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Article abstract

Critics of *Barometer Rising* (1941) tend to treat the novel's various personages as rigidly representing aspects of Canadian identity. Such an approach, however, reduces characters to components of an abstract national schema that sits awkwardly alongside the novel's visceral descriptions of the Halifax Explosion. This dualist view fails to account for how feelings and sensations are also among the building blocks of national identity in the novel. Sara Ahmed insists that "affective economies" are key to aligning individuals with communities through public events that elicit shared emotional responses. *Barometer Rising* stages such events to bring Haligonians together emotionally and physically, representing and rehearsing a particularly somatic nationalism. In this regard the novel makes a significant contribution to accounts of national identity in its insistence that citizens are drawn into the nation through their emotional and erotic lives.

# Somatic Nationalism and Spectacle in Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*

ROBERT MCGILL

IF IT IS NOW A TRUISM that Canada “came of age” in the First World War, the literary text that has most entrenched that notion is likely Hugh MacLennan’s 1941 novel, *Barometer Rising*. The novel allegorizes Canada’s wartime transformation by dramatizing the effects of the 1917 Halifax explosion on various characters, most prominently Neil Macrae, a young Haligonian who has recently returned home from the war wounded, shell-shocked, and forced to travel incognito due to the threat of being unjustly court-martialled. After the explosion, Neil’s altruistic rescue work across the city has the salubrious if medically surprising effect of easing his afflictions from the war. The explosion also gives rise to events that let Neil restore his reputation and reclaim his identity while gaining a new nationalist consciousness. The novel is not subtle in suggesting that these transformations emblemize Canada’s emergence from a colonial status into a more robust national identity. Indeed, the national allegory is all but explicitly recognized in *Barometer Rising* itself by another principal character, the doctor Angus Murray, who observes that he and others such as Neil are “the ones who make Canada what she is today” (289). Commentators on *Barometer Rising* have usually taken Murray’s hint and treated various personages in the novel as representing aspects of Canadian identity. However, such an approach renders *Barometer Rising* rather arid, reducing its characters to components of an abstract national schema that would seem to sit awkwardly alongside the novel’s visceral descriptions of the Halifax explosion and its aftermath. Such a dualist view of *Barometer Rising* as part national allegory, part graphic realism fails to account for the remarkable ways in which the novel’s depiction of human beings in extremis energizes the book’s nationalist project.

In that regard, it is important to recognize that if characters in *Barometer Rising* embrace Canada partly as a result of cogitation, their embrace is also somatic, involving feelings and sensations that are physical as well as psychological. Pain, shame, exhaustion, desire,

shock — in *Barometer Rising*, these are among the building blocks of national identity. Repeatedly in the novel, such feelings serve to orient individuals toward Canada. *Barometer Rising* thus diagnoses a role for feelings in national identity-formation similar to the role that critics such as Sara Ahmed have assigned affective experience with regard to community-building more broadly. Ahmed insists that “affective economies” are key to aligning individuals with communities (119); people become joined together by sharing emotions, whether at virtual gatherings effected by the mass media or at physical assemblies such as political rallies and athletic contests. *Barometer Rising* stages similar events that bring together Haligonians bodily and emotionally; in doing so, the novel yokes characters to Canada not simply through allegory but also in much more corporeal ways, thus both representing and rehearsing a particularly somatic nationalism: a normative model of national belonging rooted in citizens’ bodily attachments to their country.

*Barometer Rising* is particularly striking in its suggestion that such attachments are multiple and varied. In that regard, the novel gives a more comprehensive picture of nationalist feeling than do critics who have focused on affect in considering nationalism’s non-rational elements. For instance, when Marusya Bociurkiw seeks to establish the communal qualities of affect, she contrasts it with “the somewhat more individualized notion of the drive within psychoanalysis” (3). In *Barometer Rising*, though, the drive is not relegated solely to the sphere of the individual; rather, the novel repeatedly calls attention to the part that libido plays in nationalizing citizens. Indeed, the novel suggests that sexual energies suffuse collectivizing events, most explicitly during scenes between Neil and his lover, Penny Wain, but also in scenes involving bodily rescue and recovery, as well as in moments of mass spectacle. Whether the novel is presenting Canadians as watched or watching, acted upon or acting, suffering or celebrating, it suggests that desire binds them to the nation. Although George Woodcock identifies an “embarrassed clumsiness that makes MacLennan incapable in any of his novels of dealing with sexuality except in high-mindedly sentimental terms” (64), *Barometer Rising* evinces a subtler treatment of sexuality than Woodcock recognizes. In that regard, *Barometer Rising* makes a significant contribution to accounts of national identity in its insistence that citizens are drawn into the nation not only through wartime heroics but also through their emotional and erotic lives.

At the same time, in staging the Halifax explosion as a catalyst for Canada's coming of age, *Barometer Rising* depicts individual corporeal suffering and self-abnegation as salutary, even necessary for the national good, thus manifesting a certain illiberalism that is at odds with the novel's more explicit condemnation of militarism and authoritarianism. Moreover, the novel's normalization of the heterosexual male gaze and its association of male penetrative acts with national strength, alongside the narrative's emphasis on women's reproductive role in the nation, bespeaks a nationalism closely tied to a conservative gender politics. Accordingly, even as *Barometer Rising* critiques impulses to harness the bodies and feelings of citizens to national ends, the novel itself follows a similar impulse.

### The *Olympic* and the Erotics of Witnessing

A relatively early scene involving the *Olympic*, an ocean liner converted to a troopship and docked at the Halifax harbour, establishes *Barometer Rising*'s interest in the relationship between bodies, feelings, and the nation. As Haligonians gather en masse to watch a parade culminating in the embarkation of Canadian soldiers and the *Olympic*'s departure for Europe, the event organizes both citizens' gazes and their affective lives, gathering them into a collective and bearing out Guy Debord's definition of a spectacle as not simply "a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (par. 4). In particular, the description of the scene repeatedly emphasizes that the assembled citizens all share the same feelings. For instance, the narrator comments that people of the city "had seen the *Olympic* come and go so often during the past few years they had acquired a personal affection for her" (73). While this characterization homogenizes the crowd, it also notably feminizes the ship. To be sure, it is a convention to call a ship "her," but as the scene continues, the relationship between the *Olympic* and the spectators at the pier gains an erotic resonance that makes the deployment of this convention significant. The *Olympic*'s horn is described as "making the air shudder," while the ship's departure is represented in highly sensual terms: "Another gurgle sounded from the stern and a mound of white and hissing water was spewed out. A wave appeared at the cutwater and built itself up, and then a great murmur rose from the watching crowd in a sigh" (77). In this parodically orgasmic moment, the crowd members are joined not only to each other and the vessel

but also, by extension, to Canada, given the ship's role in the national war effort. The novel further calls attention to the visceral nationalism of the spectacle through Murray, who is present at the scene; when he hears pipers playing "Lochaber No More," he feels his fingers clench and senses "a salty constriction behind his eyes" (74). Murray identifies his somatic response as a patriotic one, linking it to his Scottish heritage and worrying that the playing of the song is one of "England's baits" luring Canadians to war, but he is unable to deny the music's effectiveness in stirring his emotions (74). In this moment, the novel recognizes the possibility of harnessing irrational responses to nationalist ends.

Meanwhile, the national valence of the *Olympic* is made more complex by the description of the ship, which emphasizes the camouflage on its hull known as dazzle painting. Characterized by disjunctive patterns of geometrical shapes, dazzle painting was an innovation of the First World War designed to make it difficult for enemy eyes to gauge a ship's speed and bearing. *Barometer Rising* attends to this innovation in an extended description of the *Olympic*:

each time she returned, she was strange as well as familiar because her pattern of camouflage was repeatedly altered. This voyage she was painted black and grey and white, with vast sweeps of colour going up and forward in a crazy rhythm from the plimsoll line to the first promenade deck, then veering around as though a wind up there were blowing the colours backwards. Sometimes her stern was blacked down to the wake and the picture of a tramp ship was painted amidships on her hull. But her cargo had remained the same on every voyage since the beginning of the war: three bars of khaki lining the rails, five thousand Canadians travelling in bond, going to Europe with nothing to declare. (73)

While accurately recording a dazzle design that the real *Olympic* bore, this description also functions as a self-reflexive element in *Barometer Rising*, evoking issues of audience and aesthetics that pertain to the novel itself. In particular, the emphasis on the ship as a spectacle situates readers alongside Murray and other Haligonians at the pier as observers and provides MacLennan's audience with a figure for their own act of reading *Barometer Rising* — another "vessel" containing Canadians at war and another aesthetic object holding the potential to stir the patriotism of those who engage with it. Moreover, just as the *Olympic* features patterns on it that are estranging, *Barometer Rising* insists that acts of

looking are not always innocent or accurate but can be freighted and misleading. It makes this point with regard to Halifax itself, which is frequently referred to in the novel as “familiar,” but which is also called “chameleon-like” (67) and is claimed to have “a genius for looking old” (8) while offering “more than [meets] the eye” (40). The description of the *Olympic’s* dazzle painting works alongside these other references to suggest that readers reconsider their own perspectives on the city and the Canada it represents.

The *Olympic’s* dazzle painting also recalls the various marks and disguises that human bodies in the novel take on as a result of the war. The most obvious example is Neil, who upon his return to Halifax goes about the city out of uniform and under an assumed name to avoid arrest. Meanwhile, during his time overseas, Penny has given birth to their daughter, Jean, then surrendered the girl for adoption, keeping Jean’s existence a secret from her family and thus remaining figuratively camouflaged herself. The novel suggests such dissemblance is sometimes necessary, in part, because the war has produced particularly surveilling citizens who are constantly called upon to look out for enemies while watching over themselves and each other. For instance, Haligonians in the novel are alert to the possibility of German submarines appearing in the harbour, and citizens are subject to discipline if they fail to maintain a nightly blackout (29, 46). But if characters in *Barometer Rising* are forced by national security and the risk of social censure to take on various forms of camouflage, they are also marked out bodily by the war in conspicuous, even spectacular, ways. For instance, the conflict has left Neil hobbled by a leg injury in addition to his shell shock, while Murray’s service overseas has bequeathed him a wounded arm and hand that he keeps in a sling for the first part of the novel. What is more, *Barometer Rising* recognizes that participation in the national war effort can even affect the ways in which one looks and responds to what one sees. In Neil’s case, his military training has sufficiently conditioned his sight and bodily responses that early in the novel, when he sees two soldiers approaching him in the street, “his right hand involuntarily [leaves] his pocket to wait for their salute” (63). His somatic reaction anticipates Murray’s irrational response to the pipers at the pier, signalling again the novel’s interest in how nationally inflected spectacles can intimately affect the mind and body.

## Halifax and the Hetero-Masculine Gaze

Although Penny has not served overseas like Neil and Murray, she, too, has been marked corporeally by the war even before the explosion, developing a lock of white hair that, insofar as it changes her appearance chromatically, parallels the dazzle painting on the *Olympic*. Penny tries to tuck the lock out of sight, but it is apparently “impossible to conceal it entirely” (27), a phrase echoed in the later description of the *Olympic*’s departure time as something that “could never be entirely concealed” (73). This echo is salient given that Penny and the *Olympic* are both the objects of a collective male gaze. Indeed, in this regard, it is notable that the individuated characters looking at the *Olympic* are all men, and that a scene of Penny suffering a co-worker’s lascivious looks is interpolated in the sequence of the ship’s departure (71-73). Through this interpolation, the already sensual description of the *Olympic* becomes further eroticized. As a result, the novel encourages readers to consider both the role of libidinal feelings in public spectacles and the ways in which sexual desire might be co-opted to national ends.

As the narrative proceeds, *Barometer Rising* explores this possibility by maintaining a homology between Neil’s eventual reunion with Penny and his renewed embrace of Canada as his place of belonging. The homology is established from the novel’s beginning, where a description of Neil gazing upon Halifax from atop Citadel Hill uses language and imagery that foreground his libidinal engagement with the local terrain while emphasizing the landscape’s nationalized character. As Neil looks down, he sees “sailors with only a night on shore and local girls with no better place to be” together on the slope below him (6). This tableau of shore-leave trysts in wartime notably imbricates sexual desire with national duty, while the setting of the scene at the Citadel underscores the militarized, nationalized character of Halifax. That national inflection echoes through Neil’s subsequent engagement with the local landscape. Making his way to Penny’s house, he considers knocking on the door and thinks, “Just a few movements and it would be done, and then whatever else he might feel, this loneliness which welled inside like a salt spring would disappear. Spasmodically he clasped one hand with the other and squeezed it hard” (11). Presumably, the sexual connotations of the moment require no elaboration, but it should be pointed out that the description anticipates Murray’s “salty constriction” and clenched fingers while observing the *Olympic*, thus connecting the two

men in terms of their shared corporeal and affective responses. Insofar as that connection links Neil's private feelings outside Penny's house to Murray's participation in a moment of intense nationalist affect, it illustrates Ahmed's argument that affective attachments have a "rippling effect," transferring from one object to another through metonymic exchange and thus creating "'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects" (120). And, indeed, *Barometer Rising* repeatedly effects such exchanges for nationalist purposes by evoking Canada directly or indirectly when representing characters' libidinal feelings in relation to each other and their surroundings.

Such evocations are once more in evidence after Neil leaves Penny's house. With his imagined knocking at her door having inaugurated a metonymic association between doors and her sexual penetrability, the metonym recurs as he passes a church and hears a hymn that "penetrate[s] its closed Gothic doors," followed by "a muffled sigh" from the congregation, then the "vibrant, moaning sound" of "groaning buoys at the harbour-mouth" (12). Not only does the group's sighing and the reference to the harbour once more anticipate the collective affect evident during the scene involving the *Olympic*, but Neil also then promptly witnesses more girls and sailors together, providing another reminder of the war's nationalizing force. Simultaneously, Neil finds the air "salty and moist and the odour of fish-meal . . . in his nostrils" (12). This externalization of erotic feelings both suggests sexual frustration and establishes Neil's bond with the city — and, by extension, with Canada — as a libidinal one. In that regard, it is notable that once he has returned to his lodging he ends up lying down in his room to decidedly ambiguous ends and that the narrative then shifts abruptly to Penny, who is at her workplace in the shipyard, abetting the national war effort. She is described as looking out at a sky "slashed starkly by the upthrust angles of the great cranes," and "by the two masts and three funnels of the cruiser which lay at the naval dockyard," an assembly she calls "enormous and potent" (13). Her perspective on the landscape is more phallically oriented than Neil's but no less eroticized. Although the two of them have not yet encountered each other since Neil's return to Halifax, this juxtaposition of them is already figuratively enacting a sexual reunion. In fact, twice Penny hears doors opening and closing, recalling the sexually symbolic doors in the previous scene (12, 15). Accordingly, even while the introduction of Penny at work as a ship

designer establishes her as a New Woman who has found success in her profession, the novel is also configuring her from the beginning as someone to be claimed by Neil sexually, a figure to be re-penetrated if he is to be fully repatriated.

Meanwhile, although both Neil's and Penny's thoughts are represented in these early scenes, the omniscient narrator is more closely aligned with Neil, moving almost indiscernibly in and out of his perspective while retaining a spectatorial, objectifying distance from Penny. For example, the narrator describes her as having "definite curves at her hips and breasts, a latent fullness the more pleasing because it revealed itself as a surprise" (13). In this assessment of her, he aligns himself not only with Neil but also with Murray and Penny's male co-workers, all of whom are depicted as evaluating her in a sexual way. For instance, a colleague tells her, "You got a figure ought to fill any man's eye" (18), while later Murray stares at her and thinks, "To appraise women, to study their figures . . . had always seemed to him a delightful manner of passing the time" (44). This shared hetero-masculine perspective is bound up with a broader symbolics of penetration in the novel, whereby the male gaze functions as both preparatory to and in itself a sexual, piercing act. For instance, at her reunion with Neil, Penny has "the feeling that his eyes stared right through her clothes and lingered on her body" (150). Particularly remarkable is the fact that while the omniscient narrator shares such a gaze, he is also aligned with Canada, at least in the sense that his ability to enter the minds of characters extends only to Canadians. The consequence is that even as the narrator seems to offer a pan-Canadian vision, that vision is conspicuously straight and male, such that *Barometer Rising* adopts a strikingly masculinist conception of nationalism, one in which, as J. Ann Tickner puts it, "the most dangerous threat to both a man *and* a state is to be like a woman," because, according to the chauvinist stereotype, "women are weak, fearful, indecisive and dependent" (39). Such a view of femininity opposes it to the power, assertiveness, and autonomy associated with what R.W. Connell calls "hegemonic masculinity" (185), a masculinity that in patriarchal societies is commonly identified with an ideal national identity. To be sure, masculinist nationalism was not uncommon at the time *Barometer Rising* was published. However, a more peculiar quality of the novel is the complexity of its efforts to tie the gendered and sexualized body to the nation. In part, the novel does so through

the depiction of male characters' heroic actions, but it also accomplishes the feat by staging acts of collective male looking, whether at Penny or the feminized *Olympic*.

### Penetrations and Primal Scenes

Even as the narrator's conspicuously gendered and sexualized perspective suggests that *Barometer Rising* endorses a hetero-masculine Canadian nationalism, the novel further recognizes that a national identity embracing hegemonic masculinity has not always been straightforwardly available to Canadians. In part, it has remained inaccessible because of Canada's erstwhile subordinate position as a British colony and its sometime status as an object of American desire. The latter characteristic is in evidence in *Barometer Rising* when Colonel Wain — Penny's father and Neil's uncle — meets with a Canadian staff-colonel accompanied by an American army major who wishes to secure land in Halifax for a U.S. seaplane base. As the staff-colonel uses Wain's telescope to observe a potential site in the harbour, he notes that he "can see a hole in a sailor's drawers hanging in the rigging of that Dutch ship out there. Right in the crotch, too" (82). This odd, unexpected moment of voyeurism, coupling male sexual vulnerability with an American acquisitive interest in Canadian terrain, metonymically adds an erotic register to concerns about Canada's susceptibility to foreign takeover. In that regard, the staff-colonel's identification of the ship's nationality, a seemingly unnecessary detail, consolidates a sense that the sailor's situation has a resonance in terms of national vulnerabilities, not just personal ones. Moreover, such vulnerability becomes manifest in immediate, corporeal ways once the narrative arrives at the moment of the Halifax explosion. The explosion is depicted not only as damaging to people and property but also as a national sexual violation, transforming citizens from gazing subjects into penetrated objects. At first a fire aboard a French munitions ship in the harbour appears merely to offer another wartime spectacle akin to the *Olympic's* departure, such that men gather "along the entire waterfront to watch the burning ship" (211). However, their proximity to the vessel increases their vulnerability to the subsequent blast, which kills almost two thousand people and causes glass from shattered windows to blind many. As *Barometer Rising* documents this devastation, it pays particular attention to the explosion's bodily violations of men.

In this respect, it is notable that the novel depicts its two principal male characters, Neil and Murray, as penetrated violently while serving their country even before the Halifax disaster. The figurative emasculation caused by their injuries is suggested, for instance, by the representation of Murray in his sling as particularly susceptible to others' gaze, such that Penny tells her aunt Maria, "Now for heaven's sake don't stare when he comes in" (34). What is more, upon Murray's appearance, he is described in conventionally feminine terms: his voice is "soft, lilting," and his sling is made of "black silk" (35). Having penetrated men's bodies and turned them into spectacles, the war has inverted the patriarchal order, putting them in the objectified position of women. In the novel, this position strikingly parallels Canada's subordinated relationship to Britain, so that the body's wounds stand as marks of national affiliation, symbolic of Canada's emasculation but also the literal products of it, earned while fighting for the country. In the wake of the explosion, as Neil goes about the city doing relief work while Murray treats the wounded, the two men's respective injuries are at once corporeal hurdles to overcome, figurative emasculations to be remediated, and confirmations of each man's membership in the nation, thus serving as reminders of their duty to help their fellow citizens.

As for the damage to bodies inflicted by the explosion, this challenge to hetero-masculine nationalism is perhaps most striking in a moment immediately after the blast when Penny's young brother, Roddie, enters his school and, after referring to a teacher as a "bugger," sees a plaster bust of Sir Wilfrid Laurier with "a spike of glass six inches long protruding from its mouth" (220). This sight of the former prime minister so penetrated by a phallic object, an image Roddie considers "obscenely bizarre," homophobically equates the trauma of the explosion with the apprehension of queer sex, an association confirmed later when an army sergeant tells stories about "queer stuff" the explosion has wrought, including the anecdote of a shipmaster who was "blown a clear mile and woke up naked on the top of Fort Needham" (249). At the time of *Barometer Rising's* publication, "queer" predominantly meant "odd," but by 1941, the word was also in circulation as a synonym for "homosexual," and that connotation is hard to ignore, especially given the earlier depiction of Laurier's bust.

The shipmaster shares with the bust in being not only affected by the blast but also turned into a spectacle. In this regard, it is notable

that seeing the bust is traumatic for Roddie, a parody of the Freudian “primal scene” in which the child observes its parents having sex. In fact, the scene with the bust parallels a later one in which Neil discovers the corpse of Colonel Wain *in flagrante* with his mistress in the ruins of her apartment. Referring to this discovery, T.D. MacLulich claims that it has psychological ramifications for Neil, asserting that “the explosion functions as an extended primal scene, a magnified image of the child’s fearful misunderstanding of the nature of parental sexuality” (41). But regardless of the moment’s particular psychological ramifications for Neil — or, for that matter, those for Roddie upon seeing Laurier’s bust — such parodic primal scenes are more remarkable in terms of how they complicate the explosion’s national significance as the novel construes it. To stage Roddie’s and Neil’s witnessing of the blast’s aftermath as primal scenes is to associate Canada’s figurative coming of age with what psychoanalysis has identified as a key moment in certain children’s psycho-sexual development. By making this association, the novel reminds readers that the act of witnessing can be deeply imbricated with affect and sexuality and that, in profound ways, what people see can influence who they become. The novel thus suggests how something as seemingly personal as bearing witness to violence can come to bind people together as a nation, just as characters in *Barometer Rising* become intensively nationalized through their shared corporeal and affective experiences of the explosion. What is more, because readers are also witnesses to the primal scenes in *Barometer Rising*, they too are drawn into the national trauma. If Judith Lewis Herman is right that “trauma is contagious,” insofar as a victim’s trauma can be transmitted to his or her audience through the recounting of a traumatic event (140), then *Barometer Rising* can be seen as attempting to transmit the trauma of the explosion to readers through the eyes and bodily experiences of the novel’s characters. The fact that all its centres of consciousness are Canadian reinforces the narrative’s construal of the explosion as a national trauma and encourages readers to apprehend the national in the somatic.

### Repronormative Nationalism

If the violence that battles and the explosion inflict on male characters, in particular, is portrayed in *Barometer Rising* as a sexual trauma for the nation, the novel goes on to suggest that national recuperation requires

a re-masculinization, one achieved through a variety of penetrations performed by those men. For instance, Neil enacts such penetrations during his rescue work, as when he noses the hood of a truck “through the shattered windows of a store,” then sends it “plung[ing] upward” along the slope of the Citadel (236). Likewise, earlier, he enters a collapsed house by inserting a board under a fallen beam, with the consequence that “the beam yielded, lifted a few inches and slithered to one side, making a triangular gap four feet across at its base,” which allows him to crawl through the open space (225). For Neil, the moment is at once a figurative sexual act and a figurative birth; as he enters the house he is simultaneously penetrator, midwife, and infant, delivering himself into life while ruined Halifax plays the part of his passive mother. Later the novel restages this double parody of sex and childbirth with regard to Murray and Penny. Although Neil’s return from the war leads Murray to abandon his romantic designs on Penny, the novel allows the doctor to re-masculinize himself by penetrating her in a different manner, operating on her eye after she is wounded in the explosion. The procedure is sexualized in several respects: for example, Murray’s operating smock is described as looking like a “night-shirt,” and he asks Penny to put her arms around his neck prior to operating (240–41). Then, after raising the question of whether Murray’s wounded hand will be “adequate” to the operation (242), the narrator observes “a faint smile around [Murray’s] mouth as he inserted a speculum into the eye and secured the lids with a pair of fixation-forceps” (243). Given that only a few pages earlier Penny has recalled giving birth, it is difficult to ignore the gynaecological connotations of these devices (240). Indeed, one might recall Luce Irigaray’s description of the speculum as a device that allows “man’s eye — understood as substitute for the penis — . . . to prospect woman’s sexual parts” (145). The surgery’s reduction of Penny’s own eye to an orifice for Murray to penetrate rehearses the novel’s earlier establishment of her as a sexual object and instrument, facilitating men’s solidarity in virtue of their shared gaze. She continues to be instrumental to this cause, as Murray and Neil’s rivalry is effaced by their respective penetrations of her, while each man is reborn through his renewed participation in hegemonic masculinity.

Such instrumentalization of Penny repeats itself after the operation when Neil carries her upstairs, thus proving his leg is “equal to the task” (244). If the moment is parodic of the honeymoon ritual in which the

groom lifts the bride over the threshold, it is not coincidental, as the novel's broader impulse is to direct Penny toward a wifely, maternal role in the nation. This process has begun even before Neil's departure for Europe, insofar as the ur-penetration in *Barometer Rising* is the sexual act between him and Penny in Montreal that created Jean. The novel's ending, in which Neil and Penny are on their way from Halifax "into the darkness of the continent" to claim the girl (303), not only hearkens back to that earlier penetration but is also accompanied by Neil's explicit meditation on Canada's future alongside his own (302), with the consequence that the novel, too, seems to be pairing the fate of the nuclear family with the fate of the nation. As Woodcock observes, "we know that the natural family will be united, and we can fairly assume that in MacLennan's mind this will symbolize the unity of Canada for which Neil yearns" (37). In so linking the family's future to the country's, the novel endorses what is sometimes called "repronormativity" and what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurism," an ideology in which "the Child has come to embody . . . the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (2, 11). More particularly, the ending of *Barometer Rising* espouses a repronormative nationalism in which Neil and Penny's commitment to raising Jean will symbolize and instantiate a healthy future for Canada. Indeed, when Neil declares that "for better or worse he was entering the future" (302), he echoes the words of a marriage ceremony, thus implying, as Carol Beran observes, that his commitment to Penny — and, one might add, to the nuclear family — is homologous with his "commitment to his country" (80). At the same time, by this point in the novel, Penny's status as a New Woman with a successful career has been completely usurped by attention to her role as a romantic partner and mother.

But then, even near the beginning of the novel, Penny's work designing ships is also depicted in repronormative terms. For instance, the description of her celebrated design for a submarine-chasing boat draws attention to parallels between the conception of the vessel and Jean's conception. The design is said to have been "contrived in fifteen careless minutes, years before" (28), and Penny describes her "inward process of changing" as a consequence; she also observes that her family does not know Neil had the original idea for the design, just as they are unaware that Penny was pregnant (27). Moreover, in the same way that Neil's departure for war left Penny to deal with her pregnancy alone,

she has brought the boat's design to fruition by herself after he abandoned it. Woodcock dismisses these parallels as "perhaps too obvious to emphasize" (60), but to downplay them is to ignore the role they play in the novel's larger project of connecting bodily experience to national affiliation. It is not insignificant that Penny's roles as a mother and as a participant in the Canadian war effort are aligned, as this alignment confirms the repronormative identification of the nuclear family with the nation. What is more, *Barometer Rising* reveals repronormativity to inflect people's thinking in ways that extend well beyond narrow considerations of parenthood. For instance, at one point Penny considers the role that the boat's design plays in her mind and deems it "a monstrous abortion of an attempt to avoid thinking too deeply about matters she could not control" (28). At another moment, as she travels with Murray to visit Jean and the girl's adoptive parents, intent on revealing to him that Jean is her daughter, Penny is "afraid that her plan to entice him out here [will] miscarry" (99). Penny's invocation of abortion and miscarriage as synonyms for failure affirms repronormativity insofar as it rehearses a valuing of women for their ability to give birth successfully. By extension, such language participates in the assignment of acceptable gender roles within the nation.

The fact that *Barometer Rising* depicts penetrations of male bodies as a national sexual trauma while simultaneously portraying male penetrations of women's bodies as revitalizing is, to put it mildly, disturbing. Sarah Cole argues that in war narratives where "violent death is transformed into something positive and communal," such writing "steers as clear from the violated body as it can" (1634), but strikingly *Barometer Rising* explores and exploits violated bodies to achieve its communal ends. As the novel does so, it complicates its own agenda of identifying the dangers in militarism. To be sure, the novel vilifies Colonel Wain for being proto-fascist in his tendencies: he is quick to deploy the soldiers under him for private purposes, and he is hopeful that the war will eventually allow him to be part of what Murray disdainfully calls "a military dictatorship in this country" (145). But after the explosion, it becomes clear that Wain's embrace of authoritarianism is less exceptional than characteristic of wartime Halifax, which has been formed by what the narrator calls "a century of unconscious self-discipline" (252). It is not simply, as Paul Goetsch suggests, that in the rescue work following the explosion, a "new group spirit asserts itself" (104).

Rather, the group spirit is portrayed as part of a longstanding compulsion among Haligonians to sacrifice themselves for the collective good when ordered to do so. In positively depicting Neil's and Murray's relief efforts after the explosion, which involve altruism but also the exercise of military authority over their fellow citizens, the novel promotes a politics that has at least certain affinities to fascism, which, as Terri J. Gordon observes, treats the individual body as a "public site whose purpose [is] to further the larger social organism" (164). Of course, self-sacrifice for the national interest is by no means intrinsically fascist. But *Barometer Rising* is decidedly illiberal — that is, it militates against values of pluralism and individual freedom — in its propagation of a myth that citizens' interests are necessarily congruent with those of the state. The novel perpetuates this myth by conflating the future of the nuclear family with that of the nation and by representing Neil's and Murray's post-explosion efforts as not just altruistic but also self-restorative, with both men conquering their physical limitations even while helping to re-establish social order.

### Canada Incorporated

Toward the end of the novel, Murray reassures himself about his introspective nature, declaring, "I am a reed, but I am greater than those things that destroy me. I am a thinking reed" (264). Both the substance and the words of this declaration place Murray in a tradition of humanist thinking, given that they paraphrase the seventeenth-century thinker Blaise Pascal, who asserts in his *Pensées*, "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. . . . If the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him" (120). But while Murray seems to follow Pascal in privileging rationality over corporeal being as the defining trait of the human, the physically exhausting spate of surgeries that Murray has recently completed belies his self-characterization and serves as a reminder that his status as an embodied creature is highly significant. Indeed, while Murray invokes Pascal to emphasize the unique intellectual qualities of human beings, he fails to recognize that Pascal was also a scientist very much interested in physical existence, one whose name is now the scientific unit for air pressure because of his groundbreaking work with barometers. The title of *Barometer Rising* suggests that although Murray has neglected to consider this fact, MacLennan has not. What is more,

the title, along with the narrative, insists that Canada's rising fortunes in the wake of the First World War's particular pressures were inextricably tied to physical pressures on citizens' bodies, from the force of the Halifax explosion to the tactile pressures of sexual relations.

The novel's attention to such bodily pressures creates a visceral underpinning to the national allegory the narrative presents. Individual characters do not merely represent aspects of Canada abstractly; instead, through their acts of spectatorship and suffering, they become tied to the nation in corporeal ways. Elaine Scarry notes that when a cultural construct is "manifestly fictitious" or lacks "ordinary forms of substantiation," the human body is frequently evoked in relation to it "to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'" (14). In *Barometer Rising*, the cultural construct that is the nation gains a life of its own precisely through such evocations of its citizens' somatic existence. Accordingly, despite David Arnason's complaint that the action in *Barometer Rising* is "continually interrupted by contemplations about Canadian society, Canada's place in the world, and the forces that operate in Canada" (96-97), Neil's and Murray's various meditations on Canada are not just poorly inserted abstractions at odds with the novel's passages of graphic realism. Rather, those meditations serve to corroborate a bond between bodies and the nation that the novel pervasively seeks to establish in more visceral ways. Although *Barometer Rising* might be considered a novel of ideas, it also shows a striking faith in the power of the passions, suggesting that emotions and somatic responses rather than rationality might be the foundation of nationalism. That much is implicit at a moment late in the novel when Murray recognizes that his relief work has led him to feel differently than he once did. He decides that this new feeling is

something more personal than an abstract disgust with the war. . . . He knew quite simply that the remainder of his life was going to be different from his past. He would never again crave excitement for its own sake, and the thought of alcohol or accessible women had lost any power they once possessed to modify his actions. (285)

Whether or not this change in his inclinations will be lasting, what is remarkable is that the disaster has caused a shift in him at an irrational, libidinal level. Soon afterwards, he embarks upon thinking about Canada, imagining that one day the nation will become "the keystone

to hold the world together,” but he dismisses his ideas as “too artificial to entertain seriously” (289). Here, the novel recognizes that the bulk of its nationalist work has been done not in such essayistic passages but in the intensely corporeal descriptions of the explosion and its aftermath. In contrast, the explicitly meta-nationalist passages function as dazzle painting does — not hiding from view the bodies beneath but reorienting the viewer toward those bodies. In that regard, *Barometer Rising* is the work of a *camoufleur* who encourages the novel’s readers to view individual characters as incorporating the nation.

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