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The Language of Faith and American Exceptionalism in *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*

TIFFANY JOHNSTONE

DILLON WALLACE'S *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* chronicles the disastrous 1903 trip into the Labrador wilderness that Wallace took with fellow American Leonidas Hubbard and Canadian Scots-Cree guide George Elson. Led by Hubbard, the group attempted to travel from North West River to Ungava Bay with the aims of mapping both the Naskaupi River and the George River, documenting the caribou migration, and making contact with the remote band of Innu known as the Naskapi (Buchanan et al. 8-9; Grace, "A Woman's Way" xxi). After the group confused the Susan River for the Naskaupi River, these goals gave way to a grim fight for survival that claimed Hubbard's life. However, Dillon Wallace's stirring depiction of the trip two years later in *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* spurred a widespread fascination with the journey that continues to this day. In light of recent publications which delve further into the circumstances and theoretical significance of the book, it is important to explore Wallace's use of a specifically American mythology which, despite being relatively ignored by critics, has resonated with readers for over a century.

Despite the large critical reception to *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, Wallace's narrative has been widely interpreted as an adventure tale devoid of any cultural frame of reference. However, his use of the rhetoric of faith promotes the virtue of American culture through the discourse of American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism refers to the myth of America as a nation endowed with spiritual power and responsibility. This longstanding belief in America as a distinct and morally superior nation guided by spiritual duty (Byers 46; Madsen 1) is evident in

Wallace's description of both himself and his travelling companions as a social hierarchy that depends on the ideological solidarity of its members.

Wallace uses the language of faith to express a sense of cultural purpose rooted in ideals of masculinity, militarism, and social order. Such collective ideological authority takes on imperial connotations through the imposition of Wallace's and Hubbard's belief systems onto both Elson and their Labrador surroundings. Wallace's overt use of religious and biblical allusions further mythologizes himself and Hubbard as cultural heroes. In order to interpret the specific cultural framework of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, it is first necessary to examine previous perceptions of the text, as well as the development of the Puritan association between religion and culture that informs exceptionalist discourse. An exploration of the critical reception and cultural context of Wallace's book, along with the articulation, imposition, and mythologizing of a faith-based cultural solidarity throughout the text, helps to place this narrative within the tradition of American exceptionalism.

I

Early reviews of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* tend unquestioningly to accept Wallace's moralizing tone while failing to critically explore the cultural significance of such ideological rhetoric. In a 1905 article in *The Bookman*, L.J. Brock lauds Wallace's depiction of the "heroic struggle of young Americans" (167). Associating their journey with a noble and patriotic duty, Brock interprets the story according to the exceptionalist belief in the moral distinction of American culture. However, Brock's repeated insistence that the book is somehow "artless" (167) and factual (168) ignores the very cultural myth in which he invests. Similarly, an anonymous reviewer writing for *The Nation* in the same year notes that the men acted "like good Americans" prevailing "without fear and with a manly heart, leaving the outcome with confidence to a higher power" (256). Once again, the alignment between cultural and spiritual goals evokes Wallace's portrayal of their journey into the wilderness as an expression of the sanctity of American culture. The fact that both reviewers imitate Wallace's moralistic nationalism reflects an inability to critically examine the exceptionalist discourse used in *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*.

While more recent responses to the book generally critique rather than accept its idealistic fervour, most do not consider the cultural implications of Wallace's didactic narrative. Reviewers of the 1977 reprint of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* comment on the faith of the three men while maintaining an ironic distance from the ideological tone of the book (Porter, H.; *Quill and Quire* 40; Whalen 14). However, none of these reviews examines the cultural backdrop of Wallace's literary and religious rhetoric. Similarly, in the introduction to the 1977 publication, Patrick O'Flaherty explores the thwarted idealism of the men (15) without fully analyzing the nature of such ideals. Ignoring the American background of the author,

O'Flaherty interprets the men's struggle to retain their ambitions amidst the ferocity of nature as typical of the Newfoundland experience (16). His neglect of the cultural context of Wallace's idealism subtly accepts and conceals the latter's distinctly American gaze. In the introduction to the 1990 publication, Lawrence Millman also fails to explore the very idealism that he critiques in Wallace's book. While Millman interprets the story as a reminder of the fallibility of human ideals (xi), he does not consider that such ideals stem from a particularly American brand of cultural triumphalism. In fact, his lyrical depiction of Labrador as a vast and unknown terrain (Millman v) anachronistically portrays the region according to Wallace's cultural bias. Even recent critical responses to *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, which either diminish (Gellert 159) or praise (Ure 881) the literary merit of the text, fail to consider its cultural significance. The pervasive critical silence about the cultural framework of the book thus obscures its role within the American literary imagination.

Even contemporary scholarly discussions of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* which analyze Wallace's hegemonic view of the North overlook the specific cultural nuances of his perspective. In her introduction to the 2004 edition of Mina Benson-Hubbard's *A Woman's Way Through Labrador*, Sherrill Grace describes *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* as an elegiac romance that marginalizes Elson ("A Woman's Way" xxi) and reflects nineteenth-century patriarchal and imperial goals of exploration ("A Woman's Way" xxiii). However, by summarizing Wallace's ethnocentrism as part of the wider genre of romance and the time period in which he wrote, Grace loses sight of his pointed contribution to the themes of American literary culture. Similarly, in the 2005 book *The Woman Who Mapped Labrador* by Roberta Buchanan, Anne Hart, and Bryan Greene, Wallace's patronizing depiction of Labrador is connected to general attitudes toward exploration at the turn of the century (11-12, 25, 38-39) and only briefly linked to American notions of adventure and masculinity (27). While Brian Rusted identifies the colonial and gendered tone of the book as appealing to American popular culture (263) in the 2005 article "Performing the Visual North," he also grounds his discussion in broad aesthetic conventions through the framework of visual studies. His notion that Wallace's representation of Labrador is a subjective act of "cultural performance" (259) recognizes the cultural self-reflexivity of the text without adequately relating it to the culture in question. Rusted's compelling discussion of Wallace's geographical and ideological "boundary crossing" is limited by his examination of this idea as a generic explorer motif rather than as a central facet of American literature (273). The recent theoretical focus on the cultural power dynamics in *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* emphasizes the need to explore the specific American literary context of the book.

II

Exceptionalist discourse has a foundation in the social climate of the early Puritan settlers of New England. In *American Exceptionalism*, Deborah L. Madsen argues that Puritan immigrants viewed their new community as having an “exceptional destiny” (2). The notion of a “redeemer nation” is central to this exceptionalist legacy because it identifies America as a sacrosanct culture, an example to the rest of the world (Madsen 2). Madsen’s use of religious rhetoric to describe Puritan culture points to the secularization of spirituality within the discourse of American exceptionalism. John Winthrop’s concept of a “city upon a hill” (11), later used by Ronald Reagan, presents the nation itself as the manifestation of a higher calling (Mendelsohn 73). Katherine L. Morrison’s suggestion in *Canadians are Not Americans* that the Puritans invested in the virtue of American identity by portraying themselves as “God’s chosen people” (140) evokes this tradition of mythologizing American identity. By transferring religion to the cultural and political sphere, the Puritans thus constructed an American exceptionalist discourse that imbued America itself with moral authority.

It was Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) that established the Puritan literary pattern of a spiritual challenge resulting in collective moral renewal. In the very first sentence, Bunyan describes the wanderings of the individual into uncharted territory as symbolic of a wider moral test: “as I walked through the wilderness of this world” (1). The notion of the self as enacting rather than just passively believing in spiritual faith helps to explain the book’s popularity amongst the Puritans of New England (Macdonald 23). The parallels between *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the New England Puritans also support Madsen’s claim that the seeds of American exceptionalism originate in the Protestant doctrine of seventeenth-century England (9). As Ruth K. Macdonald notes in *Christian’s Children*, Christian’s journey toward the Celestial City supports the Puritan longing to provide a moral example for the rest of the world through American politics and culture (29). The notion of an idealized civilization directly recalls the Puritan idea of the United States as a “model” society (Madsen 1). Christian’s process of attaining a sense of collective superiority through a series of physical challenges echoes the need of the New England Puritans to assert their own moral vision in opposition to other cultures and belief systems (Macdonald 29) and through a redemptive struggle with hardship (Madsen 13). The focus of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* on the individual embodiment of a common moral purpose thus helped to shape the exceptionalist belief in the elevated nature of American culture.

Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) further reveals the way the theme of a struggle in the wilderness was used within Puritan discourse to express an imperialistic ideal of moral authority. Crusoe’s tendency to imbue the island with divine meaning by learning “to detect and interpret the signs of God’s presence” (McKeon 323) evokes what Madsen reveals to be the Puritan tradition of assigning spiritual import

to the details of everyday life (5). As with Bunyan, the spiritualized depiction of a new land recalls the Puritan commitment to representing spirituality in the social sphere. By adopting the title of “king,” Crusoe endows himself with a spiritually ordained position of imperial rule that he imposes on the foreign island (McKeon 326). As in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the exalted cultural identity that accompanies the secularization of spiritual discourse is expressed through its imposition upon other cultures and the natural world. Defoe’s use of religious language associates the theme of survival with a means of reaffirming an idealized vision of nationhood. In both *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*, the struggle to survive enacts the Puritan goal of re-affirming moral superiority in opposition to external challenges (Macdonald 14). The process of asserting cultural authority in such Puritan texts is thus rooted in the use of religious language to signify a wider moral awareness that is defined and attained through the trials of individuals.

The Transcendentalist movement in the United States further intellectualized spiritual discourse by defining faith as a wider moral awareness within the individual consciousness. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a prominent Transcendentalist, promoted a process of internalizing faith whereby the individual’s understanding of God takes precedence over religious doctrine. In “The Divinity School Address,” Emerson suggests that one should strive to say “Virtue, I am thine; save me; use me; thee will I serve, day and night ... that I may not be virtuous but virtue” (104). By articulating a notion of duty to abstract aspects of religious teaching, Emerson locates the source of spirituality in the imagination. His emphasis on embodying rather than believing in ideology hints at the importance of extending religious rhetoric to an idea of moral authority applicable to the culture as a whole. As Madsen notes, Emerson’s belief in the need for the individual to live up to this higher calling echoes Puritan doctrine by portraying the redemptive cultural mission as a transforming duty undergone within the individual consciousness (13). Through their secularization of religious language, the Transcendentalists thus developed the myth that America is founded upon a sense of ideological authority to which all individuals have access. At the turn of the twentieth century, anxieties about the industrial age produced various types of literature relating to the outdoors which illustrated the cultural search for moral renewal. In *Back to Nature*, Peter J. Schmitt argues that amidst the increased urbanization of American society at the turn of the century, writers mythologized the spiritual value of nature from an intellectual, urban, and middle-class perspective (xvii-xviii). He notes that American wilderness writers of the time depicted nature as a site of spiritual conflict in which the hero must test and recapture his moral strength (Schmitt 130). This emphasis on redemption echoes the Puritan vision of America as a clean slate upon which to represent the word of God and firmly situates such work within the nation-building themes of American literature (Byers 55). Martin Green’s suggestion that American authors “could write adventure only if it was also myth or metaphor” (17) indicates the importance of survival and exploration narratives in reasserting cultural values.

Throughout the early twentieth century, non-fiction exploration narratives portrayed the north in particular as a challenging and inviting virgin territory open to the exploits of male protagonists (Grace, *Canada* 174). Theodore Roosevelt's call for exertion in the wilderness as a means of revitalizing cultural identity amidst immigration and industrialization (Bloom 32) is an example of the longstanding moralistic nationalism that concealed an American imperialist vision of the North as a last frontier (Bloom 3). The general trend toward affirming cultural ideals in the wilderness signals the desire to recreate the initial Puritan experience of claiming the land ideologically while conquering it physically. The spiritual dimension of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* reflects this ongoing literary preoccupation with reinstating the superiority of American culture through a struggle with nature.

Hubbard's commitment to American frontier mythology sheds light on his and Wallace's tendency to impose their own cultural ethos on the North. His fixation with frontier stories (Benson-Hubbard 35) and with his own pioneer family history of fighting Aborigines in Ohio and hunting in the Michigan wilderness (Buchanan et al. 68) recalls the mythologization of the frontier in Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 1893 article, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Echoing Puritan views of nature, Turner describes the American frontier as a site of moral conflict in which the essence of the American character was formed (59-60). Mina Benson-Hubbard's description of her husband's ancestors as "high-hearted, clean-living ..., strong in Christian faith, [and] lovers of nature" (34) in *A Woman's Way Through Unknown Labrador* further conveys this exceptionalist notion of the frontier as a moral test of nationhood. She aligns the Labrador trip with Hubbard's own nationalist quest in the suggestion that his "Vision" of going to Labrador began when, as a child, he viewed a picture of "Indians dressed in skins with war bonnets" (Benson-Hubbard 33) in the Canadian north. This ironic application of frontier symbolism to Canada links Hubbard to the American imperialist search for new territories at the turn of the century (Bloom 4). As Grace notes in her introduction to Benson-Hubbard's text, Leonidas Hubbard contributed to the popular male-dominated wilderness writing of the time ("A Woman's Way" xxxviii) as an explorer, writer, and assistant editor for *Outing* ("A Woman's Way" xx), a New York nature magazine that upheld mainstream cultural values ("A Woman's Way" lxiii). His idealization of the Canadian north as belonging to a burgeoning "heroic age" (Hubbard 641) in a 1901 article on snowshoeing reflects Turner's expansionist myth of the frontier as a spiritual nation-building site. Hubbard's engagement in frontier mythology underlies his goal of asserting the moral value of American culture against the backdrop of the Labrador wilderness.

Dillon Wallace's dedication to literary and cultural pursuits associated with the wilderness points to his own intentional use of exceptionalist discourse throughout *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*. The fact that Wallace was commissioned to write a "memorial book" (Buchanan et al. 88) by Mina Benson-Hubbard with the help of Frank Barkley Copley, a writer and friend of Leonidas Hubbard

(Buchanan et al. 89), implies that the book was meant to honour Hubbard's idea of the north as a new frontier upon which to stage a redemptive cultural quest. The instant success of the book (Buchanan et al. 96) indicates Wallace's contribution to this pervasive view of the Canadian north as a blank natural space in which white men must prove themselves (Grace, *Canada* 172). Benson-Hubbard's anger that Wallace's heroism appeared to eclipse that of her husband (Buchanan et al. 9; Grace, "A Woman's Way" xxi) hints that she underestimated the literary skill of the former lawyer turned nature writer (Buchanan et al. 71) in capturing this popular image of the north. Schmitt notes that throughout Wallace's twenty wilderness novels, he repeatedly portrays the struggle of American youth to achieve spiritual redemption in the wilderness before returning home in stories geared toward an affluent, metropolitan audience (122-123). This intellectual perspective emphasizes his engagement in cultural myth-making stemming from the Puritan concept of shaping a morally elevated nation through a struggle with nature. His adventures, books, and leadership within the Boy Scout movement (Hitch 32) testify to his self-made role of "explorer hero" (Schmitt 121) in American society. Wallace's career of wilderness pursuits demonstrates his contribution to the American concept of nature as a site of morally sanctified nation-building.

III

Throughout *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, Wallace uses the language of faith to align their journey with an ideal of masculinity that cultivates a sense of cultural virtue and distinction. Near the beginning of *The Lure of the Labrador Wild*, he portrays their trip, according to Green's concept of adventure, as the "ritual of the religion of manliness" (6). He presents their test of manhood as one that is culturally agreed upon in his description of their departure: "Amid a chorus of 'Good-bye, boys, and good luck!' we went ashore, to set foot for the first time on Labrador soil, where we were destined to encounter a series of misadventures that should call for the exercise of all our fortitude and manhood" (Wallace 17). His allusions to destiny in relation to a gender-based challenge depict their struggle as a higher spiritual ordeal that they enact on behalf of their country. By establishing the trip in such distinctly gendered terms, Wallace takes part in what Grace identifies as the masculinist literary depiction of the north as a forum for testing masculinity ("Gendering" 166). Wallace's link between masculine ideals and collective redemption echoes the turn-of-the-century Protestant movement known as "muscular Christianity" (Putney 72), which promoted moral renewal through male health and fitness (Putney 73) and which was advocated in Labrador by Dr. Wilfred Grenfell (Porter, V.R. 5). By envisioning their trip according to cultural ideals of manliness, Wallace presents their adherence to such ideals as a means of actively embodying the moral authority of America. His patriotic vision contributes to the

early twentieth-century link between nationalism and standards of masculinity that dominated popular representations of the north at the time (Bloom 11). Wallace's use of spiritual language in relation to manhood thus locates their journey within the duty to reassert cultural values.

Hubbard's need to prove himself to his father underlines the importance of socially prescribed gender roles within this cultural pursuit. Green's notion of the symbolic rite of passage between boyhood and manliness in adventure writing (6) is evident in Hubbard's anxieties about his own masculinity. His complaint that his father "always thinks of [him] as a child" and has "never quite realized [he is] a grown man" (Wallace 118) associates the trip with an attempt to prove his manhood. By placing this individual test within a greater responsibility, Hubbard further reveals the cultural duty associated with his personal ordeal. His focus on proving himself to his own father whose frontier life he romanticized (Buchanan et al. 68) supports Grace's argument that the spiritual struggle in dominant northern narratives demands that men live up to the patriarchal terms of their own upbringing rather than merely learning how to survive in the wilderness (*Canada* 181-182). His struggle to rise to a cultural ideal of masculinity echoes Lisa Bloom's description of American exploration and survival narratives as representative of "men's own battle to become men" (6). Wallace's tendency to refer to Hubbard as a "boy" (71, 100) emphasizes the latter's engagement in this overarching challenge. Hubbard's longing to prove his manhood thus affirms the common purpose behind their journey to Labrador.

Allusions to Rudyard Kipling establish an ideal of militaristic faith that associates the group with a sense of cultural authority. The placement of a passage from Kipling's "Explorer" immediately at the beginning of the book and throughout the text locates their journey within a collective moral challenge. Kipling depicts the active pursuit of a higher purpose in the following lines from "The Explorer": "Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. / Go!" (qtd. in Wallace 77, 154). The image of being guided by an inner voice recalls Emerson's vision of internalizing religious doctrine, and echoes L.G. Brock's enthusiastic claim in 1905 that Hubbard "was the very embodiment of the spirit of the poem" (167). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said suggests that Kipling promoted what he describes as a "service ethic" based on the belief in universal rules which must be enacted and defended (138). Such an obedience to collective goals is hinted at in Wallace's allusion to lines from Kipling's "Young British Soldier": "Don't look or take heed of the man that is struck; / Be thankful you're living and trust to your luck,/And march to your front like a soldier" (qtd. in Wallace 45). Kipling's emphasis on unquestioning obedience draws attention to the moral responsibility of the individual to serve established cultural goals. The militaristic imagery of the poem supports Jim Gellert's observation that the sense of duty within the allusions to Kipling is aligned with notions of "manliness" (158), thus further illustrating Wallace's and Hubbard's desire to live up to social ideals of masculinity. Wallace's

masculine focus on taming and “penetrating” the landscape (Grace, “A Woman’s Way” liii-liv) is mirrored in the repetitive dactylic meter of the poem which conveys a warlike purpose in relation to their surroundings. Wallace’s quotations from Kipling reveal a strict investment in the cultural endeavour represented by their journey.

Wallace carefully evokes a Kiplingesque militaristic duty to a higher power in relation to the group itself. He describes the men as if they are preparing to go into battle in his declaration that “sitting around the fire, we all took it up and repeated determinedly ‘*Michikamau or Bust!*’” (Wallace 87). The image of the three men chanting in unison demonstrates their commitment to fulfilling a sacred mission. Such ritualistic obedience to a shared goal associates their purpose with cultural unity and authority. His suggestion that “we were brothers, comrades — more than brothers” (Wallace 137) further hints that they are united by their common ideological investment in the group. The notion that their collective goal somehow transcends personal relationships indicates that their friendship is defined by cultural idealism. In his description of their motto, Wallace stresses the camaraderie of the group: “we should on the morrow start overland and see what lay beyond the hills to the northward. ‘*Michikamau or Bust!*’ was still our slogan” (95). The desire to pursue their goal “beyond the hills” (Wallace 95) clearly echoes Kipling’s advice in “The Explorer” to “Go and look beyond the ranges” (qtd. in Wallace 77, 154) in order to fulfill a spiritual duty. The repeated reminder of their shared slogan implies that the rituals of the three men cement a shared cultural purpose. Their tendency to break out simultaneously in “lusty cheers” (Wallace 89) further emphasizes a unanimous faith in a common goal. The militaristic description of the group presents the men as equally committed to an ideal of cultural authority.

Allusions to politics further imbue the group with a culturally based moral authority, while reminding us of the imbalance of power that such authority entails. Wallace’s recollection of their arrival in Labrador on Independence Day associates their journey with a symbolic renewal of American identity rather than a curiosity about Labrador itself: “It was on the Fourth of July that we saw for the first time the bleak, rock-bound coast of Labrador” (15). Hubbard establishes a social hierarchy within the group by giving titles to each member: “as the Great Mogul of Labrador, I appoint you Wallace, Chief Justice and also Secretary of State. George I shall appoint Admiral of the Navy” (Wallace 70). His imaginary position of leadership echoes Robinson Crusoe’s desire to reign over his remote surroundings. The sense of universal moral authority suggested by the capitalization of his title also recalls Emerson’s argument in “Self-Reliance” that the American traveller should act “like a sovereign” by retaining a sanctioned identity amid foreign cultural influences (34). The gradations of power to which Hubbard refers associate the nationalistic structure of the group with a pre-ordained social hierarchy reminiscent of the Puritan concept of America as an ideal nation (Madsen 2). His assignment of ranks illustrates Byers’s reminder of the discrepancy between the ideals of exception-

alism and the underlying inequalities of American society (49). The fact that Elson is marginalized by Hubbard and Wallace, despite finding his way back for help (Grace, "A Woman's Way" xxi) and being lauded as the hero of the trip (Buchanan et al. 12), implies that he is deliberately excluded from their specifically Anglo-Saxon American ideals. Wallace's suggestion that there was "never a word of dissension" (137) draws attention to this oppressive cultural authority. By emphasizing their solidarity, Wallace promotes the illusion of the three men as committed representatives of a sanctified social hierarchy.

Wallace's allusions to the men's strict faith in ideals of masculinity, militarism, and social order thus convey a shared ideological investment in America itself. His focus on their struggle to live up to such collective ideals justifies their journey in terms of this higher cultural calling.

IV

The power imbalance beneath Wallace's illusion of cultural solidarity becomes more evident through an exploration of the imperial nature of his American perspective. In "Postcolonialism in North America," Adam Paul Weisman examines the manner in which American writers project an ethnocentric gaze onto other cultures. Especially useful is his concept of "imaginative colonization," the process whereby "one North American culture imagines the other not on that culture's ... terms, but as a feature of its own historical self understanding" (Weisman 478). Wallace's engagement in this act of cultural projection is usefully referred to by Rusted as an auto(ethno)graphic approach (269-270). The imperialist perception of the north as a site for white males to prove triumphant over their vacant and threatening northern surroundings (Grace, *Canada* 184-185) is expressed by Wallace through the use of American spiritual rhetoric to describe Labrador as inferior. Weisman points out that the very tendency to observe other places according to one's own cultural ethos is overlooked by the exceptionalist mentality that views American literature and culture as distinct and isolated from colonialism (483-484). What Weisman hints at, but fails to articulate, is that exceptionalism not only conceals the colonial undertones of American literature but lies at the heart of imperial discourse itself. The Puritan tradition exemplified in *The Pilgrim's Progress* of struggling within a threatening foreign setting in pursuit of one's own collective values (Macdonald 14) foreshadows the imperial nature of the exceptionalist myth upon which America was founded. Wallace's depiction of Labrador according to his own cultural bias draws upon the language of faith in order to assert the exceptionalist vision of America upon the North.

By associating Elson's Scots-Cree ethnicity with a lack of morality, Wallace uses spiritual language to invoke his own racial and cultural supremacy. He expresses this narrow religious outlook in his description of Elson as divided by two

racism: “One — the Indian — was haunted by superstitious fears; the other — the white man — rejected these fears and invariably conquered them” (Wallace 116). Wallace’s trivialization of Aboriginal belief systems, despite the emphasis on faith throughout the book, ironically conveys the culturally specific nature of his spiritual discourse. Elson’s mixed heritage and ambiguous identification with his Cree lineage (Buchanan et al. 21) highlights the preconceived racism that characterizes Wallace’s writing and which contrasts sharply with Mina Benson-Hubbard’s relative tolerance of different ethnic backgrounds (Buchanan et al. 25). Elson’s crucial role in saving Wallace’s life and in the success of Mina Benson-Hubbard’s journey in 1905 (Grace, “A Woman’s Way” xlvii) indicates the extent to which his own character strengths are deliberately concealed by Wallace’s attitude of “imaginative colonization” (Weisman 478). Wallace even refuses to accept Elson’s Christian beliefs by dismissing Elson’s dream in which God tells them to return by river rather than retracing their steps in the Susan Valley. Wallace’s claim that “no doubt it was only natural that Hubbard should disregard the dream” confirms their shared cultural bias, especially since Wallace admits that Elson’s route could have led them to safety (166). His continued dismissal of the dream hides Elson’s conflicting viewpoint beneath the dominant first-person perspective that typifies Wallace’s narrative (Grace, “A Woman’s Way” liii-liv) and other masculinist conceptions of the north (Grace, *Canada* 185). Wallace’s and Hubbard’s rejection of both Elson’s Aboriginal and Christian beliefs thus demonstrates their imperialist use of spiritual rhetoric.

Wallace’s generalized depiction of his surroundings as spiritually inferior portrays Labrador as a metaphorical “other” within the American psyche. He associates their journey with the process of testing their own cultural authority by quoting Kipling’s “Feet of the Young Men” in which the author asks, “And the Red Gods call for you?” (qtd. in Wallace 60). The popular representation of Aboriginals as symbols of the “exotic other[nes]s” of the north (Grace, *Canada* 185) is expressed by Kipling’s mention of Aboriginal spirituality as a generic entity that exists only in relation to outsiders. His portrait of this spiritual force as the opposite of civilization in the preceding reminder that “on the other side of the world he’s overdue” (qtd. in Wallace 60) recalls the Puritan concept of America as morally superior to opposing cultures (Mendelsohn 72) and evokes Wallace’s symbolic role as explorer in crossing a moral divide between the familiar and the mysterious (Rusted 273-274). Wallace’s hostile view of Labrador compared to Mina Benson-Hubbard’s identification with her milieu in *A Woman’s Way Through Labrador* (Buchanan et al. 11, 38-39) reflects the widespread use of fixed binaries within traditional hegemonic portrayals of the north (Grace, “Gendering” 169). He further subordinates his surroundings by calling the Susan Valley “the valley of the shadow of death” (Wallace 53). The self-conscious allusion to Christian’s spiritual challenge in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* sets up Labrador as a metaphorical threat to his cultural dominion. U. Milo Kaufman reveals that Christian’s night in the valley in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

revolves around the ability to strengthen his own faith by building upon negative experience (222). The reference to Bunyan thus clearly aligns their journey with the Puritan belief in the individual as an embodiment of collective ideals that must be reasserted in difficult circumstances. The religious labels that Wallace imposes on Labrador symbolize a sense of otherness against which his cultural honour is tested.

Hubbard's spiritual longing for home also hints that their journey in Labrador reaffirms the sanctity of American culture. In his eagerness to "get to Michikamau and finish [his] work [there] and get home again!" (Wallace 101), he reveals that the trip is based upon an implicit "colonization" (Weisman 478) of Labrador according to American idealism. The allusion to his journey as "work" (Wallace 101) further echoes the strengthening of spiritual duty through hardship in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Kaufman 222). By linking the goal of his journey with a return to America, he portrays their trip as a means of renewing their own cultural values. His depiction of the Labrador trip as an extension of his homeland supports Grace's claim that cultural representation inherently objectifies and appropriates its subject (*Canada* 105). Hubbard mythologizes his homeland in the nostalgic description of his old farm: "Father wanted me to come to the farm and run it.... I feel half sorry now I didn't; for after all it's home to me, and always will be wherever I go in the world" (Wallace 111). The declaration that his home exists, no matter how far he roams, echoes Emerson's argument in "Self-Reliance" that travelling away from America ironically exposes and re-affirms one's own background (35). Hubbard's ironic application of pastoral ideals onto his American home suggests that his journey into the wilderness reflects the longing to re-articulate the exceptionalist myth of America rather than an interest in the natural landscape of Labrador. Schmitt notes that this imposition of American idealism upon foreign lands is a common theme in wilderness writing, and that it involves the search for a natural landscape to reinstate the concept of moral distinction upon which America was founded (xvii). Hubbard's longing for home defines his journey to Labrador as a re-enactment of the Puritan vision of America as the Promised Land.

Hubbard and Wallace thus use the language of spirituality to project a sense of otherness onto Labrador. The imperial nature of this exceptionalist discourse is reflected in their tendency to declare their own cultural superiority over both Elson and their surroundings.

V

Wallace further emphasizes his and Hubbard's cultural authority by mythologizing their own capacity to embody religious doctrine. He associates them with the Emersonian ability to access an all-encompassing moral awareness through the personification of religious texts. This direct relationship with religious discourse locates them within the literary tradition of asserting American exceptionalism

(Byers 62). In *Canada and the Idea of North*, Sherrill Grace identifies two archetypal heroic figures that tend to emerge throughout the multiple genres of wilderness literature set in the North (185). While the first hero dies in the wilderness and the other returns, both are met with widespread recognition and applause for serving a wider cultural purpose (Grace, *Canada* 185). These two forms of heroism are reflected in the manner in which Hubbard and Wallace are mythologized as American heroes throughout the text. Hubbard is depicted as transcending religious doctrine so that his death supports a higher cultural cause. Wallace, on the other hand, is presented as the heroic truth-teller who bears witness to Hubbard's death (Grace, "A Woman's Way" xxi). He undergoes a spiritual transformation in which his ability to encompass religious texts allows him to assume the new-found role of cultural hero and myth-maker. By describing himself and Hubbard in various stages of embodying religious doctrine, he dramatizes their goal of asserting the cultural authority upon which their journey is based.

First of all, Wallace's portrayal of himself and Hubbard as having control over reading and quoting the Bible depicts the two men as heroic figures who perform the collective purpose of the journey. Wallace indicates their duty to enact a spiritual challenge in his recollection of their first major Bible reading: "The morning we spent in reading from the Bible. Hubbard read Philemon aloud and told us the story. I read from the Psalms. Elson, who received his religious training in a mission of the Anglican Church on James Bay, listened to our readings with reverent attention" (Wallace 115-116). By depicting both himself and Hubbard as narrating and imparting religious doctrine while Elson passively listens, Wallace again refers to religion in order to suggest their racial and cultural superiority. Their direct relationship to the text emphasizes the Puritan belief in the importance of reading as a manner of intimate communion between the individual and God (Macdonald 24). Wallace's observation that Hubbard reads and then tells the story of Philemon implies that he has the Emersonian capacity to internalize and transcend the meaning of the Bible itself, thus transferring religious doctrine to the wider cultural sphere. Wallace, who reads and understands a religious text but does not embody it as Hubbard does, presents himself as in the process of finding such spiritually infused cultural authority. By aligning the group members with varying degrees of biblical knowledge, Wallace establishes himself and Hubbard as candidates for cultural renewal based on their ability to exemplify religious doctrine.

The biblical allusions that Wallace associates with Hubbard emphasize the latter's ability to somehow encompass and rise above religious doctrine. The reference to Psalm 1 (Wallace 164) evokes an ideal of man as "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit" (Psalm 1:3, KJV). The image of man as a personification of God reveals the importance of representing rather than merely receiving religious belief. This Emersonian capacity to internalize religious texts hints at the Puritan view of America as a redemptive spiritual force (Morrison 150). A similar image in John 15 occurs in the description of Christ as a tree that repre-

sents the power of God: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). The organic representation of God within this passage draws attention to the power of religious metaphor to take on a life of its own outside the religious realm. The notion of the individual as representative of such metaphorical power suggests that Hubbard's spiritual authority has less to do with religious faith than with wider cultural ideals. The emphasis on a sense of creative strength that transcends physical destruction portrays Hubbard according to Wallace's favoured convention of a redemptive hero whose personal struggle serves a greater cultural gain (Schmitt 122). The association between Hubbard and a metaphorical spiritual authority thus conveys his ability to live on after death by representing the collective moral values of America.

By transferring Hubbard's interest in the Bible to an idealization of America itself, Wallace mythologizes Hubbard as dying to uphold the honour of his country. The notion of Hubbard as a cultural martyr is evoked in his admission after reading sections from the Bible that "God will send us help, too" and his claim that "we'll soon be safe home ... safe home. How happy that makes me feel!" (Wallace 184). The insistent repetition of the phrase "safe home" (Wallace 184) in association with a sense of religious salvation depicts American culture itself as the source of Hubbard's spiritual guidance. After reading a passage from Matthew which describes a complete transcendence of immediate hardship, Wallace transcribes Hubbard's reaction to his reading: "I'm so very happy, b'y, so very, very happy tonight ... for we're going home ... we're going home. And he slept" (174). Hubbard's joyous faith in their return associates the ability to rise above one's surroundings with the transcendence of religious doctrine and the transferral of spiritual authority to American culture. The formal allusion to Hubbard as going to sleep subtly links his impending death with the process of upholding a nationalistic ideal which will live on after his passing. The manner in which Wallace associates Hubbard with biblical passages portrays the latter's spiritual duty as an unbending faith in his own culture.

Wallace's description of himself as drawing upon and representing religious texts emphasizes his own new-found ability to personify the cultural authority exemplified by Hubbard. The passage from Psalm 91 which Wallace and Elson read on their way to find help conveys Wallace's growing concern with his own struggle for survival: "He shall call upon me, and I will hear him: yea, I am with him in trouble; I will deliver him and bring him to honour" (qtd. in Wallace 192). The focus on deliverance throughout this passage echoes Defoe's repeated use of the word to describe Robinson Crusoe's realization that he can transcend his surroundings through an internalization of spirituality (McKeon 318). Wallace's suggestion that he was influenced by the psalm links the theme of delivering the word of God to his own need to carry out a higher spiritual calling. He associates the process of embodying religious faith with a means of transferring such a calling onto his own cultural background in his claim that "In the wilderness, and amid the falling snow,

those that loved me were ministering unto me and keeping me from harm” (Wallace 198). By imagining his mother and wife as watching over him, Wallace depicts his own role in internalizing religious doctrine as a means of accessing the spiritual guidance of America itself. The emphasis on such guidance during his struggle to survive echoes the American Puritan reading of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a spiritual trial in aid of cultural redemption (Macdonald 32-33). Wallace’s portrayal of his cultural background as guiding him throughout his effort to survive self-consciously presents his own personal challenge as a means of renewing and maintaining the exceptionalist vision of America.

By grounding the text itself in religious doctrine, Wallace emphasizes his job as cultural myth-maker. Before reading from the Bible and leaving Hubbard for the last time, he promises to turn their journey into a travel narrative (Wallace 184), thus hinting at his role as the “intrepid chronicler” of a spiritual ordeal (Millman xii). The alignment between the text and a sense of religious authority establishes his role of raising their story within the American consciousness as a spiritual duty. He reveals his own obligation to embody a spiritual calling through the text in the suggestion that Hubbard “died before he reached the goal of his ambition, but I do not believe his message was undelivered” (Wallace 256). Wallace’s repeated focus on the notion of deliverance echoes Psalm 91, which inspires his own desire to embody a spiritual calling. His insistence upon the deliverance of Hubbard’s message specifically associates this mission with the role of articulating their story to the American public. By hinting that the very documentation of their journey is a spiritual duty, Wallace portrays such obligation as in honour of America itself. He conveys his role in locating their story within exceptionalist mythology by stating that “perhaps Hubbard’s work, in the fulness of his plan, had been completed. Perhaps He still had work for me to do” (Wallace 254). Wallace’s allusion to a vocation places their journey within the Puritan tradition of illustrating and enacting a higher goal. The embrace of a spiritual purpose evokes the symbolic re-enactment of American cultural redemption in the wilderness that he frequently drew upon throughout his long career as a writer (Schmitt 122). The claim that he has a responsibility to continue such a purpose envisions the text itself as a means of raising their journey into the realm of cultural myth. By assigning a spiritual duty to the text, Wallace assumes the didactic role of articulating the moral authority of America.

Overt religious allusions thus portray Wallace and Hubbard as heroic personifications of the virtue of American culture. By dramatizing their embodiment of religious doctrine, Wallace depicts Hubbard as dying for the greater cultural cause which he in turn adopts and manifests throughout the text itself.

There is thus more to the language of faith throughout *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* than first appears. Rather than merely adding pathos or credibility to the story, spirituality assumes a broader significance by idealizing American culture. Wallace establishes an ideological solidarity within the group through their shared

investment in American ideals of masculinity, militarism, and social order. However, the actual inequality beneath this apparent consensus is revealed in Wallace's and Hubbard's imperial relationship toward both Elson and their surroundings. Overt religious allusions mythologize Wallace and Hubbard as heroes and locate the text itself within this wider cultural mythology. Wallace's portrait of Labrador as a stage upon which to express faith in American culture presents their journey as an act of patriotic duty, thus perpetuating the exceptionalist vision of America as a moral authority.

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