes of exquisite beauty, shut in by rocky hills of the most varied and fantastic shapes, all covered with forest. This region has, moreover, the character of being very bracing and salubrious, and there is no doubt that it will ere long be one of the favourite summer resorts of the American Continent. [. . .] [This land

> has] an inexhaustible variety of scenery the most romantic that can be conceived. (4)

Only their accommodation of the train distinguishes the landscapes described by Moore and Jaques from those of Lampman and his railway-hating compatriots. We might expect that poets with such divergent attitudes toward the train would have similarly divergent attitudes toward the land through which it sped, but all of these poets toe a pastoral line: the rural space is one of peace, health, and rejuvenation. But space, remember, is only one half of the pastoral equation. The other is time, and it is in their attitudes toward time that these two camps part ways. For the traditional pastoralists, timelessness is next to godliness. By sustaining "pastoral enclosures where ideal harmony reigns timelessly," the pastoral "I" exerts control over a specific way of looking at the world, so that the poem, like the pastoral scene and, by extension, its observer, "is its own bower where time is suspended, a land of miracle like the one Marlowe's shepherd describes to the reluctant nymph" (Toliver 41). It is hardly surprising, then, that most early Canadian poets tried to keep the train out of that bower as much as they could. Nor is it surprising that they were not entirely successful in their endeavour. As we have seen, the train, like time itself, keeps creeping into their poetry and disrupting the idylls they guard so fiercely. It is not just that trains threaten to distract or physically remove people from the pastoral enclosure, it is that the progress and historical advancement that the railway embodies threatens the pastoral ideal itself. The tacit assumption on which much Canadian railway poetry is based is that the train *is* time. It *is* progress. And it is the poet's attitude toward progress that will, inevitably, determine his or her attitude toward the railway because progress--

time--alters space by erasing "the stark contrast between city and country," in which "each had been assumed to occupy a more or less fixed location in space: the country here, the city there" (Marx 31).

Whether the poet embraced or rejected the progress wrought by rail technology had huge implications for the way he or she thought about the individual and the nation. By rejecting the railway in their poetry, pastoral-minded poets also rejected an important basis of Canadian nationalism, one that was rooted in national pride in the railway and its power to bring people together. But it was this very power that threatened to contaminate the rural character of the nation, and the inviolable pastoral observer, with dangerous outside influences. For a small number of poets like Moore and Jaques, this is no threat at all. They encourage traffic between rural and urban worlds and celebrate the progress that allows it. Furthermore, they see that this progress transcends local and individual concerns and is intimately tied to the development of the national community. Still, as we have seen to this point in their numerous references to the train's shrill dissonance, the reaction of most Canadian poets to the train between the 1880s and the 1930s resembles Hawthorne's reaction to it:

> The locomotive, associated with fire, smoke, speed, iron, and noise, is the leading symbol of the new industrial power. It appears in the woods, suddenly shattering the harmony of the green hollow, like a presentiment of history bearing down on the American asylum. The noise of the train, as Hawthorne describes it, is a cause of alienation in the root sense of the word: it makes inaudible the pleasing sounds to which he had been

> attending, and so it estranges him from the immediate source of meaning and value in Sleepy Hollow. (Marx 27)

Well into the twentieth century, the sound of the train reverberates through Canadian poetry as an accompaniment to dark emotions and the depreciation of the pastoral ideal in life and in art.

Things began to change in the 1930s and 40s. With the advent of modernism, the railway was not so threatening to poets anymore, nor were poems timeless bowers. Poetic interests shifted "from the bucolic to the urban, from 'regional passions' to the 'abstract'" (Birney, "E. J. Pratt and His Critics" 125-26). Ginestier probably overstates the case when he says that "certain poetic genres, like the eclogue and the pastoral, are dead simply because no one is willing to believe in them any longer" (18), but it is no doubt true that the effects of the Depression and two world wars--one long since concluded and the other just then brewing--gave pause to anyone who might have dared to imagine an ideally peaceful and fecund world, forcing him or her to consider what resided beyond the pastoral enclosure and the self. Ginestier argues, from a psychoanalytical point of view, that "the development of the imagination conforms to the laws of development in the material world" and that as machine culture gained force in the twentieth century, poetry changed because of "the superimposition of the metallic rhythm upon the psychic rhythm" (15). With the new rhythms and urban interests of modernist verse came a new conception of machine technology which redressed Victorian literature's "failure to recognize, and to value the aesthetic qualities of the machine" and its tendency to suggest that "the rhythms of the machine are unnatural and, as such, destructive" (Sussman 229, 4).

Although the Victorian "love for railways" is indisputable, and "quickly infected North Americans because steam technology appeared perfectly in tune with the New World character" (den Otter 21), loving the railway and loving *writing* about the railway are two different things, particularly for a literary culture that still endorsed an Arnoldian conception of the literary arts, in which the train could not be appreciated as "a visible object with its own unique aesthetic qualities" (Sussman 228). I could find no nineteenth-century Canadian poem, for instance, that even comes close to Whitman's portrait of the locomotive as a "fierce-throated beauty," a Muse that could roll through the poetic consciousness "with all [its] lawless music" (18, 19). Modern poets saw things a little differently. A train's whistle, for instance, could now be regarded as an object of art rather a disruptive force in the pastoral enclosure.

Still, the sound of the train--especially at night--continued to exercise an emotional influence on poetry throughout the twentieth century, albeit in a slightly different way. Whereas the train's whistle interrupted the peace of the pastoral "I," shrieking an unwelcome reminder of the busy world that encroached on his idyllic solitude, it tends instead to reinforce the loneliness of more modern speakers who foreground and interrogate the solitude whose benefits the pastoral observer takes for granted. The modern consciousness, forced to make sense of a world embroiled in military and financial conflict, seems less willing to endorse the perhaps naïve belief that isolation can lead to self-fulfillment. Clara Bernhardt's "Trains" (1948), whose ballad stanzas are out of keeping with the verse experimentation of many of her more accomplished contemporaries, imagines the train's whistle as "a human voice,"

> In tortured accents speaking of

The world's eternal sorrow,

Of desolation, pain and loss,

And loneliness tomorrow. (3, 5-8)

Patrick Anderson, one of Canadian modernism's seminal figures in the 1940s, describes the effects of the sound on a lonely traveler who finds himself in nearly the same setting as Hawthorne's rural haven:

The whistle tries for its target

And leaves that same mourning mark

I heard in the August woods

On my first American walk,

An Englishman full of words

Faced with the shadowy track

And the colonising birds

Some days and a few miles in

From the liner and New York. ("Train Whistle: Vermont" 14-22)

The association of the train's sound with loneliness persists to the end of the century in Patrick Friesen's 1995 poem "the wheels," whose speaker, alone in his home and separated from his lover, "cannot bear the sound of trains":

my heart hurts

like a human stone

and I can't bear the trains

the wheels

grinding

down the line (1, 19-24)

In fact, only in rare instances has the train's sound been treated as a discrete aesthetic object by Canadian poets. Martha Banning Thomas's "Railroad Crossing (Winter Night)" envisions the train's sound creating a "glittering crack" in the night air:

It made two parts of silence, low and high,

Split open by that narrow, chilling growl;

The breaking noise was like a wound in glass,

Brilliant as crystals shed upon the ground,

The night was stiff with cold . . . the frosted grass

Itself seemed splintered from the brittle sound (10, 3-8)

Richard Woollatt's "Trains Passing at Night" performs a similar imagistic turn:

Brittle Alberta winter night

amplifies whistles at crossings

sharp crack

of dynamite caps

steam blasts from

engine flanks (1-6)

Woollatt's and Thomas's efforts aside, Canadian poets have been reluctant, even in the twentieth century, to forsake emotional attachments to the sound of a train in the distance. The observing "I" is as strong in modern railway poetry as in its pastoral predecessor, is just as unlikely to consider the railway in an overtly nationalist fashion, and is even more forthright in its admission that examination of the self is its end;

however, while the pastoral "I" might avoid or impugn the railway in order to preserve the self from its presumably corrosive influence, the modern "I" embraces it as only another component of the experience through which the self is constructed, and in fact one whose transformative power, threatening to the pastoralist, is enriching and enlivening. This historical shift is connected to "the modernist urge to secularize, to find new human-centred explanations for older conceptions of God, the universe, and man's place in it" (Djwa, Introduction xi). Still, perhaps because of its lingering romantic resonances, the sound of the train seems to forbid modern poets to reduce it to mere abstraction.

This prohibition does not, at least, deter these same poets from including the train in their art. Whereas traditional pastoralists often refused to describe the train physically in their poetry, as if to do so would be to acknowledge the brute fact of its presence in the landscape, modernists eagerly ride the train in order to describe it and its passengers. In "Night Travellers," Anne Marriott recreates the ethereal scene inside a cramped rail car, the restless movements of her eye capturing perfectly the discomfort of her fellow riders as she catalogues the various "[f]orms grotesquely bent in green plush seats" (4) that comprise her still-life portrait: "A boy strums a guitar, / One single tune that never starts nor ends" (12-13); "A Polish woman takes / An orange from a bulging flour-sack" (15-16); "A woman twists a ring, prays journey's end / Will come--will never come--" (21-22). Here, notably, the lyric "I" defines its present circumstances in relation to other people, in relation to a community, as it very rarely does in pastoral verse. But still the "I" is somehow separate here, a detached observer. The sexually charged setting of Louis Dudek's "Night Train," with its "people--

baggage--paper--fur-- / And the great flares of matches lighted in the train" (1-2), is produced in large part by the way that the train's rhythms work upon the observer and his fellow passengers:

> [. . .] the motion
> Of the railroad's belly pounding under us--
> While within the lighted car, in the loudness,
> Girls sit, their heads bowed over books,
> Ferreting the pages of love, unsatisfied. (12-16)

Both poems have a pronounced darkness about them beyond their nighttime settings--Marriott's poem particularly so, with its reference to a man who "Starts awake, stares, steadying lips into a smile, / (He dreamed of bombs and gas-masks)" (18-19) showing her difficulty in retreating from a war-torn world into a convenient pastoral haven--but they also make strides by using the train as an accompaniment to, and even a reflection of, the perceptions and emotions of the age rather than as a disruption of these, which it had been for the pastoralists. The train could now mirror an individual's state of mind rather than lay waste to it. It could, perhaps, join the landscape as a symbol of the Canadian psyche. It could, perhaps, finally be treated as a discrete poetic subject.

During a period when representational art was giving way to art for art's sake, Dudek, who wrote a number of train poems, was perfectly willing to imagine the train for art's sake. His answer to Ginestier's question about whether the train was "really poetic" (19), would have been a resounding, and most un-Arnoldian, "yes." He realized that the train's real artistic potential lay not only in its form, which was still very rarely

the subject of Canadian poetry, but also in its power to move people physically and imaginatively.[15] He and his contemporaries recognized that the train influenced people by imparting its motion and rhythms onto their consciousness, thereby altering their experience and perception of their surroundings.

In the 1940s an entirely new image began to appear in Canadian poetry: the train's window as a frame for a self-consciously aestheticized landscape. The image of "pieces of the countryside pass[ing] under [passengers'] eyes, in the frame of the window" is, as Ceserani has shown, common to the railway literature of other nations (131). Robert Finch's "Train Window" is an excellent Canadian example. In it, the train window frames a modern landscape whose only hint of green is in the colour of an ice truck that sits on a cement platform, bearing its load:

> Five galvanized pails, mottled, as if
> of stiffened frosted caracul, three
> with crescent lids and elbowed spouts,
> loom in the ice, their half-hoop handles
> linking that frozen elocution
> to the running chalk-talk of powder-red
> box-cars beyond, while our train waits here. (15-21)

Finch's cold, metallic scene is as notable for its sound as its imagery. He obviously delights in the striking rhythms and consonance of the "stiffened frosted caracul" and "chalk-talk of powder-red / box-cars," sounds that were nearer to hand for urban poets

[15] Aleksandar Flaker argues that, in the Slavic tradition, "it is precisely the technical medium of movement, particularly a mobile observation point, that aids in a kinetic presentation of the external

than for pastoral ones. The observer obviously revels in his interaction with this metallic world as much as the pastoral observer does his idyllic one. Finch's use of the word "caracul" is suggestive; caracul is fur made from lambs' pelts, and Finch's willful mistaking of it for the surface of a metal pail may give some indication of the fate of shepherd and flock in the modern world, an example of Marx's contention that

> anti-pastoral forces at work in our literature seem indeed to become increasingly violent as we approach our own time. For it is industrialization, represented by images of machine technology, that provides the counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design. (26)

But even if the pastoral idyll may be on the wane in the modern era, when "the rural pattern of life in which man was in direct and continuous contact with nature was already giving way to urban civilization" (Rashley 109), the self-sufficiency of the lyric "I" need not be. If technology and urbanization have, indeed, limited the opportunities for the self to commune with--and construct itself in--nature, they have also opened up new vistas, created new settings and experiences in which the "I" must test and prove itself.

In another of his poems, the nearly identically titled "Train-Window," Finch employs the window frame to turn scenery into images on a moving canvas, "the diesel / Fling[ing] land and sky back on the easel" (1-2). It may be that Finch's poems demonstrate just what the pastoralists had feared: a passenger sits behind his window and observes the passing landscape dispassionately, intellectually engaged with it but

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world and the relativization of its shape. These are features that are already characteristic of avant-

spiritually disconnected from the nourishing properties of the Canadian countryside, a victim of a culture whose urbanization and technologization have limited the individual's contact with the land to something "fitted into metropolitan calendars in the form of holidays, school outings, and work-related schools and seminars" (Gerald Friesen 175).

Dudek counters this suggestion by insisting that there need be no disconnection between subject and object in such images. In "From a Train Window," he makes of a set of concrete images an incredibly abstract poem, thereby suggesting, as the movement of the poem's lines and their imagery do themselves, that there is no hard boundary between the space inside and outside the window, nor between observer and landscape as he sits inside a moving train. Here is the poem in its entirety:

A reeling swallow

dips

and rises--

a score running across the snow noteless,

a fan, a train-yard

a pen-nib, a

twisted cable (that

black spot

like a tennis ball

batted over)

Wire and wind

---

garde literature and art" (187).

electrons a/ß

trace

lines in a copybook

with the letters elementary countryside

written around them.

Writing, nature, and technology coalesce here in the consciousness of Dudek's observer, whose own roving eye replicates the organic form of the noteless score he describes. The pastoral consciousness might, like the consciousness of the traveler before the advent of the train as Schivelbusch describes it, have experienced a "mounting crisis" because of the way that the railway altered its relationship with the landscape, but as the train became a more familiar mode of travel,

> another perception started to develope [sic], one which did not try to fight the effects of the new technology of travel but, on the contrary, assimilated them entirely. For such a pair of eyes staring out of the compartment window, all the things that the old consciousness experienced as losses became sources of enrichment. The velocity and linearity with which the train traversed the landscape did not destroy it--not at all; only under such conditions was it possible to fully appreciate that landscape. (59)

The modern observer in the rail car is actually a little like the pastoral observer in the rural enclosure, albeit with a slight twist. Whether enclosed in the train or in a Yeatsian bee-loud glade, the lyric "I" is alone with his thoughts and observations, and turns inevitably to contemplation of the landscape. But whereas the pastoral "I" tries to

preserve the speaking subject from time and outside influences by hermetically sealing itself in the pastoral enclosure, the modern "I" denies the possibility of such severance from the world. The window frame does not separate passenger from scenery at all. It serves, along with the person who looks through it, as a conduit between landscape and locomotive, albeit one better suited to a modern poetic consciousness than a Victorian one.[16]

The landscapes Finch and Dudek describe are remarkably different--both from one another and from the traditional pastoralists' version--but they are nonetheless just as reflective of their observers' state of mind as they are in the poetry of Lampman and his cohorts. What these windows frame, ultimately, are the individual consciousnesses, the hearts and minds, of the passengers who stare through them. Where the modernists part company with their predecessors is in their willingness to create observers who admit that they are really observing themselves; their self-contemplation is informed by a self-consciousness that the pastoral observer's seems not to be. We are expected, as readers, to understand that the scenery in Lampman's "Heat" is a projection of his speaker's mental state, but nowhere in the poem are we told this pointblank. In a poem such as P. K. Page's "Reflection in a Train Window," however, all pretense is dropped. In this poem the window doubles as a mirror and the passenger "is a woman floating" in it, "transparent" (1-2). The image of the mirror is obviously one of self-examination and the exploration of identity that Page so often engages in, but there is more to the

[16] To get an idea of the development of these framing and aestheticizing poems, see Harry Amoss, "Locomotive Smoke Shadows"; Maxwell B. Bates, "Prairie from a Train Window"; and Margaret Avison, "Sketch: From Train Window (Leamington to Windsor) in March" and "Beyond Weather, *or* From a Train Window."

image than that. The woman can see her reflection and the passing winter landscape simultaneously, so that she is superimposed on it in a sort of out-of-body experience:

> Merged with a background of mosaic
>
> she drifts
>
> through tenement transoms, independent stars,
>
> while in between her and herself the sharp
>
> frost crystals prick the pane with thorns. (7-11)

The two poles of the poem's Christian imagery ("Christmas" [3], "saint" and "haloed" [13] vs. "stigmata" [5], "martyr" [6], and the prick of thorns) point to the woman's suspension between joy and suffering, which in turn is an apt description of the traveler's liminality: "She is without substance, ectoplasmic" (12).

Paulette Jiles creates similar imagery of a woman "[s]natched loose from [her] baggage and address" (5), although this woman claims to "like it here in the middle element where this / express is ripping up the dawn like an old ticket" (13-14) ("Waterloo Express"). Whereas the pastoral mindset resisted the train because it disrupted the illusion of the timeless bower and thus the ideal of a stable identity, Jiles embraces the opportunity for self-examination and transformation that this disruption occasions. Identity, the subject, can be unstable. Change is good.

> Who do you think
>
> I am? I bet you think I'm running away from home or
>
> a man who never done me wrong. I bet you think
>
> I'm twenty, with the fragile soul of a wild fawn.

Well, I used to think so too, but the job didn't pay much

and anyhow I never liked the taste of wages. (7-12)

The train, with its "glass eye, the eye of a fanatic" (2) is not just a convenient setting here. It is a compelling symbol of the fluid identity of a speaker who, by the end of the poem, is similarly "pared down to one white eye" (18). Jiles's play on "eye" and "I" also reinforces what I have been noticing all along here; namely, that the railway is most often used in Canadian poetry in order to exercise self-examination, not national examination.

Page's take on the traveler's liminality may be slightly more gloomy than Jiles's, but in her case the self-consciousness of the modern speaker breeds a self-conscious poetics; Page is easily as interested simply in creating imagery in the poem as she is in reflecting a woman's state of being. Her "Journey" is even more imagistic in its depiction of the train and its female passenger:

Oh, do not lag behind syringe of whistle

douching your ears; on spongy fingers

number the revs. per min.

They are your tempo.

You may be boxcar baggage or begonia,

porter with epaulettes and moon for navel;

the way is watercolour to the station,

the stop is limbo. (9-16)

Page's two train poems are difficult explorations of an individual consciousness, are full to the brim with poetic self-consciousness, and are indisputably related to trains, but they do not suggest a national consciousness, or a sense of community, realized through the railway experience any more than the pastoral poems do. Given the difficult language and imagery of Page's "Journey," it is worth wondering whether modern poetry's frequent obscurity and preoccupation with formal minutiae limit its facility to contribute to the creation of a populist national symbol. As Timothy Brennan might point out, pastoral poetry comes a lot closer than its modernist cousin to speaking in Wordsworth's "common language," and is thus more likely to appeal to the "plebeian authenticity" crucial to Romantic nationalism (53).[17]

There is something of a Catch-22 at work here, so far as the train and the nation have figured in Canada's poetry. On one hand, pastoral poets who sang the praises of their surroundings in comparatively plain language were not at all interested in including the train in their songs. Although it is more tacit than explicit, an expression of nationalism may lie at the centre of their descriptions of Canada's landscape:

> This may be thought incompatible with [. . .] Canada First aims [. . .]; yet, remembering the analogy of Romantic writing in England, we can perhaps concede that the Canadian poets chose with instinctive wisdom. [. . . .] Those who turned to nature were not evading but seeking the true Canada. The only thing Canadians possessed that other people did not was the top half of the American continent. (Daniells 201)

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[17] Case in point is bpNichol, whose two long railway poems, *Continental Trance* and "Trans-Continental," are not for the weak of literary heart. The latter poem, in particular, with its alphabetic

This fits rather well with Brennan's description of a "[. . .] Romantic insistence on the primordial and ineluctable roots of nationhood as a *distinguishing feature* from other communities" (53), and lies at the heart of Leslie Armour's contention that a common Canadian culture should be rooted in a commonly represented social space (22). It must be remembered, however, that in the poems I have been discussing the relationship of the pastoral observer with "the top half of the American continent" has been intensely personal, privatized, detached from questions of nation and community. On the other hand, even though the modernists welcomed the train into their poetry, they too made no overt attempts to connect it to a Canadian nationalism. There may well be a robust nationalism at the heart of modern Canadian poetry, despite Desmond Pacey's claim that literary nationalism had dissipated, "evaporat[ing] in the dry atmosphere of the thirties" (486), but it is one whose connection to the railway is completely superceded by the individual's response to self and surroundings as he or she rides the train.

So it seems that Canadian poetry has played virtually no role in engendering public interest in the railway as a national symbol. Charland's argument for the railway's centrality in the public conception of the nation is compelling, but it is an argument whose truth has not been reflected in our poetry:

> The myth of the railroad, or of the binding of space technologically to create a nation, places Canadian in a very particular relationship to technology. [. . . .] In the popular mind, Canada exists more because of the technological transcendence of geographical obstacles than because of any politician's will. Thus, technology itself is at the centre of the

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landscape ("a d in a cloudbank / an r by the sea / [. . . .] a town / in which the r becomes an l" [3]),

> Canadian imagination, for it provides the condition of possibility for a Canadian mind. (201)

You would simply never know this from reading Canadian poetry, which has never seemed able, whether in the hands of pastoral or modern poets, to get the train and the nation together in the same poem. In this respect Canada's railway poetry differs hardly at all from that of the United States and England. The popular mind may think of the railway as a touchstone of national consciousness, but the poetic mind emphatically does not.

There are, of course, a few exceptions to this rule. Al Purdy's "Transient" describes "the nationality of riding freight trains thru the depression" (59) by recreating the adventures of a young man hitching a cross-country trip aboard a boxcar:

> After a while the eyes digest a country and
> the belly perceives a mapmaker's vision
> in dust and dirt on the face and hands here
> its smell drawn deep thru the nostrils down
> to the lungs and spurts thru blood stream
> campaigns in the lower intestine
> and chants love songs to the kidneys. (45-51)

This is an obvious articulation of a personal identification with the nation that is facilitated by the railway. Purdy's poem is, in a way, quite American in its articulation of the expansion of the individual to "a larger and larger condition" in which the nation "becomes a 'self,' an 'individual State'" (Mathews 15). The national panorama of his

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might be brilliant, but it hardly appeals to populist conceptions of the sweep of the national landscape.

poem "Canadian," with its catalogue of scenery and its speaker's profession of love for the country, does much the same thing. The familiar self-contemplation is still present in these poems, but it stretches itself out to include the entire country, so that the self, like the railway, can be the centre of national experience. Forty-odd years earlier, the station-to-station stops of W. H. Porter's acrostic panorama in "Canadian Scenes from Eastern Coast to Western Isle" show how the railway could bind cities together in national unity. City after city is described along the lines he describes Winnipeg:

Winnipeg stands as the gateway
of our wondrous west,
In through which the tide of toilers
pours for homes in quest.
Nursed beside her bending river
on her loamy lands,
Nourished by unbounded prairies,
broadly she expands.
In her favored situation
and her enterprise,
Promise of her vast extension
and her greatness lies.
Even now her splendid structures
and her business hum
Glimpses give of what she must be
in the days to come. (179-94)

The only non-geographical entity that receives this glowing acrostic treatment in the poem is the Canadian Pacific Railway, which runs "**F**rom eastern coast to the Pacific strand, / **I**ncluding all in one great, growing land, / **C**ombined and bound by this steel, double band" (380-82). Nina B. Criddle's poem "The Iron Horse" is one of few that describes the construction of the railway and the moment when

> We felt at last
> Our struggles were past
> And all of our dreams
> Come true. (60-63)

These expressions are countered by those made by an equivalent number of poems that use the train to show what is wrong with the country rather than what is right with it. Seymour Mayne's "Passengers" contrasts travelers who pass through Ottawa as they "barrel towards their destinations / in times of perennial depression" (3-4) with federal politicians who "take to the air / and pass over as if on / high burnished chariots" (11-13). The train is also front and centre in bill bissett's poem of national class consciousness, "The Canadian":

> [. . .] i did en
> vision th society of fact in Canada
> as a train, its peopuls classd, & sub-
> classd, according to th rank & station,
> that is, what they cud claim they owned, or,
> who they cud claim owned them, its
> peopuls cut off from each other by

such coach cars & compartments. (23-30)

Neither of these is exactly a vision of national unity. And as if to counter Porter's praise of the railway's construction, the Khan reminded his readers in 1925 that the nation and the railway were only a gamble, for "Many a railway was built with a rush-- / Its capital only a bob-tailed flush" ("Poker, Push, and Prosperity" 11-12). With these two minor extremes roughly balancing one another out, we are left with a vast majority of Canadian poetry that simply declines to consider the railway and the nation in close conjunction.

The search for an overt nationalism in Canadian railway poetry buys into just the type of criticism that Leon Surette says we have had more than enough of, "an enterprise in which the central purpose [is] the discovery of Canadian-ness of the literature written in this country" (17). Volker Strunk goes farther by saying that this enterprise "has long outlived whatever usefulness it once may have possessed because it subscribes to a spurious notion of distinctiveness which seldom if ever sees the light of the testing phase of inquiry" (71). Yet Canadians themselves do seem to subscribe to the notion that they are indeed distinct, even if only from Americans. And the railway still seems, even after all the cuts to its passenger service in the late twentieth century, to stir national passions in Canada, as is evidenced in events such as the Ottawa International Writers Festival's VIA Rail Great Canadian Literary Tour, books such as Ron Brown's *The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore: An Illustrated History of Railway Stations in Canada* and Ted Ferguson's *Sentimental Journey: An Oral History of Train Travel in Canada*, and the persistence of national contests by businesses such as Home Hardware in which customers are offered the chance, in

commercials resplendent with big, red maple leaves, to win a cross-country rail trip. Given these facts, it is certainly worth wondering why a body of literature so willfully neglects the railway's contributions to national consciousness.

What it may boil down to, ultimately, is a clash not just between pastoral and modern poetic modes, but between the exceedingly focussed artistic concerns of their practitioners and the rather fuzzy nostalgia that is the basis of the popular Canadian attachment to the railway--and between the poetic project of exploring and expressing the lyric "I" and the more populist project of tying the railway to our national identity. Pastoral poets, so intent on fashioning an autonomous subject and preserving a pastoral enclosure that stood as an example not only of the "original condition of human life" (Ettin 45) but also of the original state of the nation, could not bear to acknowledge that the railway was threatening to change that state--and that self--so soon after its inception. Modern poets, so intent on reckoning with the rapid pace of change in the twentieth century and, at least in some cases, with their own experiments with form and language, could incorporate the train into their poetry but were too busy with their work and the subject's response to modernity to look up from it and wonder about questions of nation.

Only recently, since about 1980, have Canadian poets made a concerted effort to bring together the interests of their predecessors under the umbrella of nostalgia. They have done so by suggesting that the train and the landscape that the pastoral poets fought so hard to keep it out of have both become endangered species, that they both

have value to Canadians, and that they both are, in a way, symbols of home.[18] Anne Marriott's "Transcontinental" reminisces about the way that the sight of the country from aboard the train affected a young girl whose "skin grew tight / threatened to split / holding in all the wonder" (20-22) and who found a sense of community sitting on seats that "shone from the shifting / of a thousand bottoms" (29-30). Raymond Souster remembers standing with other boys on a railway platform, daring one another to play a game of chicken because "to our young boys' minds / that seemed the ultimate of daring" ("Humber Valley Railway Trestle" 6-7), and thinks of how different, how much simpler, life was back then. In "The Train Set," Michael Hulse thinks back to watching trains with his parents:

ever

since, whenever

I've sat on that hillside, I've been the child

I once was in that wide-eyed world

watching over a train set with my mother

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[18] Poetic expressions of nostalgia for the old steam-driven locomotive, which Hedin notes are common in American poetry as well (xviii), depict an emotional attachment to the train that, ironically, went almost entirely undepicted while the train was in its heyday. Elizabeth Gourlay's "Plea" (1969) provides a good example of this sentiment:

this black locomotive
even though
rusted
can still move through snow
climb the mountain incline

don't shunt her
off to a siding. . . .

Nostalgia--literally, the pain of the return home--is also induced by the train as it carries passengers back to the places of their youth in poems such as Barker Fairley's "Fields," Philip Roberts's "Just Passing Through", and Heather Spears's "CN West." Bowering writes that it was only "when the jet airliners started zipping businessmen and politicians and Canada Council writers from city to city, and

and father till it was dark, loving to see
the trainlights and fireflies, the headlamps of cars
as shooting stars. (20-27)

Each of these poems endorses an essentially pastoral vision in its longing for a return to origins, for a chance to recapture an "innocent past that has yielded to a decadent and turbulent present" (Ettin 127). But it does so in a most modern way, by musing on the train as a way to overcome time's passage and discover a Canada as innocent and unspoiled as a childhood memory. Moreover, each of these poems takes care to situate its speaker's personal reminiscences within a larger, communal context. The individualist and the communitarian do not just meet here, they coalesce, so that the lyric "I," while still the centre of the poem, is also able to expand itself and incorporate itself into a community--and vice versa. Finally we see some signs of the "critical features of communitarianism--belonging, identification and feeling" (Aster 61). What Marriott, Souster, and Hulse dream about, ironically, is a railway that can take one back to the pastoral space *and* embody its principles. What they are dreaming about is a pastoral railway, and that dream is rooted in nostalgia for the nation in a form so pure that none of us has ever experienced it because, regrettably, it has simply never existed. Given the impossibility of recapturing these origins, it is perhaps a sign of their prudence that Canadian poets, unlike the nineteenth-century travel writers who preceded many of them, have so steadfastly refused to address the railway's role in the nation's mythology.

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the railways went into decline, [that] our poets stepped out of their coureur-de-bois canoes and began

All of them, that is, except E. J. Pratt.

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to write prolifically about the train" ("bpNichol" 7).

Chapter Three

Ties that Bind:

E. J. Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*

Huntington sleeps in a house six feet long.
Huntington dreams of railroads he built and owned.
Huntington dreams of ten thousand men saying: Yes, sir.

--Carl Sandburg, "Southern Pacific"

Bring in the workers and bring up the rails
We're gonna lay down the tracks and tear up the trails
Open her heart let the life blood flow
Gotta get on our way 'cause we're moving too slow
Get on our way 'cause we're moving too slow

--Gordon Lightfoot, "Canadian Railroad Trilogy"

Sandra Djwa has described E. J. Pratt as both a liminal and a seminal figure in Canadian poetry. On one hand, he was "a bridge between the Confederation group and the younger poets of the 1940s" (Introduction xx) because his poetry appealed both to "those whose poetic tastes had been nurtured by the English romantics and the poetry of Roberts and Carman" and to "the smaller groups who appreciated the new poetry" of the modernist period ("Transitional Modern" 61). On the other, he laboured in his poetry "to show that the Canadian past could be

transformed into a 'usable myth' for the political present" and "established a Canadian voice and a narrative mode, later classified as 'documentary,' which helped shape the English-Canadian poetic tradition of the twentieth century" (Introduction xx, xxii). From this view, Pratt emerges as a dynamic poet of union, a writer who fused the formal and thematic interests of traditional and modern poets, as when he, like Kipling before him, broke from the previous, Arnoldian model of appropriate poetic diction by employing the language of science, technology, and the machine in his poetry.

But Pratt is a poet of union in another important sense. In his long poem *Towards the Last Spike*, Pratt brings the railway and the nation together in his verse as no other Canadian poet has been willing or able to do, presenting a national mythology grounded in railway construction and full of the heroic figures and deeds suitable to that mythology. Further, the poem resolves the terms of Mathews's dialectic, rejecting the notion that individualistic and communitarian interests must stand in opposition and asserting that these interests, and their agents, exist in a wholly reciprocal relationship. Pratt proffers a cooperative rather than a competitive model of railway- and nation-building, and insists upon the power of integration by showing how seemingly opposed forces--be they the individual and the masses or words and actions--must work together in order for the national culture to thrive. Like the railway itself, *Towards the Last Spike* is the expression of a powerful vision of unity, but it is a vision that is never, despite its critics' contentions, simplistically nationalist in its scope.

Unlike his poetic counterparts, who were the subject of the preceding chapter, Pratt eschews the introspective "I" of lyric poetry in *Towards the Last Spike*. Indeed, many of his critics have commented on his poem's documentary impulse and Pratt's seemingly insatiable need to get his facts straight, to bolster the thematic truths of his vision of humanity with the truths of history, science, geography, and other bodies of knowledge. "Pratt," Robert Collins writes, "loved facts, the harder the better [. . .]" (*E. J. Pratt* 141). In "Pratt and History," Agnes Nyland traces the depth and meticulousness of Pratt's research prior to writing such long poems as *The Titanic*, *Brébeuf and His Brethren*, and, of course, *Towards the Last Spike*, among others, and praises his achievement in having "[known] our history well and used it accurately and yet with imagination and so made it come alive as no one had ever done before" (115). Having pored over the Pratt papers at the University of Toronto, Catherine McKinnon Pfaff is able to confirm that the same exacting impulse that drove Pratt to consult letters, archaeological records, and flesh-and-blood theologians and astronomers in order to ensure his "success in presenting history" in *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (Nyland 106) also fueled his research preliminary to publishing *Towards the Last Spike*. And, like Nyland, Pfaff credits Pratt with bringing Canadian history alive in a way his predecessors had not: "In the early fifties when Pratt was writing *Towards the Last Spike* the story of the railroad was in Canadian books and not in Canadian minds" (49). For her, Pratt joins with Donald Creighton, Pierre Berton, and others who wrested the narrative of the railway's construction out of the hands of Harold Innis's "arid, highly statistical" *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* and turned it into a living,

breathing history.[1] Earle Birney also lauds Pratt for being much more than "a mere versifying encyclopaedist," calling him instead "a man whose capacity for feeling is so great he is like a smelter furnace demanding stacks of raw life for fuel" ("E. J. Pratt and His Critics" 139)

As important as Pratt's documentary mode is to bringing the story of the railway's construction to life, it is his decision to remain "faithful to a reasonably plain dramatic narrative and epic in an era of extremely subtle, introspective lyric" (Birney, "E. J. Pratt and His Critics" 143) that most sets him apart from other Canadian poets, particularly in his approach to writing about the railway. Frank Davey casts Pratt as a "detached, dispassionate observer," "an impersonal, manipulative, synthesizing, rationalist craftsman" ("Rationalist Technician" 65, 77), but it might be more fair to say that whereas his predecessors and contemporaries explored psychology, morality, and spirituality by taking the self as their immediate subject, Pratt goes about things from the opposite direction. His starting point, it is true, is the quantifiable reality of "miles, tonnage, names, quotations, that which can be weighed, cited, or documented" (Davey, "Rationalist Technician" 70) rather than the depths of the human psyche itself, but he is no less concerned with explorations of humanity. His approach forbids him from imagining the individual in isolation in the way the poets in my previous chapter do, compelling him instead to consider how the individual and the community act together in society.

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[1] The difference between the narrative modes of these histories is also, coincidentally, that between Sir John A. Macdonald's and Sir Edward Blake's language models in the poem. As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, the former, like Berton, knows that rhetorical embellishment is sometimes more important than fact, and that extravagant verbiage can bolster a listener's sense of authenticity; the latter, like Innis, believes that the truth of any tale is contained in its facts and figures alone.

This compulsion is what makes it so important for Pratt to represent the world in which his individuals and communities live and act; only through an accurate rendering of this world can he arrive at an authentic account of the people who occupy it. Den Otter, who argues that the railway's primary function was to generate profits for its investors, would disagree with Collins's assessment of Pratt's heroes as "men serving the community's need rather than their own personal ones" ("Homeric Voice" 100). Daniel Francis quotes Van Horne as having admitted that the railway "was built for the purpose of making money for the share-holders and for no other purpose under the sun" (20). But it is clear that Pratt is intensely interested in showing how individualist and communitarian motives and actions are dependent upon one another, rather than locked in a dialectic between whose two terms division remains "loud and clear" (Mathews 6). Like the railway itself, *Towards the Last Spike* is a complex feat of engineering that depends upon the energies of individual and communal enterprise for its success.

This play between the individual and the communal is manifested most clearly, perhaps, in the way that Pratt constructs the character of William Van Horne, the American-born businessman without whose forceful personality the CPR might never have been completed. Van Horne is the personification of the rugged American individualist. Compelled by genetics to build and lead (his family history dates back 250 years to a "trek [that] had started from the Zuyder Zee / To the new Amsterdam" where "His line of grandsires and their cousins / Had built a city from

Manhattan dirt" [*TLS* 365][2]), he is a man of extraordinary magnitude, capable of remaking the land in his own image:

> Nothing less
> Than geologic space his field of work,
> He had in Illinois explored the creeks
> And valleys, brooded on the rocks and quarries.
> Using slate fragments, he became a draughtsman,
> Bringing to life a landscape or a cloud,
> Turning a tree into a beard, a cliff
> Into a jaw, a creek into a mouth
> With banks for lips. (364)

He is, in a way, a god, although it is more important for Pratt's purposes that he be a dynamic hero, a man of action who, "by greatness of imagination and adamantine will," can "make a grander future out of a sluggish past and a massive and reluctant physical world" (Collins, *E. J. Pratt* 138).

It is Van Horne, normally a man of few words (Sir John thinks of him as a man with "little time for speeches" [376]), who stands alone in front of the CPR's board of directors and has to "argue, stamp and fight" for his plan to build the railway across the forbidding territory north of Lake Superior. As if forgetful of his own nationality, he convinces the directors to trust his judgement by appealing to their own nationalism, arguing that "the north shore could avoid / The over-border [U. S.] route--a national point / If ever there was one" (367). His eagerness is less to preserve an all-Canadian route than to ensure that he will be given the opportunity

[2] All references are to page numbers in *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, edited by Northrop Frye.

to combat this reptilian "Laurentian monster," "the thing Van Horne set out / To conquer" (369). He yearns to fight--and win--this battle against the land. W. H. New maintains that "the land for Pratt represented a test of heroism, faith, will, individuality, and endurance--the very qualities that Canadian criticism prized from 1900 to the 1950s" (*Land Sliding* 104). By engaging in this battle, Van Horne will become not only the archetypal Pratt hero, but the archetypal Canadian hero as well. His battle against the Laurentian monster will prove his valour and forge the character of the nation.

Davey has noted that one difficulty in Pratt's reptilian metaphor is that it causes him "to evade the literal building" of the railway, so that the reader "never does see this section of the railroad completed, or learn how Van Horne overcomes the final barrier of the muskeg" ("Rationalist Technician" 75). Pratt does seem, at times, more interested in crafting his image of the Laurentian monster than in fleshing out Van Horne's conquest of it. One reason for Van Horne's lack of action on the north shore of Superior may lie in the passive character of his enemy; the reptile is not particularly aggressive, or even mobile: "All she had to do / Was lie there neither yielding nor resisting" (*TLS* 369). The fact is that for all the attention lavished upon the Laurentian monster by the poem's critics--who might be more vulnerable to the accusation of single-minded obsession with her that Davey levels at Pratt[3]--Van Horne does not even consider her his primary enemy in the poem. As he muses late at night about the difficulties of the railway's projected east-west route he imagines this terrain as only the second most challenging obstacle to

construction, after the mountains of western Canada: "He made a mental note of his three items. / He underlined the Prairies, double-lined / The Shore and triple-lined *Beyond the Prairies*" (366). The opening line of "Number Three," the section of the poem devoted to construction through the Rockies and Selkirks, encapsulates Van Horne's estimation of the challenge ahead: "The big one was the mountains--seas indeed!" (371). It is in this setting that Pratt reveals, in hyperbolic form, Van Horne's heroic individualism:

> His name was now a legend. The North Shore,
> Though not yet conquered, yet had proved that he
> Could straighten crooked roads by pulling at them,
> Shear down a hill and drain a bog or fill
> A valley overnight. Fast as a bobcat,
> He'd climb and run across the shakiest trestle
> Or, with a locomotive short of coal,
> He could supply the head of steam himself.
> He breakfasted on bridges, lunched on ties;
> Drinking from gallon pails, he dined on moose.
> He could tire out the lumberjacks; beat hell
> From workers but no more than from himself. (372)

After this litany of tall-tale details, Pratt also compares Van Horne to Paul Bunyan, the folk hero who embodied the American frontier experience, and in doing so

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[3] See Djwa, Introduction; Frye, "Letters"; Johnson; Jones, *Butterfly*; King; Marshall, "Weather"; Pfaff; Clever; Edmund Wilson; Smith, "The Poet"; Reaney; "*Towards the Last Spike*" and F. W. Watt.

makes him the heroic figure of a nationalism grounded in the victory of the individual man over landscape (372).

By likening Van Horne to a popular folk hero and indicating that he expected no more from his workers than from himself, Pratt reveals his "Flying Dutchman" (372) to be more than just a heroic individual. He is also, and perhaps even more importantly, a man of the people, capable of and comfortable with walking among the unnamed men who form his work gangs in the poem and suited to "companionship / With quarry-men, stokers and station-masters, / Switchmen and locomotive engineers" (365). Glenn Clever has commented that for Pratt, "the symbol of the achiever is man in action, not only individual heroes such as Macdonald and Van Horne, but also men in communal commitment [. . .] and common man" (16). This view is in keeping with Armour's emphasis on the idea that the Canadian community "need not be brought into being and sustained by exceptional individuals" (109), but that it can instead be the product of an overarching communitarianism in which everyone can take part. So even though Van Horne is the workers' leader, issuing orders that "sent hundreds to the bush, / Where axes swung on spruce and the saw sang, / Changing the timber into pyramids / Of poles and sleepers" (367), their labour is more than just a detached expression of his vision--they are, indeed, full partners in it. "The loss of individuality here," Jonathan Kertzer remarks, "does not express industrial alienation, but rather the way people are utterly united through shared work" (84). This is the same ideal of national industriousness celebrated by the travel writers in the nineteenth century.

Pratt's depiction of the men who laboured on the railway might seem, at first glance, to diminish them. None of them is singled out, given a name, or granted the opportunity to speak. They are, as Pratt will say five times in five lines, simply parts of faceless labour gangs, cogs in a sprawling technological leviathan:

> As individuals
> The men lost their identity; as groups,
> As gangs, they massed, divided, subdivided,
> Like numerals only--sub-contractors, gangs
> Of engineers, and shovel gangs for bridges,
> Culverts, gangs of mechanics stringing wires,
> Loading, unloading and reloading gangs,
> Putting a silver polish on the nails. (368)

It is undoubtedly on passages such as this one that Davey bases his assertion that "the masses who built the CPR" are, unlike Van Horne and other heroic individuals, destined "to be great only as agents of oppressively vast powers, forces, traditions" ("Apostle" 62). But the poem's Laurentian monster would seem to disagree. Van Horne declares her his enemy, but she recognizes the entire community of nameless labourers--"this unknown breed, / This horde of bipeds that could toil like ants"--and not Van Horne as her opponent. By the end of the poem, when the railway has been successfully completed and its last spike driven into the ground, the victory is not Van Horne's but the people's: "The breed had triumphed after all" (388). The shouts of the men attending the driving of the last spike represent "the triumphant

recognition of Canada by Canadians through the accomplishment of this technological miracle" (Johnson 149).

For Pratt, depicting the rail workers as a collective by no means reduces them or their importance. Quite the contrary. In fact, it is collective man, and, more than this, their expression of the essence of humanity, which Pratt pits against the Laurentian monster:

> It was not size or numbers that concerned her.
> It was their foreign build, their gait of movement.
> They did not crawl--nor were they born with wings.
> They stood upright and walked, shouted and sang;
> They needed air--that much was true--their mouths
> Were open but their tongue was alien.
> The sounds were not the voice of wind and waters,
> Nor that of any beasts upon the earth. (370)

It would be easy at this point to claim that the workers supplant Van Horne in the poem's version of history, that Pratt's statement that "The Road itself was like a stream that men / Had coaxed and teased or bullied out of Nature" (385) is intended as a corrective for the earlier image of Van Horne straightening crooked roads by pulling at them himself. However, Davey's claim that Pratt is "an enemy of individual action" ("Apostle" 57) goes too far. It may be true that Pratt believes at heart that it is "the whole group engaged in the quest that is the hero" (Frye, Introduction xviii), but that group includes the man who possesses the vision as well as the men who enact it. In other words, that group accommodates Van Horne,

the individual, as well as the community of men whom he leads--even if he seems to do so, at times, by remote control.

Pratt's vision, then, is cooperative rather than competitive, refusing to abide by simplistic oppositions between individualism and communitarianism. Indeed, cooperative effort is the basis of Pratt's conception of heroism in *Towards the Last Spike*, and Pratt shows himself willing to expand his idea of cooperation to include that which occurs not only between men, but also between men and machines--an idea that is completely foreign to most other Canadian railway poetry.

The effort to advance the rail line through the Fraser Canyon is perhaps the archetypal instance of Pratt's model of cooperation; here, the vision of a single man (Andrew Onderdonk, the American contractor who was charged with pushing the railway through the canyon), the power of a machine (the *Skuzzy*, a steamboat commissioned by Onderdonk to penetrate the treacherous Hell's Gate section of the Fraser), and the labour of hundreds of men (including the Chinese workers of whom F. R. Scott has asked, famously, "Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?" ["All the Spikes But the Last" (1)]) combine in one grand partnership:

> Two engines at the stern, a forrard winch,
> Steam-powered, failed to stem the cataract.
> The last resource was shoulders, arms and hands.
> Fifteen men at the capstan, creaking hawsers,
> Two hundred Chinese tugging at shore ropes
> To keep her bow-on from the broadside drift,
> The *Skuzzy* under steam and muscle took

The shoals and rapids, and warped through the Gate,

Until she reached the navigable water[.] (375)

In this passage, and in the poem as a whole, Pratt demonstrates a faith in the possibility of a model of national cooperation that Clever argues resonates throughout Pratt's narrative poems, a belief in the power of "creative imagination, effort, courage and willing submission of individual goals to attain a communal end. In this Pratt expresses the essential myth of Canada at the turn of the century, the achievement for its own sake [. . .]" (9). Yet as important as the achievement is in this poem, it is the community's effort toward that achievement, towards the last spike, that truly captures Pratt's imagination, because it is one of those "expressions of power that represent dynamic life in the first sense" (Collins, *E. J. Pratt* 38).

Pratt is also interested in other expressions of power, and he finds one of these in the person of Sir John A. Macdonald, whose combination of heroic vision and human frailty make him an ideal Pratt hero. Sir John might not look like much of a hero when we first see him, pacing sleeplessly late at night as he frets about the railway's route and flipping a coin to help him decide what course to take (348-51), nor later when Pratt takes a jab at him upon the defeat of his government: "The House had rarely known sobriety / Like this" (355). True as ever to the historical record, Pratt refuses to transform Macdonald, who got away with his weakness for alcohol but could not escape the consequences of his involvement with the Pacific Scandal, into a flawless hero. Instead, he depicts "a human being beset with weaknesses, hesitations, doubts, and temptations" (Pacey, Review 164).

Pratt does, however, labour to demonstrate that Sir John is nonetheless a man of vision: his first action upon waking from his fitful sleep is to grasp a telescope and scan the heavens in search of the same self-illumination as the stars. What he sees provides little initial relief from his worries over whether the railway must, inevitably, make its way in part through the United States rather than adhering to the all-Canadian route: "That stellar path looked too much like a road map / Upon his wall--the roads all led to market-- / The north-south route." Then he does something else. He holds a candle to "a second map full of blank spaces / And arrows pointing west" and finally returns to bed "savour[ing] soporific terms: / *Superior*, the *Red River*, *Selkirk*, *Prairie*, / *Port Moody* and *Pacific*" (350), his resolve to follow the all-Canadian route renewed.

His comfort in these words is an important key to Macdonald's heroic character in the poem. Just as Van Horne's birthright is his talent as a builder, Sir John's is his facility with words. He understands their power instinctively, knows how to shape them and how to use them to shape the will of others. Pratt attributes Macdonald's abilities, like Van Horne's, to heritage, the oatmeal-fueled Scots bloodline that gave his forebears "The power to strike a bargain like a foe, / To win an argument upon a burr" (348). In fact, when he is first introduced it is through a description of his voice, tied directly to his Scottish heritage: "the skirl of Sir John A., / The general of the patronymic march" (348).[4] It is this linguistic heritage that

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[4] Macdonald is not the only product of Scots heritage in the poem. Scottish blood also fuels the individual talents of Donald Smith and George Stephen. The former possesses an epic ability to transform land and objects into money;

> He fought the climate like a weathered yak,
> And conquered it, ripping the stalactites
> From his red beard, thawing his feet, and wringing
> Salt water from his mitts; but most of all

enables Sir John to recognize the persuasive power of a single word. Before he falls back to sleep he imagines how he can "make use" of Canada's past pioneers to convince others of his vision of a "Western version of the Arctic daring, / Romance and realism, double dose":

> Most excellent word that, pioneers! Sir John
> Snuggled himself into his sheets, rolling
> The word around his tongue, a theme for song,
> Or for a peroration to a speech.

Van Horne, the man of action, sees the railway as the product of physical labour. Macdonald, the man of words, sees the nation as a linguistic construct and determines that the person best able to employ "the patriot touch" by appealing to "The flag, the magnetism of explorers, / The national unity" can determine the future course not only of the railway, but of the nation (350). As strident an individualist as he is, he still possesses a communitarian understanding of language and the nation, realizing that Canadians "draw on the same set of images to articulate their nation. They share a national discourse" (Kertzer 84). In the same way that Van Horne depends on mass labour to build the railway, Sir John depends on shared discourse to drive his message home.[5] It may be, as Frank Underhill

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> He learned the art of making change.
> [. . . . . .]
> What could resist this touch? Water from rock!
> Why not? No more a myth than pelts should thus be
> Thus fabricated into bricks of gold. (55)

The latter combines the talents of Van Horne and Macdonald: he is "Chief bricklayer of all the Scotian clans" and also speaks with a "Banffshire-cradled r" that "paralysed the nerves, hit the red cells, / [. . . .] / Would seep through channels and befog the cortex" (69).

[5] Pratt's poem also depends on shared discourse, which Milton Wilson makes clear in noting that "the poem assumes the story [of the railway's construction] rather than narrates. As I discovered in discussing the poem with an American reader, unless you are Canadian or have some modicum of knowledge of Canadian history, it is impossible to read *Towards the Last Spike* as narrative at all!"

argues in *The Image of Confederation*, that the nationalism that "captured the support of the Canadian people" was Macdonald's nationalism because his was "the nationalism of the protective tariff and the Pacific railway" (24), but Pratt takes pains to stress that this was only the case because Sir John's linguistic powers far outstripped those of his opponents, enabling him to convince his fellow citizens that they shared in a national discourse and in his vision of Canada. For Sir John--and, as New writes, for Pratt himself--"to mark the movement towards national consciousness, towards 'the last spike,' is to mark a poetic quest for linguistic method" ("Identity of Articulation" 34). The initial expression of this method may be made by a single man, but it is his ability to convince others to join in it that helps create the national community.

Sir John's skirmishes with Edward Blake in the House of Commons reveal the implications of different linguistic methods. After a sputtering start, Sir John is revealed to be a heroic individual who uses language as though it were a mighty weapon. In their first exchange over the Pacific Scandal, which Pratt neatly summarizes as "Gifts nuzzling at two-hundred-thousand dollars, / Elections on, and with a contract pending" (358), Sir John makes a poor showing. Blake gets the upper hand because his rhetorical powers, backed by a moral certitude that allows him to feel entirely in "[h]is element" (353), surpass his rival's on this. Sir John is so thoroughly trounced that Pratt chooses not to recount the details of his speech, reducing it instead to a "great defence" in which "he flung / Himself upon the

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(50). Pfaff also writes that Pratt "refused to spoonfeed his readers. Some, but not all, of the chronological narrative is there. [. . . .] *Towards the Last Spike* is a remarkable poem for the way it both casually assumes some of its story [. . .] and meticulously records the rest" (49-50).

House, upon the Country, / Upon posterity, upon his conscience" (353, 354).[6] Even these vague generalities are nearly enough to topple Blake, but in the end they are no match for Blake's careful exposition of his case. Like Pratt himself, Blake is a man of facts. Eschewing Sir John's theatrics, he focuses on "telegrams and stolen private letters" (354):

> The logic left no loopholes in the facts.
> Figures that ran into the hundred-thousands
> Were counted up in pennies, each one shown
> To bear the superscription of debasement.
> [. . . . . .]
> Each word, each phrase, each clause went into position,
> Each sentence regimented like a lockstep. (355)

The military imagery here helps establish Blake as a mock-epic figure, a hero whose credentials, though useful in the political forum, Pratt makes light of: "No one could equal him in probing cupboards / Or sweeping floors and dusting shelves, finding / A skeleton inside an overcoat" (353). Still, he proves a more dangerous foil to Macdonald than the Laurentian monster does to Van Horne. Worn down by Blake's incessant sniffing out of the details of the Pacific Scandal, Sir John eventually signals his surrender by silently putting his fingers to his nose in response to the charges laid against his "Ministry of Smells" (354). He simply

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[6] Although Pratt's description of Macdonald's "flinging" himself is taken directly from Hansard ("I throw myself upon this House; I throw myself upon this country; I throw myself upon posterity, and I believe that I know, that, notwithstanding the many failings in my life, I shall have the voice of this country, and this House rallying around me" [qtd. in Berton 136]), it does not account fully for the beleaguered leader's passionate speech.

cannot muster the strength to wield his rhetorical weapons, and as a result is left looking like anything but the heroic individual who can speak for his community.

With Macdonald defeated, Alexander Mackenzie's Liberals form the government in 1874 and immediately place the railway on the back burner. Their reasons for doing so boil down to "economy, just plain horse-sense. / The Western lines were there--American" (357)--so why go to the trouble and expense of building an all-Canadian route? Unlike Macdonald, Mackenzie is willing to subordinate nationalist vision to economics and so supports the detour south through the United States. He fails to realize, however, that national passions and plain horse-sense tend to have very little in common. This lapse of vision is reflected in the way he just as blithely subordinates rhetoric to economics, something Sir John would never think of doing.

Ironically, Pratt finds that the primary weakness of the Mackenzie government is its emphasis on anchoring vision in facts, which causes it, in its arguments against building the railway through sparsely populated territory, to resort to a befuddled chicken-or-the-egging that betrays a lack of political foresight and national foresight. This weakness is compounded by the government's stale, pragmatic rhetoric:

> Measured and rationed was the language
> Directed to the stringency of pockets.
> The eye must be convinced before the *vision*.
> [. . . . . .]
> For every one who cleared his throat

And called across the House with Scriptural passion--

"*The Line is meant to bring the loaves and fishes,*"

A voting three had countered with the question--

"*Where are the multitudes that thirst and hunger?*"

Passion became displaced by argument. (355-56)

The country needs relief from Mackenzie and his "non-adventurous common sense." It misses Macdonald and his symphonic oratory:

Was this the substitute

For what the auditorium once knew--

The maestro who with tread of stallion hoofs

Came forward shaking platforms and the rafters,

And followed up the concert pitch with sound

Of drums and trumpets and the organ blasts

That had the power to toll out apathy

And make snow peaks ring like Cathedral steeples? (357)

Sure enough, Macdonald is returned to power in 1878, National Policy in hand. He realizes that he has to mould men's minds, that he cannot fail in the "battle of idea and words" (358) if the all-Canadian route is to win out over petty economics.

This battle will be fought, once again, against Blake in the House of Commons, the site of Macdonald's first painful defeat. This time, though, Blake does not have moral certitude on his side, and he can no longer go after Sir John with a single, powerful word: "*Impeachment*" (359). Instead, he must aim his barrage of facts at the all-Canadian route and all the nationalist sentiment attached

to it, which Sir John knows is "a theme less vulnerable / To fire." Blake truly is the individual who pits himself against the nation--or at least against a national vision. Sir John also knows that even though Blake remains a dangerous opponent, he is likely to be done in by his own rhetorical mode, which is "too intricate, / Too massive in design": "Men might admire / The speech and talk about it, then forget it. / But few possessed the patience or the mind / To tread the mazes of the labyrinth." It is not that Blake has forgotten how to unsheathe his linguistic weapons entirely. He does still realize that the doubtful phrasing of "*To build a Road over that sea of mountains*" carries greater rhetorical weight than a simple "*It can't be done*" (360), even though the meaning of both expressions is precisely the same. But he does not deploy these phrases nearly often enough, and he returns instinctively to the "*decimals*" and "*tessellated subtleties*" that had swept him to victory during the Pacific Scandal (361). This proves to be bad strategy. Blake's verbal assault misfires badly and, in a wonderful mock-epic flourish, he literally bores his listeners to death, littering the parliamentary battlefield with their corpses:

> This homicidal master of the opiates
> Loosened the hinges of the Opposition:
> The minds went first; the bodies sagged; the necks
> Curved on the benches and the legs sprawled out.
> And when the Fundy Tide had ebbed, Sir John,
> Smiling, watched the debris upon the banks,
> For what were yesterday grey human brains
> Had with decomposition taken on

The texture and complexion of red clay. (361)

As Pfaff says, "The tools for moulding men's minds are words, and so the heroes of Pratt's poem are not only visionaries but also individuals who can convince others that their dreams can be transformed into reality" (63). Blake and Mackenzie fail on both counts.

Sir John, on the other hand, can convince others of his dreams, and the reason for this is that he, unlike Blake and Mackenzie, who speak as though no one were listening, understands that he must tailor his message to his listeners' ears, that he must incorporate the community into his individual vision if it is to be brought to fruition. Tom Marshall comments that "[i]n the parliamentary battle for the railroad there is an emphasis on language as creation, a medium of power in politics as in poetry" and that there is "an implicit analogy between the politician and the unacknowledged legislator who turns history into myth" (38). Actually, there is nothing implicit about this analogy whatsoever, at least as it concerns Sir John, who is described in terms appropriate to a poet: "[Confederation] was his laurel though some of the leaves / Had dried" (348-49). Macdonald is no lonely poet labouring in weary isolation in a garret, but he does respect the creative power of language. Early in the poem he muses on his promise that "the Line should run from sea to sea": "'*From sea to sea*', a hallowed phrase. Music / Was in that text if the right key were struck" (351).

This appeal to music is central to Pratt's construction of Sir John's character as a dynamic public figure. He is the "old conductor" whose railway project is a "daring symphony" (357) that the nation's citizens do not only listen to, but also

participate in as members of the "massed continental chorus" described at the end of the poem (388). Granted, the community that Macdonald directs from his podium, a community of taxpayers, seems rather more passive than the masses directed by Van Horne; Sir John must "dip / And scrape farther into the public pocket, / Explore its linings: his, the greater task; / His, to commit a nation to risk" (376). We are never afforded the opportunity to see Macdonald's masses in action except insofar as they comprise the labourers who work under Van Horne's guidance. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of Sir John's individual vision, like Van Horne's, is inextricably linked to the interests and efforts of the national community.

The difficulty of securing public funds gnaws at Sir John, leading him to resent what he sees as Van Horne's easy successes in gaining public support for his work on the railway. Sir John is bothered by a "thought / He could not sponge away":

> Had he not fathered
> The Union? Prodigy indeed it was
> From Coast to Coast. Was not the line essential?
> What was this fungus sprouting from his rind
> That left him at the root less clear a growth
> Than this Dutch immigrant, William Van Horne?
> The name suggested artificial land
> Rescued from swamp by bulging dikes and ditches;
> [. . . . . .]

> And yet this man was challenging his pride.
> North-Sea ancestral moisture on his beard,
> Van Horne was now the spokesman for the West,
> The champion of an all-Canadian route,
> The Yankee who had come straight over, linked
> His name and life with the Canadian nation. (377-78)

With the obvious exception of Sir John's parliamentary duels with Blake, these lines really provide the only example of competitive individualism to be found in the poem. Certainly it is true that Donald Smith, George Stephen, and the other investors are in it for the money, but it is just as true that they have "pledged / Their private fortunes as security / For the construction of the Road" (376). Individual and communal financial commitment brings the line into being.

This partnership between the private and public sectors mirrors the poem's other partnerships between seemingly opposed entities: the individual and the masses, words and actions, and, inevitably, Macdonald and Van Horne. Macdonald's petty jealousy about Van Horne's popularity does little to damage the "network of interaction and interdependency" that Davey outlines: "Van Horne supports Macdonald, and Macdonald reciprocates. Both men are further supported by Tupper, Stephen, and Smith, and all five are in turn reliant on the loyalty, sweat, and ingenuity of the thousands of works who, in dedication to their task, [lose their identity]" ("Apostle" 60). To use Pratt's own musical metaphor, politicians and engineers, taxpayers and workers, words and actions, and humanity and technology join together in a massive contrapuntal design that accommodates both the diversity

of interests and the unity of vision that combine to power the construction of the railway and the nation. The intricacy of this design allows Pratt to resolve the tension between the two halves of Mathews's dialectic, showing the possibility of harmony between individualism and communitarianism in the national sphere.

The question that remains is whether Pratt's own vision in this "unmistakably Canadian poem derived from an undeniably Canadian fact" (Collins, *E. J. Pratt* 136) is narrowly national--and nationalist--in its scope. Certainly many of his critics have suggested that this is the case. James Reaney credits Pratt with "bringing the materials of our tradition into the world of imagination where these materials can perform the useful work of defining and moulding us imaginatively as a nation" ("*Towards the Last Spike*" 23); Glenn Clever pronounces Pratt "the first and only Canadian creative writer to express truly the spirit that forged the nation" (30); Sandra Djwa writes that for Pratt "The transformation of vision into a persuasive argument is as important as the story of the events themselves. Pratt's belief in the power of language as another form of energy [. . .] which can ultimately unite, demonstrates how Macdonald's national vision is brought into reality" (Introduction xix). Djwa comes very close here to saying that the poem itself labours to bring a national vision into reality--a view that would seem to stand in opposition to claims that *Towards the Last Spike* is another in the line of emotionally detached, rationalist narratives churned out by an "authoritarian craftsman" (Davey, "Rationalist Technician" 66). Her mention of the "transformation of vision into a persuasive argument" could apply equally to Pratt or Macdonald in the context of her comments, making *Towards the Last Spike* as

capable of engendering a national vision as are Macdonald's words. In this reading, the heroic individual in the poem is Pratt himself, who has joined Sir John and Van Horne in being "not only visionaries but also individuals who can convince others that their dreams"--in Pratt's case the dream of a nation forged in the spirit of cooperative effort--"can be transformed into reality" (Djwa, "Transitional Modern" 63).

It might be prudent, though, to step back a moment from the poem's apparent nationalism and ask whether Pratt's fascination with Macdonald's rhetoric necessarily implicates him and his poem in it. Pratt surely does understand and esteem language's power (New argues that the poem is "about language, about poetry, as well as about nation-building" ["Identity of Articulation" 33]), but he does not do so uncritically. He recognizes their periodic "shysterism" (MacDonald, "Apostle" 36). Pratt's references to Sir John's rhetorical scheming--his desire to apply a "patriot touch" through carefully chosen words (350)--demonstrate his awareness that language, even in the cause of a noble goal, can be willfully manipulative and that nationalism itself can be reduced to little more than a rhetorical device. Pratt does seem to agree that the nation is, at least in part, a linguistic construct, but he also seems worried about what happens when "words become mere cogs or wheels in [the] engineering of the union" (MacDonald, "Apostle" 36) and when certain language models cannot be entirely trusted, as in the political wrangling over the railway's course through the western mountains:

> Likewise the Pass had its ambiguous meaning.
>
> The leaders of the factions in the House

> And through the country spelled the word the same:
> The way they got their tongue around the word
> Was different, for some could make it hiss
> With sound of blizzards screaming over ramparts:
> The Pass--the Yellowhead, the Kicking Horse--
> Or jam it with *coureur-de-bois* romance,
> Or join it to the empyrean. (358-59)

It seems unlikely that Pratt, whose "flexible, unpretentious speaking style" Frye praises (Introduction xv), shares the same linguistic goals as those acknowledged legislators of the nation who spend their time in the House of Commons running themselves around in endless rhetorical circles, and as much as *Towards the Last Spike* is a poem about language, it is also suspicious of language, particularly the manipulativeness of political rhetoric. Even so, just as the Anti-American, imperialist, nation-building rhetoric of Macdonald's Tories "was in harmony with the mood of many Canadians" during the construction of the CPR (den Otter 201), so has Pratt's inclusion of this language in his poem been in harmony with a critical tendency to depict *Towards the Last Spike* as a rather straightforward national epic, even if the poem does not naïvely endorse "the tub-thumping rhetoric which one associates with patriotic poetry" (Pacey, Review 164).

Ultimately, *Towards the Last Spike* cannot escape the pull of its own subject matter. How could a poem about the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, full of heroic individuals and praising the mass industry of thousands of Canadians, *not* be nationalist at heart? Indeed, the poem is nationalist insofar as it relates the

story of the construction of the railway as part of a romantic national epic about Canada's development at the end of the nineteenth century and, moreover, places the same emphasis on progress and industriousness as cornerstones of the national character as was placed on them at least as far back as the travel narratives discussed in my first chapter. But the expansive outlook and integrative spirit that drive Pratt to insist on a cooperative model of national development, the same outlook and spirit that allow him to be "at one and the same time the great realistic documenter or reporter and the great myth-maker" (F. W. Watt 129), make it difficult to imagine that Pratt intended his poem's model of human cooperation to pertain to Canadians alone.

It is not simply that the railway itself was far more than an exclusively national enterprise, as W. L. Morton shows in pointing out that "British capital and American skill [were] harnessed by Canadian purpose to make the northern nation of Morris and the subordinate kingdom of Macdonald one of the operating facts of the British Empire and the American continent" (47). Far more important is that Pratt's national vision is located within a global context, one that pays tributes to "world granaries, / [. . .] / a world expanding, if not the universe" (346). Canada, like the poem's individual heroes, will maintain its hard-fought identity even as it participates in the larger project of humanity's development through science, technology, and language. Pratt's "technical interest in the instruments of communication," fundamental to his and the nation's appreciation of the railway's place in Canada's mythology, is grounded in a deeper faith that it is "the power of the word which brings men together [. . .], and the word is a token of that power of

the imagination whereby men may comprehend the cosmos and may see his life as one with the creation" (Jones, *Butterfly* 119)--and with one another.

Chapter Four

The Other Side of the Tracks:

The Railway in Canadian Fiction

> The train charges down the tracks into the blackening happy night, down the typeface of the double rails and ties, as if it were a typewriter carriage engaged upon an endless sentence--all of it in upper case, all of it in Helvetica Bold 48-point--typing out, like a transcontinental court reporter, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
>
> --Paulette Jiles, *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola*

> You keep pushin' on when you friends keep turning back
> And you keep building towns and laying railroad track.
> And things get crazy and you have to use that gun
> And you wonder if this is the way the West is won.
>
> --Joe Jackson, "Wild West"

The railway runs as steady a course through Canadian fiction as it does through the Canadian landscape. Nicholas Temelcoff, newly arrived in Canada from the Balkans, boards a train in Saint John, New Brunswick in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, riding on rails that reach into the Annapolis valley, where David Canaan, the failed artist of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the*

Valley, watches a train pass him and is reminded of how "the train of your own life went by and left you standing there in the field" (271). From the Maritimes, through Quebec, where Athanase Tallard rides the train in Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* and looks out at French-Canadian farmers who are "bound to the soil more truly than to any human being" (77), and into Ontario, where Robert Ross sits aboard a troop train in Timothy Findley's *The Wars* awaiting transport to a training facility, the railway continues on its way. On through the prairies it goes, impressing young Gander Stake, in Robert Stead's *Grain*, with the sheer power of its engine and taking the life of Hagar Shipley's son in *The Stone Angel* before it finally reaches the west coast, where a group of track-walkers press themselves against the wall of a tunnel in order to avoid being killed by an oncoming train in Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma*.

As this list of titles will suggest, the use of the railway in our fiction is just as varied as in our poetry. In Canada, as in Europe, the railway "supplie[s] themes and metaphorical fields to the literary imaginary" and "offers new patterns and shapes to the procedures of narration" by constructing plots and settings around the realities of train travel (Ceserani 132). And, as in American fiction, the realist impulse in twentieth-century Canadian writing allows novelists simply to depict the train as "the normal means of long-distance transportation--if not to heaven or hell, at least to wherever the trains are running" (Sealts 30). Even in such realist depictions, however, the railway maintains its symbolic character. Although it may stand as either "a romantic symbol of adventure and progress" or "a symbol of corruption, dehumanization, and intrusion" given a novel's theme and

circumstances, the railway's status as a "symbol of modern Canada, embodying within it the many elusive dimensions of the modern Canadian identity" (Cole 124), colours its representation at every turn, so that it is exceedingly difficult to escape the impression that almost any narrative depiction of the railway relates in some way to questions of nation, community, and identity.

This impression is facilitated, in part, by the notion that the mimetic function of fiction--realist fiction in particular--enables the "fus[ion of] the world inside the novel with the world outside" and thereby creates models of perception and civic behaviour with which a nation's readers can identify (Benedict Anderson 30). It is not mere happenstance, Timothy Brennan argues, that "the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature--the novel":

> Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility. But it did much more than that. Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation. (49)

In Canada, where the novel developed much later than in Europe, the same dynamic has been at work--so much so that Robert Lecker, in *Making it Real*, argues that our literary historians have been obsessed with "valorizing mimetic, as opposed to expressive," literary forms because the former better represent the nation for consumption and emulation by Canadians (36). In other words, fiction helps to engender a sense of national belonging in its readers. This sense of identity and belonging is reinforced--but also questioned--by the fictional representation of

the railway in Canada. Some novels, such as Alan Sullivan's *The Great Divide* and MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*, employ the railway in their pointed attempts to connect a character's desire to belong to a local community to the larger impulse to participate in the national life; others, such as Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and Geoffrey Ursell's *Perdue: or How the West Was Lost*, suggest resistance to the narrative of the railway's smooth union of varied peoples and regions into an unassailable national whole.

> This tension between fictions that seem to endorse and to denounce the railway as a symbol of national unity is related to Mathews's dialectic; the novels that endorse the railway's role in the narrative of national unity seem to partake of the communitarian view of the nation that Mathews describes, and those that denounce it may be expressions of an individualist challenge to this communitarianism, one that resists the tendency to elide local and individual identity in the cause of the nation. Robert Kroetsch finds this tension to be fruitful, creating a national identity based on disunity, on an "insist[ence] on staying multiple," on the ability to forge a sense of belonging out of our shared differences (360). Where the actual railway bridges distances, its fictional counterpart bridges differences, suggesting that both consenting and dissenting depictions of the railway's place in our national mythology work together to affirm that, at the very least, the railway stands as a powerful symbol of a people "too busy bridging loneliness / to be alone" (Birney, "Can. Lit." 5-6).

The railway figures prominently in Canadian short fiction and novels of all stripes and periods, each depicting it according to the conventions of its form and era--from the maudlin tale of the return home by train in S. J. Robertson's "Home Again, 40-1" (1897) to the tale of a trainman's heroism in Robert Stead's "Driver Dick's Last Run: A Railway Story" (1921) and on to longer works such as Eric Wilson's *Murder on the Canadian* (1976) and Paulette Jiles's *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola: A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies Crossing Canada by Train* (1986). I have decided to focus in this chapter, however, on a dozen works that seem to me to represent the range of responses to the railway in Canadian fiction and to probe the questions of national belonging central to this dissertation. What follows is less a comprehensive analysis of the sort I have tried to perform in chapters one and two than a survey of the range of fictive responses to the railway, a field report of sorts on what I observed while following the path of the railway through Canadian fiction. This approach resists synthesis somewhat, even given my efforts to examine the texts contained herein through the lens of the tension between individualism and communitarianism in Canada, but this resistance is suggestive of the difficulty of finding a uniform response to the railway in Canadian literature--a difficulty that is the product of, and indeed reflects, the diversity of the Canadian community.

I will begin with Alan Sullivan's *The Great Divide* (1932), a novel that is, as its title suggests, about division and separation on a massive geographical and cultural scale. The novel's account of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway focuses on the continental divide, the point high in the Rocky Mountains at

which, Sullivan writes, "a spring formed a tiny pool that overflowed in opposite directions, one part of it moving hesitantly to the west, where, joined by other trickles, it began to hurry down the sunset slope. The other ran eastward towards the Columbia River" (14). Although Sullivan does eventually document the "discovery" of the divide by the American engineer Major A. B. Rogers ("'Jesus! that water is running both ways!'" [112]), he begins the novel by following the movements of Apau, a native North American who kneels to drink from the pond years earlier and notices that it runs both east and west just before he is killed by a rogue grizzly bear (17). In the figures of Rogers and Apau (whose skull lies nearby as Rogers makes his discovery), Sullivan also points to the social and cultural divisions for which the geographical divide is a metaphor: divisions between European and native North American interests, between the classes, and, as in *Towards the Last Spike*, between great individuals and the labouring masses. Like Pratt, Sullivan attempts to resolve these divisions by showing how individuals, communities, classes, and cultures are united by the railway. His vision, like Pratt's, is integrative; however, Sullivan's vision is also redemptive, showing how the communal effort exerted in order to build the railway helps to improve the character of individuals and the nation.

The similarities between *The Great Divide* and *Towards the Last Spike*, which was published twenty years later, are striking. Like Pratt's Sir John, Sullivan's Macdonald is a beleaguered politician who must pit his "vision" against "the solid unimaginative weight of London" (22), from whom he is trying to secure funding for a transcontinental rail line "with every damned spike in it a bright red"

(26). Sullivan does not recount Macdonald's epic oral battle against Edward Blake in the House of Commons, but he does make a point both of emphasizing Macdonald's rhetorical powers and of revealing the savvy political creature who employs them:

> A practised tactician, and no altruist, he did what he believed to be for the good of Canada, things that he admitted were of doubtful morality. His intelligence perceived the strength and weakness of men. In a bilingual country, he had made friendship between French and English. On the platform, with his oriental nose, eyes of fire, and a lonesome curl on his forehead, with his penetration, jaunty manner and the oft-changing expression scarred by strange lines, there were none to surpass him: he loved a fight and glowed in contest [. . .]. (175)

This Macdonald, "gay survivor of a hundred political duels" (165), is in every sense the equal of Pratt's heroic individual. We rarely catch a glimpse of him outside the boardrooms of power, where he is surrounded by other political and financial leaders such as Charles Tupper and George Stephen, and we never see him in contact with the citizens for whom he speaks. Still, as the spokesman for "a technologically-mediated political unity as a common denominator" (Charland 200), Macdonald is also the spokesman for the national community. By compelling his followers to follow his "melodious note" (165),[1] Macdonald unites the country through language even as he seems to stand apart from it. He understands that, as

Lecker says in his discussion of the twentieth-century gap between academic debates and communal interests, the nation is "constructed, and that everyone can participate in that construction" not simply by helping physically or financially to build a railway, but by recognizing that this effort is part of "a dramatic narrative about community" (*Making* 10). As the community's narrator-in-chief, Macdonald unites the nation through vision and language because he realizes that "'[I]t isn't so much a railway we're dealing with as the spirit of a young nation'" (Sullivan 175).

Macdonald's counterpart, William Van Horne, is, as in Pratt's long poem, a transitional figure who more concretely bridges the gap between the individuals in their boardrooms and the unnamed masses out working on the railway. He is, as he himself remarks in the novel, "'a builder, [. . .] it's in my blood; I'll build till I drop'" (258), and it is his innate talent for building that allows him to see a kinship between himself and his railway workers. Sullivan's Van Horne deliberately distances himself from the great individual, Sir John, whose "contributions to the C. P. R." Van Horne connects to leading works crews to "that sink-hole south of us" (118), where an engine and a thousand feet of rail were sucked into the muskeg north of Fort William. He allies himself, instead, with the men in his work gangs, and the beat of their ringing hammers is like music to his ears: "'it means work, progress, a few less shots to be fired, a salute to civilization. Steel, dynamite, brute strength, stupidity, brains, guts, risk, anxiety, money, oats, beans, and bacon, that's what it takes to build a railway, and we're using 'em all'" (133).

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[1] This musical image is familiar from *Towards the Last Spike*, where Sir John is referred to as the conductor of a national orchestra, and the description of Macdonald's alternation between looking out the window and at his map of country (Sullivan 166-67) also appears in Pratt's poem.

Sullivan likens Van Horne's private rail car to a "throne from which his thunders proceeded" and writes that he seems "more than an ordinary man" because he is "the central, whirling dynamo that pulsated through the whole gigantic project" (121), but the fictive Van Horne is able to step from this car and plant his feet firmly on the same terrain in which his employees are working. He likes "the feel of ties under his feet" (118). His connection to his workers is palpable, eliding the divisions between the self-interested individual and the community that labours to bring the individual's vision to fulfillment. It would be absurd to say that Van Horne's motivations are nationalist in the sense that "the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state" (Kohn 9); after all, Van Horne is an American whose passions are fueled more by construction and visions of progress than by fealty to the Canadian nation. Clearly, though, Sullivan intends for Van Horne to stand for something other than sheer self-interest or engineering genius. His Van Horne expresses the values on which Ernest Renan says a "national idea" can be founded: "to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more--these are the essential conditions for being a people" (19). So even though Van Horne may not directly express any nationalist ideals, his character and actions are important components of the national narrative to which Macdonald gives voice, yoking individualist and communitarian interests in his mediation between the boardrooms of Montreal and the sections of track being laid across the Canadian landscape.

If Sullivan employs Van Horne as a bridge between the two halves of Mathews's dialectic (which would be fitting, given Van Horne's profession), then

he employs Big John Hickey, a rail worker whom Van Horne sizes up and pegs as a fellow builder and kindred spirit, to resolve the dialectic completely:

> Van Horne scanned the big frame with satisfaction: he liked big men when they were well-built, and the proportions of this one pleased him. [. . .] It was a habit of his during construction to keep a sharp watch for those he would need after the tracklayers moved on, and he considered only the cream of thousands who came to play their transitory part. (262-63)

Despite the novel's numerous famous figures it is Big John, a reformed drunk and gambler who cleans himself up and focuses his energies on laying track, and not Macdonald or Van Horne, who emerges as its central character. Part of Big John's importance lies in the way he fuses the faith and vision of Sir John (with whom his name alone suggests an affinity) with the dedication to labour of Van Horne. More important, though, is the way in which his story of personal redemption--from drunk to railway crew foreman--parallels the story of the nation's maturation through the construction of the railway. His attempt to improve himself reflects the dynamics of the railway project, which, "[l]ike growing pains in the muscles of youth, [. . .] invited the unproved strength of a young Dominion" (27).

Big John's story of individual betterment is meant to be instructive. Although he is a common man, he is clearly intended to be exemplary, a crucial part of the novel's "civil Imaginary"; he represents the "manners, taste, behaviour, [and] utterances for imitation" by the nation's citizens (During 142) in a quite specific sense by giving expression to the possibility that the individual's labour can lead to

communal as well as personal fulfillment. His work on the railway does free him from the grips of alcohol and enable him to improve his financial circumstances, but it also makes him feel part of something bigger, part of a community and a vision to which the railway is central:

> John, agate-blue eyes roving, began to feel that he was sharing in a larger life: [. . .] a vague conception of some outside force to which distance meant nothing, a force that thrust out long, powerful arms brandishing steel rails, attacking this formidable problem from two ends that were slowly and irresistibly approaching each other, so that if one remained in the junction spot, wherever that came, one would inevitably be caught between two steel snouts advancing from opposite ends of the continent. (202)

So convinced is he of the validity of this vision of a larger, national life that he actually offers, late in the novel and with a strike threatening because Macdonald's difficulties in raising money are inevitably visited upon rail workers who wait in vain for their pay-car to arrive, to pay his crew out of his own pocket. He makes this offer because he sympathizes both with the faceless men who deserve to be paid "what they had justly earned" (312) and with great men such as Van Horne, whose perseverance reminds him that "there must be something behind this line that determined them to stay with it whatever happened" (315). His selflessness, achieved through his participation in the railway project, has nationalist implications. On one hand, Big John answers Gerald Friesen's complaint that Canadians "have failed to integrate the achievements of common people into the

ideas and symbols that articulate their sense of nationhood" (228) by furnishing a reminder that the railway in Canada symbolizes not just the nation itself in some abstract sense, but the industriousness, the communal vision and labour, enacted by "common people" who worked together to cut its path across the country. On the other hand, his personal narrative of redemption and maturation from "his old useless rut into a new sphere of influence" (193) parallels that of the nation, which, "like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion" (Renan 19).

But this rosy picture of the seamless integration of individualist ambitions and communitarian goals is suspect, and Sullivan raises some suspicions of it on his own. Despite Big John's example, a divide does still exist between the salon of Andrew Onderdonk and Judge Pearson, where the possibility of a "'spiritual or social or economic barrier between them and us'" is given voice (69), and the saloon of Kelly the Rake, the inveterate card shark whose scams are the stuff of west coast legend. Sullivan is wary of denying a close relationship between these two spheres, but that relationship can sometimes be cynical, even parasitic. Kelly's "financial prospects [are] intimately connected with the all-red line" insofar as he preys upon its workers to line his pockets (30), and the novel takes for granted the "co-dependency between the railway and the politicians whose survival depended on its completion" (Francis 22)--a completion which in turn depended entirely on the efforts of the common labourers that Kelly tries to fleece. Furthermore, the play

between salon and saloon suggests that the railway is as much a gamble as any game of poker.[2]

Sullivan's interrogation of the instances in which the great divide--in the social sense--resists resolution is tentative at best. He does depict the dangers of rail labour and the attitudes of workers who know only that "some bloody politicians had decided to build a railway, and it was their job" (74), but such dissent is ultimately quashed, or at least appeased, by the physical and social forces exerted by the CPR enterprise and the train itself. The same workers who at times resent their conditions seem to set aside these complaints in their admiration for the railway and what it means to the nation:

> [T]he mountains had been bored and riven, and the panting engine with its inverted cone of stack [. . .] was the ambassador of civilization. The rock men, leaning on their hammers, stared at it, voiceless and mesmerized. This was the thing they had dreamed of, and the driver, grimy arms resting at the cab window, looked like a god. (378-79)

Sullivan is similarly tentative in his representation of the effects of this "ambassador of civilization" on the prairie natives, the Blackfeet, who see in the advancing rails a sure sign that "the old wild freedom was at an end, their world was shifting, another kind of world [was making] itself felt" (179). If progress was the metaphorical enemy of Canada's pastoral poets, then it was also, particularly in

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[2] The image of the railway--and the nation--as a high-stakes gamble appears in the Khan's poem "Poker, Push, and Prosperity" (1925). At one point in the novel, Sullivan reveals the discovery of Rogers Pass to have been nothing but a gamble itself; the American engineer Major A. B. Rogers tells his nephew that even though he has not yet been down the other side of the route he thinks may

the form of the railway, the very real nemesis of native North Americans. Sullivan does try to depict the novel's "Indians" as sympathetic figures whose way of life is endangered by the railway, but the attempt has a certain disingenuousness about it, perhaps because his chief means of doing so is suddenly to transform Van Horne, whom he has taken pains to represent as a man of the people, into the cold voice of progress and colonialism:

> "This road is going to go through--it must go--and all the Indians that ever let out a war-whoop won't stop it. [. . . . T]he prairie's going to be swept clean of what was once there, Indians included. Instead of teepees like those on that point, you'll see houses: wheat instead of grass, locomotive smoke instead of prairie fires, and your Indians just a sort of human curiosity on the reserves." (130)

The Blackfeet people, who actually do manage to halt the railway's advance through their land for a short time in 1883, are convinced by Father Albert Lacombe, an Oblate missionary, to stand aside and let the construction continue. Sullivan does not comment on the fact that Lacombe's words and his gifts to the Blackfeet--"two hundred pounds of sugar and a like amount of tobacco, tea, and flour" (Berton 237)--are as irresistible a colonial force as are Van Horne's rails. The work simply continues, Crowfoot's Indians having been placated by the man of God whose efforts serve as a benediction for the railway project:

> So came the last stand the Indian was destined to make against the white man's road. [. . . .] The Oblate waved his arm to the track-

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be a path through the Selkirks, he has decided "'to do some scientific guessing in the form of a report to Van Horne telling him I have found a feasible route'" (115).

> layers; there came a whine from the gaunt machine, a pair of rails lifted, dropped and were swiftly centred, the spiker's hammers swung up, and there began the sharp ringing clamour of steel on iron.
>
> The all-red line had come to life again [. . .]. (189)

Sullivan's attempts to integrate the concerns of the local and individual into a broader vision of the national and communal that preserves the sanctity of the former within the latter, so well realized in his depiction of Big John, are defeated, in a sense, by history. He cannot help that his novel, a historical romance, is able to construct a more tenable model of the integration of individualist and communitarian interests in its wholly invented characters and circumstances (i.e. those of Big John, who is a purely fictional character) than in those which are dependent on the realities of the historical record to which Sullivan does try to be true.

A little more than fifty years after *The Great Divide* was published, Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) presents a much less self-divided narrative. Whereas Sullivan's shaky transformation of Van Horne from hero to villain and back again, as the occasion demands, betrays his discomfort with what Kroetsch calls the "assumed story"--the metanarrative--which "has traditionally been basic to nationhood" (355), Wiebe challenges outright the metanarrative of how the railway united Canada's people into a single, satisfied whole. Douglas Jones's comparison of *Big Bear* to *Towards the Last Spike* sheds further light on the difference between Wiebe's and Sullivan's approaches:

> Wiebe's novel as a whole is less ambiguous in implying that the imperial control of space does not breed communion with the land or one's fellow man or with the divine. What Pratt saw as three thousand miles of "Hail," others may see as simply three thousand miles of rail, or, worse, a technological extension of Babel. ("Steel Syntax" 39-40)

One reason Wiebe is able to mount the kind of challenge to Canada's assumed story of the railway that Sullivan can only tentatively gesture toward is that he, writing from a postmodern perspective, frees himself from the strictures of historical and narrative convention under which Sullivan, with one foot in the twentieth century and the other planted firmly in nineteenth-century literary convention, operates. As Linda Hutcheon notes, Wiebe demonstrates his distrust of metanarrative by raising suspicions about both "the view of history as ordered and neatly closed-off narrative" and the "literary conventions [writers] were once able to take for granted" (15). His suspicion of the latter is reflected in the novel's multivocality, its disorienting jumble of treaties, letters, journal entries, and dialogue shorn of context that is a response to the Babel that Jones describes.

Narrative and linguistic destabilization in the novel is a sign of how the historical record is itself unstable, not least because "the fixed permanence and arid factuality of written treaties and of newspapers [. . .] of the white world [are] pitted against the oral, unrecorded, and thus undefendable discourse of the Indian world" (Hutcheon 70). Faced with a gap in the historical record where Big Bear's voice should be, Wiebe supplements that record by granting him a richly metaphorical

voice that speaks powerfully to the possibility that the railway may actually split apart rather than unite the country:

> "There is no way to go north and south now but to cross those two iron rails they have bolted down into the land, split it open like a thong jerked too tight. It is an iron thong. On it runs that Iron Horse that moves of its own fire, that pulls long carts faster than a running prairie fire and when these carts fall off the track their hard edges will cut open heads." (201)

Big Bear's voice, the voice of the individual who dissents from the political and institutional vision of the Canadian community in favour of a personal and traditional vision of his Plains Cree community, asserts an insistent challenge to the railway's vaunted ability to unite cultures of such fundamentally different histories and world views into a single nation.

The crux of the difference between the two cultures--white and native[3]--lies in their conceptions of land. The white man's view, an institutional view, is that the land is a possession, something over which control can be exerted, something that can be given and taken away. But Big Bear's perspective is quite different: "Land was not like paper, wind did not blow it away nor water rot it. Whatever the Governor could carry with him as a gift he could have for the Government, but not land" (72). For him, the relationship with the land is both individualized and communitarian, so although a single person may make use of it, he must also

[3] To say that only two cultures are addressed here is reductive; Wiebe represents Cree, Blackfoot, Assiniboine, Sioux, and Métis cultures and shows that there is no uniform response to the railway among them. Big Bear resists not only the temptations of Christian baptism and settlement on a

acknowledge that he shares it with others, and others with him. It is on this basis that he rejects the government's offer to move with his people to a reserve in order to clear the land for the railway:

> "No one can choose for only himself a piece of the Mother Earth. She is. And she is for all that live, alike. [. . .] I have always lived on the Earth with my people, I have always moved as far as I wished to see. We take what the Earth gives us when we need anything, and we leave the rest for those who can follow us. What can it mean, that I and my family will have a 'reserve of one square mile'? What is that? [. . .] Who can receive land? From whom would he receive it?" (28-29)

Whereas for Big Bear the expansive, boundless landscape is a symbol of his freedom, for the white man it was, as Dick Harrison writes in his study of Canadian prairie fiction, "particularly tough to humanize, particularly intractable to the imagination" (xiii). In a private letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, Edgar Dewdney, "Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories and an Indian Commissioner to boot" (Berton 113), writes that the land here is "so vast, so laid out in unending curving lines that you can begin to lose the sense of yourself in relation to it. [I]t can drive a small man to madness, this incomprehensible unending at any point seemly [sic] unresisting and unchecked space" (Wiebe 114). The railway, that great civilizing engine of the nineteenth century, was the instrument through which the white man would tame both the land and its native inhabitants, binding them

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reserve, as Kroetsch says (361), but also the entreaties of Sitting Bull, who wants to declare war on the white man (Wiebe 101-02).

between two coasts and within the political and social structures of the young nation and representing not just "the consummation of Canada's grand transcontinental vision but the extension of eastern metropolitan empires to [. . .] traditional hunting and farming grounds" (den Otter 213).

Railway construction would allow Canada to impose its will on the landscape and the people who occupied it. Its assault on the land was also an assault on the sensibility of Black Bear and his people. The sounds of men and machines at work, so musical to Sullivan's Van Horne, are "spastic clangs and whistles and screams" to Big Bear, who cannot "understand what he [is] seeing any more than he [can] understand the scurry of huge horses pulling wheels and men so covered with smoke they seemed black [. . .]. So he soon turned away, the tangle confusing him and the sounds unendurable, as if intent now to split his awareness into unfindable pieces" (135, 136). This concluding image, of the individual psyche which becomes fragmented at the sight and sounds of a process that was intended to unite the country and its people but also "announces the arrival [. . .] of immigration, of dustbowl economics, of life and death on the reservation" (Kroetsch 362), suggests something more than just that Big Bear "resisted a whole new set of metanarratives" (Kroetsch 361). It also suggests that the nation is not, as nineteenth-century poets, priests, and politicians would have it, organic, and that the railway can make it so neither by connecting its regions nor by compelling its citizens to consent to attempts to forsake individual and regional interests in the name of a communitarian ethos.

The Temptations of Big Bear is a novel about the fact that words are, as Big Bear says, "power" (144). Big Bear's own words challenge the metanarrative of a community created by a railway and a few marks on a piece of paper, and Wiebe's novel challenges another metanarrative, that of literature's reliability as a means of manufacturing consent to national principles among the nation's citizens themselves. Wiebe calls the myth of the railway's creation of a peaceable kingdom into question, and in doing so suggests, as Jonathan Kertzer does, that

> if literature promotes social cohesion by imagining a nation, it also encourages social discontent. A common language inflected by a national voice is supposed to articulate the national life, but that very articulation can prove divisive, especially when the voice speaks in a colonial accent. Language knits people together, but it also shows how the knitting was accomplished and at what cost. Language knits but it also unravels. (13-14)

The colonial accent is largely discredited in the book, particularly in its inflection of the ludicrous charges read against Big Bear for "not regarding the duty of your allegiance which you owe to the Queen" (355), and Wiebe affirms that the nation, imagined as a linguistic construct, can be disrupted by the language of its native citizens as well. Language knits but it also unravels.

This knitting is accomplished in part, as Renan says, through common endeavours and "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" (19); however, as Kertzer points out, if that legacy contains memories of the cost at which the nation is achieved, it can unravel the nation from within. This is why,

Renan argues, lapses in memory are as crucial to a nation as are memories themselves: "Forgetting, I would go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle] of nationality" (11). What he means is that it is to the nation's benefit for its citizens to forget--and, furthermore, never to speak of--those moments of brutality that enabled the nation to exist as a political entity and as a "spiritual principle" (19). Contrary to Hutcheon's assertion that Wiebe "gives his reader multiple perspectives on his hero's actions and intentions, and then leaves us to make up our own minds" (15), Wiebe seems to have a more fruitful goal in mind: to rewrite, or at least to add to, the idealizing metanarrative of the railway's role in creating the Canadian community and thus to ensure that his readers do not forget.

The refusal to forget some of the harsher realities of Canada's railway history is also a motive force behind Sky Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), which, like *The Temptations of Big Bear*, is less about the refusal to belong to a community than the refusal to be compelled to feel part of a community not of the individual's choosing. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is an intergenerational novel about the search by its narrator, Kae Ying Woo, for the story that will help her make sense of her family's muddled history in Canada. She wants to believe that "by applying attention to all the important events such as the births and the deaths, the intricate complexities of a family with chinese roots could be massaged into a suant, digestible unit" (19). Her search through the fragments of her family's

history begins with, and is parallel to, the search by her great-grandfather, Gwei Chang, for

> the bones of dead chinamen strewn along the Canadian Pacific Railway, their ghosts sitting on the ties, some standing with one foot on the gleaming metal ribbon, waiting, grumbling. They were still waiting as much as half a century after the ribbon-cutting ceremony by the whites at the end of the line, forgotten as chinamen generally are.[4] (6)

Gwei Chang's 1892 search for bones occupies only a few pages of the novel--Lee's narrative shifts restlessly, alighting briefly on various moments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Kae remembers and reconstructs her family's story--but it is the thematic nexus of the novel in two important ways. First, it is during his search that he meets Kelora Chen and has a child with her, thereby creating the first branch of Kae's skewed, *Wuthering Heights*-esque family tree. Second, the story of his search, conducted among the community of Chinese men who worked on the railway, is a touchstone for Kae, urging her to seek out a community of women throughout the novel and to enrich her present through familial stories that allow her to reckon with the past. For both Kae and Gwei Chang, the individual's search for meaning can lead to communitarian sense of belonging.

Gwei Chang first achieves this sense of belonging only after his reluctant search for bones has begun. At first he, like Kae, has little idea even where to start looking, but after a while, and with the help of Old Man Chen, he gains an

appreciation of the importance of both his search and the community of men who hover around it, the men of the work camp gangs, "left behind to rot because the CPR had reneged on its contract to pay the chinese railway workers' passage home." Initially, he feels "only a little disdain" for these men and his mission:

> At first, he actually dreaded the macabre work. What were a few dried bones to him, except disgusting? But the spirits in the mountains were strong and persuasive. The bones gathered themselves into the human shapes of young men, each dashing and bold. They followed him wherever he roamed, whispered to him, until he knew each one to be a hero, with yearnings from the same secret places in his own heart.
>
> How could he not be touched by the spirit of these wilderness uncles who had trekked on an incredible journey and pitted their lives against mountains rocks and human cruelty? (12)

Thousands of Chinese immigrants worked on the west coast line, receiving a fraction of what white labourers were paid and often forced to take on the most dangerous of jobs, so much so that the *Inland Sentinel*, which apparently "did not count Chinese" in its reports of fatalities on the railway, asserted that "'Not even Chinamen should be unnecessarily exposed to injury or loss of life'" (Berton 202, 201). Gwei Chang, himself never a member of these work gangs, slowly comes to feel as though "he had met them all":

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[4] Chinese participation in the construction of the CPR is also addressed in Paul Yee's children's book, *Ghost Train*, in which a young Chinese girl is told by the ghost of her father to paint the car that rides the rails he helped to build.

> uncles who had climbed mountain heights and then fallen from them, uncles who had drowned in deep surging waters, uncles who had clawed to their deaths in the dirt of caved-in mines. By then, he wasn't afraid and they weren't alien any more. Like them, he would piece himself together again from scattered, shattered bone and then endure.
>
> The next time Gwei Chang walked into a work camp, he was ready to share with them instead of taking from them. (13)

By running his hands over the bones of his fallen countrymen, now long dead, Gwei Chang touches the past and is able to bring meaning to his present, to find community among men with whom he had originally assumed he had nothing more in common than the colour of his skin.

Lee makes no attempt in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* to recount in detail the history of Chinese labour on the railway, perhaps because she is fearful that the narrative resonances of that experience, so crucial to the story that Kae tries to tell in the novel, might be lost in a welter of statistics and official documents. Whereas Wiebe seems intent on supplementing the historical record in *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Lee is not content to embark on the same project. Instead, she focuses on examining and imagining how the recovery of a shared past can be relevant to individuals and communities in the present.

By beginning her novel with Gwei Chang's quest, and insisting on that story's centrality to her narrator's search for meaning, she suggests that the past--*this* past, in particular--is a living, breathing part of the present and is crucial to the

survival of the community--even if that community is one that has generally been excluded from the Canadian metanarrative of unity achieved through the railway. Kae, who has just given birth to a son, longs to bring the same order to her tangled life and family history that her mother brings to her house when Kae is at ragged ends with the baby: "Suddenly, my whole household is transformed. Peace and serenity descend. A feminine order takes charge; a hearthlike warmth alights. Magic" (127). Her mother's presence reminds her that, in her desperate attempts to "pick, trace, coax and cajole each knot out" of her personal and familial life (123), she can find comfort in the companionship of a community of women, just as Gwei Chang did in his community of men. Looking back through her family history at the women who endured sacrifices, betrayals, and deceptions in the cause of prolonging the family line, Kae finds that "there is a simple truth beneath their survival stories, [. . .] that women's lives, being what they are, are linked together. Mother to daughter, sister to sister" (145-46); or, as Hermia Chow tells her years earlier, "'Women's strength is in the bonds they form with each other'" (39).

The affirmation of the value of a female community is important to Kae, and to the novel, but Lee uses this idea, as she uses Gwei Chang's search for bones along the line of the railway, as the means to an even more important end. Kae, who when we first meet her is, as that chapter's title says, "Waiting for Enlightenment" (19), ultimately realizes that the story she has been piecing together throughout the novel is more than just a story about the women in her family's past. It is a story about her in the present, and how she, as an individual, depends for identity on

those who come before her. She imagines Hermia asking her a series of rhetorical questions:

> "Do you mean that individuals must gather their identity from all the generations that touch them--past and future, no matter how slightly? Do you mean that an individual is not an individual at all, but a series of individuals--some of whom come before her, some after her? Do you mean that this story isn't a story of several generations, but of one individual thinking collectively?" (189)

The answer to these questions comes soon after, when Kae, her enlightenment finally achieved, says, "'My actual life, and what I do in it, is the real resolution to this story'" (210); in other words, the individual embodies the narrative of the entire community.

Kroetsch's argument that Canadians "cannot agree on what their metanarrative is" (355) is relevant here because, as Lee shows in her novel, different individuals and communities within the larger, national community may have very different experiences of, and attitudes toward, one of the central symbols of that metanarrative--namely, the railway. Still, whereas Kroetsch sees Wiebe's novel, and would presumably see Lee's, as an exploration of how "we reject the metanarrative and assert the validity of our own stories" (357), Lee's project, with its emphasis on community, seems less deliberately subversive than Wiebe's. Her challenge to the metanarrative is constructive, showing how the disorienting whirl of stories that compete with it do not threaten the nation and the railway's part in its mythology, but rather complicate them in a fruitful way by taking a symbol of

nationhood that many Canadians take for granted and using it as the starting point for the individual's search for a more local, and more personally felt, community that, acknowledged or not, is part of the Canadian community writ large.

The train is not as central to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), but it nevertheless performs a similar complicating function by questioning the narrative of national unity in which the railway operates as a powerful and esteemed symbol. Like Wiebe and Lee, Kogawa turns her attention to one of the least flattering chapters in Canada's history: the displacement of Japanese Canadians to internment camps during the second world war. The novel's narrator, Naomi Nakane, who strives throughout the novel to break through the silence surrounding her family's history and her mother's disappearance during the war, remembers being transported by train in 1942 from her childhood home in Vancouver to an internment camp in the British Columbia Interior. This relocation transforms the train's passengers from productive members of the national community into "chips of sand, the fragments of fragments that fly like arrows from the heart of the rock" (111): "We are those pioneers who cleared the bush and the forest with our hands, the gardeners tending and attending the soil with our tenderness, the fishermen who are flung from the sea to flounder in the dust of the prairies" (112).

By showing how the train was used to fragment this community, a community whose claim to founding citizenship is every bit as strong as that made by European settlers, Kogawa uses one of Canada's most valued symbols of national unity to question how well the myth of unity achieved through the railway

squares with the historical record.[5] Obviously, it does not square very well, at least in this instance. Ironically, the same railway that was used to attract immigrants to Canada and transport them to new homes and new opportunities throughout the nation is used here to effect a diaspora. Even when the train is used to transport camps' prisoners back out from the interior to begin their lives anew, it only further disperses them rather than returns them to their homes:

> We sit in two seats facing each other once more, exactly like the last time. Where is Father? Why is Kenji not with Mas? Where are we going? Will it be to a city? Remember my doll? Remember Vancouver? The escalators? Electric lights? Streetcars? Will we go home again ever?

They will not. Before boarding the train to leave Slocan for her new life, Naomi remembers a giant woodsman from her grade-two reader, and the text that accompanies his image:

> *If all the seas were one sea,*
>
> *What a great sea that would be!*
>
> *And if all the trees were one tree,*
>
> *What a great tree that would be!*
>
> *And if all the axes were one axe,*
>
> *What a great axe that would be!* . . .
>
> *And if all the men were one man.* . . . (180)

---

[5] The railway's centrality to the internment experience that Kogawa tries to capture is suggested is suggested by the cover of the Penguin edition of the novel, which features a photograph meant to represent Naomi as she clutches her doll and stares out the train window as she is carried away from her west coast home.

Naomi does not provide the last line of this verse, no doubt because, given her present circumstance, she knows all too well that all the men are *not* one man, that the national community does not allow all of its members to partake equally of citizenship at all times. The train ultimately does not facilitate the incorporation of individuals into the community; instead, waiting for it is like waiting for the axe to fall:

> The day we leave, the train station is a forest of legs and bodies waiting as the train jerks and inches back and forth, its black hulk hissing with steam and smelling of black oil drops that drip onto the cinders.
>
> We are all standing still, as thick and full of rushing as trees in a forest storm, waiting for the giant woodsman with his mighty axe. (179)

Kertzer writes that although one function of a national literature is "to build a consensus about what the nation was, and is, and aspires to be," it can also "reveal the shifting, partisan nature of the national consensus, especially when it is subject to all the strains of a pluralist society" (119). Kogawa shows that neither the nation nor one of its greatest symbols stands up to these strains very well.

Wiebe, Lee, and Kogawa all make powerful challenges to the narrative of national unity, and to the railway's place in it, from the standpoint of race. But another challenge, from a much less frequently recognized standpoint--that of social class--is just as powerful. Earle Birney's *Down the Long Table* (1955) and Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* (1950) show in their depictions of the railway that the

nation has not always been very sympathetic to social concerns and to the claims of equal citizenship made by members of the lower classes.

Birney's novel is a social satire that follows the misadventures of Gordon Saunders, a Canadian professor of English at a university in the United States who recalls his past as he sits at a table being grilled by a McCarthyite senator about how, through his teaching of medieval literature, he succeeds in "influencing [his] students in matters of politics and economics" (6). Part of his reminiscence centres on his time spent jumping freight trains with other down-and-outers between Toronto and Vancouver during the Depression, and as humourous as much of the novel is, his memories of this time are deadly serious, taking the glow off the nineteenth-century romance of the rails and illuminating the extent to which, in Canada, the experience of poverty is, as Ruth Smith contends, "one of marginality, of location on the periphery" (212)--on the periphery not only of the nation's politics, but of the national community as it imagines itself. Just as Naomi finds an alternate community aboard the train in *Obasan*, comprised of women who reach out to help one another as they move toward their unfortunate destination, so does Gordon suddenly find himself part of a community that the nation would rather not imagine, one made up of jobless men, "a colony of fellow-amateurs and a few professional transients, whose ages ran from a dubious sixteen to a manifest seventy." Far removed from the plush passenger cars in which the authors of nineteenth-century travel narratives reclined, Gordon and his compatriots hang on for dear life in empty boxcars that have become "traveling bunk-houses (and latrines), foul, lawless, sometimes lethal" (166). There is nothing at all romantic

about their travel; as they pass over the Great Divide, they share their accommodations with

> an overalled Indian girl, dulleyed and gum-chewing, [who,] in the light of a stolen yard-lantern and after prolonged negotiations by a scar-faced male companion with saintly white hair, began to exchange her grimy favors in a corner of the bouncing floor in return for a packet of Bull Durham, a tin of canned heat, and four dimes, the combined offerings of the only two customers who could scrape up both the taste and the capital. (174)

Constantly on the lookout for brakemen who might kick them off the train and Mounties who might arrest them for vagrancy the moment they jumped off a freight as it pulled into the next town along the line, these men form a furtive community whose marginality is impressed upon them at every turn. Gordon finds it "astonishing [. . .] how many hundreds were daily taking such risks in order to wander over the barrenness of Canada" (170). They move ceaselessly across the nation, as if they can escape its reminders of their marginality through perpetual motion.

In *The Vertical Mosaic*, his study of social class in Canada, John Porter describes how poverty can create a migratory impulse in its sufferers, an impulse that has a discernible "push and pull" dynamic:

> The push comes when economic or political conditions in a country are so bad that they lead to desperation migration. [. . . .] The pull of migration is the prospect of upward mobility, of being better off by

> moving elsewhere than by staying put. The push and pull factors are not wholly separate, and often they work together. (30)

The men with whom Gordon barrels across the country are certainly desperate, but their migration is bred less of a desire for upward mobility than for mere survival. Sam Archibald, a twenty-something pulp worker who has traveled three times across the country and back by boxcar since being laid off, tells Gordon that "'movin on is what guys like us got to do. Until we git that golden age them science fellows is talkin about, anyways. Lucky it's a kinda interestin country anyway, Canada I mean. Fulla scenery, that's for sure'" (170). These hoboes bear little resemblance to the familiar literary image of the traveler who sees the country by looking out the window of his or her comfortable passenger car. Birney's characters, in contrast, find themselves on the outside looking in, waiting for the golden age that, fifty years earlier, the train itself was supposed to have ushered in.

In one of the very few scholarly articles written on the representation of the train in Canadian literature, Wayne Cole writes that the image of the train became darker as "men's lives became more unbearable. [. . . .] Ironically, the Canadian railroad, built to bridge the vastness of the Canadian wilderness, to 'bridge loneliness,' and to create a viable Confederation, becomes a symbol of the very isolation and loneliness it was built to diminish" (128). Birney, looking back nearly two decades to the Depression era, captures this irony perfectly in his novel. The harried, temporary community of train-jumpers in which Gordon Saunders finds himself is not one which affirms the talents and values of the individual, and is no replacement for the national community which the mythology of the railway

promises. Although, as Lecker says, the novel "serves to validate our communal position in time and space" through mimesis (*Making* 136), the mirror that Canadian literature holds up to the railway and the nation does not always reflect a pleasing image.

The image is even less pleasing in *Cabbagetown*, which is even more pointed in its class critique. Garner's social realism paints a much starker, politically-charged picture of Canadian society than does the realist fiction that Lecker describes as having been "valoriz[ed]" as "the type of literature best suited to [nationalist] reflection" (*Making* 38), reminding us that such literary depictions are as well suited to disrupting the narrative of national community as they are to engendering it. Presumably, the actions of Ken Tilling, the protagonist of *Cabbagetown* who quits his job in a soap factory and flees Toronto by boxcar after learning of his girlfriend's pregnancy, are not of the sort that During would include in his civil Imaginary. The reality that the novel depicts in no sense affirms the value of the nation, nor the railway's role in uniting it. As in *Down the Long Table*, *Cabbagetown* resists an idyllic image of rail travel:

> [Ken's] peaked cap was pulled down over his ears against the grit and smoke, and his face was sunburned under its black bituminous coating. Scattered along the tops of the train of boxcars were a couple of dozen other hoboes, each one huddled down on the warm steel of the car roof, facing the rear of the train, impervious by now to the monotonous sight of lake and forest. They held themselves on with a hand gripping the catwalk. (117)

Like Gordon Saunders and countless actual men who rode the rails during the Depression,[6] Ken must dodge police officers and railway cops in order to make his way to western Canada and, hopefully, opportunity. Leaving Winnipeg, however, he and a number of other hoboes are rounded up by RCMP officers. The ensuing dialogue depicts the gulf between the imagined community that the railway was to have engendered and the desperate citizens that community would rather not imagine:

> The officer, strutting and preening himself like a gorgeous bird, shouted, "Where the hell do you people think you're going anyway? Why didn't you stay home where you belong? Were you afraid you'd have to work or something?"
>
> The hoboes watched him apathetically.
>
> "I want all of you to know I'm sick of complaints from the railways about you bums riding these trains. [. . .] You're all guilty of breaking the law! Every damn one of you. [. . .] I'm going to make an example of some of you. We'll see what a month's honest toil will do to straighten out your silly heads and toughen your crummy hides. [. . .]"
>
> "We're looking for work, that's why we're here," said a voice from the crowd. [. . .] "You called us bums. Listen, brother, I fought for four years for this goddamned country, and for this bloody railroad too." (182-83)

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[6] Gerald Friesen recounts the true story of one such man, Ali Knight, in *Citizens and Nation* (107-38).

The officer's questions raise important questions of their own: where is "home" if it is not the country that these men have lived in, fought for, and imagined themselves a part of? How can nationalism be "a manifest and self-evident principle, accessible as such to all men" (Gellner 125) when the nation itself denies access--a sense of belonging--to some of its own citizens? And how can the railway possibly remain "a potent symbolism for enacting the sense of nation, steel lines running through the disparate regions of the mosaic" (McDougall 76), when the threat of being thrown from one's precarious perch atop a train is so powerful a reminder of how the nation has already cast off these men?

Cabbagetown and *Down the Long Table* address Mathews's dialectic in the economically inflected terms in which he originally proposed it. Mathews argues that because Canada is a liberal capitalist democracy, it cannot escape the "abiding fundamental of Liberal philosophy--[. . .] that pursuit of the individual's apparently selfish interests will result in the highest collective good" (39), but that because the nation also expresses a social democratic identity in its crown corporations and cooperative movements, it must also respect the principle that "the working classes, the great mass of human kind should participate significantly in the definition of civilization and should share in the benefits derived from production" (55). Each side of this dialectic depends on the "ideals of self-sufficiency and autonomy upon which liberal society is based and which reinforce the stigmatization of those who, for whatever reason, are unable to be self-sufficient" (Ruth Smith 220). The characters of Birney's and Garner's novels find themselves caught in this dialectic, struggling for self-sufficiency but estranged from a community that does not

recognize the validity of their efforts. They are excluded from participation in the industriousness that, as I argued in my first chapter, was connected to the railway and fundamental to conceptions of the national character. From one perspective, Gordon Saunders and Ken Tilling opt out of the community by striking out on their own; from another, they are forced out by a community that leaves them to fend for themselves in times of economic hardship. Either way, the model of individualism they embody is quite remote from Mathews's description of a selfish individualism derived from pure profit motive. What these novels represent instead is an individualism grounded in unbelonging. Unable to live up to the expectations of a liberal society, unwelcome in the national narrative because of their reminder of its failures, and unfortunately relegated to an impoverished community that falls short of being a recognizable social group because its members neither "share common values and traditions" nor "have an awareness of unity and common purpose" (Porter 10), the men in these novels ride the train not through the nation, but through a no man's land in which they are recognized neither as valuable individuals nor as members of a community.

The reason that the train proves an insufficient means for the individual to escape his financial circumstances is that it is itself an expression and an instrument of the nation's economics. The CPR may have "permitted the development of a political state and created the possibility of a nation," but it did so, to a great degree, by "extend[ing] eastern economic interests" (Charland 199). As I discussed in chapter one, the use of the railway in the wheat trade was crucial to Canada's economy, which had its roots in eastern Canada. Frederick Philip Grove's novel

The Master of the Mill (1944) shows how the railway linked east and west economically but also facilitated a system of production and profit from which all but a privileged few were excluded.

As Grove describes it through the eyes of its owner, Samuel Clark, the mill, with its increasingly mechanized and automated processes, is itself a manifestation of Mathews's dialectic; it stands as a "symbol and monument" both of "a ruthless capitalism which had once been an exploiter of human labour but had gradually learned, no less ruthlessly, to dispense with that labour, making itself independent, ruling the country by its sheer power of producing wealth" and of "a first endeavour to liberate mankind from the curse of toil" (21). Samuel's vision of how the mill can benefit the wealthy individual and the community of workers alike by generating profit and eliminating mass labour may be naïve, but its later incarnation in the mind of his son, Edmund, who takes over operation of the mill, demonstrates the potentially frightening implications of that vision. Edmund would "divide mankind into two classes": "'The rulers and the ruled; the masters and the men; those who control the machines and those who benefit from them. [. . . . Because] when the process is finished, [the masses] will live in a toilless heaven'" (229). Because he does not understand that, for the men who labour in the mill, working is a necessary part of living, Edmund, as Mathews himself says, "cannot balance the demands of the spirit of capitalism and the requirement for humane community" (91). The mill drives a wedge between the individuals who run it and the community which depends on it for more than just its daily bread.

In its original form, in the 1880s, the mill served its community as "a purely local affair, buying wheat from the straggling and struggling farmers in the bush, grinding it, and selling it at a slight advance to the people of the town." But the railway, "touching the little village as a tangent touches a curve, [. . .] brought a change, first in outlook, then in fact" (26).[7] By connecting it to the rest of the nation through trains that could "carr[y] the wheat in and the flour out, day and night, never ceasing, year after year" (20), the railway transforms the little mill and the relationship between it and its community. The first change comes when the master of the mill realizes that, because of the railway, he need no longer depend on the supply or demand of the local farmers and workers:

> Farms in this country of rock and forest were small; their crops ran to two or three hundred bushels; since he had found a market in the east, Rudyard [Clark, Sam's father,] had begun to buy by the carload. Sam had seen him watching the great trains go by, from the prairies where wheat was beginning to be grown on a large scale: trains of a hundred cars each, every one of them filled with wheat. [. . .] These trains would multiply till there was a steady stream of them [. . .]. All this grain, this potential wealth, would pour past the little Langholm mill: Langholm might become a sort of gateway between East and West. (28)

[7] The railway's power to change the fate of a community through "the pencil stroke of a chief engineer" is evident here; without the railway, there would have been no change of "the old wooden mill with all its additions into the colossal enterprise which had its ramifications throughout a continent and its market overseas" (Grove 29). One community's feast, however, is another's famine; in Mary Russell's short story "The Changed Road," a man's dreams are ruined because his certainty that the CPR will build its line through the place where he intends to build a town proves wrong.

The dynamic described here is akin to the one that Gerald Friesen describes in debunking the trickle-down economics that stand behind the Laurentian thesis; he points out that economic benefits rarely trickled down to small farmers who "did not often produce enough to be included in the Hudson's Bay Company's account book" (76). Indeed, these benefits do not trickle down in Grove's novel, either. But the impact on the Langholm community is not only financial. Grove shows that, in this case, the railway does not so much unite the country as provide a simple connection between the local and the national through economics, and that this connection is achieved at the expense of the local citizens' connection with their own community. Because of the railway's influence and reach they are no longer the mill's primary suppliers and consumers, and are thus excluded from participation in the community that the mill has created.

Ironically, given the fact that it is a symbol of communal industriousness, the railway also threatens to deny Langholm's citizens the opportunity to participate in their community through their labour. The engine of progress in nineteenth-century Canada does not usher in the golden age hoped for by the hobo in *Down the Long Table*. Instead, it only facilitates new advances in technology that will free men from work but also rob them of their identity: "The installation of the machines began: trainload after trainload arrived from Europe; even the men could now see that automated operation was coming. They felt threatened in their very livelihood" (151). Before long, the mill is a mechanized behemoth that seems "withdrawn from

human control" (188) and its workers are deprived of meaningful participation in the labour which gave them a sense of community.[8]

Grove's novel does not address the question of nation directly (one of its characters does, though, refer to the mill workers' strike as "a national crisis" [299]), but it does rely on the assumption that the railway yokes the nation and its citizens economically. Charland's argument that a nationalism based on the idea that the railway, or any other communications technology, can be the "neutral medium for the development of a *polis*" is "bankrupt [. . .] because it provides no substance or commonality for the *polis* except communications itself" (198) is relevant here because Grove demonstrates that the railway can be as powerful an agent of disunity as of unity, particularly when its communications function is reduced to sheer economics. In his essay on the railroad in American literature, Merton M. Sealts notes that Thoreau's *Walden* asks "whether Americans rode on the railroads or the railroads on Americans" (31). Grove, Birney, and Garner ask the same question in the Canadian context, and their novels answer that the railway does play a role in dividing individuals and communities, be they wealthy or working-class, by disrupting their sense of belonging.

Grove did recognize the railway's role in helping to build the nation. In *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), Abe Spalding arrives in Manitoba, having traveled there from Ontario in "the caboose of a freight train containing a car with four horses and sundry implements and household goods which belonged to him" (16). Using the

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[8] Schivelbush suggests another ramification of the railway's part in alienating labourers from their product. Although local transport of manufactured goods could maintain their local character, modern transportation denuded goods of this character by making them available in places far from

tools he has brought with him, Abe builds a home and then becomes the powerful individual who helps to build an entire community. He is, as he tells his wife, working to make this place "'a country fit to live in. That is my task. The task of a pioneer'" (48). His story, up until its tragic end, is that of the individual who, in building a prairie community, also helps to construct the nation, and the railway is instrumental in this process. This story of western development, part of the national metanarrative that Kroetsch describes, is challenged, both formally and thematically, by Geoffrey Ursell's novel *Perdue: or How the West Was Lost* (1984).

Whereas Grove's novel is an example of prairie realism whose depiction of how the individual's "proving up" of his plot of land functions as a metaphor for his contribution to national development, Ursell's novel comes from a magic realist tradition and resists these metaphors of development in favour of a vision of the prairie as a site of natural, boundless fertility. By facilitating the cultivation and civilization of the prairies, the train robs this space of the fertility that defines it, cutting lines across free land that are replicated in "the utilitarian geometry of the [farmers'] fields" and "in the townships, school districts, electoral districts and [. . .] the town lot, fenced and hedged on a rectangular grid of streets usually responsive to the railroad tracks rather than any of the natural topography" (Harrison 21). At one point in *Perdue* a malevolent dwarf pops up in the luxuriant garden that has sprouted up around a stone covering a buried giant:

> "There's a new plan." He began to speak louder. "We must ensure the material conditions of prosperity. And how? Machinery!

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their site of production. By turning goods into commodities, railway transportation diminished local space and, in turn, the identity of local workers (40).

> Machinery. [. . . .] I'd advise you to get out," he said. "Get out while you can. [. . . .] The new forces can't be stopped. Machines can't be stopped." (121)

Sure enough, the following chapter opens with "the scream of whistles" as "train after train, pulling hundreds of flatcars piled high with long metal bars, rolled into town." Men gather and participate in a flurry of activity that transfigures the landscape:

> They graded earth, levelled gravel, and laid track for a spur line leading from the rail yards towards the ornamental lake. [. . . .] Working in the opposite direction, another throng of men, using teams of horses, dragged ploughs on a line straight through the tall, green crops directly towards the hills. They heaped the earth into a long ridge, and, with huge round weights pulled by horses, shaped it and rolled it into a road. Halfway to the hills, a crossing road going north and south was started. Soon the roads reached the hills, sending offshoots to all the farms there. (122-23)

Within what seems like minutes, these men construct roads, bridges, and an entire city, while the shrill voice of the dwarf can be heard exclaiming wildly over it all: "'Progress . . . prosperity . . . commerce . . . destiny!'" (124). The earth itself is changed utterly:

> Now there was stillness. No creatures roamed about. They heard no vital sounds. Just, in the distance, the dull roar of the city. The roar

> of machines running over the land, of other machines rising and falling out of the air.
>
> No pleasant smells. But a lingering trace of something corrupted; a strange, sweet venom rising from the earth.
>
> The earth itself was not soft below the feet, but hard, as if turning to rock. [. . .] The city itself oozed out across the land, leaving a long trail of lights, as slugs leave their slime. (140-41)

This is how the west was lost, its wide open spaces apportioned into neat units by the railway and the civilizing impulse that it brought to the prairies.

Opposition to the railway in western Canada was rooted in more than just resentment of the way that the CPR altered the prairie landscape. Sir John A. Macdonald's National Policy, which was critical to gaining the public support necessary to complete the railway, prescribed a set of protective tariffs that effectively denied westerners access to American markets. The west came to feel that "time and again its attempts to develop regional resources to their fullest were frustrated," and "the CPR and subsequent railways became the most obvious targets for prairie discontent" (den Otter 215). Sir, the prairie entrepreneur and father of Perdue in the novel, takes aim at this target in a literal sense. He takes remarkably little notice at first of the men planting wooden stakes in the ground and blasting away at the landscape with dynamite, but reacts violently when he is awakened one morning by a knock on his door. Grabbing his double-barrelled elephant gun, he flings open the door and is greeted by the sight of a man dressed as a train conductor:

> A crowd of people stood behind him, wearing baggy dark clothes, sheepskin coats, and colourful, printed kerchiefs. Behind all of them, no further than Sir could spit, dark metal and black enamel gleaming in the first rays of sun, an enormous locomotive loomed up.

Without a word, Sir pulls the trigger, "smash[ing] in the very guts of [the engine's] vital workings." Only after he fires this fatal shot does he finally speak: "'Bloody trespassers.'" Sir is not completely opposed to the railway--he is more than happy to avail himself of its services in bringing him the stones used to build his enormous home and filling his coffers with "a silver flood of coins" by carting away boxcar after boxcar of his harvest of grain (59). But, individualist that he is, he resents both the rail line that the CPR, under the authority of the federal government, has run through his property ("'Not on my bloody land'") and, moreover, the people that ride that rail line to populate the west: "'Bloody hills are filling up with bloody foreigners and their bloody little sod hovels. Bloody railway ships in load after load. What's the bloody country coming to, eh? [. . . .] God damn the CPR!!!'"[9]

Sir's vision of the country--which for him means the land west of the Ontario border--is antithetical to the vision of the nation that the railway was meant to engender in its citizens. He is more interested in building his personal fortune than in building a nation. Like Edmund Wilson in *The Master of the Mill*, Sir is a manifestation of the "unleashed competitive individualism" that Mathews says forms one half of the Canadian dialectic. In the late nineteenth century, the western expansionist movement promulgated the belief that "hopes for the future of the

[9] Gabrielle Roy's short story "The Well of Dunrea" addresses the railway's role in attracting immigrants to the west and describes their unique set of problems in adapting to life in Canada.

region [were] inevitably intertwined with the more general national aspirations of the young Dominion" (Owram 4). Ursell's novel points out the flaw in central Canada's belief that individual settlers, whose work in "civilizing" this prairie "wilderness" helped to develop Canada, would be willing to have their region's land, wealth, and political interests subsumed into the nation's. Further, Sir's resentment of the CPR points to the way that the railway, by homogenizing space and time, robbed regions of their local identities:

> As the space between the points--the traditional traveling space--was destroyed, those points moved into each other's vicinity: one might say they collided. They lost their old sense of local identity, formerly determined by the spaces between them. The isolation of localities, which was created by social distance, was the very essence of their identity, their self-assured and complacent individuality. (38)

In *Perdue*, the railway threatens this regional identity and individuality both by transporting "foreigners" to the prairie and by annexing its space to the nation's. As Wiebe, Lee, Kogawa, Birney, Garner, and Grove have all shown, the nation's attempts to manufacture consent to a peaceful resolution between individualist and communitarian tensions have not always gone smoothly, and the railway has not always functioned as a great symbol of national unity in some ethnic, social, and regional communities.

The preceding pages may suggest that Alan Sullivan stands alone in his attempts to use fiction to show how the railway buttresses Canada's narrative of national community. He does not. Hugh MacLennan, in particular, incorporates the

railway into his panoramic view of the country. In *Each Man's Son* (1951) Archie MacNeil, the down-and-out boxer who longs to return to his native Cape Breton, is as destitute as the train jumpers in *Down the Long Table* and *Cabbagetown*, but his ride in a boxcar is, nevertheless, much more happy than theirs, because he has a community to which he can return:

> He leaned against the side of the open door and watched the dark green spruce go by. The heavy odor of balsam told him that he was coming home at last. [. . .] When he got home they would all be good to him because he had come back and once he had made them proud. (229)

Whatever romance MacLennan creates in this depiction of Archie's return home by rail to his east coast community is undone by the novel's violent conclusion, in which Archie confronts his wife and her lover with disastrous results. And even though *Barometer Rising* (1941) represents a far more profound violence, and actually visits this violence upon the railway itself, MacLennan manages in this early novel still to emphasize the railway's importance as a symbol and fact of the Canadian community. After the *Imo* and the *Mont Blanc* collide in Halifax harbour, as inevitably as if they had been fated to do so, the resulting cataclysm lays waste to the entire North End of the city, "telescoping houses or lifting them from their foundations, snapping trees and lampposts, and twisting iron rails into writhing, metal snakes" (153). The North Street station is destroyed (155-56) and Halifax's "principal railway yard [is] blown to pieces" (180). MacLennan, like Sullivan before him and Pratt after him, is faithful to the historical record in his depiction of

the Halifax Explosion, but his decision to focus on the damage wrought on the railway is significant because the railway is described in the novel as the "tenuous thread which bound Canada to both the great oceans and made her a nation" (79). Destruction of the railway, or even a part of it, is therefore fundamentally destructive to the nation's unity.

In a sense, then, MacLennan would seem to agree with Charland that the railway does not provide a viable basis for an enduring nationalism. MacLennan's Halifax sometimes seems more sure of its colonial character than its national affiliations; the city, "terminus of the longest railway in the world, her back to the continent and her face to the Old Country" (32), "never seemed able to become truly North American" (33), let alone Canadian. Indeed, as MacLennan indicates in a passage that employs some familiar nationalist rhetoric--straight out of Shakespeare, the booming voice of the Old Country--Canada, still connected to England by colonial ties in the first decades of the twentieth century, is itself still groping for its identity:

> this anomalous land, this sprawling waste of timber and rock and water [. . .], this empty tract of primordial silences and winds and erosions and shifting colours, this bead-like string of crude towns and cities tied by nothing but railway tracks, this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself, these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question-mark, this future for himself, and for God knew how many millions of mankind! (79)

These lines would seem to indicate that the railway connects the country in a physical sense only, providing none of the basis for community that lies at the heart of Canada's myth of national origins.

The sentiments of the preceding passage are given expression, however, through the character of Neil Macrae, a Canadian soldier who has come home to Halifax after having been presumed killed in action during the first World War. Uncertain though he may be of the eventual fate of "this question-mark," Neil nevertheless finds upon returning to Canada that "he fully realized what being a Canadian meant. It was a heritage he had no intention of losing" (79)--even if he finds himself unable to articulate this heritage with any precision. His voice, the voice of national self-recognition, contrasts sharply with that of his foil in the novel, Colonel Wain, who can hardly wait for his overseas service to resume so that he can leave Canada for good: "'Everything in this damn country is second-rate. It always is, in a colony'" (101). Neil is the voice of the new country that will emerge after the war, in which Canada achieved international recognition and self-recognition with a "military effort that exceeded all that anyone had anticipated. By 1916 there could be no question of Canadian forces fighting dispersed under British command" (W. L. Morton 52). Canada's coming of age during the war is part of the same narrative of national development in which Confederation and the construction of the CPR play so important a role.[10] And while this self-recognition may seem to some the product of the "slow evolutionary growth" that Howard Aster describes in his discussion of the relationship between nationalism and communitarianism, to

MacLennan it seems to be bred of a single apocalyptic moment; the Halifax explosion is a metaphor for the country's casting off of its subordination to Mother England.

This revolutionary model of national realization, which has its great North American example in the United States, does not seem to fit in the case of Canada--neither historically nor metaphorically. We are, after all, a nation that only took possession of its own constitution in 1982, when Queen Elizabeth II proclaimed the Constitution Act, and that still has as its head of state a governor general who is appointed by the English monarch. And it is not entirely clear how the impression--perhaps vague, perhaps profound--that Canada broke away from its colonial status during the Great War would have the sort of staying power necessary to create a stable foundation for an enduring Canadian nationalism. MacLennan's vision of the national identity resides less in the moment of explosion than in the actions of the community in its aftermath, and here, again, the train is central to the expression of an ethos of cooperation.

After having worked tirelessly to help the wounded, Neil walks through Halifax with Penelope Wain. He spots a train--its windows lit, still alive--in the darkness: "'A train in the middle of all this!'" (216). They board the train, whose transformation from passenger car to mobile hospital mirrors the transformation of the image of the nation from passive recipient of settlers to active participant in the world's affairs:

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[10] *Barometer Rising* does not address, as MacLennan's most famous novel does, the French-Canadian half of Canada's two solitudes, nor the many other groups that combine to give Canada its pluralist character.

> Every car in the train was crowded. Some were ordinary day coaches, but the majority were old-fashioned colonist cars generally used to transport harvesters and settlers to the West at cheap rates. [. . .] The backs of the seats were down now, and wounded lay on either side of the aisles. In each car there was a single nurse. (217)

The sense of community effort here, of individuals banding together and coming to one another's aid, is not far removed from the ethos of industriousness that helped to construct, and was in turn engendered by, the railway. The simple fact of their togetherness aboard this train, which grants the scene a powerful unity of space, time, and action, also suggests a unity of purpose, a will to move on as a community into the future. And lest this image of unity be thought to refer only to this small band of Haligonians, Neil's thoughts as he sits among them set the record straight:

> He looked down the car and saw the lines of quiet bodies sway gently with the train's motion. Why was he glad to be back? It was more than the idea that he was young enough to see a great country move into its destiny. It was what he felt inside himself, as a Canadian who had lived both in the United States and England. [. . . . I]f there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order. (218)

Neil, with his consciousness of his half-American, half-English character, is the fictive embodiment of Mathews's belief that the dialectic he describes "is a real part

of the individual personality" (121).[10] His desire to maintain continuity with the past through his return home is tied to the "evolutionary side" of the national identity, which is "drawn to [the] traditional culture" for which England stands; however, his vision of the country's ascension has the ring of Manifest Destiny about it, transposing that American ideal into a Canadian vision of greatness achieved in the international arena. Citizens like Neil will work to unite not just the nation, but the world.

Neil's expansive perspective, in which he imagines a Canada that will prove that it belongs among the world's great nations, is rooted in his own personal sense of belonging in the city and nation of his birth. That he achieves this perspective while studying the figures of his fellow citizens aboard the train testifies to the railway's enduring power as a symbol for this belonging, which is crucial to the relationship between individuals and communities upon which the nation rests.

The railway's ability to engender this sense of belonging in its passengers is also the focal point of Hugh Garner's short story "A Trip for Mrs. Taylor" (1952). The story makes no overt connections between the railway and the nation, but its representation of a community achieved through rail travel does suggest how, as Frank Watt argues, nationalism can be "an indirect product or by-product of literature" insofar as imaginative writing may, "quite apart from its motives, contribute[] to the articulation and clarification of Canadians' consciousness of themselves and of the physical, social and moral context in which they live their lives" (236). Watt's comments are related to During's theory of the civil Imaginary and Lecker's insistence on the valuable role that realist fiction has played in Canada

by representing a country and a culture for its citizens to emulate. In "A Trip for Mrs. Taylor," Garner depicts an elderly woman's search for a sense of community and belonging in an urban landscape. A widow who lives alone, Mrs. Taylor waxes nostalgic for the days when she and her family would board a train and go away on summer vacations, for the days when she had a real "awareness that she *belonged* to the crowds around her. That was the thing she had missed most during the past few years, the feeling of being one with those around her. The knowledge that she was old and ignored by younger people sometimes cause her to wish she were dead [. . .]" (151). In an attempt to recapture this feeling of belonging, she purchases a train ticket to visit her son in Montreal, and although she leaves the train at its very first stop and takes a streetcar home (she cannot afford the fare to Montreal), the sense of community she achieves during her short time on board and at the train station is the real point of her brief journey. She is astonished, yet heartened, to discover that "so many people had awakened this morning as she had done, with the idea of catching the same train. [. . . .] The knowledge that they all shared the same sense of immediacy seemed to bring them close together, and they were united in their impatience to be going" (153). On board the train, she need care no longer for her own marginality to the bustling city; the people she sees on the streets outside the train are now marginal to her and her new community, "a race apart; an earth-bound race separated from herself by movement and time, and the sense of adventure of her and her fellows" (157).

Mrs. Taylor's trip is, in a sense, purely escapist. She forms no lasting bonds with the people who sit on the train with her, and after she leaves the train she will

"go back to her room and lie down on the bed," returning to the lonely routine of her day-to-day life. But as she lies there she will be "remembering only the excitement and the thrill of going away, and the new friends she had made" (159). She does not need to remain part of that rail community, physically, in order to feel a part of it in an enduring way; instead, having congregated with her fellow citizens and reassured herself that there still exists a community of which she can be a part, she holds on to this feeling of belonging and becomes an individual expression of the communitarian ethos realized through the train. Her escape is not from a community, therefore, but only from her own loneliness.

The railway has also been used in Canadian literature as a symbol for the individual's occasional impulse to escape from a community which may be stifling him or her. Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941), whose New Canadian Library incarnation features a telling cover illustration of railway tracks moving out to their vanishing point on the prairie, is one articulation of this impulse. The novel's narrator, Mrs. Bentley, feels trapped in the small prairie town of Horizon, where she lives in squalor with her husband Philip, an itinerant country preacher and failed artist. Mrs. Bentley wears her poverty and her sense of her own diminishing possibilities in this arid town like a millstone around her neck. She feels no sense of community with the townspeople, and she loathes walking streets which seem to her to be lined with mirrors: "at every step I met the preacher's wife, splayfooted rubbers, dowdy coat and all. I couldn't escape. The gates and doors and windows kept reminding me" (23). Time and time again, she wanders down along the railway tracks in an attempt to remove herself, however briefly, from the

oppressive interior of their tiny home, but also so that she can follow the path that leads, symbolically, out of the town and toward a better life. However, she always stops at the same point, going only as far as the last grain elevator in town before stopping to sit, toss some pebbles listlessly, and think about her situation.

She never boards the train; the closest she comes is to hitch a ride on a handcar back into town one day, an act deemed scandalous by her peers. She does, though, watch the train depart town on a couple of occasions--once when it carries away her foster son, Steve, and once when, shortly thereafter, it moves past the spot near the tracks where, but for the presence of the family dog, she sits alone as if waiting for something to happen:

> The locomotive hissed out clouds of steam that reddened every time the fireman stoked. It started backing up presently, and the dead, clugging sound of car on car ran through the night like a mile of falling dominoes. [. . .]
>
> Then all assembled, the train pulled slowly past us. There seemed something mysterious and important in the gradual, steady quickening of the wheels. It was like a setting forth, and with a queer kind of clutch at my throat, as if I were about to enter it, I felt the wilderness ahead of night and rain. There were two long whistle blasts that instantly the wet put out. The engine left a smell of smoke and distance. (131)

She is, as always, left behind.

The train does not rescue Mrs. Bentley from Horizon. It does not, and indeed cannot, help her escape from her problems because her problems have less to do with this individual town and its people than with her and her stagnant relationship with her husband. Like his wife, Philip too wants to believe that the train can take him away. Sitting with him under the bridge as a train passes over them during one of their rare walks together, Mrs. Bentley watches his reaction to the passing locomotive:

> A train still makes him wince sometimes. At night, when the whistle's loneliest, he'll toss a moment, then lie still and tense. And in the daytime I've seen his eyes take on a quick, half-eager look, just for a second or two, and then sink flat and cold again.
>
> He grew up in one of these little Main Streets, rebelling against its cramp and pettiness, looking farther. Somewhere, potential, unknown, there was another world, his world; and every day the train sped into it, and every day he watched it, hungered, went on dreaming. (29)

Philip's frustrated search for "the outside world he hasn't reached" (33) begins in his childhood, when he decides to enter the ministry in order to pay for his education and extricate himself his own small-town beginnings and the feeling that he does not belong. He worries, as a teen, that "the outside world had no place for him either" and that "all he was fit for was peeling potatoes and ringing his bell" at the family restaurant across the street from the local train station (31). As he moves from town to town ("Tillsonborough, Kelby, Crow Coulee--now Horizon" [33]) he

cannot shake the feeling that he somehow does not belong in any of them, and so he goes on hoping to find fulfillment in the next town but discovering instead that, even though the towns may change, he remains the same. So no matter where he is there is "always the train, roaring away to the world that lay beyond" (32) and there is always his continuing hope that, at the next stop, that world will be one in which he feels welcome.

He and his wife spend most of the novel in physical and emotional isolation from one another, but they are united in their desperate, erroneous belief that they can flee their own emotional and spiritual stagnation by fleeing the community, and that the train can help them do this. They err because they do not understand that a change of scenery will affect nothing. The railway may be able to create communities by defeating space and bringing people together, but it cannot recreate individuals. The train can unite people, separate them, and move them from place to place, but it cannot work miracles.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the train *usually* cannot work miracles. There is one famous train in Canadian fiction that does perform a miraculous feat, transforming itself and transporting its passengers back in time as it moves them through space. The train to Mariposa, which thunders out from the city to the bucolic town on the shore of Lake Wissanotti in the final section of Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), is utterly magical in its ability to make the trip to the little town seem like a national homecoming. Throughout the book the narrator addresses "you," who is only revealed in the closing sketch, "L'Envoi. The Train to Mariposa," to be a native of Mariposa now returning there

by train after years of living in the city. The book's affable second-person address, which seems to do little more than keep "you" off balance in its shifting assumptions of "your" intimate knowledge and complete ignorance of Mariposa, is crucial to Leacock's attempts to draw the reader into the nostalgia of that final section, where the "you" addresses the reader more forcefully than at any other point in the book:

> It leaves the city every day about five o'clock in the evening, the train for Mariposa.
>
> Strange that you did not know of it, though you come from the little town--or did, long years ago.
>
> Odd that you never knew, in all these years, that the train was there every afternoon, puffing up steam in the city station, and that you might have boarded it and gone home. No, not "home,"--of course you couldn't call it "home" now; "home" means that big red sandstone house of yours in the costlier part of the city. [. . . .]
>
> But of course "home" would hardly be the word you would apply to the little town, unless perhaps, late at night, when you'd been sitting reading in a quiet corner somewhere such a book as the present one. (181)

Leacock's self-reflexive turn here is startling and effective. He succeeds in making a connection to a "you" who is universal, or at least universally modern and Canadian, the type of person to whom his nostalgic portrait of the small town idyll might appeal--the type of person who, as the novel's opening lines suggest, will

recognize in Mariposa a microcosm of the nation: "I don't know whether you know Mariposa. If not, it is of no consequence, for if you know Canada at all, you are probably well acquainted with dozens of town just like it" (13). Leacock's idyll stands apart from most of those I discussed in my second chapter because it refuses to limit itself to the concerns of the pastoral "I"; instead, "I" and "you" join together in Leacock's small-town pastoral space in order to form a deeply felt community to which the train can return us all, if only we will let it.

At the end of chapter two, in which I discussed the clash between pastoral and modern conceptions of the railway and the nation, I commented on recent Canadian poetry's search, rooted in nostalgia, for a railway that had the power to transport us back to the pastoral space and embody its principles, a pastoral railway that could deliver its passengers to an unspoiled landscape and nation. Leacock creates this train, whose destination is less specifically Mariposa than it is a communitarian ideal, a pastoral home that is common to us all. City dwellers may regard the train to Mariposa as "just a suburban train" (183)--city dwellers are forever making the mistake of thinking that urban realities outweigh the deeper truths of Mariposan dreaming in the book--but they are dead wrong. Once it has left the city behind, the train "changes its character," shedding the electric engine that pulled it out of the city as "the old wood engine is hitched in its place" (184). The closer the train gets to Mariposa, and the closer it gets to the dream life of the little town, the more fantastic it becomes:

> How fast the train goes this autumn night! [. . .] Don't tell me that the speed is only twenty-five miles an hour. I don't care what it is. I

> tell you, and you can prove it for yourself if you will, that that train of mingled flat cars and coaches that goes tearing into the night, its engine whistle shrieking out its warning into the silent woods and echoing over the dull still lake, is the fastest train in the whole world.
>
> Yes, and the best, too,--the most comfortable, the most reliable, the most luxurious and the speediest train that ever turned a wheel. (185)

The narrator idealizes the train and, inevitably, Mariposa itself, which has not changed at all: "Just as it used to be thirty years ago" (186). Of course, everything changes. Time passes. There is no Mariposa. Nevertheless, Leacock insists that you can return home, that the individual can return to the community and renew his sense of belonging, and that the train performs a certain magic by transporting people back to their home roots.

Leacock's vision may idealistic, but it is far from simplistic. In fact, it depends upon the same complex set of feelings that theorists say is fundamental to the creation of a national consciousness, and *Sunshine Sketches* actively encourages its readers to participate in the "daily plebescite" through which the nation is validated (Renan 19). In seizing upon the railway as a setting and symbol through which to affirm these feelings, Leacock only does what many of the writers of Canadian fiction who followed him have done. And although some writers, such as Wiebe, or Kogawa, or Garner, might challenge this symbol of national unity, it is important to note that they do so precisely because the power of that symbol is so pervasive and enduring.

George Bowering's *A Short Sad Book* (1977), a novel about the way that things become, about how literature, history, love, individuals, and even his own book come together in Canada, is suspicious of Canada's symbols and wonders whether they are truly familiar to enough Canadians to inculcate a national identity. The beaver simply will not do--"Try to think hard & try to imagine or really try to remember, [. . .] have you ever seen a beaver" (46)--and the maple leaf is a foreign species to some westerners:

> The maple leaf forever. Your father told you about things you had never seen because he was an adult. & the same with Canada. It told you to sing about things you had never seen. What did a maple leaf look like. [. . . .] If they were serious about making us grow up & become Canadians they should have sent us a maple leaf. (60-61)

Bowering recognizes that there is nothing intrinsic in these objects that makes them worthy of staking one's identity to them, but he does not deny their pervasiveness--or their persuasiveness. But the railway, he realizes, holds a special place in our national mythology both for the way it unites us ("Van Horne hung our hopes on the last spike" [96]) and the way it divides us (with a train whistle on the west coast "British Columbia [is] welcomed into Confederation & the prairies [are] doomed to fiction" [51]). Ultimately, however, the railway does bring us together as a national community because it is central to a shared history of consent and resistance to the railway and the nation, a history that is as much about feeling as fact because, as Bowering writes, "Love & history are different names for each other" (97). What emerges from these different fictional approaches to the railway, with their

disparate emphases on individuals, communities, and belonging, is the possibility that, as Kroetsch suggests, the differences inherent in the various races, regions, classes, and cultures that these fictions represent are the motive force behind Canada's long "disunited" story, and that "this very falling-apart of our story is what holds our story together" (355) because it is a falling-apart in which we all participate.

Conclusion

The End of the Line

As the shifts in its literary depiction from the travel narratives and poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the poetry and prose of the later 1900s will no doubt suggest, the railway in Canada is not what it used to be. Then again, neither is Canadian literature, whose own nationalist energies and thematic and formal unities (inspired to a substantial degree by the imperial example of literary England) seem to have been cast aside in the twentieth century in favour of examinations of the local and individual, a thematic shift that is reflected in modern literature's efforts to escape the constraints of literary convention that imposed formal unity on earlier texts. The railway's presence as a powerful symbol of national community has waned since its first appearance in the pages of travel narratives of the late nineteenth century, and the train has most often been employed as a means of exploring the individual consciousness--and sometimes even of questioning the national metanarrative that informed the travel literature--in subsequent poetry and fiction. Yet the railway still has currency in the public mind despite the fact that our literature, which is presumed to be at least partly formative of our national consciousness, has done so little to engender belief in it as a national symbol. This begs the question, which I pose in my second chapter, of whether Canadian literature has somehow lost touch, at least in its conception of the railway, with its public. And although this question is impossible to answer with certainty, it does raise an interesting possibility; namely, that the tensions between community

and individuality that I have been tracing throughout this dissertation are replicated in the gap between public consciousness and literary representation of the railway.

One obvious implication of this possibility is simply that there exists a divide in Canada between art and popular culture. This is hardly a ground-breaking proposition, but it is one that deserves some attention because it suggests that literature may no longer be one of the primary engines of our national consciousness. That distinction would seem to fall, instead, to works of popular culture such as Molson's "I Am Canadian" television commercials, in which images of hockey players, William Shatner, and, significantly, Donald Smith's driving home of the last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway are promoted--along with beer, of course--as common bases for our national culture. Perhaps this is why nineteenth-century travel narratives, whose motives are more populist and promotional than literary, make a greater effort to fuse the railway and nationalism in their pages then do subsequent poetry and fiction. Perhaps literature should be prone to some of the suspicion that den Otter levels at technology for its vaunted power "to overcome regional jealousies and to establish a sense of unity" and, more pointedly, at the railway, which he insists has become more and more irrelevant to the way Canadians imagine themselves as part of a national community:

> While journalists, politicians, and commentators blithely refer to the CPR myth, the recent history of branch and main-line abandonment, diversification into unrelated enterprises and multinational objectives, and participation in VIA Rail have eroded its nation-building symbolism. [. . .] Unfortunately, as erosion of the railway

> transportation across the nation clearly illustrates, any technology can become obsolete and thus cannot provide a lasting sense of community. (30)

It might be that print technology--and its product, our literature--is just as vulnerable to obsolescence and just as unlikely to provide a lasting sense of community.

All this being said, the railway's status in our national mythology seems, despite den Otter's tolling of the bell to announce its demise, unassailable. Cuts to rail service have focused rather than eroded national passions. It may be true that few Canadians today are familiar with the history of the CPR, and that fewer still have devoted even a moment's thought to the railway's symbolism of national industriousness and cooperation, but somewhere deep within them the railway holds an enduring meaning as the fulfillment of our "national dream." This may seem an unnecessarily vague impression on which to base a national consciousness, but, as I argued in my Introduction, it just this sort of feeling that is the basis of national consciousness the world over.

I also recounted in my Introduction, with the help of Leslie Armour, two distinct ways of thinking about national consciousness--one that considers the objects of Canadians' thoughts when they are thinking deliberately about what it means to be Canadian and one that considers the possibility that we share a set of experiences, ideas, and feelings--rarely the focus of conscious attention--that shape our national identity. If this distinction between conscious and unconscious expressions of community can be assumed to apply to our literature as it does to our

public life, then there is in fact no split at all between literary and popular conceptions of the railway. Both simply accept it as a fact--a fact of everyday life and a fact of our common culture. As it is in our landscape and our consciousnesses, the railway is just *there* in our literature, requiring no deliberate emphasis on its national symbolism. Its presence in the pages of our national literature is reminder enough of how its power to inspire Canadians to imagine themselves as a community has lasted long after the last spike of the CPR was driven.

This presence extends far beyond the range of texts I have discussed in this dissertation. The oral narratives assembled in Peter Wilson's *Someone's in the Kitchen with Dinah!: Stories of the Great Steam Railroad Told by Great Steam Railroaders* (1992) and Ted Ferguson's *Sentimental Journey: An Oral History of Train Travel in Canada* (1985), for instance, provide rich examples of the deeply felt bonds between Canadians and the railway. And there are, of course, a plethora of travel narratives, poems, fictions, folk songs, and other artifacts, literary and otherwise, which I could not account for in the space of these pages but whose existence testifies just as ably to the railway's power to capture the imagination of Canadians.

* * *

Over the past two years the organizers of the Ottawa International Writers Festival have begun, tentatively, to publicize the second leg of their VIA Rail Great Canadian Literary Tour. The advertorial rhetoric in support of Write Across Canada: Words in Motion, which the festival calls on its website (www.writersfest.com) "the second chapter in one of the most audacious and

important stories in Canadian culture," is even more hyperbolic than was the case for the tour's former incarnation--a surprising circumstance given that plans for the new tour, which according to earlier advertising was already to have taken place, seem to have been stalled for some time now. Despite the fact that Write Across Canada will take place in an undefined "near future" and that its advertisements seem to confess obstacles to mounting this second tour by saying only what they are "allowed to say for now," the faith of its organizers in the nexus of train, text, and nation is as strong as ever. Their insistence on the tour's "unique opportunities for our cultural and corporate communities" and their exhortation for Canadians to participate in the experience through live web casts also suggest, though, how much ideas about technology, textuality, and the nation itself have changed in the 116 years since the completion of that other audacious and important story in Canadian culture, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Whether any of the passengers on board that train--if and when it eventually starts its cross-country journey--experience the rush of excitement felt by those first travelers aboard the train in the nineteenth century remains to be seen. But in riding the train, looking at the country through its windows, and sharing that rumbling space with their fellow travelers, each of them will, in his or her own individual way, reimagine and reenact the sense of community to which the railway has been fundamental for so many years. Together they will, like the writers and works which have preceded them, attest to the enduring place that the railway holds in the hearts and minds of Canadians.

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