

The Bird of Passage and the Petit Panthéon Frances Brooke, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils*, and Where to Begin a National Literature

Alexander Beecroft

Volume 38, numéro 1, 2013

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl38_1art02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Beecroft, A. (2013). The Bird of Passage and the Petit Panthéon: Frances Brooke, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils*, and Where to Begin a National Literature. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 38(1), 31–49.

The Bird of Passage and the Petit Panthéon: Frances Brooke, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils*, and Where to Begin a National Literature

ALEXANDER BEECROFT

IN ONE OF THE EARLY LETTERS in Frances Brooke's 1769 epistolary novel *The History of Emily Montague*, the first novel written in English in what is now Canada,¹ the protagonist, Captain Rivers, describes his first sighting of the shores of the St. Lawrence River:

On approaching the coast of America, I felt a kind of religious veneration, on seeing rocks which almost touch'd the clouds, cover'd with tall groves of pines that seemed coeval with the world itself: to which veneration the solemn silence not a little contributed; from Cape Rosieres, up the river St. Lawrence, during a course of more than two hundred miles, there is not the least appearance of a human footstep; no objects meet the eye but mountains, woods, and numerous rivers, which seem to roll their waters in vain. (3)

Beyond those two hundred miles but still far short of his destination of Québec, Captain Rivers's ship would have passed by the town of Saint-Jean-Port-Joli, which would later become the setting for the opening of Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils*'s 1837 novel *L'influence d'un livre*, the first novel written in French in what is now called Canada:

Sur la rive sud du fleuve Saint-Laurent, dans une plaine qui s'étend jusqu'à une chaîne de montagnes, dont nous ignorons le nom, se trouve une petite chaumière, qui n'a rien de remarquable par elle-même ; située au bas d'une colline, sa vue est dérobée aux voyageurs par un bosquet de pins qui la défend contre le vent du nord, si fréquent dans cette partie de la contrée. (13)²

On the south bank of the St. Lawrence River, on a plain which stretches toward a chain of mountains, whose name we don't know, there is a small cottage, unremarkable in every respect. Located at

the foot of a hill, it is hidden from view for travelers by a pine grove which protects it from the north wind, which is so common in this part of the land.

The juxtaposition of these scenes — the English ship gliding past the French village, the former seemingly unaware of the existence of the latter, which in turn has screened itself from the view of outside visitors — seems to enact all too well the “two solitudes” made famous by Hugh MacLennan’s 1945 novel, or the “two nations warring within the bosom of a single state” of Lord Durham’s 1838 report on the constitutional position of Britain’s Canadian colonies. Even more evocatively, perhaps, the lack of mutual recognition in the openings of these novels might recall the image suggested by the Québec politician and man of letters Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau (1820-1890) in his *L’instruction publique au Canada*:

Dans une autre occasion, au risque d’être accusé de bizarrerie, nous nous sommes permis de comparer notre état social à ce fameux escalier du château de Chambord qui, par une fantaisie de l’architecte, a été construit de manière que deux personnes puissent monter en même temps sans se rencontrer, et en ne s’apercevant que par intervalles. Anglais et français, nous montons comme par une double rampe vers les destinées qui nous sont réservées sur ce continent, sans nous connaître, nous rencontrer, ni même nous voir ailleurs que sur le palier de la politique. Socialement et littérairement parlant, nous sommes plus étrangers les uns aux autres de beaucoup que ne le sont les Anglais et les Français d’Europe. (335)

On another occasion, and at the risk of being accused of eccentricity, we allowed ourselves to compare our social situation to that famous staircase of the *château* at Chambord which, through an architectural fantasy, was built such that two people could climb it at the same time without meeting each other, and without seeing each other except at intervals. English and French, we ascend as if by these double stairs toward the destinies chosen for us on this continent, without knowing each other, meeting each other, nor even seeing each other except on the landing of politics. Socially and literarily speaking, we are more foreign to each other by far than are the English and the French of Europe.

Certainly, the very mutual invisibility of English-Canadian and

Québécois cultures in these works — notionally the foundational novels of each literature — illustrates something of the challenges of forming two national literatures within the boundaries of a single political state. Even more striking, however, is the profound ambivalence experienced toward *both* of these novels within their own traditions. In the context of literatures always painfully aware of their belatedness in comparison with the literatures of Europe, the fairly consistent disavowal of Brooke and de Gaspé *fils* as foundational figures suggests much about the challenges inherent in creating and defending the claims of national literary history in a bilingual new world settler society. While many of the reasons for rejecting these two novelists differ — Brooke is too English, too temporary a visitor to serve as a suitable point of origin, while de Gaspé *fils* is too politically awkward and, especially, too anglophilic — they share a striking feature in common: both Brooke and de Gaspé *fils* seek, in one way or another, to break through the “two solitudes,” to find a way between the two staircases, as it were. Both authors, in other words, create texts that engage in significant ways with metropolitan traditions in *both* English and French, generating the possibility of a national literature for Canada at once bilingual and cosmopolitan in outlook. That the works of these two novelists have, in varying degrees, been marginalized within their linguistic traditions says much about the business of constructing a national literature.

As Lorraine McMullen has ably documented, *Emily Montague* was well received (after initially disappointing sales) by critics and readers in both Britain and France (it was translated twice into French in the year after its publication), while in the anglophone community in Québec, the novel was widely read, and speculation was rife as to the real-life models for Brooke’s characters. The English- and French-Canadian man of letters Sir James Macpherson Le Moine (1825-1912), who praised the novel in one of the few issues of the *British Canadian Review* (a literary journal he helped to establish in 1862), claimed that the novel’s “*couleur de rose tint*” had inspired wealthy British families to migrate to Canada. Le Moine did not, however, seek to make the text in any way foundational to a national literature, or indeed to insert it into any narrative of literary history. As the writing of English-Canadian literary histories increased in the early twentieth century, with growing national self-awareness (and also the development of a body of literary material suitable to the writing of literary history), opinions as to Brooke’s

place became still more uncertain. Thomas Guthrie Marquis's 1913 survey of English-Canadian literature praises *Emily Montague*, which it claims should be studied by "every student of Canadian literature," but ultimately dismisses the work's role in national literary history, characterizing Brooke as a "bird of passage in Canada" and suggesting that John Richardson's 1832 Cooperesque novel *Wacousta* is the rightful claimant to the title of first English-Canadian novel (534-35). Lorne Pierce, whose 1927 *Outline of Canadian Literature* is noteworthy for its groundbreaking inclusion of French-Canadian literature (and its gestures toward the role played by Aboriginal cultures), reflects a growing sense of the distinction between English-Canadian identities by proclaiming Brooke a "colonial" writer whose "heart was in England" and whose work had "no influence upon subsequent Canadian literature" (24). John Daniel Logan and Donald Graham French developed, in their 1928 *Highways of Canadian Literature*, a complex schematization of Incidental, Emigré, Nativistic, and Native and National Literatures of Canada, reflecting the gradual political consolidation and cultural emergence of the nineteenth century. *Emily Montague*, of course, belongs to the first of these categories, which "must be merely noted as fact. In nowise, whether it be literature or not, had it any real influence in developing a Canadian sentiment or in awakening a Canadian literary spirit" (45).

Scholars discussing *Emily Montague* in its own right, as opposed to those writing histories of Canadian literature, have been more willing to recognize (with reservations) the novel's status as foundational to Canadian literature. In a 1921 magazine article, generally enthusiastic about *Emily Montague*, if resistant to its epistolary form, Charles Blue identified Frances Brooke as "Canada's first novelist." Blue's article includes a quite extensive survey of Brooke's London literary career, both before and after *Emily Montague*; he does not offer a defense of his description of Brooke as a Canadian novelist but seems to view the nature of her subject matter as sufficient proof. Desmond Pacey, writing immediately after the Second World War, expressed greater reservations about Brooke's status as a Canadian novelist but nonetheless identified *Emily Montague* as "the first Canadian novel," again on the basis of its content. More recently, and in the context of a discussion of Brooke's possible influence on Jane Austen, Juliet McMaster has argued that the content of the novel, along with Brooke's years in Canada, earn *Emily*

Montague the title of the first Canadian novel. By contrast, George Woodcock dismissed the claim that Frances Brooke was a Canadian writer, describing her (in an echo of Marquis's phrase) as a "bird of passage." It is suggestive, I would argue, that writers of Canadian literary history are more skeptical about the position of *Emily Montague* within that history: given the novel's engagement with metropolitan cultures in both English and French, and its cast of aristocratic British characters, it makes a problematic beginning for the kind of teleology that literary histories tend to construct.

Philippe de Gaspé fils's *L'influence d'un livre* plays an even more problematic role in the literary history of Québec. The immediate political context of de Gaspé fils's novel — the increasing discontent of radical, republican, anti-clerical, and anti-British elements in Québec society, which culminated in the very weeks after the publication of *L'influence d'un livre* in the Lower Canadian Rebellion of 1837 — determined, to a great extent, readerly reaction. Of particular significance was de Gaspé fils's own political position, which, apart from a highly idiosyncratic and personal antagonism toward key leaders of the rebel *Patriote* party (including the launching of a stink-bomb on the floor of the Legislative Assembly in Québec City), mixed elements of republicanism and anti-clericalism (expressed, in particular, through judiciously edited epigraphs heading each chapter) with a pronounced anglophilia. This stance, highly unusual in its time, has continued to render de Gaspé fils's novel deeply problematic for Québécois readers: too radical for the conservative reaction which was ascendant in Québec from 1840 to 1960, the work was also too unapologetically bilingual and bicultural to suit the politically progressive but culturally nationalist discourse of the post-1960 era. As a result, histories of the French-language literature of Canada have found it difficult to know how to treat *L'influence d'un livre*. Where it has not been ignored outright, or dismissed with vague reference to its presumed literary inadequacies, the novel has been celebrated most comfortably for those aspects that can most easily be assimilated to what Pascale Casanova would call "*l'effet Herder*": that is, to a model of literary history that takes its origins in folkloric and/or popular traditions (110-19).

L'influence d'un livre disappeared from the literary record for a time after its publication; when it was heard of next in 1864, it had undergone "*quelques légères corrections*" at the hands of Abbé Henri-Raymond

Casgrain (1831-1904) (Casgrain 6). These corrections ranged from a change of title (to *Le chercheur des trésors*, which Casgrain believed would better suit the content) to the omission of oaths and all references to Eugène Sue and Lammenais as well as to dancing, theatre, and the female body (Biron 138). Casgrain's Catholic nationalism celebrated "*Le chercheur des trésors*" for its folk-tale-like depictions of simple, rustic Canadien life, a suitably Herderian beginning for an emergent national literature.

A more sympathetic reading of *L'influence d'un livre* came with Edmond Lareau's 1874 *Histoire de la littérature canadienne*, arguably the first literary history of French Canada (Blodgett 20). Lareau was a Liberal politician who advocated for a restriction of the tax-exempt status of the Catholic church and, as such, was less hostile to de Gaspé *fil's* political agenda than Casgrain. Lareau even defended the representation of the protagonist, Charles Amand, as a would-be alchemist, which he considered forgivable as a marker of a more ignorant and prejudiced past (302). Lareau is among the few readers to praise de Gaspé *fil's* style, which he characterizes as "clair, sans prétention," regretting only that the novel is too brief (a brevity only increased, of course, by Abbé Casgrain's editorial activity) (303).

Camille Roy (1870-1943), perhaps the most famous of the *prêtres-critiques* who dominated early Québécois literary criticism, mentions *L'influence d'un livre* without saying anything further about it, a silence that testifies to the work's continuing problematic nature (313). Albert Dandurand (author of the 1935 *Littérature canadienne-française*, and yet another *prêtre-critique*) went so far as to insist that the history of the Canadien novel began in 1846 with Charles Guérin, thereby eliminating the very space claimed by de Gaspé *fil's*. That Dandurand was motivated by more than clerical suspicion of a radical of the previous century is suggested in his *Conclusion Générale*:

La pensée a subi l'influence française un peu tout le long de son existence. Et il serait surprenant qu'après la Conquête, l'ambiance anglaise ne s'y fût pas aussi fait sentir. Mais elle s'est presque toute inspirée de chez nous, de la chose nationale passée et présente, légendaire et réelle. Aucune littérature au monde ne semble sur ce point plus nationale que la nôtre. (185)

Our thought has undergone some French influence throughout its existence. And it is surprising that after the Conquest, the English environment did not also make itself felt. But our thought is almost completely inspired at home, from national matters past and present, legendary and real. On this point, no literature in the world seems more national than our own.

Dandurand's complete rejection of the possibility of English influence on Québec intellectual life (to say nothing of his minimizing of the role of even metropolitan French thought on Québec), would seem clearly to preclude sympathy for an author so deeply engaged with both French radical thought and English literature as de Gaspé *fils*.

Recognition for de Gaspé *fils*'s role as the founder of the Canadian novel came, however, a few years later, in Séraphin Marion's *Les lettres canadiennes d'autrefois* (1939-1958), and in particular in volume 4 of that work, which appeared in 1943.³ Marion, who taught at the University of Ottawa, was a member of the Royal Society of Canada and wrote his study with the support of the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada. His study marks a decisive (and early) shift in the writing of the literary history of Québec: away from the clerical and toward a more secular and contemporary model of academic scholarship. As such, he is perhaps the first literary historian to acknowledge *L'influence d'un livre* as "notre premier roman," and to subject the text to a sustained reading (48-60).

That reading, however, was far from unequivocally favourable, attacking the weakness of the plot and the pretensions of de Gaspé *fils*'s preface, while praising the author's preservation of folk tales and his sketches of rural life (49). Marion's defense of the novel is at best half-hearted:

Dussé-je encore une fois m'attirer le dédain des esthètes et des raffinés, je veux tirer momentanément de l'oubli ces chers personnages qui ont fait seulement une fugitive apparition dans le péristyle du petit Panthéon de nos Lettres. (49)

Though I might attract one more time the disdain of esthetes and refined folk, I wish to drag briefly out of oblivion those dear figures that made but a brief appearance in the peristyle of the little Pantheon of our letters.

This imagery evokes Marion's sense both of the general fragility and underdevelopment of Canadian literature and of the particular feebleness of de Gaspé *fil's* contribution to that literature. A century after its publication, *L'influence d'un livre* finally gained the recognition its author had sought as the first novelist of Québec, but at the cost of being seen as a halting and misshapen false start, a work whose pretensions to literary sophistication are best dismissed in order to preserve both its folkloric traces of a bygone era and its rightful place as the humble beginning of a literary history.

The next major work of Québécois literary history is Pierre de Grandpré's *Histoire de la littérature française du Québec*, published in 1967.⁴ This history consolidates a number of themes critical to contemporary readings of *L'influence d'un livre*: an emphasis on its folkloric dimensions (95), a discussion of the influence of French writers such as Dumas and Sue (while omitting reference to the British writers on whom de Gaspé *fil's* also draws [135-36]), and a downplaying of the book's significance by representing it as one of a series of early novels by young men, "dont le courage dépasse de beaucoup le talent littéraire" ("whose courage far surpassed their literary talent" [178]). Composed as a collaborative effort in an era of rapidly emergent secular nationalism, the history edited by de Grandpré might be thought to have more sympathies with de Gaspé *fil's* own anti-clerical leanings, and thus, perhaps to have led to a positive re-evaluation of *L'influence d'un livre*. The book's brief discussion of the novel couches its dismissiveness in formal terms: "Ce petit ouvrage, qui date de 1837, est au premier chef un récit d'aventures fantastiques et horribles, alors qu'il se voulait le premier roman de mœurs canadien" ("This short work, which dates from 1837, is first and foremost a narrative of fantastic and horrific adventures, even as it claims to be the first Canadian novel of manners" [178]). This dismissal continues, under another guise, the disavowal of *L'influence d'un livre* as a foundational work of Québécois literature, which is, as we have seen, the most constant feature of the novel's interpretation.

Most recently, the *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* (2007), edited by Michel Biron, has continued to emphasize de Gaspé *fil's* use of folk tales and folk song as well as his claim that the novel represents historical events, all understood as dimensions of the novel's nationalist ambitions (114). Studiously non-evaluative, Biron's history is the first work of its kind in some time to draw attention to those elements of

L'influence d'un livre that exceed or escape the model of the foundational nationalist novel:

Par ailleurs, les nombreuses épigraphes placées en tête de chapitre juxtaposent les traditions anglaises et françaises et renvoient tantôt au classicisme, tantôt au romantisme. Elles donnent en outre au roman un aspect littéraire qui contraste avec l'inspiration populaire de plusieurs chapitres. (136)

Furthermore, the numerous epigraphs placed at the beginning of each chapter juxtapose English and French traditions and reflect classicism as often as romanticism. Beyond that, they give the novel a literariness that contrasts with the popular inspiration of several chapters.

Biron also stresses the formal and stylistic heterogeneity of the novel, which he sees as key to its mixed reception. Certainly, the “aspect littéraire” of *L'influence d'un livre*, and particularly its use of English as well as French epigraphs, are inconvenient from the perspective of national literary history. I would argue that literary history, like any other good narrative, requires a beginning, a middle, and an end: a trajectory from humble, popular, and/or fumbling beginnings toward increasingly self-assured and complex works, culminating in some sort of Golden Age (normally, though not necessarily, prior to the date of writing), and continuing beyond that in some manner of decadence, decline, or development toward the future.⁵ De Gaspé *fils's* novel fulfills some of the expectations for foundational works of national literatures: the self-conscious exploitation of folk tale and folk song, and the novel's failure fully to integrate its heterogeneous elements conveniently both suggest a literature with its origins in the *Volk* and provide later writers with room to improve. At the same time, other elements of the novel prove equally problematic for this national-literary narrative, and especially de Gaspé *fils's* ostentatious references to English and French literature. Each of the chapters begins with one or more epigraphs; there are a total of twenty-four across the fourteen chapters, of which ten are English and fourteen French. Among the English authors cited, Shakespeare is the most common, with four citations (two from *Macbeth*, one each from *Hamlet* and *Henry VI Part I*), but the Romantics are well represented as well, with contributions from Byron, Scott, and the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell. De Gaspé *fils's* French citations are equally diverse, includ-

ing Jean-François de la Harpe (1739-1803) — an Enlightenment figure who moved toward ardent Catholicism and literary conservatism — but also Victor Hugo and Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854) — a former clergyman who by the 1830s argued for a personal piety radically divorced from the Catholic church and a political program of democratization and popular welfare (four citations) — and Louis-Auguste Berthaud (1810-1847) — a now almost completely forgotten Romantic poet, originally a glazier from Lyon, whose brief and unsuccessful career included a considerable corpus of satiric and political poetry (three citations). These epigraphs were intensely controversial in the initial reviews of *L'influence d'un livre* (written as the 1837 rebellion was unfolding), in which critics condemned not only de Gaspé *fil's*'s embrace of political and literary radicalism from France, but also his use of English, which de Gaspé *fil's* memorably defended on 15 November 1837, just a week before the Battle of Saint-Denis, as a “*langue sublime et énergique*.”⁶ De Gaspé *fil's*'s literary cosmopolitanism seeks (if haltingly) to place his novel in dialogue with the English and (metropolitan) French literary traditions, rendering it (from a nationalist perspective) insufficiently grounded in its native soil, a problem that this first French novel in Canada of course shares with its anglophone counterpart.⁷

By the time of *Emily Montague's* publication in 1769, Frances Brooke was already the author of a successful novel, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763); a weekly periodical entitled *The Old Maid* (1755-1756, publication of which ceased with the marriage of its author); a failed play, *Virginia* (1756), and a successful translation of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni's sentimental epistolary novel, *Lettres de milady Juliette Catesby à milady Henriette Campley, son amie* (1759). All of these works were written prior to her brief sojourns in Canada in 1763-1764 and 1765-1767 while her husband served as a military chaplain there, and none has a Canadian setting. Even more problematically, the novel expresses even greater ambivalence about the nation in which it is set than its author did in her own life. Its plot revolves around a group of young men and women who find themselves in Canada in the year 1766, shortly after the conquest of New France by the British in 1759. Captain Rivers, knowing that his English estates will be inadequate to support a family in the manner he wishes, has left England to seek his fortune in Canada. While there, he falls in love with the titular Emily Montague, who breaks her engagement to a wealthy man in favour of

a love match with Rivers. Secondary romantic plots play out between Montague's confidante, Arabella Fermor, and Rivers's fellow soldier Captain Fitzgerald (in Canada), and between Rivers's sister Lucy and his best friend John Temple (in England). All three couples are, of course, happily united in marriage by the end of the novel, and Rivers and Montague are rescued from the threat of genteel poverty by the convenient death of a mysterious relative who had grown wealthy in India. But perhaps most importantly, all three couples find their happiness in England, even though two of the couples met in Canada and in both these cases the men, at least, assumed they were migrating permanently to Canada. In a move that would be paradigmatic of the novel's implicit political message, the only major character in the novel to remain in Canada is Mme des Roches, the widow whose failed attempt to seduce Rivers prompts his decision to purchase lands in the Eastern Townships (then unsettled land near Montréal, only opening up for colonization after the conquest), rather than acquire her lands near Kamouraska on the lower St. Lawrence (171). She will eventually take a vow "to live and die a batchelor [sic]" (349), perpetuating her doomed love for Rivers and programmatically rendering barren all contact between English visitors and the Canadian inhabitants.

This ambivalence to the Canadian setting of much of the novel is expressed not only through its plotting, but also through the content of the letters sent back to England by characters resident in Canada. Other readers have commented, rightly, on the fascination with the picturesque and quaint dimensions of Canadian setting as represented in these letters (for instance, Trumpener 328n45), and certainly the novel abounds with descriptions of the majesty of the natural setting (as we have seen in Captain Rivers's initial letter home), of the customs of the Huron villagers of Lorette (26-31), and of the beauty and deportment of "the Canadian ladies" (4). The letters home likewise contain extensive descriptions of natural phenomena, such as Montmorency Falls (125-28), and the spring break-up of the ice on the St. Lawrence (202-03). To this general category of "local colour," we might add two picturesque character sketches of two historical individuals, neither named directly in the text but both attested to elsewhere: Esther Wheelwright (11), Mother Superior of the Ursuline Convent in Québec, who was born in Maine, then captured by the Abenaki and later by the French; and Toussaint Cartier (64-66), who lived as a hermit on the île Saint-

Barnabé, opposite Rimouski in the St. Lawrence, after watching the wife he had eloped with from Europe drown before his eyes.⁸

These moments of travelogue, however, form a comparatively small proportion of the novel, and are mostly found in its earlier stages. As the narrative continues, characters express increasing disenchantment with their new land, describing Québec, for example, as “like a third or fourth rate country town in England; much hospitality, little society” (81),⁹ and the politics among the *habitants* as “as complex and as difficult to be understood as those of the Germanic system” (82). Arabella Fermor, the last of the principal characters to arrive in Québec, draws on her father’s experience as a military officer involved in the conquest for that last remark, and indeed it is William Fermor’s letters (sent to an unnamed earl in England) that provide the only explicit political analysis in the novel.¹⁰ This analysis is, in some ways, quite surprising. While clearly supportive of the imperial project, in general, and speaking approvingly of possible measures to convert the Canadiens to the Church of England (179) and to establish the use of the English language (214), William Fermor’s letters emphatically reject the idea of British colonization of Canada (187-88).

Fermor argues that the British settlement of Canada is to be discouraged for two reasons: because the homeland can ill-afford the loss (thanks, in part, to the enclosure movement, which, interestingly, he vociferously opposes), and also because the English, in his view, are temperamentally unsuited to the role of colonists. Fermor’s skepticism about the suitability of the English as colonists seems based, in part, on the experience of Britain’s *other* North American colonists; references to unrest within the Thirteen Colonies pervade Fermor’s letters and explicitly inform his views on a number of subjects. Fermor, for example, strongly supports the establishment of the Church of England within Canada, because he believes that the failure to do so in previous North American colonies had contributed greatly to tensions with the homeland, but he hopes that the Canadiens will come to Anglicanism “enlightened by a more liberal education, and gently led by reason” (178). In the course of this same letter, Fermor also advocates for the emancipation of Catholics, and, in arguing that “the civil government of America is on the same plan with that of the mother country” (179), he seems to imply support for an elected assembly in Canada, develop-

ments that will await the Québec Act (1774) and the Constitutional Act (1791), respectively.

Fermor's letters, then, seem to argue that Canada represents an opportunity for the British to begin anew in the colonization of North America, learning from the mistakes made further south — for instance, not establishing the Church of England and failing adequately to assure the assimilation of non-anglophone communities, such as the Dutch in New York (214).¹¹ To some extent, these views match those eventually taken in the colonial administration of Canada: the Constitutional Act of 1791, for example, would establish a Protestant (i.e., Church of England) clergy in Upper Canada, and, after the failed 1837 rebellions, British policy would turn increasingly toward an attempted assimilation of the French by the growing English-speaking population, especially after Upper and Lower Canada were rejoined in 1841. The idea that Canada (i.e., English Canada) represented a perfected version of the British colonial model that had failed in the Thirteen Colonies would become a touchstone of English-Canadian nationalist identity throughout the nineteenth (and much of the twentieth) century. To that extent, then, Frances Brooke, in authoring the first literary representation of Canada along these lines, deserves an important place in the history of the development of English-Canadian identity. That William Fermor's vision of the Canadian future excludes British migration, however, creates the paradox of an English Canada without English-Canadians, a nation of English-speaking Protestants descended from French-speaking Catholics. In this sense, Fermor's vision prevents the conditions of possibility of an English Canada as it exists today, and thus the first work of English-Canadian literature seems to reject not only its position within that literature, but even the possible future development of such a literature.

There is a final way in which Brooke's novel seems to foreclose, rather than initiate, an English-Canadian literary tradition. The last letter of the novel, sent from Captain Rivers to Arabella Fitzgerald (née Fermor), imagines, in its closing lines, the addressee speaking to the writer in the words of Voltaire: "Cela est bien dit, mon cher Rivers; mais il faut cultiver notre jardin" (352). This reference to the final sentence of *Candide* (published just ten years earlier, in 1759), is telling in its own right. *Candide*'s famous response to his former tutor Pangloss's claim that the absurd and horrific events which have punctuated the

novel were, in fact, all for the best, argues for a quietistic and pragmatic focus on one's immediate surroundings — in *Candide's* case, his small farm near Constantinople; in Rivers's, his English estate. Where *Candide's* adventures have left him tilling the soil of a foreign land, Rivers's own adventures (which began, remember, with the intention of acquiring an estate in Canada, either at Kamouraska or in the Eastern Townships) return him to his ancestral home and ancestral land. Where, for Voltaire, the point of cultivating one's garden is the turn away from philosophical speculation, for Brooke, the point seems to be very much that the garden be *one's own*. What William Fermor argues for as imperial policy is enacted at the level of plot in the return of the Riverses and Fitzgeralds to England. Where *Candide* and his companions (refugees, after all, from the war between the Bulgars and the Avars that had strangely afflicted Westphalia at *Candide's* start) must build new lives in a new land, the Riverses and Fitzgeralds, on the winning side of history, somewhat unexpectedly decide that there's no place like home. In an interesting detail, Rivers comments on the "veneration" (250) he feels for the cliffs of Dover on his return to England, repeating the word he had earlier used to describe his first encounter with the new world (and, specifically, with the cliffs of the Gaspé Peninsula).

There are additional ways in which the citation of the closing sentence from *Candide* should inform a reading of *Emily Montague*, a novel that contains several lengthy quotations from French literature, both in the original and in translation. The most notable of these are Rivers's citations from Saint-Evrémond (48) and Madame de Maintenon (173-74) in letters to his friend Temple and to his sister, respectively, on the subject of marriage. Such quotations are not wholly unexpected in an eighteenth-century English novel, but the claim that they make for the cultural sophistication and influence of the French creates an odd, and unresolved, tension with the representation of the French settlers of Québec as in need of anglicization; the form of the eighteenth-century novel, in other words, collides here with its content. As with the citation of *Candide* at the end of the novel, these other quotations register Brooke's complex relationship with French culture, both at home and abroad in Canada, and the choice of a Canadian setting for *Emily Montague* seems motivated, in part, by the need for a suitable ground within which to locate these tensions. Canada, in other words, becomes for Brooke a place to work through her anxieties about the relations

between English and French literature, highlighting her engagement with the latter while asserting the cultural superiority of the former.¹²

More significantly for our purposes, the use of *Candide*'s closing line inevitably recalls Candide's exchange a few chapters earlier with the skeptic Martin, as the two sail from France to England:

Vous connaissez l'Angleterre; y est-on aussi fou qu'en France ? C'est une autre espèce de folie, dit Martin. Vous savez que ces deux nations sont en guerre pour quelques arpents de neige vers le Canada, et qu'elles dépensent pour cette belle guerre beaucoup plus que tout le Canada ne vaut. (Voltaire 21:196)

“You know England; are they as mad there as in France?” “It's a different variety of madness,” said Martin. “You know that these two nations are at war over a few acres of snow near Canada, and that they are spending on this glorious war much more than all of Canada is worth.”

These “few acres of snow,” perhaps Canada's most memorable insertion into eighteenth-century French literature (and a continuing source of nationalist *ressentiment* in Québec and in English Canada alike), illustrate Voltaire's skepticism concerning the merits of the Seven Years' War, whose recent conclusion is, of course, responsible for Rivers's and Fermor's decisions to seek their fortunes in Canada. What we are meant to think of this passage when reading *Emily Montague* is suggested by a passage in Captain Rivers's first letter home:

It is impossible to behold a scene like this without lamenting the madness of mankind, who, more merciless than the fierce inhabitants of the howling wilderness, destroy millions of their own species in the wild contention for a little portion of that earth, the far greater part of which remains yet unpossessed, and courts the hand of labour for cultivation. (3)

There are, to be sure, differences between the views expressed by Rivers and by Martin in *Candide*: Rivers (in contrast with Fermor) believing that the value of Canada will increase over time and thus (perhaps) begin to justify the human cost of the war, and Martin, pessimist that he is, not imagining such a possibility. Still, the similarities are at least as striking: both emphasize the madness of the combatants and the smallness of the territory contested; moreover, given that the novel con-

cludes with so overt a borrowing from *Candide*, it seems plausible to find echoes of that text here as well. Certainly, it is striking that Brooke has a military man (and prospective colonist) such as Rivers express such regret over the conquest that makes possible his adventures and that he hopes will guarantee his prosperity. That Rivers returns to England, abandoning the pursuit of fortune, seems then to reinforce the ambivalence he has expressed from the beginning — if not about the conquest itself, then at least about its cost. Once again, we see the action of the novel seeming to reinforce Fermor's political advice: Canada is a land where fortunes will be made and which will increase the prosperity of Britain, but British migration is to be discouraged. Especially telling is the source of Captain Rivers's eventual fortune, noted already in passing: a relation of Rivers, a Colonel Wilmott, who had made his fortune in India, returns to marry his daughter (whom he has never met) to Rivers — only to discover, in appropriately novelistic fashion, that that daughter, Emily Montague, is already married to Rivers (343). Wilmott is repeatedly referred to as a “Nabob” (334), that is, as an Englishman who has made his fortune in India (the term likely derives from the Urdu *nawaab*, used in the Mughal Empire as a title for regional governors or semi-autonomous local rulers). Wilmott thus provides from India the economic fulfillment Rivers had originally sought from Canada. Rivers only uses the term “Nabob” negatively, to indicate the hypothetical fortune whose enjoyment he would gladly surrender to his mother's greater happiness (2-3), but he does speak of his own ambitions in similar language:

I love England, but am not obstinately chained down to any spot of earth; nature has charms every where for a man willing to be pleased: at my time of life, the very change of place is amusing; love of variety, and the natural restlessness of man, would give me a relish for this voyage, even if I did not expect, what I really do, to become lord of a principality which will put our large-acred men in England out of countenance. My subjects at present will be only bears and elks, but in time I hope to see the human face divine multiplying around me; and, in thus cultivating what is in the rudest state of nature, I shall taste one of the greatest of all pleasures, that of creation, and see order and beauty gradually rise from chaos. (1)

The resolution of the novel, in other words, takes the form of a reversal: the protagonist's original desire to colonize in Canada (and "cultivate" his wilderness, transforming it into a garden of sorts) is supplanted by a desire to return home to cultivate the "woodbines and wild roses" (305) of his native garden, a desire facilitated by an alternative (and more lucrative) British empire in India. The whole concatenation of plot incidents — the illness of Rivers's mother, Fermor's own decisions to retire from the army ("as there is no prospect of real duty" (206) in the aftermath of the conquest) and to marry Fitzgerald to his daughter, thus inducing Fitzgerald to return to England as well — represent in each case some form of realization that the future, for these individual Englishmen, at least, does not lie in Canada. As a result, this novel, which might portend the beginnings of an English-Canadian literary culture based on elite models from the home country, instead establishes that while a sentimental novel might use Canada as its temporary backdrop, romantic and economic fulfillment must take place at home.

This ambivalence, I would argue, represents the deepest problem with both *Emily Montague* and with *L'influence d'un livre* as foundational works of English-Canadian and Québécois literature, respectively. Both novels, in their different ways, cannot be accepted fully into their respective national canons because both have other allegiances. Frances Brooke, that "bird of passage," clearly wrote as a participant in metropolitan English literary culture, with significant connections to French literary culture. As such, and even though her novel is in fact obsessed with the very questions that would bedevil English-Canadian identity for centuries, she resists adoption as a Canadian icon. In contrast, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils* is a native son of Québec, and he explicitly and self-consciously seeks to found a literature. At first glance, his work should be much more readily assimilable into a national canon, yet it is precisely the kind of literature he wishes to found, in touch with its local origins but resolutely bicultural and engaged with metropolitan trends, that makes his work an embarrassment to nationalist readings. Both writers, in other words, fail to find their appropriate places on the bottom steps of the double-helical staircase at Chambord, preferring instead a literary culture that, for all its flaws, insists on an openness to metropolitan traditions and to both of Canada's national literary languages. The project that each author seems to suggest, of a Canada and a Canadian literature thoroughly bilingual and thoroughly integrated

into the larger worlds of English and French, may well have represented a utopian dream in the land of the two solitudes, but its presence at the births of both literary traditions might serve as an inspiration, or at least a provocation, to our own times.

NOTES

¹ This novel may well be the very first written in any language anywhere in the Americas. For the early history of the novel in the United States and in Latin America, see, respectively, Davidson and Sommer. Davidson identifies several candidates for the title of first American novel; none pre-date *Emily Montague*. All of the Latin American novels Sommer discusses date from the nineteenth century.

² All translations from French are mine.

³ The work seems especially obscure; it is not mentioned, for example, in Blodgett.

⁴ As with earlier works of literary history, the title of this work already does much to define its content: the label used to name the literature studied reveals much about the national assumptions underlying the history. Lareau's 1874 *littérature canadienne* becomes Dandurand's 1935 *littérature canadienne-française*, which becomes here the *littérature française du Québec*, and would, in Michel Biron's 2007 history, become *littérature québécoise*.

⁵ René Wellek documents this tendency in the late eighteenth century, as the antiquarian precursors of literary historians started to shift from condoning the "primitivism" of early vernacular literature to actively celebrating it, beginning, as he suggests, with the excitement surrounding the "discovery" of Ossian (28-29).

⁶ Philippe Aubert de Gaspé *fils*, "Response to Pierre-André," *Le populaire journal des intérêts canadiens* (15 Nov. 1837, 94).

⁷ For a thoughtful discussion of the implications of de Gaspé *fils*'s bilingual citations in the context of nineteenth-century Québécois literary culture more generally, see Grutman 55-64.

⁸ For the story, we are indebted to Sir James Macpherson Le Moine, aficionado of *Emily Montague* and friend to de Gaspé *père*, founder of Canadian literary journals in both languages, and general man of letters of post-Confederation Canada (*The Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*, 314-15).

⁹ Revealingly, when Sir James Macpherson Le Moine quotes at length from this passage in his review of *Emily Montague*, the words "like a third or fourth rate country town in England" are omitted. ("Emily" 88). The *couleur de rose* tint that Le Moine, and most other Canadian readers, seem to find in this novel may perhaps be found most clearly in their own reading glasses.

¹⁰ While Laura Moss rightly reminds us to be cautious in equating Fermor's views with Brooke's (Moss 454), I would nonetheless suggest that the detail with which Fermor expresses his views necessarily colours one's reading of the novel.

¹¹ In a striking historical irony, Fermor hopes that the Canadiens will be more easily assimilated than the Dutch, thanks to their greater attachment to court life.

¹² As it happens, we know that Voltaire read and appreciated *Lady Julia Mandeville*, Frances Brooke's previous novel. In the *Gazette littéraire de l'Europe* of 30 May 1764, Voltaire praised the French translation of *Lady Julia Mandeville* as "peut-être le meilleur roman de ce genre [i.e., the epistolary novel] qui ait paru en Angleterre depuis *Clarisse* et *Grandisson*" (26.2, 41-42).

WORKS CITED

- Biron, Michel. *Histoire de la littérature québécoise*. Montréal: Boréal, 2007. Print.
- Blodgett, E.D. *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. Print.
- Blue, Charles. "Canada's First Novelist." *The Canadian Magazine* Nov. 1921. 3-12. Print.
- Brooke, Frances. *The History of Emily Montague*. Ed. Laura Moss. Ann Arbor: Tecumseh, 2001. Print. Canadian Critical Editions.
- Casanova, Pascale. *La république mondiale des lettres*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999. Print.
- Casgrain, Henri-Raymond. *La littérature canadienne de 1850 à 1860*. Québec: Desbarats, 1864. Print.
- Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- de Gaspé fils, Philippe Aubert. *L'influence d'un livre*. Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007. Print.
- . "Réponse à Pierre-André." *Le populaire journal des intérêts canadiens* 15 Nov. 1837. 1. Print.
- de Grandpré, Pierre. *Histoire de la littérature française du Québec*. Vol. 1. Montréal: Beauchemin, 1967. Print.
- Grutman, Rainier. *Des langues qui résonnent: l'hétérolinguisme au XIXe siècle québécois*. Montréal: Editions Fides, 1997. Print. Nouvelles études québécoises.
- Lareau, Edmond. *Histoire de la littérature canadienne*. Montréal: John Lovell, 1874. Print.
- Le Moine, Sir James Macpherson. "Emily Montague; or, Quebec a Century Ago." *The British Canadian Review* 1.2 (Jan. 1863): 86-88. Québec: Hunter, Rose, 1863. Print.
- . *The Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*. Montréal: Dawson Bros., 1878. Print.
- Logan, John Daniel, and Donald Graham French. *Highways of Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland, 1928. Print.
- Marion, Seraphin. *Les lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*. Vol. 4. Hull: Editions L'Éclair, 1943. Print. Publications sériees de l'Université d'Ottawa.
- Marquis, Thomas Guthrie. "English-Canadian Literature." *Canada and Its Provinces: A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions*. Vol. 12. Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, 1913. 493-589. Print.
- McMaster, Juliet. "Young Jane Austen and the First Canadian Novel: From Emily Montague to 'Amelia Webster' and Love and Friendship." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11.3 (1999): 339-46. Print.
- McMullen, Lorraine. "Reception." *The History of Emily Montague*. Ed. Laura Moss. Ann Arbor: Tecumseh, 2001. 375-80. Print.
- Moss, Laura. "Colonialism and Postcolonialism in *The History of Emily Montague*." *The History of Emily Montague*. Ed. Laura Moss. Ann Arbor: Tecumseh, 2001. 451-59. Print.
- Pacey, Desmond. "The First Canadian Novel." *The Dalhousie Review* 26 (1946): 143-50. Print.
- Pierce, Lorne. *An Outline of Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Ryerson, 1927. Print.
- Roy, Camille. *Nos origines littéraires*. Québec: L'Action Sociale, 1909. Print.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991. Print.
- Trumpener, Katie. *Bardic Nationalism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997. Print.
- Voltaire. *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*. Paris: Garnier frères, 1877-85. Print.
- Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983. Print.
- Woodcock, George. Introduction. *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Fiction Series*. Ed. Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley. Toronto: ECW, 1983. Print.