

Fashion and Anti-Fashion in Recent Maritime Literary Criticism

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head, and ask how much the region has contributed to business history...and here the answer is, sadly, 'not enough'. I am not quite sure why this should be the case: there is plenty of valuable work out there to do. Is it, perhaps, that the macro-issues of development and dependency have caught us, not just in a potential trap of victimization, but also in a kind of distaste for business? Are we sitting here expecting to have it written for us from elsewhere, and will we then gripe about inadequate attention, knowledge, understanding? In 1972, Bill Acheson pointed to where we ourselves could start writing such a history, and he identified what have become today's great themes. There are firms out there to be investigated, politico-economic interfaces that are poorly understood, successes and failures that will throw light on issues of graft, patronage, monopoly, foreign domination, staples...and undoubtedly staples fractions too. I think it is time we got to work.

ROSEMARY E. OMMER

Fashion and Anti-Fashion in Recent Maritime Literary Criticism

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY BOOKS ABOUT individual Maritime authors and many collections of essays about the writing of Maritimers, there is only one book of Maritime literary criticism, Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987). That Maritime literary affairs could be in such a state is scarcely credible, since for 200 years Maritimers have been devout practitioners of the literary arts. In her "Polemical Introduction", Kulyk Keefer feels obliged to argue that a body of definably Maritime fiction exists, and this sense of obligation itself suggests an explanation for the lack of critical books: books cannot be written (or at least will not be published) on a non-subject. Indeed, Kulyk Keefer reminds her readers, since Confederation the Maritimes have been almost a non-place. Partisan whining aside, Confederation meant that the Maritimes, instead of looking outward to the wide world from the seat of an international economy, had to look wistfully inward toward an economy churning along without reference to the region except when a bail-out has been politically expedient. The region has been a place from which ambitious people (writers included) either emigrated or else had to defend their decision not to emigrate. Kulyk Keefer observes:

That Maritimers have no comprehensive history of their region or adequate general critical study of their region's literature may be seen as evidence of

their lack of basic interest or enthusiasm in these subjects, but it may also be interpreted as a reflection of their state of demoralization. If one's home region has traditionally been seen as an 'anachronistic backwater',...an exporter of the talented and harbourer of the shiftless, then there will hardly be the confidence to undertake major studies that will show one's region to be as worthy of scholarly and critical interest as more politically and economically favoured regions (p. 263).

She might have added that central Canadian, English and American control of publishing and book distribution has been an equally powerful deterrent to Maritime literary self-respect.

Another critical preoccupation has militated against the development of a clear view of Maritime fiction. From about the end of World War II through the 1970s, the search for "the Canadian identity" so obsessed critics that they excluded from their consciousness and from the canon of "real" Canadian literature whatever failed to conform to their unification theories. Kulyk Keefer points out that the Maritime outlook on many aspects of life and literature began in the 18th century along with settlement and culture, and Maritime literature has remained to some extent under the influence of the Enlightenment models followed by our earliest writers. The literary consciousness of southern Ontario, which today exerts a strong influence over the entire country, began instead by following more emotionally heated Romantic models, particularly with respect to nature. Margaret Atwood's *Survival* theory, according to which Canadians see themselves as the helpless victims of nature and consequently of everything else, does not apply to Maritime fiction, nor do Northrop Frye's "garrison mentality" and Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow" metaphor. The wilderness in the Maritimes has been seen by McCulloch and Haliburton as a boring wasteland compared with trim farms and orchards; as an accidental threat in stories by Charles G.D. Roberts in which the hero finds himself in a dangerous spot but cheerfully triumphs thanks to his skill in woodcraft and a bit of luck; as a source of peace in countless romances and idylls from the 1840s until today; but only rarely as the implacable enemy of human life. If "Canadian Literature" is seen as that which elucidates any or all of the various unification themes, then most of the fiction written in the Maritimes or by Maritimers simply does not qualify.

Kulyk Keefer announces her stance as a "transparent" critic, that is, one who examines the work before her on its own terms and tries to see how it relates to the world at large, rather than taking the more fashionable stance as an "opaque" critic, one who sees literary works in the light of a specific critical theory. Her intention is to allow the works she studies to bring what they can to her (and so to her readers), rather than to impose something on the literary works. She defends "transparent" criticism with relation to modern critical theory, but she does not mention that she is in fact working in an ongoing Maritime tradition. Fred

Cogswell has always taken the “transparent” stance, and his clear-sighted but learned approach to literature, and especially to poetry, has produced insights upon which a number of “opaque” critics have built, whether they realize it or not. His essays “English Poetry in New Brunswick Before 1880” and “English Prose Writing in New Brunswick: World War I to the Present”, both in *A Literary and Linguistic History of New Brunswick*,¹ give a straightforward overview of the topics, but the best recent example of Cogswell’s “transparent” stance is his monograph on the poetry of Charles G.D. Roberts.² He shows that, perhaps because Roberts represents “the culmination of a tradition that ended in his lifetime”, the rather narrow views published by James Cappon in 1905 have continued to hold sway. Cogswell draws attention to the work of those critics who have studied Roberts’s works from fresh points of view, and he himself proposes at least two new ideas. Roberts’s “ecological overview is not Darwinian but symbiotic in the modern sense”; the viewpoint of the animals is “markedly existential”; and Roberts’s “creed” might be described as “existential pantheism” (pp. 210-11). Also, Roberts’s “linguistic strengths lay in vocabulary, in his command of grammar through long and complex sentence structures, and in his mastery of a rhythm that was too large and plangent to fit well into the confines of most English metrical lines”; this explains why his stories are “‘poetic masterpieces’ ” (p. 224). Malcolm Ross, too, has worked in this “transparent” tradition, as his recent collection of essays *The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986) shows. Most of these essays have little to do with Maritime literature, but “‘A Strange Aesthetic Ferment’ ” (pp. 27-42), which elaborates on Roberts’s description of the Frederickton of his and Carman’s boyhood, is “transparent” criticism at its finest.

As a foundation for her thesis that an identifiable Maritime fiction exists, Kulyk Keefer isolates some common characteristics. She finds that “Maritime writers would seem to share a confidence foreign to modernist and post-modernist alike, a belief in the reality and significance of the accessible world of human experience common to reader and writer. That which is actual, to hand, and meaningful by virtue of association with established patterns of thought and action...is the prime stuff of Maritime fiction.... Absences, traces, *différance* usually possess a secondary status...; they derive their power from the pre-

1 Reavley Gair, ed., *A Literary and Linguistic History of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, Goose Lane, 1985), pp. 107-15 and 229-44. This book contains essays about Micmac, Maliseet, English and French language and literature, and it was published simultaneously in English and French (Moncton, Les Editions d’Acadie). Acadian and English authors wrote in their own languages; French articles were translated into English for the Goose Lane edition and English articles were translated into French for the Editions d’Acadie edition.

2 Fred Cogswell, “Charles G.D. Roberts”, in Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley, eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Poetry Series 2 (Toronto, ECW, 1983), pp. [186]-232.

established authority of presence” (p. 6). Maritime fiction writers have also continued to be, in the broadest sense, conservative, preoccupied with our “common heritage”. They see past and present as a continuum, writing about the past in historical romances and novels (and, one might add, poetry) as if it is at least as significant as the present, or bringing the past into the present to make the present comprehensible. Their stories concentrate on family and community. And Maritime fiction writers share a clear understanding (indeed, an 18th century perception) of the “Siamese twins of beauty and poverty” in their common vision of their home as a rural Arcadia in which even the privations are preferable to urban mechanization and anonymity.

In “Community”, the first non-polemical chapter of *Under Eastern Eyes*, Kulyk Keefer scrutinizes the identifiably Maritime components in the attitude toward community expressed in four works, *The Stepsure Letters*, *The Old Judge*, *The Master’s Wife*, and *The Channel Shore*. She begins by distinguishing between “society”, which depends on social class, and “community”, which cuts across social classes and depends on location and shared history. She notices that, although descriptions of “society” abound in the first two books — and particularly in *The Old Judge* — and occur from time to time in the other two, the books’ authors or narrators “speak and act out of a common pool of values, wisdom, and experience both positive and problematic” (p. 37). “Society” stands apart from, or even against, the communal values seen by the narrators as embodying the truth about human nature. In none of these books is the fact of ubiquitous poverty overlooked; in fiction as in life poverty draws communities together for better and also for worse, and virtues and benefits as well as guilty secrets are guarded tenaciously against interlopers “from away”. In these four books, the influence of community is generally positive, as it is in other works Keefer mentions, such as Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley*, but even when stability decays into stagnation, familiarity into hatred, and acceptance into imprisonment, community remains central. By its very absence, community remains at the heart of recent works such as those by David Adams Richards in which communal pursuits and values have been dissolved by industrialization, and traditions and group memories have been driven out by mass culture.

Kulyk Keefer’s criticism is most acute in “The Book of Nature”, in which she carefully demolishes the assumption that the popular “transcontinental” theories setting out *the* Canadian approach or response to nature necessarily apply to Maritime fiction. She observes that:

Maritime fiction has traditionally perceived the natural world as a challenge rather than a menace — as accessible book, rather than metaphysical mirror.... Given that the elements of wind and water, though capable of great destructiveness, were also prime means of communication, commercial prosperity, and sheer mobility in the Maritimes; given that the region’s tempered climate and landscape contrast dramatically with the blasted

climes and boundless wastes our mythmakers offer us as 'Mother Canada', the paradigms and very particulars of the natural world given us by a Buckler, Roberts, or Raddall should be recognized as authentic and significant alternatives to the established Canadian tropes — Tallman's wolf and Frye's snow-fort garrison (pp. 62-63).

She further notes that "In Maritime literature...the complex emotional and economic ties of people to the land they farm or dig coal from, and the seas they fish, is a dominant feature;...economic pressures and realities, not terror or delight in wilderness, determine their relation to the natural world" (p. 65). Even "in tragic works, nature usually features as hapless instrument of mute witness, rather than as angel of devastation" (p. 69). A section on books and stories about the sea, oddly enough, demonstrates her thesis by pointing out that Maritime writers seldom write about the sea. Although the sea may figure prominently as background, the stories themselves, with their conflicts and resolutions, occur on land — Raddall's *The Nymph and the Lamp* is a prominent and typical example. Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound* comes closest to being a "novel of the sea", and certainly Day shows the sea to be a menace as well as the source of the fisherman's meagre and hard-won livelihood, but finally "poverty and greed, not wind and water, are man's worst enemies" (p. 74).

The most problematic writer discussed in "The Book of Nature" is Charles G.D. Roberts; his animal stories, with their relentless killing, seem to be paradigms of Atwood's "survival" theory. Kulyk Keefer examines Roberts's novel *In the Morning of Time*, his story "The Vagrants of the Barrens", his essay "The Poetry of Nature", and his Introduction to *Poems of Wild Life* to find the premises that lie behind the fiction. Roberts wrote essays and fiction alike, not in the midst of nature, but in cozy domesticity or in an urban studio. His portrayal of nature was meant, of course, to entertain his readers and to refresh their spirits by mentally transporting them to the woods. But he also intended to share his vision of the place of humans in the natural scheme. Although his animals realistically devour one another in a "vicious spiral" of violence, "Roberts maintains a social and moral hierarchy in his wilderness" (p. 85). Certain animals, such as eagle and moose, are more "advanced" than others, intellectually and psychologically as well as morally, and humans are the most advanced of all. Some kind of life-force propels animals to be the best they can be, and the same force works in humans. Kulyk Keefer reminds her readers that "it is not only the bleats and whimpers of dying animals that sound from the pages of Roberts's wilderness fiction, but also the shouts of invincible backwoodsmen" (p. 90). In Kulyk Keefer's opinion, this pervasive sense of hierarchy, morality and progressive improvement throughout the animal kingdom destroys "the attempt to portray Roberts as possessing a modernist, quasi-existential sensibility" (pp. 89-90). Kulyk Keefer's short exposition of Roberts's view of nature-as-book

does not by any means exhaust the topic, but it throws new light on an old and contentious issue.

In “Fictive Histories”, Kulyk Keefer concentrates her argument on four books treating the expulsion of the Acadians. Three of these are historical romances, examples of a genre rarely given serious critical attention: Douglas Huyghue’s *Argimou*, Charles G.D. Roberts’s *A Sister to Evangeline*, and Thomas Raddall’s *Roger Sudden*; the fourth, Antonine Maillet’s *prix Goncourt*-winning *Pélagie*, is more well-known.³ Kulyk Keefer intends to show that over a period of a century and a half these authors “have been engaged in restoring to us a part of our national memory, whatever our home region may be” (p. 22). In his pastoral romance, Huyghue shows personal friendship and mutual respect among Micmac, Acadian and English men and women, but there is no happy ending; the Micmac Sachem must swear allegiance to the English, knowing that their treachery will bring about the ruin of his people. In *A Sister to Evangeline*, Roberts repatriates the history of the expulsion of the Acadians, which the American Longfellow had expropriated in “Evangeline”. Kulyk Keefer points out, not merely Longfellow’s inaccuracy and ignorance, but his glorification of the life the transported Acadians will enjoy in their American paradise. Although Roberts has his Acadians remain loyal to France and not Acadia when they escape to Quebec, he turns the story into a Canadian romance by showing the hero and heroine dwelling happily on the banks of the Ottawa River after the English conquest. Kulyk Keefer finds the “ideological projects” in this book and its companion-piece *The Forge in the Forest* “questionable” (p. 97), but she recognizes that Roberts has recovered the historical facts from their American exile and firmly Canadianized the famous story.

Raddall approaches the expulsion very differently. Instead of trying to balance the opposing sides and ending with a peaceful coalition, Raddall shows the Acadians to be degraded, the Indians to be savages, and the responsible English (though not the Cockney settlers of Halifax) to be the saviours of Canada. Roger Sudden starts as a villain, a disloyal Jacobite, but ends as a hero by betraying the French in the battle for Louisbourg. When the French capture and execute him for his perfidy, he is at peace with himself because he has finally chosen the right side. *Pélagie* presents a version, not of the expulsion itself, but of the return of a handful of tenacious Acadians to their own land. Kulyk Keefer recognizes that, in dealing with Maillet’s attitude toward historical facts — that they are whatever *Pélagie* says they are or whatever her people want to believe they are — she is shifting the grounds of her argument. While the discussion of

3 Hans Runte’s essay “From Yesterday’s Novel to Tomorrow’s” in the *Literary and Linguistic History of New Brunswick* (pp. 203-12) assesses the place of *Pélagie* in Acadian literary history.

Pélagie is illuminating, and Maillet's quasi-historical treatment of folklore is certainly valid, Kulyk Keefer's inclusion of *Pélagie* with the three historical romances shows more about their incompatibility than about Maritime fiction. Nevertheless, *Pélagie*, like the other three books, is revisionist; it brings back into view aspects of regional — and in this case also national — history that had been forgotten, covered up, or falsified.

"Politics and Fictions" consists of analyses of books so different that only the force of the author's argument, a denial of the "prevailing stereotype of all-pervasive Maritime conservatism" (p. 123),⁴ could hold them together. James DeMille's allegory *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* and *Each Man's Son*, and Silver Donald Cameron's foray into new journalism, *The Education of Everett Richardson*, make odd bedfellows. Kulyk Keefer describes *A Strange Manuscript* as an "'utopia' which conflates the utopia and dystopia to sabotage the very possibility of envisioning social systems radically worse or better than our own" (p. 132). *Barometer Rising* and *Each Man's Son* show MacLennan "squeezing a multicultural nation into a bicultural mould, and then compress[ing] the latter until it achieves singular expression" (p. 138). Finally, *The Education of Everett Richardson* documents the steadfast resistance to floating fish-processing plants that the Nova Scotia Fishermen's Union mounted in 1970-71. By the end of the chapter, Kulyk Keefer's aim is reversed. Her "cross-section of Maritime political sensibility" consists of "the weirdly concerted inertia of DeMille's conservatism, MacLennan's dedication to the rights of the exceptional individual and his animosity towards collective action and achievement, and finally the radical 'conservatism' of Cameron" (p. 159). DeMille and Cameron are conservative; MacLennan misunderstands labour activists and patronizes workers; and Cameron's view of humble fisherfolk is condescending as well as conservative, if the quotations accurately represent the book.

In "Reading the Real", Kulyk Keefer asserts that the central feature of "hard" Maritime realism is poverty, and she observes that "One of the essential features of 'hard' realism as it has developed in the Maritimes is a consciousness of how language is implicated in the process of impoverishment, victimizing those who cannot aspire to correct or educated speech, and liberating those who can" (p. 167). She demonstrates her point with reference to Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* and the work of Alden Nowlan and David Adams Richards, but it also applies to older works such as *The Old Judge* and even of some of Roberts's fictions. For Antonine Maillet, the poverty is the same but the opposite is true of the language: the non-literary tongue and overflowing words of poor Acadians

4 Kulyk is, of course, quoting E.R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1819-1917: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, 1979), p. 111.

are liberating forces for individuals and for the whole society. *La Sagouine* demonstrates the power of language most strongly, though Kulyk Keefer confesses to stacking her deck by including this stage work in her discussion. Alistair McLeod's characters "are given such pride and independence that their struggle with perpetual poverty achieves tragic dimensions" (p. 182). McLeod's view of the real has a metaphysical component, and therefore "his difficulty lies in finding a prose rich enough to translate with any adequacy [his Cape Bretoners'] characteristic modes of expression: gesture, music, silence" (p. 183).

In "Pigs in the Pinewoods: Self-Destructing Regional Idylls", Kulyk Keefer again takes seriously a genre that has been commercially important to Maritime writers, emotionally important to readers, and yet slighted by critics. Her scrutiny of Lucy Maud Montgomery's books, especially *Anne of Green Gables*, reveals a double view of Avonlea that has escaped the notice of most readers. Although the village is materially a paradise compared with Anne Shirley's other homes, it is an emotional minefield. Anne *must* romanticize to escape the constant criticism meted out by most adults to all children, the rigid standards of appearance, behaviour and religious belief, and the consequent guardedness of all her acquaintances. Indeed, all of Montgomery's major characters evade reality by casting a veil of enchantment over their lives, and while Montgomery tries to make her readers believe that the ability to do this makes her characters superior to their purblind neighbours, it also proves that her rural paradises are not so heavenly after all. The Eden in Roberts's *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* also topples. Here, Kirstie Craig has created a Peaceable Kingdom for herself and her daughter Miranda in a clearing far from the gossiping Settlement. As Miranda grows up, her mystic power charms the animals to such an extent that they neither attack her nor kill one another in her presence, and her companion is a huge mother bear. But, thanks to Young Dave, she awakens to reality. Animals must kill to live; even she and her mother must eat meat sometimes; and she must accept her love — sexual as well as emotional — for Young Dave and his for her. Miranda is different in kind, not just in appearance, from the "woodfolk". Kulyk Keefer posits a Freudian explanation for the dismantling by a male of a female Eden, but it is not necessary to agree with this to profit from her analysis of the ruined idyll. Ernest Buckler's *Oxbells and Fireflies*, too, is a subverted idyll, for although Buckler apotheosizes the rustic, non-literate community of Norstead, his narrator is a voluntary social (though not physical) outsider obsessed with words. Donna Smyth's *Quilt*, too, partakes of the idyll by revealing the false idylls of Dayspring and its inhabitants. When regional idylls deconstruct themselves in this way, they "become not exercises in sentimentality and nostalgia but rather, intriguingly problematic manifestations of desire for that which we can never have, and knowledge of that which we cannot help but desire" (p. 210).

Perhaps that "desire" and "knowledge" lie beneath the perpetual dilemma of Maritime life: whether to leave in the hope of finding greater opportunity, prosperity or recognition in some larger market, or whether to stay and reap less

tangible rewards. In “Going or Staying”, Kulyk Keefer shows that the same dilemma pervades Maritime fiction, and she examines a spectrum of solutions to the problem. Physically and intellectually, Hugh MacLennan left. Even when he chooses Maritime subjects, as in *Barometer Rising* and *Each Man’s Son*, he solves his characters’ problems as a central Canadian, and his protagonists “advance” by leaving Nova Scotia for Britain or central Canada if they are to succeed and for the U.S. if they are to fail. “MacLennan has effectively written off [the] region, portraying it as a graveyard of desires and ambitions, and creating a whole range of characters who re-enact his own story...abandonment of the Maritimes” (p. 220). Ernest Buckler, at the opposite extreme, stayed, and his protagonists do the same. Buckler stuck doggedly to both farming and writing, to his tortured use of intellect and words to glorify the wordless and the physical. While he treats the unintellectual with almost religious adoration, his protagonists are, like himself, anger-ridden intellectuals. After a detailed analysis of *The Mountain and the Valley*, Kulyk Keefer finds Buckler to be the mirror image of MacLennan. Both are “trapped in the same limbo; like the invalid and isolated David Canan, “[they] could neither leave nor stay’ in their imaginations’ own home ground” (p. 231).

Charles Bruce and Alastair MacLeod occupy intermediate positions on the going-staying spectrum, and both reach personally and artistically satisfying solutions. In *The Channel Shore*, Bruce’s alter ego, Bill Graham, returns to the Shore only for a summer, but he is nonetheless at home there. “Bruce shows...that physical exile...need not entail spiritual exile...; that informed ‘looking back’ is in itself a form of return, and that even if one is condemned only to visit rather than actually live in one’s native region, one can still make it the source and substance of one’s fictive worlds” (p. 223). Five of the seven stories in Alastair MacLeod’s *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* deal with the question of going, staying or returning, but in *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, the protagonists “are simply at home” (p. 236). MacLeod has found a way to deal with universals by dealing with Cape Breton particulars, “‘breaking through’ in his writing without ‘breaking free’ of his native region” (p. 237).

The last chapter of *Under Eastern Eyes*, “Words and Women”, is valuable in itself, but it does not fit comfortably within the boundaries Kulyk Keefer set for herself in the “Polemical Introduction”. Understandably, she wanted to include women writers, but she worked under a double handicap. Women’s voices have been silenced in the conservative and often taciturn Maritimes to an even greater degree than elsewhere; and, until recently, the most powerful works by Maritime women have usually not been fictions. Recognizing this situation, Kulyk Keefer writes movingly about Lucy Maud Montgomery and her closest fictional counterpart, Emily Byrd in *Emily of New Moon*. She concludes: “Perhaps [Montgomery’s] most important contribution to her country’s literature will turn out to be the private journals in which she wrote out the feelings and experiences which both tortured and liberated her — perhaps, for all her

publications she was, as so many Maritime women have been, a prisoner of silence” (p. 250). Kulyk Keefer identifies Nancy Bauer’s *Flora*, *Write This Down* and *Wise-Ears* and Susan Kerslake’s *Penumbra* as leaders in post-modernist Maritime fiction, and she invites her readers to “speculate on how much of [the authors’] energies derive from this sudden sense of being freed from silence into speech, and of their perceived need to speak for those who were previously excluded either from the expression, or else from the recording of their identities” (p. 258). It is important to say these things, but *Under Eastern Eyes* seems to be an inappropriate context.⁵ Kulyk Keefer might have disrupted the unity of her book less if she had chosen to stretch its terms in a different direction by including Maritime women’s life-writings. Some of these journals, diaries and letters display fiction-making talents equal to those of the male writers treated at length in *Under Eastern Eyes*.⁶

As a whole, *Under Eastern Eyes* is intelligently conceived and capably written, and it begins to fill a gaping hole in the study of Maritime literature. No matter how interesting collections of essays by different authors may be, they cannot have the sustained thought and force of a critical overview by a single well-informed author. Books such as those in the Anchorage Symposium series receive what unity they have from their common subject.⁷ Because they consist of conference papers, the topics of the individual essays are governed by whatever aspect of the subject happens to interest the various writers, no topic can be explored thoroughly, and the essays in any volume are uneven in quality of scholarship and writing. Of the 20 articles in the ECW *Atlantic Anthology*,⁸ only five deal with major writers. This is a virtue; as Kulyk Keefer points out so strongly, much Maritime literature lies buried because it has not fit into the canon established by “transcontinentalists”. Still, the book must be appreciated as a handy collection of otherwise-unrelated journal articles rather than as a discrete contribution to

5 Kulyk Keefer published some of the material in this chapter, along with findings reported elsewhere in *Under Eastern Eyes*, in *Studies in Canadian Literature*, New Brunswick Literature Issue, II, 2 (Fall 1986), pp. 168-81.

6 For a selection of such life-writings, see Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw and Donna Smyth, eds., *No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women 1771-1938* (Halifax, Formac, 1988).

7 Carrie MacMillan, ed. *The Proceedings of the Sir Charles G.D. Roberts Symposium*, Anchorage Series 1 (Sackville, Centre for Canadian Studies, 1984); Wayne A. Hunt, ed., *The Proceedings of the Joseph Howe Symposium*, Anchorage Series 2 (Sackville, Centre for Canadian Studies, 1984); Margaret Fancy, ed., *The Proceedings of the Art and Music in New Brunswick Symposium*, Anchorage Series 3 (Sackville, Centre for Canadian Studies, 1987); Richard Paul Knowles, ed., *The Proceedings of the Theatre in Atlantic Canada Symposium*, Anchorage Series 4 (Sackville, Centre for Canadian Studies, 1988).

8 Terry Whalen, ed., *The Atlantic Anthology, Vol. 3: Critical Essays, Essays on Canadian Writing*, 31 (Summer 1985).

Maritime literary criticism. The same might be said for the special New Brunswick issue of *Studies in Canadian Literature* (1985), which contains articles of equal merit even though the volume is not as attractive as *The Atlantic Anthology* and received no special marketing.

The work that Kulyk Keefer has started should be continued by other scholars, because many of her points could be applied with profit to other kinds of writing. Although she could not find suitable evidence in fiction to back up her sense that Maritimers are not always as conservative as they seem, another critic might find support for this thesis in life-writings and religious writings, particularly those of Henry Alline. Critics of E.J. Pratt's poetry argue over whether Pratt is a Newfoundland or a Toronto poet. Kulyk Keefer excludes Newfoundland fiction from her survey on the grounds that Newfoundland was not part of Canada during most of the period under investigation, and that Newfoundland has its own literary traditions which deserve to be treated separately; she compares lumping Newfoundland with the Maritimes to considering British Columbia along with the prairies as "the West". Nevertheless, Peter Buitenhuis, in his monograph "E.J. Pratt",⁹ brings out the same qualities in Pratt's poetry that Kulyk Keefer finds characteristic of Maritime fiction. Although Pratt's view of nature is different, his writing is technically conservative; his subject matter is almost exclusively historical, whether antediluvian or recent, imaginary or factual; he is preoccupied with the community and the individual's place in it rather than with the individual's own emotional state; and his most dazzling gift is for realistic narrative. In her essay "The Newfoundland Context of the Poetry of E.J. Pratt",¹⁰ Susan Gingell argues against Buitenhuis that most of Pratt's narrative poetry should be seen against the urban and academic background in which it was written. But when Pratt's work is examined in the light of Kulyk Keefer's analysis, Gingell's reading seems incomplete; Kulyk Keefer's description does not have to be stretched very drastically to include Pratt among Maritime fiction writers.

In *Jonathan Odell: Loyalist Poet of the American Revolution* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1987), Cynthia Dubin Edelberg presents her "discoveries": many Loyalists intended to back the winner but chose the wrong side; all Loyalists were not rich and educated; England cared little for its own soldiers and sailors and less for the colonists loyal to the crown; and the more educated Loyalists, once they arrived in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, grasped power and ruled as selfishly as they could. However, using readily-available historical materials, Thomas Raddall dramatized the same ideas in "At the Tide's Turn"

9 Robert Lecker, Jack David and Ellen Quigley, eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, Poetry Series 3, (Toronto, ECW, 1987), pp. [109]-160.

10 *The Atlantic Anthology*, pp. 93-105.

(1939) and *His Majesty's Yankees* (1942).¹¹ Edelberg collates the facts about Odell's pre-Revolutionary life and his experiences during the Revolution with his poems to give a full picture, not just of Odell, but of what Loyalists in Odell's circumstances were trying to do. Her book highlights the need for a complete collection of Odell's poems, and the fact that she could have found her "new" information in Thomas Raddall's fiction highlights the lack of comprehensive critical books about Maritime literature.

Valuable as it is, *Under Eastern Eyes* has one important fault. It is not as unadulterated an example of "transparent" criticism as one could wish — or perhaps it is too transparent. Kulyk Keefer has included so many value judgements and snide remarks that, at times, the idiosyncracies of the author overshadow the subject. While Kulyk Keefer praises Roberts for reclaiming as Canadian the "Evangeline" material, she criticizes his imperfect fidelity to French-English relations and historical events surrounding the expulsion of the Acadians (pp. 96-103). A few pages later, she praises Antonine Maillet for "juggling with those facts...in order to tell her listeners what *they* want to hear" (p. 119) in *Pélagie*. She disapproves of Roberts's meting our rights and wrongs equally to English and French strategists and to English and Acadian settlers; she admires Raddall's coming down firmly in favour of the British against the Americans in *His Majesty's Yankees* (p. 104); and she ridicules Raddall's siding with the British against the French and depicting Colonel Winslow as a humane gentleman in *Roger Sudden* (pp. 108-9). Hugh MacLennan reaps her scorn because in *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice* he uses intercultural marriage to symbolize the hoped-for union of French and English into one harmonious nation (p. 215). Roberts, Raddall and MacLennan were all committed to the ideal of nation-building, an ideal that excludes American influence and includes some kind of Anglophone alliance between English and French. Neither the ideal of French-English union nor the opinion that the deportation of the Acadians was essential and done gently is now fashionable, though anti-American sentiment remains strong. Kulyk Keefer finds fault with Roberts, Raddall and MacLennan for holding opinions common in their times while committing the same offense herself.

Kulyk Keefer's attitude toward Calvinism in Maritime fiction is similarly governed by prejudice. At first, her interpretation of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* seems acute, but gradually one realizes that she is not very knowledgeable about the Calvinism that she sees as the object of the book's satire (pp. 130-7). A sarcastic remark in her discussion of Hugh MacLennan's

11 For a full discussion of Raddall's work, see Alan R. Young, *Thomas Raddall* (Boston, Twayne, 1983); see also Alan R. Young, "Thomas H. Raddall: An Annotated Bibliography", *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*, 7 (Toronto, ECW, 1987), pp. 403-77.

Each Man's Son crystallizes her distaste for the powerful, complex and respectable set of doctrines for which the term "Calvinism" is the merest shorthand: another author, she says, stresses the "traditionally Celtic rather than neurotically Calvinist elements" in his "portrait of the Cape Breton Gael" (p. 143). Her dislike of *Each Man's Son* finally boils over, and she bursts out, "Do we allow the novelist freedom to write of a mining town more along the lines of the *Odyssey* than of *Sons and Lovers*, and to impose a Homeric-Calvinist schema upon the troublesome reality with which his fiction engages — or do we demand a stringent (and problematic) kind of verisimilitude?" (p. 144). In fact, "we" lack the power to "allow" or "demand" anything of writers; it can be argued that *Each Man's Son* is not a novel but a romance, which obeys different conventions and against which, in spite of her efforts, the author remains biased; and Kulyk Keefer has praised Antonine Maillet for doing the very thing for which she attacks MacLennan — imposing her own vision of "reality" on the actual world of which she writes. In one rash sentence, Kulyk Keefer privileges reader/critic over writer, novel over romance, and an experimental French female over a conservative English male. Every reader will sympathize with Kulyk Keefer's strength of feeling, but surely the "transparent" critic must treat the works she examines with dignity, regardless of intellectual fashion and her own tastes.

On a smaller scale, too, Kulyk Keefer's sarcasm weakens *Under Eastern Eyes*. She works hard to demonstrate the value of Charles G.D. Roberts's fiction, but clearly she doesn't like it. Of course she has the right to dislike whatever she chooses, but, by sniping at Roberts throughout the book, she undermines the respect for his work that she has built up in her elucidation of his romances and novels. Similar undercutting pervades her discussions of James DeMille and Hugh MacLennan. She thus conveys a double message: the fiction of these authors deserves to be taken seriously, yet only a fool could be interested in such nonsense.

This criticism of *Under Eastern Eyes* goes beyond personal preference; Kulyk Keefer's apparent fear that she will attract the ridicule of her peers by giving careful critical treatment to unfashionable material shakes one's faith in her book as a whole. Her fear — if such it is — is completely unnecessary. *Under Eastern Eyes* is truly a seminal work of criticism, one that should become the basis, not only of more work conceived in its image, but also of enlightened dissent. For Kulyk Keefer's thesis is manifestly correct: there *is* a recognizable Maritime fiction, and it *is* worthy of our attention and critical scrutiny.

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