

# The History of Maritime Literature

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Folklore research in Atlantic Canada has come a ways since Helen Creighton first set out to collect folksongs in the late 1920s. The work of Creighton and other early folklore researchers still provides a solid base of data upon which more recent contextual and functional studies can stand. With works like *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* and *Joe Scott, The Woodsman-Songmaker*, the folklore traditions of the region have provided material for studies of rare excellence. Still, our knowledge of the region's folklore is quite uneven. Little work, for example, has been done by folklorists on the traditions of coal miners, and much remains to be done on the folk traditions of the inshore and offshore fishermen. Factory lore, community studies, ethnic traditions — the list is endless. A more comprehensive understanding of the regional folk culture can come only when folklore studies have become an integral part of the research and teaching in Maritime universities. One hopes that this will begin to occur soon. If it does not, the folk will always be with us, waiting, for we are all the folk.

RICHARD S. TALLMAN

### The History of Maritime Literature

We have in this place a profound awareness of the importance of the past. At the moment this is reflected more in the work of historians I suggest, and to a much lesser degree in the work of literary historians and critics.<sup>1</sup>

So spoke Douglas Lochhead at the opening of the Atlantic Canada Institute's Literary Colloquium in 1976. A review of books containing historical studies of Maritime literature reveals his words to be all too true. There are only two of any significance: Carl F. Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1965; 2cd rev. ed., 3 vols., 1976) and Ray Palmer Baker's *A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation; Its Relation to the Literature of Great Britain and the United States* (New York, Russell & Russell, 1920). As their titles make clear, neither treats Maritime literature exclusively, but at least they are specifically literary histories and devote sections to the Maritime provinces. Other books yield biographical information on individual authors, and the pages of such periodicals as *The Dalhousie Review*, *Fiddlehead*, *The Journal of Canadian Fiction*, and *Canadian Literature* carry occasional articles on an author or a topic from the Atlantic past, but book-length studies on the subject simply do not exist.

What we have so far is Klinck and Baker, or we should say Cogswell and

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Lochhead, "The Literary Heritage", *The Marco Polo Papers: One* (Saint John, Atlantic Canada Institute, 1977), p. 3.

Baker, for the lion's share of the history of Maritime literature in Klinck's anthology of essays falls to Fred Cogswell of the University of New Brunswick. He provides four sections: "Newfoundland 1750-1880", "The Maritime Provinces 1720-1815", "Haliburton" (which also includes a sketch of Thomas McCulloch), and "Literary Activity in the Maritime Provinces 1815-1880". Cogswell's chapters on the periods prior to 1880 were ambitious undertakings in their day, but have been dated by the research of the last fifteen years. His essays suffer from another limitation imposed by the nature of the anthology; they plainly attempt to do little more than survey the ground, and one is left with only a sense of general context and a list of names. Worthwhile critical evaluation of specific authors, or in-depth analyses of their social contexts, require much greater scope. However, in terms of the scope allowable, and the information available when they were written, Cogswell's essays are highly informative and still the best synthesis in existence on the pre-Confederation period.

Cogswell begins with a short section on Newfoundland from 1715-1880 which is clearly inadequate today. His assertion that "Newfoundland's sole nineteenth-century writer of verse of any importance was Henrietta Prescott" (p. 71) is inaccurate.<sup>2</sup> He proceeds to a treatment of the Maritime Provinces from 1720-1815, offering very brief, often one-sentence introductions to a number of writers, and singling out Henry Alline (1748-1784) and Joshua Marsden (1777-1837) for two or three-page treatments. Joseph Stansbury (1750-1809) and Jonathan Odell (1737-1818), whose works were published together in 1860, are alluded to only briefly. Here is a case in which Ray Palmer Baker's *A History of English Canadian Literature to the Confederation* complements Cogswell. Baker's book is subtitled "Its Relation to the Literature of Great Britain and the United States", and its more restricted time span and concern for relationships gives a much larger place to the Loyalists. Baker points out that many of the "United Empire Loyalists" were fleeing persecution, and did not freely choose to remain with the Empire. He quotes Stansbury:

Believe me, Love, this vagrant life  
O'er Nova Scotia's wilds to roam,  
While far from children, friends, or wife,  
Or place that I can call a home,  
Delights not me: — another way  
My treasures, pleasures, wishes lay (p. 25).

However, many of the Americans made Nova Scotia their own, perhaps the best examples being Joseph Howe (King's Printer and Postmaster General of the Maritime Provinces), and Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Baker devotes a

2 All page numbers for Klinck refer to the first (1965) edition unless otherwise indicated.

chapter to each, treating Haliburton in the context of the development of American humour and satire.

The Loyalists were not the only exiles to swell the population of the Maritimes in the late eighteenth century. The second largest influx came from Scotland, bringing with it a strict Presbyterianism, and a Gaelic gift for language capable of generating such haunting verse as:

From the lone sheiling of the misty island  
Mountains divide us and a waste of seas;  
Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland  
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides (Baker, p. 50).

Baker devotes part of a chapter to the Scottish migration, but somehow misses Thomas McCulloch, the Scottish Presbyterian minister of Pictou, whose *Stepsure Letters* is the best-known product of that era. Cogswell, on the other hand, devotes fifty lines to McCulloch at the beginning of his section on Haliburton. Everyone would not agree with his assertion that McCulloch deserves attention for his *Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure* alone, or that Haliburton's debt to McCulloch has been greatly exaggerated. Certainly McCulloch was the pioneer in the use of incidents in the life of a Nova Scotian character to illustrate a moral. Between Cogswell and Baker, a fairly sound picture of the nature and significance of Haliburton's work emerges, but detailed scholarship has yet to come.

"Literary Activity in the Maritime Provinces 1815-1880" does a workman-like job of covering the ground. But perhaps Cogswell tries too hard not to make special claims for the Maritime literature of this period:

Cultural borrowing is particularly dangerous when the cultures concerned are disparate. Such Maritime poets as Peter Fisher, Oliver Goldsmith, James Hogg, Joseph Howe, William Martin Leggett, and David Palmer adopted the forms of a poetry already out of date in England. These were the heroic couplet, the public song, and Miltonic blank verse. Of these only the public song — a minor genre at best — proved transplantable. The heroic couplet, designed to express the sensibilities of an urban elite and demanding a professional polish, come off badly when applied to the frontier by amateur poets. Miltonic blank verse had become by the early nineteenth century imitative and mediocre in its own land.

The successors of this generation of Maritime poets borrowed from the great English Romantics. Romantic forms and techniques had been developed to resolve the tensions of a complex society going through its time of troubles. Maritime poets fitted them to platitudinous and decorative verse on general themes to satisfy a society whose concepts were narrow and homogeneous (p. 104).

Such an attitude simply angers certain students of Maritime literature. That this literature is highly derivative is a fact which cannot be escaped, but it is also important to realize that because a frontier colony is to a degree isolated from the mother country, and to a large extent preoccupied with the practical concerns of establishing, not refining, its culture, its fashions lag considerably behind those of the cultural centers, and its taste reflects its present state of knowledge and values. The literature of the nineteenth-century Maritimes is sociologically and historically significant, therefore, as much for what it is not as for what it is. Moreover, I would not agree, in general terms, with Cogswell's assessment of the Romantic movement; there was also a new vitality in those forms and techniques, and in those ideas, which carried forward even to our own times, and was not entirely lost or inappropriate in the colonies. For instance, the Wordsworthian reverence for Nature helped the colonies to see their wilderness as not necessarily hostile, and though this may have been partly a self-deception, it was a useful one (see Hunter-Duvar's poem below).

After a general introduction to the period, Cogswell singles out James De Mille (1733-1800), Oliver Goldsmith (1794-1861), Peter Fisher (1782-1848), Joseph Howe (1804-1873), Peter John Allan (1825-1848), Alexander Rae Garvie (1836-1875), and John Hunter Duvar (1830-1899) for special attention, coming to the conclusion that DeMille's *A Strange Manuscript found in a Copper Cylinder* is "by far the most interesting novel to be written in the Maritimes before 1880" (p. 113), and that Hunter-Duvar's "The Emigration of the Fairies" is "the most technically successful and the most aesthetically satisfying poem" (p. 24) of that period. Cogswell closes by printing for us a poem of Hunter-Duvar's which he has salvaged from a newspaper, and I will pass along to you the last verse, as it demonstrates the development of a sense of belonging among the settlers, and counter-balances that verse of Stansbury's.

Where once the stumps had been grew apple trees,  
And grass and grain and a rude garden place,  
And in the course of time the orchard fruits  
Grew red-cheeked in the sun; and specimens  
Of planted trees for landscape — beech and elm —  
And some imported — lime and sycamore,  
Became unbrageous, and lent dignity;  
While round the circuit of the whole domain  
Was left a margin of the old rough woods,  
Wherein the intersecting timber-roads  
Were underbrushed and trimmed to bridle-paths,  
At which the Squire — a setter at his heels —  
Would frequent take his rides in Spring and Fall,  
Beneath the red flame of the maple bush,  
Or in the yellow rain of beechen leaves;

And musing with full heart, would grateful say, —  
 “Dear Lord! the land is fair to look upon,  
 Although it is not like my English home!” (p. 124)

After 1880 the information on Maritime authors must be gleaned from sections with general headings, as the *Literary History of Canada* ceases to treat the Maritimes after Confederation as a matter of separate concern. Gordon Roper’s “New Forces: New Fiction 1880-1920” is useful for placing names in a general context, while the next section, which he shares with Rupert Schieder and S. Ross Beharriell, provides a brief review of titles. In a third section on the period, “Writers of Fiction 1880-1920”, they offer thumbnail sketches of the better-known figures. The Maritime writers of the turn-of-the-century must be sought out by name. We find Charles G.D. Roberts in a section by Roy Daniells on “Lampman and Roberts”, Bliss Carman in his “Crawford, Carman and Scott”, and Francis Sherman in a third essay by Daniells titled “Minor Poets 1880-1920”. Theodore Goodridge Roberts, briefly mentioned by Roper, is given some attention in a section titled “Nature Writers” by Alex Lucas.

*Literary History of Canada’s* treatment of Maritime literature in the twentieth century is very poor. Raddall and McLennan are discussed under fiction, and Bruce and Leslie are given a page each by Munroe Beattie in “Poetry 1935-1950”. Beattie also devotes a separate essay to E.J. Pratt, who, aside from Haliburton, is the only Canadian author assigned a separate section of his own. This, incidentally, reflects a certain unevenness in the overall presentation, a sense of the book having been merely assembled from pieces at hand rather than written to an orderly plan. Sometimes the references to Maritime writers are so fleeting as to be quite pointless. Desmond Pacey mentions only two of Frank Parker Day’s works, *Rockbound* and *John Paul’s Rock*, calling them “vigorous stories”. His original gaff of stating that they are both stories of “the harsh lives of fishermen off the Nova Scotia coast” (1965 edition, p. 668), when *John Paul’s Rock* is about a Micmac Indian living in central Nova Scotia, has been corrected in the 1976 edition. Pacey spares a brief paragraph for a rather negative comment on Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley*, but does not mention Charles Bruce’s *The Channel Shore*. The short stories of Buckler and Bruce do not receive mention, nor does any of the short fiction of our lesser-known writers. E.M. Richardson is not recognized. Will R. Bird is mentioned as “a chronicler of the eighteenth-century Yorkshiremen who emigrated to Nova Scotia” (p. 697), but *Here Stands Good Yorkshire* is not named, and no indication is given of the scope of Bird’s other writings.

Plainly, *Literary History of Canada* is not useful for a study of literature in Atlantic Canada after 1880. More detailed information about figures of national or international reputation such as Carman, Roberts, Raddall and Carman, together with the lesser poet Francis Sherman, and Robert’s cousin

Theodore, had been variously praised for over half a century when A.J.M. Smith reminded the Fredericton public at a Founder's Day Address in 1946 that scholarship and criticism had not yet submitted their works to any very rigorous or acid examination.<sup>3</sup> The situation has improved since then, particularly with the publication of W.J. Keith's *Charles G.D. Roberts* (Toronto, Copp Clarke, 1969). James Cappon's *Bliss Carmen and the Literary Currents and Influences of his time* (Toronto, Ryerson, 1930) was then in existence and received a word of praise from Smith. It has not been superceded. Any reader interested in the Fredericton poets would do best to read Smith's article "The Fredericton Poets" and then go directly to Cappon and Keith. The essays in *Literary History of Canada* are inadequate for any scholarly purpose by comparison. This can also be said of the treatment of the major twentieth-century figures.

The chapter on Pratt has recently been complemented by an article of similar scope in David Staines, ed., *The Canadian Imagination* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1977) by Peter Buitenhuis, who states flatly that Pratt is Canada's most significant poet (p. 46). He suggests that the anachronistic character of Pratt's work is fortunate, for it allows Pratt to fill a nineteenth-century role, as a Canadian myth-maker, which had previously been left empty. This kind of theorizing is typical of the articles in *The Canadian Imagination*, as its orientation is basically conceptual rather than historical, as is Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto, Anansi, 1972). These, and similar studies such as John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1974), are only of peripheral interest to the student of Maritime history. What a literary history should provide is an analysis of the literary climate of the time and place. For this reason, a regional approach might have been much more successful than the thematic and chronological one adopted by the *Literary History of Canada*. Once the Maritimes ceases to be a distinct political unit, its writers appear to have no importance in Klinck's history except as they relate to larger National considerations.

The papers delivered at the Atlantic Canada Institute's Literary Colloquium have been published under the title *The Marco Polo Papers: One* (Saint John, Atlantic Canada Institute, 1977). Three papers are of particular interest to the Maritime historian: "Eighteenth-Century Poetry in Maritime Canada: Problems of Approach — A Research Report" by Tom Vincent, "Notes on some early Newfoundland Poems" by Cyril Byrne, and "Belles and the Backwoods: A Study of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century Maritime Periodicals" by Gwen Davies. Tom Vincent is presently the authority on pre-Confederation poetry in the Atlantic Provinces. I understand that his research has been

3 A.J.M. Smith, "The Fredericton Poets", *Towards a View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays 1928-1971* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1973).

extensive, and he has recently published *Narrative Verse Satire in Maritime Canada 1779-1814* (Ottawa, The Tecumseh Press, 1978), an anthology of original texts with a useful introduction. Hopefully this is only the beginning of his publications. However, should Vincent produce a "History of Maritime Poetry to Confederation", it should not be too much dominated by the kind of thesis which he outlines in his Colloquium paper. Having offered three poems as examples, Vincent concludes:

I have suggested that (in broad terms) one finds in all three poems forms of confident rationalism apparently controlling the poetic experience, but always being confronted by the unpredictability and tentativeness of emotional perception and awareness. I think this is where one must begin to explore 18th-century Maritime verse. It is in the interaction between the rationalistic and emotive features of the poem, in how the poet resolves and blends these in his poetry, that we find the center of creativity and originality in Maritime verse (p. 22).

I think this should read "rational and emotive features". If you stop to think about it, there is nothing original about the workings of that dualism in any form. I confess to being unable to derive, from a reading of these three poems, the subtleties Vincent claims for them. They appear to be quite conventional. Perhaps a broad knowledge of the poems of this era discloses an underlying bias not readily apparent in the individual example, but the claim of originality seems exaggerated.

The critical approach reflected in Cyril Byrne's "Notes" would seem more reliable and informative. Byrne simply presents poems discovered in newspapers and manuscripts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and supplies them with their real social and cultural background. This is essentially the approach also taken by Gwen Davies in her "Belles and the Backwoods". There is unquestionably something quite distinctive about the Indian tales and the "captivity tales" which form a part of her concern, but Davies does not hesitate to identify a derivative and uninspired style:

If *Belinda Dalton* exhibits many of the characteristics of the popular romance, it also reflects the influence of the domestic realism school in England in the early years of Victoria's reign. Like the domestic realists, Mary Eliza Herbert is detailed in her descriptions of dress, furniture and architecture. But detail is not realism, as Henry James pointed out in "The Art of Fiction", and Mary Eliza Herbert does not always possess the ironic version and selective eye that made the best of the domestic realism school interesting (p. 45).

Gwen Davies would be the ideal author for "Nineteenth-Century Fiction in Atlantic Canada".



It is our hope, of course, that such a book as Klinck's will ultimately be made redundant for the study of Maritime literature by the progress of scholarship in the field. But the very real weaknesses of *Literary History of Canada* are not things for which individual essayists or the editor are entirely to blame; a better general history of Maritime literature cannot be produced by any method whatever until the specific history has been fully researched, and this is a process which is only beginning.

The prospect has already been seized upon by some, and important works are going forward; there are unlimited literary undertakings lying at our feet ready to be done . . . . It is time to expand literary studies to embrace history, politics, sociology and science and other ways of looking — at this place, this past, this ever-present.<sup>4</sup>

The 1976 Literary Colloquium at Saint John was a valuable stimulus to literary research in Atlantic Canada. It is time for another. Literary scholars in the Maritimes have finally realized that they do not have to justify local research as an academically respectable pursuit. It is a simple matter of "getting our bearings", as Northrop Fry would say. The new generation of teachers and researchers at our Maritime Universities would do well to cultivate a healthy disregard for a literary establishment which fails to recognize the social and historical significance of Charles Bruce or Frank Parker Day.

ANDREW T. SEAMAN

### Canada's Economic Problems and the American Connection

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature critical of Canada's economic performance. Critics of what may be described as 'the Canadian Syndrome' complain that Canada has concentrated far too large a portion of its employed labour force in low value adding activity, has allowed external interests to control a large part of the economy and to dominate critical processes essential to development, has failed to develop or attract sufficient indigenous entrepreneurship and innovative capacity, and lacks the necessary homogeneity and co-operating skills and the ability to identify and deal effectively with economic realities. Some Canadians may take offense at this list, but it is undeniable that Canada is developing at a rate far below its potential, that the economy increasingly relies on initiative, technical expertise, capital and advanced products of external origins, and that the nation has adopted living standards matched neither by productivity levels, nor by over-all

4 Lochhead, *op. cit.*, p. 8.