

THE INDIAN IN POETRY AND HIS
RELATIONSHIP TO CANADIAN NATIONALISM

By

Margaret Godo, B.A.

McMaster University

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THE INDIAN IN POETRY AND HIS
RELATIONSHIP TO CANADIAN NATIONALISM:
A STUDY OF THE LATE NINETEENTH
CENTURY AND THE MID TWENTIETH CENTURY

By

MARGARET ANNE GODO, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Margaret Anne Godo, B.A. (McMaster University)

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SCOPE AND CONTENT:

This thesis studies the relationship between the use of the figure of the Indian in poetry and the concerns of Canadian nationalism. In the two intensely nationalistic periods that are focused on, the late nineteenth century and the mid twentieth, the Indian becomes the symbolic link to a sense of Canadian unity and patriotism, playing the role of the Canadian hero and the innocent and noble savage. Yet the Indian also becomes the implacable foe, functioning as a force detrimental to the development of a sincere Canadian sense of security and comfort in a homeland. The varying roles of the Indian symbolically represent both the innocent promise and the terror offered by the Canadian landscape to its new inhabitants. The Canadian must come to terms with both before he can achieve a true sense of nationalism. The presence of recurring themes in both periods in connection with the Indian in poetry attests to the fact that the Canadian mentality has yet to achieve the understanding necessary for the creation of such a sense of nationalism.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION	Page 1
I. THE INDIAN AS HERO	13
II. THE INDIAN AS PRIMEVAL INNOCENCE	33
III. THE INDIAN AS PRIMEVAL SAVAGE	53
CONCLUSION	75

INTRODUCTION

Canadians have been continuously concerned with the question of their national identity, perhaps the result of the fact that Canada, still a relatively young country, began life as a colony and a subsidiary of a dominant nation already steeped in tradition. A.J.M. Smith has recently pointed out, in fact, that this question "seems to underlie¹ the thinking and haunt the imagination". In their attempts to inculcate a distinctive national identity, Canadians have recognized the power of literature, even before the historical fact of Confederation. E.H. Dewart in 1864 pointed out that "a national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country's mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity and the guide of national energy"². Northrop Frye a century later attests to the continuance of this sentiment. He believed that "poetry is of major importance in the culture, and therefore in the history of a country, especially of a country that is still struggling for articulateness"³. Canadian poets, moreover, in their

¹ The Book of Canadian Poetry, p.36.

² Selections From Canadian Poets, p.ix.

³ The Bush Garden, p.126.

attempts to inculcate a distinctive national identity, have made recurring use of the figure of the Indian. Completely indigenous to the land, the Indian symbolically provides the key to a greater understanding and closer association with the Canadian environment. He indeed functions as a guide to the prerequisite for a national sentiment, the recognition of "a way of life within which [Canadians] can live with some assurance [It] is a question of feeling at home"⁴. This thesis will attempt to consider two periods in which nationalistic feeling and the use made of the Indian figure by poets in order to foster it seems to be intensified. Such a study of the Indian in poetry not only reveals how Canadians have thought and reacted to questions of nationality but also provides an insight into the imagination of the nation itself, in effect, its identity.

The first period under consideration, which I have roughly labelled the late nineteenth century, includes the nationalistic impulse following Confederation. Called the "Golden Age of high colonialism"⁵, it involved the years between 1867, the date of political union, and 1910, when, as Carl Berger suggests, this form of imperialism-

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D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.5.

⁵

Roy Daniells, "Confederation to the First World War" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.199.

nationalism fell into final demise⁶. Despite the "colonial" label, this period, as the use of the Indian in poetry revealed, fostered the need for a greater love for Canada itself as well as for the British tie. It was, in fact, essentially a "yearning for significance and a desire to obliterate the stigma of colonialism"⁷ by bolstering the strength and unity of the Canadian nation even though within the protecting walls of the "most notable Empire in the world"⁸. The literature of the period was characterized by a deep emotional attachment to Canada, the reason perhaps for the recurring use of the Indian figure. The first edition of The Week (1883-96), for example, promised to follow the policy of "cultivating Canadian patriotism and Canadian interests, and of endeavoring to aid in the consolidation of the Dominion on a basis of national self-respect and a mutual regard for the rights of the great elements which make up the population of Canada"⁹. Poets developing out of this literary environment whom I have chosen to discuss include

⁶

A Sense of Power, p.264.

⁷

Ibid., p.62.

⁸

C. Mair, quoted by N. Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.69.

⁹

Quoted by R. Daniells, "Confederation to the First World War" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.197.

Charles Mair, Archibald Lampman, Pauline Johnson, Duncan Campbell Scott and Isabella Valancy Crawford. Their works focused upon the Canadian scene, especially upon the world of the Indian, in the hope that they were, in the words of Charles Mair, "helping to create for a young people that decisive test of its intellectual faculties, an original and distinctive literature -- a literature liberal in its range, but, in its highest forms, springing in a large measure from the soil, and 'tasting of the wood'"¹⁰. This form of late nineteenth-century nationalism also had its limitations and marked essentially a first step on the road to a distinctive national identity and literature. In 1882, J.W.Dawson, in fact, outlined the recurring belief that "in Canada at present, whether in science, in literature, or in education, we look around in vain for anything that is fully ripe. We see only the rudiments¹¹ and beginnings of things". The use of the figure of the Indian revealed at times what often resulted from this immaturity, the tendency to "[sacrifice] poetic quality¹² for representative national sentiment". Another

¹⁰

Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.3.

¹¹

Quoted by D. Pacey, Essays in Canadian Criticism, p.122.

¹²

R.Daniells, "Confederation to the First World War" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.198.

limitation in the literature of this nationalistic period hinged upon the desire to perpetuate the British tie which meant, as well, that many of these poets thought of themselves "as inheritors of the elaborate tradition of poetry of the motherland"¹³. The result? One finds, in the portrayal of the Indian and, in fact, of the whole Canadian scene, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, that often the "traditional standard English collides with the need for a distinctive North American phrasing"¹⁴ and that the imitative conventional phrase often does not relay the real feelings inspired by the country¹⁵.

By the time of the second intensely nationalistic period in which I have chosen to discuss the function of the Indian figure in poetry (labelled the mid twentieth century for the sake of convenience), there has developed a form of nationalism that no longer divides its vision between Canada and Britain. As D.G.Jones points out, "we [have] become increasingly aware that our identity and our view of the world are no longer determined by our experience of Europe"¹⁶. Instead the concern seems to be with

¹³
A.J.M.Smith, quoted by N.Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.38.

¹⁴
The Bush Garden, p.219.

¹⁵
Ibid., p.134.

¹⁶
Butterfly on Rock, p.3.

"the nation itself and [with] a determination on the part of Canadians to remain the independent people that history had made of them"¹⁷ . It is the figure of the Indian who often becomes the vehicle expressing this concern with national uniqueness and the limitation of the late nineteenth-century form of nationalism. Recent critics mark this as a positive step on the road to maturity. D.G. Jones praises the fact that now the poet's vision is focused upon his own land¹⁸ . Margaret Atwood, too, applauds the fact that poets are now consciously voicing their predicament, "making explicit . . . something that was hitherto implicit"¹⁹ .

This period I have begun with E.J.Pratt's Brébeuf and His Brethren(1940), part of the "renaissance of the forties"²⁰ and the "[product] of a plainly authentic and original Canadian"²¹ . Other poets whom I discuss in connection with this period and who also have made use of the Indian for nationalistic purposes include Patrick

¹⁷ W.Kilbourn, "The Writing of Canadian History" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.503.

¹⁸ Butterfly on Rock, p.30.

¹⁹ Survival, p.241.

²⁰ M.Beattie, "Poetry (1950-60)" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.765.

²¹ E.Birney, "E.J.Pratt and His Critics" in A.J.M. Smith, Masks of Poetry, p.73.

Anderson, Douglas LePan, Leonard Cohen (whose novel, Beautiful Losers, in the final analysis, closely approximates poetry), John Newlove, Al Purdy and Don Gutteridge. Like their predecessors in the late nineteenth century, these poets use the Indian once again in the attempt to create poems of Canadian material, to bring "Canada, acre by acre, street by street, into the world of poetry"²² and to "[find] words for the obscure features of our own identity"²³. One is left, however, amid the fanfare of the Centennial celebrations and the "fundamental inquiry into our own identity and destiny"²⁴ caused by the threat of the Séparatists, with the impression that much soul-searching yet remains for the Canadian mentality. The mid twentieth-century poets, like the late nineteenth-century, still attempt to use the Indian in order to help the Canadian mind to understand totally the nature of his land and hence allow a sincere emotional commitment to the nation to develop.

It must be noted that the choice of the late nineteenth and the mid twentieth centuries in my discussion

²² M. Beattie, "Poetry (1950-60)" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.795.

²³ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.183.

²⁴ D.Pacey, Essays in Canadian Criticism:1938-63, p.130.

of the Indian and nationalism is not to suggest that the years between 1910 and 1940 were completely devoid of nationalistic concerns. The early decades of the twentieth century did, however, suffer a decline in nationalistic feeling and consequently in the use of the Indian figure in poetry. Desmond Pacey refers to it as "the age of brass . . . [during which] the national excitement which had in part initiated and sustained the first national cultural awakening no longer existed"²⁵. Somewhat of a revival in the fostering of a Canadian literature occurred in the nineteen-twenties; it has not been focused on in this thesis because it still "held an anachronistic affinity with . . . [the] Post-Confederation period"²⁶, both in the concern with "[hymning] . . . the grandeurs of Empire"²⁷ and in the re-publishing of late nineteenth-century works, including those based on the world of the Indian. A new literary movement did grow out of the late 'twenties. Known as the Montreal School, these poets, F.R.Scott, A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy and A.J.M.Smith, while determined to make Canadian literature "worthy of comparison with the

²⁵

Creative Writing in Canada, pp.88-9.

²⁶

N.Shrive, "What Happened to Pauline?", Canadian Literature, XIII(Summer,1962), p.36.

²⁷

A.J.M.Smith, quoted by N.Shrive, "What Happened to Pauline?", Canadian Literature, XIII(Summer,1962), p.36.

literature emanating from abroad"²⁸, assumed a cosmopolitan emphasis that claimed to be scornful of literary nationalism²⁹. Hence few poetic uses of the Indian occurred. The Great Depression of the 'thirties presented again a period of decline in all literary production and in the search for a national identity. Commentators, such as C.S. Ritchie in 1932 in The Canadian Forum, wrote that "today . . . the national mood is one of disillusionment, . . . an increasing indifference to the old form of flag-waving nationalism"³⁰. But with the Second World War, under the stimulation of renewed national interest and pride, the search for a sense of Canadian identity and the use of the Indian figure in poetry were revived.

The study of the Post-Confederation and the mid twentieth-century periods of nationalism reveals that similar attitudes towards the figure of the Indian in poetry have recurred with an amazing frequency. Elizabeth Waterston notes, in fact, "the curious persistence of many of the roots struck by the Confederation poets"³¹, for

²⁸ D. Pacey, "The Writer and His Public" in C.F.Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.482.

²⁹ Ibid., p.482.

³⁰ Quoted by D.Pacey, "The Writer and His Public", p.486.

³¹ Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature, p.87.

example, the vision of the dying Indian race, tragic but inevitable. And poets today still stress the same need to salvage at least the memory and even the mythology of the Indian culture in order to allow Canadians to achieve an identity with their land. What marks the mid twentieth century from the late nineteenth is perhaps the fact that the call to embrace the symbolic value of the Indian has become even more strident, marked by the knowledge that one hundred years of nationhood have not yet developed a secure and definite conception of the Canadian identity.

The inability of the Canadian to "[feel] at home"³² and secure with his land is, in part, a reflection of his schizophrenic vision as he gazes upon his environment. Seeking to achieve comfort and a sense of identity there, he finds also the terrors of a vast, unknown and surrounding wilderness. The resulting duality has found its way into the use made of the Indian for nationalistic purposes. The figure of the Indian, in fact, functions as two apparently antagonistic symbols in the Canadian mind, as the embodiment of both "the dreams and nightmares of a people"³³; as D.G.Jones suggests, coming to terms with both of these attitudes which "shape [the Canadian] imaginative

³²

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.5.

³³

Ibid., p.4.

vision of the world", can help the nation "define, as it evolves, [its] cultural identity"³⁴. This thesis will attempt to examine the Indian as both "nightmare" and "dream". Chapter One will study the use made of the Indian as Canadian hero, a figure offering a source of nationalistic pride and hence unity. Chapter Two will consider another way in which the Indian is praised, this time as a figure representative of primeval innocence and ultimately as a link with the land itself. The white man in these two visions of the praiseworthy Indian finds himself under reproach for not accepting the sense of continuity with the past and the union with the land which the Indian represents and instead becoming the major source of the demise of the valuable Indian culture. Chapter Three shifts to the other pole of the dual attitude towards the Indian. He now becomes the primeval savage, a source of terror and destruction and hence a danger to the ultimate viability of the nation. It is the white man who assumes the praise as the dedicated and courageous nation-builder in the face of perilous odds and hardships. In effect, the figure of the Indian in poetry reveals the conflicting patterns of thought in the Canadian imagination as it reacts to the land, now and one hundred years ago.

³⁴

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.4.

It may be that, through such Indian guides, the Canadian mentality can achieve the understanding necessary for a sense of identity and a "feeling of being at home"³⁵.

I

THE INDIAN AS HERO

In the attempt to inculcate a sense of national identity, Canadians, as poet-critic Margaret Atwood has pointed out, have been concerned with the need to establish "ancestral totems, . . . visible presentation[s] of mythic ancestral figures for the symbolic purposes of unity and identity, with the past and with the social group"¹. Conscious efforts have been made by poets to supply these "totems", to fashion into legend heroes who have grown out of the unique experiences of the nation and its people. The task is a necessary one in a country which Northrop Frye has characterized as possessing a "foreshortening of . . . history"². Too soon out of the formulative pioneer periods into nationhood and the modern industrial world, Canada has not had sufficient time to establish a firm cultural tradition and much of her history remains "the undigested raw material of Canadian experience"³. Poet Barry Dane, in the late nineteenth century, indeed saw that one cause of the lack of a distinctive national identity (and therefore a distinctive national literature)

¹
Survival, p.112.

²
The Bush Garden, p.219.

³
D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.7.

lay in the fact that "we have had no barbarous infancy moulded by the natural features of our land No fabled heroes have left us immortal memories"⁴ . Hence the need arises in the "dreams of a people" for the conscious creation of "mythic ancestral figures" in order to incorporate Canada's past into her national fabric and to supply sources of nationalistic pride.

As Miss Atwood's catch-phrase would suggest, the figure of the Indian has played a significant role in providing the hero born out of the Canadian past and supplying a much-needed sense of tradition. Poets in both nationalistic periods under consideration have attempted to legendize Indian figures important in Canada's history and to indicate their relevance to the present, whether as symbols of patriotic fervour and unity or as sources of a national mythology. In this chapter I have chosen to focus mainly upon three poets who have worked purposely to build the Indian figure into a hero: Charles Mair from the late nineteenth century and Leonard Cohen and Don Gutteridge from the more recent period of nationalism. One can detect in their work a sense of the European mind at work, molding the indigenous Indian figures into suitable white man's heroes. Margaret Atwood approximates

⁴ "National Literature", The Week , I (August 21, 1884), 600.

this technique to "an imported whiteman [looking] at a form of natural or native life alien to himself and [appropriating] it for symbolic purposes"⁵. Charles Mair, in the late nineteenth century, carefully worked to create a distinctive national hero and literature as the "touchstone, the gauge"⁶ of his country's greatness yet could not escape the "garrison mentality"⁷ that bound him to preserve Old World attitudes, conventions and ways of thought. Poets in the mid twentieth century have progressed to a recognition of this conflict between the need to articulate the experiences of the nation, to formulate them into a unique mythology, and that frame of mind which hinders its completion. They recognize, as well, the need to correct this dichotomy, to make the past relevant to the present in a way unique to the Canadian nation. The concern with preserving the memory of the Indian hero has continued but now with an emphasis on the attempt to come to terms with an undistorted past in order to understand its real significance for us today. Leonard Cohen in Beautiful Losers (1966) has satirized the incongruity between national aspirations and Old World ties while Don Gutteridge laments this conflict in Riel: A Poem

⁵
Survival, p.91.

⁶
N. Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.131.

⁷
N. Frye, The Bush Garden, p.226.

for Voices (1968).

The intensely nationalistic fervour of the Post-Confederation period emphasized the desire to preserve the Canadian past and those elements within it that led to the creation of the present nationhood. In doing so, commentators began to recognize the significant role played by the Indians in defending the Canadian boundaries from the American invader. Mercer Adam, for example, encouraged the Canadian people to recognize their debt to the noble red men, symbols of loyalty to both Canada and the British Crown.

It is important that the heroic deeds of the faithful allies of Britain, in the struggle to plant and maintain the flag of Empire on this continent, should be treasured, and a fitting memory preserved of their loyal services and staunch friendship. Nor should gratitude be lacking, particularly in the Canadian nation, which owes so much to the Indian tribes for the heritage it now peacefully enjoys. 8

Charles Mair was one of the many who attempted to transcribe this sentiment into poetry. Choosing an Indian chief who had played a significant role in the War of 1812, he made conscious use of him as a symbol of loyalty to Canada and Britain. "Not in all history a nobler example of true

manhood and patriotism"⁹ according to Mair, Tecumseh played a vital role in saving the nation. His aid marks the "turning-point of Canada's destiny"¹⁰; both he and General Brock, writes Mair, "were men of transcendent ability, to whose genius and self-sacrifice at the most critical period in her history is due the preservation of Canada to the Empire"¹¹. It is by such praise of the Loyalist tradition that nationalists of the Charles Mair breed hoped to create a cohesive national heritage. Carl Berger points out that this form of nationalism hinged upon the continuity into the present of the Imperialist tradition which the nineteenth-century nationalists believed "grew out of Canada's past and was part and parcel of Canadian history"¹².

As well as playing the part of the noble nation-saving hero, Tecumseh becomes for Mair a symbol of unity. His attempt to coalesce the Indian tribes into a powerful force, "to weld the nations wide"¹³, serves as an analogy for the work that must be done in order to unify the

⁹ Tecumseh: A Drama, p.189.

¹⁰ Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.4.

¹¹ Tecumseh: A Drama, p. 78.

¹² A Sense of Power, p.108.

¹³ "Prologue to Tecumseh", Dreamland and Other Poems, p.108.

Canadian provinces into a viable Confederation. Mair believed that Tecumseh's patriotism held serious implications for the present; his loyalty provided both an example that all good late nineteenth-century nationalists must follow and a sense of continuity in Canadian history and tradition. With the memory of "great Tecumseh and high-hearted Brock"¹⁴, writes Mair, the future youths of Canada "shall . . . profit, drinking of the past,/ And, drinking loyally, enlarge the faith /Which love of country breeds in noble minds"¹⁵.

In the later nationalistic period under consideration, Don Gutteridge in 1968 too presents his misunderstood hero, Louis Riel, as a symbol of national unity. Riel's mixed blood (both French-Canadian and Indian) itself marks a potential union; Gutteridge writes that Riel, a man of "two beginnings . . . [.] could make a quiet linking of unity"¹⁶. As well, in his attempts to unite the Métis into the Republic of Saskatchewan, Riel experiences strange "twin yearnings"¹⁷ and dreams that harbour the possible union of Eastern and Western Canada; when fourteen years old, he hoped to bring back to the Red River "the seed of

¹⁴ Tecumseh: A Drama, p.127.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.127.

¹⁶ Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.2,17.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.17.

18

of a new beginning" from the St. Lawrence. Gutteridge, however, makes it apparent that the white man with his attitude of exploitative materialism could not grasp Riel's potential significance. John A. Macdonald represents the Ontarian, Anglo-Saxon view; Riel becomes one of the threats to the physical unity of Confederation that include

a relentless lance
Of imperial power, and the democratic
Hysteria south of the line; and further
West
. . . a swarthy, seedy half-breed 19
With messianic dreams in his breech-clout.

Riel's mysterious dream of spiritual unity is even chanced upon in one form by a Parliamentarian for whom Confederation was simply a business merger. For him:

Parliament should have
been
Built at the juncture of two rivers so
that
It might feel the subtle pressure of
both currents
Merge and flow as one stream to the 20
embracing sea.

Rejected mockingly by the Confederation businessmen, this vision, had it reached fulfilment, would have guaranteed the most important unity for a nation -- a union of spirit and soul. But, as it stood in 1878, rejected.

18

Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.16.

19

Ibid., p.20.

20

Ibid., p.19.

It is the Charles Mair form of nationalism which Gutteridge, in his analytic vision, implies to be the villain, unable to reach into the heart of the land. And the shortcomings of late nineteenth-century nationalism are indeed evident with a closer inspection of Tecumseh: A Drama. Charles Mair does attempt the laudatory task of creating a Canadian Paul Bunyan or Odysseus, demonstrating that the Canadian history and landscape are capable of producing a figure of mythic proportions. Mair presents Tecumseh as a larger-than-life figure, a warrior whose "fabric is of perfect parts"²¹, who could leap from horse onto buffalo "with a grip of steel"²² and who could make the trees "shake to their roots"²³. The possession by a nation of such a hero who is indigenous to the land itself can potentially act as a cohesive force by providing an aspect of a unique national mythology. But Mair's treatment of Tecumseh, not completely "tasting of the wood"²⁴ as he had hoped, does not adequately fulfill this function. His hero is modelled too much upon Old World heroes and in terms too reminiscent of Shakespeare and Sir

²¹ Tecumseh: A Drama, p.133.

²² Ibid., p.133.

²³ "Prologue to Tecumseh", Dreamland and Other Poems, p. 108.

²⁴ Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.3.

Walter Scott. The tendency in fact was to connect Mair's Tecumseh to Old World myth. Robert Norwood, in his "Introduction" to Mair's works, proudly concludes that the author "aimed at depicting a singularly lofty character, a man whose words and deeds carry us back to the divine tale of Troy, and bring the best of its heroes, Hector, back to our near contemplation"²⁵. This "carrying back" to Old World tradition implies that Mair and the form of nationalism which he represented were essentially eastwardly rather than inwardly oriented into the heart and soul of the land. Instead of building a truly distinctive mythology and hence "an original and distinctive literature"²⁶ out of "our romantic Canadian story"²⁷, Mair, in reality, as E.H. Dewart typified the period, allowed his "mental wants [to be] supplied by the brain of the mother country"²⁸. In the same way, one senses that Mair followed the pattern which Leslie Fiedler sees evident in many literary uses of the Indian figure; he simply made "the pretense of writing from within the consciousness of the Indian", which becomes

²⁵ In J.W.Garvin, ed. of Mair's works, Tecumseh: A Drama, etc., p.xxx.

²⁶ C. Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.3.

²⁷ Ibid., p.3.

²⁸ Selections From Canadian Poets, p.xiv.

only an "act of impersonation rather than identification"²⁹
 with the symbolic links to a "feeling of being at home"³⁰ .
 Mair's attempts to create a "mythic ancestral figure",
 therefore, mark only the initial steps on the road to both
 a truly distinctive national mythology and an original
 articulation of it.

Leonard Cohen in Beautiful Losers satirizes this
 inability to loosen the imaginative hold on the European
 heritage. The narrator searches for the transformation
 that would bring magic and meaning into his lethargic and
 perverted world. He finds it through contemplation of the
 seventeenth-century Indian heroine, Catherine Tekakwitha,
 and becomes therefore a new breed of man, the New Jew, whom
 Cohen had earlier described as one that "loses his mind
 gracefully He has induced amnesia by a repetitious
 study of history He dissolves history and ritual by
 accepting unconditionally the complete heritage . . . [;]
 always he is American"³¹ . Ironically Cohen's New American
 Man is not the New Indian as one would suppose after the
 white man's union with the indigenous Catherine. Indeed,
 the magic of Cohen's heroine does not produce a completely

²⁹

The Return of the Vanishing American, p.5.

³⁰

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.5.

³¹

Quoted by L.Fiedler, Return of the Vanishing American, p.166.

new myth for the northern experience. As Fiedler points out, "the Indian Maiden loses her specific American meanings and fades into a more general - Near Eastern archetype of female sexuality -- thus dissolving our West once more into the larger Occident"³². Catherine becomes, like Mair's Tecumseh, essentially a heroine for the white man born out of his "garrison mentality". For example, the sainthood for which she is praised is based upon the white man's European religion, which compels complete denial and rejection of the Indian faiths, those formed out of experience with the land itself. Catherine Tekakwitha becomes, in fact, the ultimate "white" heroine; in Cohen's satiric vision, she undergoes a complete colour transformation. "The face of Catherine Tekakwitha had turned white . . . , became so beautiful and so white"³³. She has become acceptable as a source of legend for the white Canada but at a high cost to herself, one which necessitates a denial of her Indian values and concerns -- symbolically, a denial of forces indigenous to the Canadian experience. Cohen presents, therefore, a heroine capable of bringing union between the past and present but also one created by

³²

The Return of the Vanishing American, p.166.

³³

L. Cohen, Beautiful Losers, p.265.

imposing European ways of thought upon the native peoples in order to purify (and thus civilize) them, essentially Charles Mair's process in the late nineteenth century.

Both periods under consideration have recognized the need to capture the past for nationalistic purposes. The late nineteenth-century emphasis, however, was on a glorification and idealization of that past and its heroes. Charles Mair's use of Tecumseh as a symbol of loyalty, for example, comes complete with a glaring discrepancy between reality and the literary impression. While Tecumseh did ally himself with the British-Canadian cause, he did so, in reality, not out of a deep-set and inherent love for Britain but as a strategical move in order to further his own plans to regain the occupied lands for his people. John Charles Dent in 1880 pointed out the contrast between the fiction and the fact.

It is not to be supposed, however, that Tecumseh co-operated with us on account of any special love which he bore us. He chose us as the least of two evils, and assisted us in fighting his old enemies merely because he hated the latter with all the venom which long and bitter feuds had engendered within his breast. He did us good service, and died fighting bravely for our cause. Such being the case, he has deserved well at our hands; but those enthusiastic hero-worshippers who have so persistently held him up to our admiration as the warm and affectionate friend of British ascendancy on this continent know little of the

man and his motives. The simple truth is that Tecumseh would cheerfully have tomahawked every white man in America with his own hand had any opportunity of doing so been afforded him. 34

It might be argued that Mair followed his poetic license in choosing to view the Shawanoese chief as a symbolic rallying-point of patriotism -- a "mythic ancestral figure" relevant to the Post-Confederation period. Yet Mair, himself, unconsciously presents somewhat similar discrepancies in the poem. Tecumseh, for example, not only fights courageously for the salvation of white Canada but can also proclaim:

For us, no peace
...
Let valour make excuse that we shall live,
And, breathing vengeance, shake our spoilers
so
That they will reel in terror to the East,
From whence they came, and cry -- 'The West 35
is Yours!'. 36

Perhaps Mair's difficulty lies in a "creative schizophrenia" which Northrop Frye sees evident in the patriotic poets, who were caught between chauvinistic ready-made doggerel, and the attempt to communicate what they really saw and felt 37. Mair, in his patriotic zeal, desired to make

34
"Canadian Portrait Gallery" in C.F.Klinck, ed.,
Tecumseh, p.139.

35
C. Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama, p.177.

36
The Bush Garden, p.133.

37
Ibid....

Tecumseh an idealized symbol of loyalty to the British Empire and Canada yet he could not dismiss completely the vision of the savage, uncivilized figure who vowed to battle the white race forever.

The mid twentieth-century poets, perhaps in an attempt to rid themselves of any "creative schizophrenia", tend to reproduce what they hope is an undistorted past and attempt to find its relevance for the present. Leonard Cohen, while able to criticize and satirize the transformation of Catherine Tekawitha, perhaps like all "Canadians [who] don't know which side they're on"³⁸, does not completely reject what she offers. Beautiful Losers,³⁹ in fact, becomes an attempt by a "well-known folklorist" to recover for the twentieth century the relevance of the Indian heroine and the past that she represents. The narrator suffers from a spiritual and physical constipation caused by his inability to digest his past, signified by his lament: "How can I begin anything new with all of yesterday in me?"⁴⁰. The narrator's situation can be seen, perhaps, as analogous to that of the Canadian mentality, unable to digest its own past into a national mythology that must underlie a sense

³⁸ Margaret Atwood, Survival, p.170.

³⁹ Leonard Cohen, p.5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.48.

of patriotism and pride and instead working to create heroes acceptable in the European mode. By spiritually merging with his Indian heroine, the narrator (and potentially Canada) could overcome his lethargy and find his way back into the present transformed, his memory "all one incident"⁴¹ and himself causing men to experience the heroic once more, "the delicious certainty that they were at the very centre of action, no matter which side"⁴². Cohen presents ultimately an optimistic conclusion. By coming to terms with a realistic past, understanding the forces at work which made Catherine Tekakwitha really a modified white man's heroine, Canadians can finally begin to digest the "raw material of . . . [their] experiences"⁴³.

Don Gutteridge, as well, resurrects the figure of the misunderstood Métis hero, Riel, in order to re-analyze his situation and discover the truth. Interspersing actual 1878 newspaper reports, editorials and letters between Riel's dreams of unity, Gutteridge works to digest the past in the way that D.G.Jones saw it must be. He writes that "fragments of the past . . . may suddenly reveal with irony or dignity its authentic voice Isolated

⁴¹

L. Cohen, Beautiful Losers, p.291.

⁴²

Ibid., p.302.

⁴³

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.7.

from its formal context and a whole set of conventional assumptions, the text of an Indian treaty may discover new meanings: governmental eloquence may become pompous hypocrisy; native simplicity may become honest eloquence"⁴⁴ . Consider, for example, the ironic implications of the article in The Mail which Gutteridge includes to describe the festivities at a banquet held in honour of the successful controlling of the North-West Rebellion (once considered a praiseworthy deed but subtly questioned now in Riel: A Poem for Voices).

Mr. J.L.Hughes said it was a
privilege to celebrate the brave deeds
of the past He called on them
to be true to the Maple Leaf as Canadians
and to the Bible and the Crown as
Orangemen.

45

Again evident is the essentially eastward glance of the patriots who were unwilling to release their Orangeman status, which praised the destruction of the unseen greatness of Riel, spokesman for the soul of the nation. Gutteridge's portrayal of the Métis leader does in fact strive to justify Riel's striking against this sort of essentially false Canadianism. The rebel leader, for example, believed that

Scott had deserved death; for he was a
symbol
Of all that stood in the way of their
hopes, the vision:

⁴⁴

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.175.

⁴⁵

D. Gutteridge, p. 31.

Canadian, Orangeman, bigot, blasphemer,
A man without root, with no touch of the
soil
In him or wind on him.

It is this lack of understanding in the Canadian mentality which Gutteridge laments and perhaps hopes to rectify by his presentation of Riel as a "Canadian" hero.

Significantly the three Indian heroes under consideration suffer physical defeat, examples of what Margaret Atwood has termed the "perfect all-Canadian ⁴⁷ failed hero". These individual martyrs fail to instigate wide-spread social change. And yet spiritually they remain triumphant and ennobled to the end. Tecumseh, Catherine Tekakwitha and Louis Riel, in fact, never cease the struggle for their beliefs. Perhaps in this way the experience of the Indian hero becomes ultimately an analogy for the Canadian experience, itself one of endless struggle and recurring defeat and hence the repeated identification by the Canadian mentality with these martyrs. In the same way, the poets in both nationalistic periods have attempted to fabricate the Indian heroes, "beautiful losers", into the national mythology from which the nation can draw a source of strength and identification -- in fact, "a shared world

46

Don Gutteridge, Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.31.

47

Survival, p.167.

48

of experience" .

In the glorification of the memory of the Indian heroes, there is something, too, of the need to create a panacea assuaging the white man's sense of guilt for usurping the lands of the Indians and directly causing the decline of their culture. This sort of rationalization was a recurring attitude in Mair's nationalistic period. Mercer Adam, for example, wrote that "[no] gratitude [should] be lacking, particularly in the Canadian nation which owes so much to the Indian tribes for the heritage it now peacefully enjoys, and from which it has rudely dispossessed the children of the woods, and done much to make them what they are now -- a poor, emasculated, vanishing race" . Mair himself implicitly states this attitude in his "Notes" to Tecumseh: A Drama .

As Colonel Coffin says in his 'Chronicles of the War of 1812', 'His death sheds a halo on a much abused and fast departing race. May the people of England, and their descendents in Canada, never forget this noble sacrifice, or the sacred obligation it imposes'.

Tecumseh, the hero, becomes a spokesman for the wrongs suffered by the Indian race. "From the East our matchless

48

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.28.

49

Quoted by N. Shrive, "What Happened to Pauline?", Canadian Literature, XIII(Summer, 1962), p.32.

50

p.189.

misery came! Since then our tale is crowded with your crimes"⁵¹.
 The mid twentieth century, in its creation of Indian heroes,
 can be seen, as well, as attempting to assuage the guilt
 felt because of the rejection and prejudice still offered
 toward the Indian. Leonard Cohen, for example, presents
 his narrator lamenting the fact that Catherine's "brethren
 have forgotten how to build [birchbark canoes]"⁵² and that
 "the Indians are dying! The trails smell! They are pouring
 roads over the trails, it doesn't help. Save the Indians!"⁵³.
 The attempt to make Catherine valuable to the twentieth
 century as something "mystical and good"⁵⁴ is perhaps a
 rationalization to provide the narrator with some sort of
 mental and spiritual comfort. Don Gutteridge, too, in
 defending the misunderstood and exploited Riel, gives to
 the Indian race its due, a people who knew "what it was to
 be a man, and make one's choice, /And Stand"⁵⁵. Hence the
 creation of the Indian hero serves both to ease the white
 man's burden of guilt and to supply a Canadian "mythic
 ancestral figure" that functions as a source of unity and

⁵¹ C.Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama, p.69.

⁵² Beautiful Losers, p.6.

⁵³ Ibid., p.43.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.52.

⁵⁵ Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.61.

patriotism. Elements of this need to assuage guilt and to find a heroic and innocent past appear in the more general vision of the figure of the Indian as primeval innocence. The next chapter will study in more detail this "dream" of the Canadian people, the need to discover or create something of an idyllic past in the history of the Canadian nation.

II

THE INDIAN AS PRIMEVAL INNOCENCE

Chapter One has focused on the vision of the Indian as hero and ultimately as a potential unifying force. Associated with this "[dream]¹ of a people" is the myth of the Indian as primeval innocence, symbolically representing the possibilities and hopes experienced by the nation in the search for a unique nationality. The discussion of the Indian as innocence includes both a concern for the lost world of the simple savage that somehow embodies the Canadian inheritance and a vision of the Indian as a representative of the land itself. It is with this figure that the white man in his European-based mentality must unite in order to form a true sense of nationality. Poets in the nationalistic periods under consideration have recognized the reluctance and, in fact, inability upon the part of Canadians to make this figurative union and the necessity to do so before Canadians have indeed "[gained] the whole world and [lost their]² own soul". The poets to whom I have chosen to refer in my discussion include Pauline Johnson, Charles Mair, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Isabella

¹ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.4.

² Barry Dane, "National Literature", The Week, I(August, 21, 1884), p.601.

and slept the last immortal sleep of its ⁵
childhood.

Some critics, such as A.J.M.Smith, have labelled this dream of innocence as, in fact, an escape from reality, the result of the doubts and sense of inferiority generated by the spectre of colonialism. Hence the attempt to turn away "from the despised local present by retreating toward an exotic, idealized ⁶crystallization of impossible hopes and 'noble' dreams". Although Smith's thesis contains elements of the truth, it tells only the partial story. Nineteenth-century anthologists believed that they were actually encouraging a sense of pride in their nation (and thus the basis for a sense of nationality) by revealing the romantic nature of their land. This was perhaps meant to counter critics such as E.H.Dewart who had criticized immigrants whose memory clung to "their native land, to which the productions of our young and unromantic country can put forth no claim" ⁷. W.D.Lighthall, for example, proposed that Canada does indeed have "a special history too [;] . . . its story down to the conquest of 1759-63 is full of romance", not the least elements of which are "painted Indian war

⁵
The White Centre, p.31.

⁶
The Book of Canadian Poetry, p.13.

⁷
Selections from Canadian Poets, p.1x.

parties"⁸ .

In some ways, this quest for a romanticized and innocent past also approximates the search for that "haunting vision of a serenity that is both human and natural"⁹ , the hope being that, in such a world, Canadians could achieve a feeling of ease with the environment and hence develop a sincere emotional tie for their nation. The vision of serenity extends to include the depiction of this land as a new Eden, offering rejuvenation, spiritual refreshment and prosperity for the tired peoples of Europe. Charles Mair saw the Canadian prairie as that "West" for which men had been searching for centuries and as the land of promise "where Canada's future lay"¹⁰ -- all calculated to attract the settlers necessary to build a strong, unified nation. Isabella Valancy Crawford in Malcolm's Katie believed that "Eden bloom'd /Deep in the heart of tall, green maple groves"¹¹ . Dorothy Livesay regards Miss Crawford's vision, in fact, as the suggestion that "the Canadian frontier . . . will create the conditions for a new Eden. Neither a Golden Age nor a millenium, neither

⁸
Canadian Songs and Poems, p.xxi.

⁹
N. Frye, The Bush Garden, p.249.

¹⁰
Quoted by N. Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.137.

¹¹
Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie and Other Poems, p.86.

pointing out of wrongs suffered by the Indians was attempted, in part, out of the hope that Canadians would correct the injustices and become the moral and virtuous nation that the United States was not. Charles Mair in his idealistic dreams envisioned the ultimate result of such a programme -- "the haunt of the Indian, the bison, and the antelope, waiting with majestic patience for the flocks and fields, the schools, the churches, the Christian faith, and the love of freedom of the coming man"¹⁶. Somewhat of this moralistic stance is evident in Pauline Johnson, who offered the inherently innocent Indian as an example to the white man, a tendency that was continued by poets like John Newlove in 1965, who could see that "the sources revealed a people /Endowed with valuable qualities"¹⁷. It was the Indian race, Miss Johnson wrote, "that gave the world its measure of heroism, its standards of physical prowess . . . , that taught the world that avarice veiled by any other name is crime . . . [and] taught . . . men to live without greed and to die without fear"¹⁸. The pointing out of injustice was also meant to prevent, if possible, the racial conflict

¹⁶ "The New Canadian" in Canadian Monthly, quoted by N. Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.132.

¹⁷ "Resources, Certain Earth" in Moving in Alone, p.72.

¹⁸ Quoted by M. Van Steen, Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work, p.3.

which would be disastrous to a young and still somewhat feeble nation. Mair's "last bison" warns of "the time when they who spared not are no longer spared"¹⁹ and, of course, one need only remember the Riel Rebellions to realize how very real the danger was. Ironically Mair himself went on to incite conflict in his beloved West through the publication of certain less-than-complimentary letters about the Métis, indicative perhaps of the essentially racial character of his nationalism. Canada was to be a nation of white Anglo-Saxon settlers who would kindly tolerate but ultimately assimilate the noble red men. In the nineteen-sixties Don Gutteridge continues the prophetic warning through the figure of Riel, who waited for an apocalypse to free his people, "waiting for God's call to Moses /To move through earth's-corruption /His wind-seed of words"²⁰. Nonetheless, the Indians' attempts to retrieve the days when "the earth [smiled] as of yore . . . and savage nations [roamed] o'er native wilds again"²¹ were abortive and Canadians often smugly and paternally attempted "to help the unbefriended Indian into the new but inevitable paths

¹⁹ "The Last Bison", Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.152.

²⁰ Riel : A Poem for Voices, p.43.

²¹ C. Mair, "The Last Bison", Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.152.

of self-support, and to shield him from the rapacity of
the cold incoming world now surging around him" ²² .

While Canadians accepted that the necessity of obedience to a government and its laws meant the loss of the days of unfettered innocence, they still deemed it important to preserve at least the memory and appreciation of such a past. Pauline Johnson in the eighteen-eighties stressed the value of an Indian inheritance that offered a sense of continuity into an archaic and noble past which could provide a sense of national pride. Miss Johnson, according to Marcus Van Steen, "in her own person . . . was a tangible proof that Canada has a past that extended back beyond the arrival of the white man -- a past, moreover, in which she proclaimed that all Canadians should take unqualified pride" ²³ . Al Purdy in the later nationalistic period too emphasized the role of the Indian as a link in the chain that stretches us back through the trail of history.

All of it meaningless now,
except that the thing itself is meaning.
And those million roving specks of life
under and over the earth,
reptile and mammal, hunters and food-
gatherers,

make a long chain stretching backward.

24

22

C.Mair, Through the Mackenzie Basin, pp.47-8.

23

Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work, p.15.

24

"The Myth Includes" in Poems for Voices, p.11.

In the mid twentieth century, as well, the Indian inheritance assumes even greater importance, offering not simply an innocent past of which to be proud but in fact our roots.

John Newlove envisions the Indian culture as embodying "our North American inheritance that idles about and waits to

be given a voice"²⁵. He writes:

we seize on
what has happened before,
 . . .
we stand alone,
we are no longer lonely 26
but have roots.

In effect, the white man begins to destroy a part of himself in the destruction of the Indian culture. As John Newlove emotionally writes: "See what we have done to them, /And to ourselves, the realization!"²⁷. Al Purdy, reflecting upon the inheritance of the Piegan Indians, has moved to an identification with the Indian as victim, a tendency in the mid twentieth century pointed out by Margaret Atwood that could perpetuate a sense of self-denigration in the Canadian

mind²⁸. Purdy writes:

Piegan Indian country, rivers the Black-
 foot crossed,
their descendents hitch-hikers at the
 roadside,

²⁵ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.11.

²⁶ "The Pride", Black Night Window, pp.109-110.

²⁷ "Resources", Moving in Alone, p.73.

²⁸ Survival, p.100.

war parties disarmed by the baby bonus,
 their broncs hauling milkwagons,
 I hear them
 inside my own skin-deep bone-hard 29
 tiredness.

The loss of a romantic past reflects a loss within the Canadian himself in another way. The Indian culture is one which has been better able to articulate the impact of the Canadian environment upon the imagination; the Indian reactions to the natural world are unique to this land. James Reaney sees one legacy of the Indian race to be just such a unique vision of their homeland. "The totem poles and the mounds seem so effortlessly to come out of the look of the country; but our culture, as yet, doesn't"³⁰. Reaney, in effect, implies that Canadians should look more closely at that culture in order to achieve the same sense of understanding of the land and hence develop a sincere emotional tie with the nation. Northrop Frye has pointed out as well that, in fact, the Indian mythology approximates many elements of our own yet "Canadians couldn't establish any real continuity with it"³¹ despite the efforts of poets such as Rev. J.I.Hindley in 1885, who captured the Nanbush legend in print. This Indian mythological character was

29

"The Myth Includes", Poem for Voices, p.8.

30

"The Canadian Poet's Predicament" in A.J.M.Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p.120.

31

The Bush Garden, p.233.

"the messenger of the Great Spirit sent down to them in the character of a wise man, and a prophet. But he comes clothed with all the attributes of humanity, as well as the power of performing miracles"³², reminiscent of the gods in the European tradition. Perhaps had the white man been able to grasp "the gods of another race"³³, the Canadian mentality³⁴ would not remain so easily "divided from one's own earth" .

Part of the inheritance offered by the innocent savage involves this understanding of the natural world and its vitality. The Indian often is portrayed in harmony with nature. Mair envisioned the Indian brave as holding "in fealty to Nature, these domains"³⁵ and educated by "his intimate contact with nature in all her phases -- a good education truly which serves him well"³⁶. Isabella Valancy Crawford portrayed the seasons as a series of struggles between Indian giants. The coming of the Autumn, for example, is visualized as "the South Wind laying his moccasins aside . . . ; his soft locks /Of warm, fine haze grew silver as the birch"³⁷ in anticipation of the coming of the North Wind who

32

C. Mair, "Notes" to Tecumseh: A Drama, p.204.

33

George Grant, Technology and Empire, p.18.

34

Ibid., p.18.

35

"The Last Bison", Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.152.

36

Through the Mackenzie Basin, p.72.

37

"Malcolm's Katie", Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie and Other Poems, p.45.

"wrestl'd with the giants of the woods"³⁸ . Don Gutteridge in the twentieth century saw that "the Métis spirit /Moved with the ancient wind and the ancient ways, /Came like the gray geese across a prairie sky"³⁹ .

This link with nature implies that potentially the Indian becomes the "voice of the land"⁴⁰ , a link between the transplanted white man and his new home. Through the figure of the Indian, the transplanted European could symbolically unite with the land itself to create the "Canadian" bound in a sincere nationality to his new homeland. This step is a vital one. As D.G.Jones points out, "unless we possess [the land] . . . we shall never possess that much lamented sense of patria, or more radically, our own souls"⁴¹ . In the late nineteenth century, the need to merge with what the Indian represented was clearly articulated. Barry Dane lamented the lack of a unique Canadian literature (and hence identity) precisely because "we have not amalgamated with the native and woven the woof of our refinement in the strong sinuous web of an aboriginal tradition and religion. In our civilized arrogance we swept away that coarser fabric, knowing not that we destroyed that which

38

"Malcolm's Katie", p.45.

39

Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.25.

40

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.165.

41

Ibid., p.34.

we would now, as a garment, be proud to wear"⁴² . In effect, the transplanted white man manipulated his environment at the expense of knowing the land for itself. It was such a process that late nineteenth-century writers like G.M. Grant deplored in the "custom of discarding musical, expressive Indian names for ridiculously inappropriate European ones"⁴³ when naming places. This concern with the inability to unite symbolically with the Indian and hence the land has continued. John Newlove in "The Pride" outlines the legends of the western Indians only "half-understood" and "obscur'd" by the whites. Yet, to overcome his sense of rootlessness, the white man must accept the Indian who preserves "the knowledge of /our origins, and where /we are in truth, /whose land this is/ and is to be"⁴⁴ . As Margaret Atwood points out, Newlove, in fact, stresses the "acceptance of one's place and on rebirth through that acceptance"⁴⁵ . Only then can a sincere "feeling of being at home" be achieved by the Canadian mentality.

The recurrence of the neurotic and lost half-breed

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600. ⁴² "National Literature" , The Week, I(Aug.21,1884),p.300.
⁴³ Quoted by M.H.Scargill, "The Growth of Canadian English" in C.F.Klinck et al, eds., Literary History of Canada , p.254.
⁴⁴ Black Night Window, p.110.
⁴⁵ Survival, p.43.

figure, the "symbol of the divided mind"⁴⁶, attests to the reluctance upon the part of Canadians to consummate the symbolic union between white and red man. D.C.Scott presents figures such as the half-breed girl who suffers with a divided personality.

She is free of the trap and the paddle,
The portage and the trail,
But something behind her savage life 47
Shines like a fragile veil.

Unable to understand the inheritance of her Scottish father, she remains troubled, with "shadows in her soul", and "longing for the strange, still years /For what she knows and knows not"⁴⁸. Her situation can be perhaps analogous to that of the Canadian mentality which can only pretend to ignore the Indian voice; as long as it does so, it can never find a sense of peace. Keejigo, in "At Gull Lake; August, 1810", becomes a symbol of a potential union between the European conquerors and the Canadian wilderness that too remains unfulfilled. "Troubled by fugitive visions /In the smoke of the camp-fires"⁴⁹, she is rejected violently by both her Indian and European lovers. As a symbol of the

⁴⁶

D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.43.

⁴⁷

"The Half-Breed Girl", The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott, p.55.

⁴⁸

Ibid., p.56.

⁴⁹

In The Green Cloister, p.55.

Canadian nationality, she remains in limbo, somewhere out in the land, waiting; "only the midnight moon knew where she felt her way, /Only the leaves of autumn, the snows of winter /Knew where she lay"⁵⁰. In the twentieth century, the half-breed still represents the potentiality of a union between the land and the settlers that is nonetheless discarded or ignored. Don Gutteridge presents the figure of Riel who felt "twin yearnings"⁵¹, the "shadowed half-fabled valley /Of his[French]ancestors"⁵² in his soul as well as his Indian heritage. Yet the white man who was ostensibly building a nation could only destroy him, glad that "the son of a bitch is gone for certain now"⁵³. Patrick Anderson, in Poem on Canada, also defends the Métis rebel, "not mad. Pas fou . . . [who] claimed the dignity of the conscious will"⁵⁴. Unless the Canadian mentality can accept the union with the Indian and the land, Canada will always remain "a something possible, a chance, a dance /that is not danced. /A cold kingdom"⁵⁵.

⁵⁰

⁵¹ "At Gull Lake, August, 1810", The Green Cloister, p.58.

⁵¹ Riel: A Poem for Voices, p.16.

⁵² Ibid., p.2.

⁵³ Ibid., p.64.

⁵⁴ The White Centre, p.39.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.39.

A potential union between the European mentality and the land is also symbolized by the possibility of a marriage between an indigenous figure and a white man who is often lost in a European consciousness. Ironically the marriages are usually prevented, perhaps again indicating the inability upon the part of Canadians to make the mental and emotional leap into the land. Mair's Tecumseh, for example, vowed that "red shall not marry white"⁵⁶ and, indeed, the love affair between Iena, the Indian maiden, and Lefroy, the Byronic white man, is culminated and unfulfilled by her tragic death. Pauline Johnson was aware of the reluctance on the part of the authors to wed their Indian heroines to white men. She protested that the "white hero never marries her! Will some critic who understands human nature, and particularly the nature of authors, please tell the reading public why marriage with the Indian girl is so despised in books and [yet is] so general in real life?"⁵⁷ . The answer lies perhaps in the symbolic implications (however unconscious) inherent in the works of those authors. Miss Johnson went on in fact to outline such a union in the marriage between her Indian Chieftain father and Victorian-pretty mother. The result

⁵⁶

Tecumseh: A Drama, p.17.

⁵⁷

Quoted by N. Shrive, "What Happened to Pauline?", Canadian Literature, XIII(Summer, 1962), p.33.

of their union was a son;

. . . a being of a new world, a new nation. Before he was two weeks old he began to show the undeniable physique of two great races from whence he came; all the better qualities of both bloods seemed to blend within his small body . . . His grey-blue eyes held a hint of the dreaming forest, but also a touch of old England's
skies. 58

Miss Johnson, however, could not escape the dependence upon Old World ties; her parents indeed lived in a Victorian, tea-party world in which they taught their children to love the "Anglican Church, British life, Queen Victoria, dainty china" and, of course, "Indians and their legends"⁵⁹. The division of interest weighs heavily upon the imperial tie, essentially a glance away from the Canadian landscape and "soul".

Perhaps it is the poets themselves through their own works who have achieved some sort of unity with the Indian world and thus the land. The attempt has been made by Don Gutteridge in the nineteen-sixties. The words of the old Cree chief and later even of Riel adopt the terse, concise imagistic quality of the Indian vision of the Indian vision of the environment.

58

"My Mother", in M. Van Steen, Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work, p.208.

59

Ibid., p.215.

Let my blood be wind
 Wind is north
 rivers tongue
 gathering voice
 from tundra wolves 60
 white . . .

But perhaps one of the best imaginative mergings with the Indian instinctive vision of the land occurred in the late nineteenth century in the poetry of Isabella Valancy Crawford. She has, according to Northrop Frye, "[integrated] the literary tradition of the country by re-establishing the broken cultural link with Indian civilization"⁶¹. A.J.M. Smith praises "Malcolm's Katie" and "The Canoe"; "the spirit of the northern woods under the impact of the changing seasons has passed into the imagery and rhythm of the verse"⁶². Miss Crawford attempts to integrate the "rich prospect of Time's dying and renewing cycle"⁶³ with the work of man in the wilderness, in effect, "approximating . . . the primitive myth-makers"⁶⁴. She does see the interplay of the characters with the natural world they set out to dominate. Just as the North Wind slew the forest vitality, so too did Max. Yet

60

Riel: A Poem for Voices, p. 13.

61

The Bush Garden, p.178.

62

The Book of Canadian Poetry, p.15.

63

J. Reaney, "The Poet's Predicament", in A.J.M. Smith, ed. Masks of Poetry, p.119.

64

L. Stevenson, quoted by M. Maclure in C.F.Klinck, et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.530.

both also work towards a rebirth and renewal; "in trance of
 stillness Nature heard her God /Rebuilding her spent fires"⁶⁵
 and Max, too, builds both "a nation strong"⁶⁶ out of the bite
 of the axe and a world immortalized through the power of love.
 Indeed, as Dorothy Livesay points out, "the real power of the
 lover's relationship comes into being precisely because they
 are in harmony with Nature"⁶⁷. Even though "Malcolm's Katie"
 bears the influence of the "Romantic silliness on the
 surface"⁶⁸, it nonetheless presents the Indian sense of the
 universe, in fact, actually assimilating the Canadian
 landscape into the imagination. It is significant that in
 the late nineteenth century Miss Crawford's poetry did not
 win a wide acclaim in Canada; the critic Seranus in The
Week, 24 February 1887, believed that "there is little, if
 any, direct Canadian inspiration in her verse"⁶⁹. This is
 perhaps indicative of that recurring reluctance in the
 Canadian mentality to make the imaginative union with
 the land. Part of the reason lies in the fact that the

⁶⁵ "Malcolm's Katie", Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie and Other Poems, p. 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.65.

⁶⁷ "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre" in E. Mandel, ed., Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p.274.

⁶⁸ R. Daniells, "Crawford, Carman and Scott" in C.F. Klinck et al., eds., Literary History of Canada, p.408.

⁶⁹ Quoted by J. Reaney, Collected Poems: Isabella Valancy Crawford, p. xxiv.

vast wilderness presented not only the possibility of "dream" but also one of "nightmare", a vision of "inexplicable life, /Still wasted by inexorable death"⁷⁰ and beset by terrible dangers and foes. In fact, the innocent dream world must be qualified by the fact of savagery before a complete understanding and empathy with the land (and hence sincere nationalistic feeling) can be achieved by the Canadian mentality. As John Newlove has pointed out:

Let me swallow it whole and be strong,
accept it whole and be strong! 71
Let me take it whole and be strong!

Chapter Three will deal with the attitude that connected the Indian to the primeval savagery of the Canadian landscape.

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C. Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama, p.131.

⁷¹

"Resources, Certain Earths" , The White Centre, p.74.

III

THE INDIAN AS PRIMEVAL SAVAGE

The preceding chapter has dealt with the vision of the Indian as the "dreams . . . of a people"¹, a force working towards the achievement by the Canadian mentality of a unique nationality. The Indian figure, however, has also been portrayed by Canadian poets as a factor negative to both national unity and a sense of security and comfort associated with a "feeling of being at home"². This chapter will examine the Indian as the "[nightmare] of a people"³. The vision of the Indian as primeval savage itself functions in two ways with respect to the concerns of nationalism. In the first place, poets worked to foster a pride in the Canadian achievement by praising the white man's struggles against his implacable foe, the Indian savage, in order to hew a home out of the forest. Secondly, the Indian comes to represent an aspect of that terrifying wilderness which surrounded the transplanted European settler and blocked a genuine rapport with the land. Poets in both nationalistic periods have seen that to overcome this barrier to a sincere

¹ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.4.

² Ibid., p.5.

³ Ibid., p.4.

emotional attachment to the land (and hence to the nation) requires an understanding of the terror elicited by the unknown wilderness. The figure of the Indian as grotesque menace functions symbolically to present these themes in both the late nineteenth and the mid twentieth centuries, implying that the Canadian mentality has yet to free itself from the stricture of fear that hinders the growth of a sincere nationalism. Poets included in my discussion will be D.C.Scott, Archibald Lampman and Charles Mair from the earlier period and, from the later period, E.J.Pratt (chosen because his theme in Brébeuf and His Brethren marks the continuation of many late nineteenth-century concerns into the present nationalistic era), Patrick Anderson and Douglas LePan.

⁴ When the Indian assumes the posture of a "fiend from hell", it is the white man struggling to build a civilized nation who now becomes the hero and source of nationalistic pride. Not surprisingly, an important element in the Canadian mystique concerns the courage of the white settlers and, by implication, their offspring. In the late nineteenth century, anthologists intent upon inculcating "the new nation's identity and its seemingly unbounded potentiality"⁵, stressed

⁴ Joseph Howe, "Acadia", Poems and Essays, p.24.

⁵ N. Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.29.

the indomitable valour demonstrated by Canadians against the countless threats to the viability of their nation. W.D. Lighthall, for example, in 1864 echoed this sentiment in the introduction to his collection of decidedly "Canadian" poems.

The poets whose songs fill this book are voices cheerful of the consciousness of young might, public wealth and heroism. Through them, taken all together, you may catch something of . . . the rural sounds of Arcadias just rescued from the surrounding wildernesses by the axes, shrill war-whoops of Iroquois battle, proud traditions of contests with the French and Americans The tone of them is courage -- for to hunt, to fight, to hew out a farm, one must be a 6 man.

The tradition has continued to the modern era. Desmond Pacey has remarked upon the "heroic endurance" of the Canadian spirit, elicited by "the challenge of a stern environment"⁷ and Northrop Frye has paid tribute to the courage and steadfastness of the Canadian nation, "only now emerging from its beginnings as a shambling, awkward, absurd country, groping and thrusting its way through incredible distances into the west and north, plundered by profiteers, interrupted by Indian wars, divided by language and bedevilled by climate, yet slowly and inexorably bringing a culture to

⁶
Canadian Songs and Poems, p.xxi.

⁷
Essays in Canadian Criticism: 1938-1963, p.44.

life"⁸. Poets, too have sung the praises of the white settler's energy and endurance. Archibald Lampman, himself an enthusiastic nineteenth-century supporter of the growth of Canadianism, which he called "the love of the name of our country, . . . and a moral necessity"⁹, celebrated the heroic struggle of Daulac and his men against "not men but devils, panting for prey"¹⁰ in "At the Long Sault: May 1660". He writes that:

none [of Daulac's men]
Falters or shrinks or utters a coward word,
Though each setting sun
Brings from the pitiless wild new hands to
the Iroquois horde,¹¹
And only to them despair.

The white men possess a kind of valour incomprehensible to the savage, irrational red men who, at "the spot where the comrades lay", can only "gnash their teeth and stare"¹².

E.J.Pratt in Brébeuf and His Brethren finds the same selfless "courage inspired by a zeal beyond reproof"¹³ in the stand of the missionary Jesuit against his victimizers, "the

⁸
The Collected Poems of E.J.Pratt, p.xvii.

⁹
"Two Canadian Poets: A Lecture, 1891" in A.J.M.Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p.26.

¹⁰
At the Long Sault and Other New Poems, p.1.

¹¹
Ibid., p.2.

¹²
Ibid., p.2.

¹³
N. Frye, ed., The Collected Works of E.J.Pratt, p.259.

warriors lean, lithe and elemental"¹⁴, who, like Lampman's savages, could not discern "the home of his courage that topped the best /Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their legends"¹⁵.

Underlying the vision of the courageous white man standing bravely against the savage Indian foe is the deep-seated belief in the validity and the necessity of the white man's struggle. In the late nineteenth century, nationalists of the Charles Mair breed accepted the civilizing mission of their moral and virtuous Christian Canada; indeed, such Canadians considered themselves a vital part of the Anglo-Saxon race which held the destiny of the world in its hands. Rev. W.T.Herridge, for example, pointed out that "to the English-speaking race the Providence of God has committed no small part of the duty of advancing the civilization and the Christian principle of the world"¹⁶. Whatever the cost, therefore, the Indian must be made to accept the far better way of life being imposed upon him. An editorial from The Canadian Monthly in 1872 offered this sentiment.

The thoughtful treatment of our
Indians by the Hudson's Bay Company, in

¹⁴
N. Frye, ed., The Collected Works of E.J.Pratt, p.267.

¹⁵
Ibid., p.196.

¹⁶
Quoted by C. Berger, A Sense of Power, p.251.

the first instance, has tended to make them as peaceful and as industrious as they are. It remains now for our government to keep them strictly to an understanding that their rights will be secured to them as they are to the whites: but that in return for such treatment they must submit to the rule¹⁷ of life which the white man's law prescribes.

Charles Mair commented on the progressive state of the North-West Indians who ostensibly did submit: "Here were men disciplined by good handling and native force out of barbarism . . . and on the high road to comfort"¹⁸. One can detect, however, that this messianic tone is in part an attempt to rationalize the expropriation of lands and "the displacement of the indigenous population by often scandalous means"¹⁹ that was involved in the process of nation-building. If the Indian is no more than a brute beast, it would indeed be better to civilize him and help him adjust to the superior ways of the white race. Somewhat the same rationale is inherent in the later nationalistic period in E.J.Pratt's Brébeuf and His Brethren. No matter how much "fighting courage" or "endurance . . . and impassivity"²⁰ the Indian

¹⁷ Quoted by R. Daniells, "Confederation to the First World War", C.F.Klinck et al, eds., Literary History of Canada, p.195.

¹⁸ Through the Mackenzie Basin, p.55.

¹⁹ H. Kreisl, "The Prairie: A State of Mind", E. Mandel, ed., Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p.261.

²⁰ N. Frye, ed., The Collected Poems of E.J.Pratt, p.262.

braves possessed, they nonetheless represented the lowest form of uncontrolled man who must learn the necessary discipline of the Christian way of life. Brébeuf himself hoped to send the pagan children to a missionary school "there to be trained /In Christian precepts, weaned from superstition²¹ /And from the savage spectacle of death". And, despite the initial Iroquois victory over the Jesuits, as John Sutherland has pointed out, "Brébeuf's sacrifice becomes a civilizing force in history, leading ultimately to the conversion of his Indian foes: the Quebec church is born as it were from the character of his bones and the 'crosses come back at the turn of the spade'²²".

In the late nineteenth century one of the driving forces of this messianic vision inherent in the Canadian mentality was the acceptance of the morality and virtue of the Canadian nation and of its superiority to the American experiment. The figure of the cruel Indian savage became an instrument to demonstrate this aspect of our nationalism. Charles Mair, who saw it his duty to develop and extend Canadian virtue, presented his hero, Tecumseh, as the bloodthirsty menace set irrevocably against the

²¹

N. Frye, ed., The Collected Poems of E.J. Pratt, p.261.

²²

The Poetry of E.J. Pratt, p.11.

Americans. The chief could vow to punish the American people; "they claim our lands, but we shall take their lives; /Drive out their thievish souls and spread their bones /To bleach upon the misty Alleghanies"²³. But once Tecumseh joins the British-Canadian cause, preferable because of "the spirit of justice which animated the Canadian authorities"²⁴, he becomes undoubtably the noble, merciful savage -- perhaps simply from association with that better breed of men. For example, he can now inspire his people to "be strong /And, if we conquer, merciful as strong For ever it has been reproach to us /That we have stained our deeds with cruelty"²⁵.

In the mid twentieth century, poets question this nineteenth-century nationalistic belief in the inherent morality of the Canadian experience. Patrick Anderson, for example, in Poem on Canada realizes that in actuality the malevolence of Europe was brought to the New World shores by "this conqueror with the marvellous corrupt face, drawing soft Europe out of the water . . . ; and the clean sands were disordered by prayer and greed, as though by the wounded"²⁶. Compounding the sins transplanted by these

²³

C. Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama, p.44.

²⁴

N Shrive, Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist, p.165.

²⁵

C. Mair, Tecumseh: A Drama, p.136.

²⁶

The White Centre, pp.31,32.

"wounded", the products of a culture sophisticated in intrigue and corruption, is the attitude of exploitative materialism which George Grant sees underlying the North American experience as a result of "the meeting of the alien and yet conquerable land with the English-speaking Protestants"²⁷. Ironically this exploitation becomes not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon but a North American one. Hence Grant laments what he assumes to be the demise of any Canadian nationality at all in view of the Canadian branch-plant mentality that apes the attitudes of the culture to the south. Note the rather pessimistic reversal of the belief held by Charles Mair and his type of nationalism which accepted that Canada was ultimately free from the "social cancers which are²⁸ empoisoning the national life of our neighbours" .

The conscious drive to exploit the natural resources of the land demanded the encroachment upon the forest homes of the Indian, perhaps further explaining the psychological need to justify the action by regarding the Indian as a brute beast that must be subdued. The vision of the white settler imposing his way upon the Indian and the land recurs in both nationalistic periods. Charles Mair in the late

²⁷

Technology and Empire, p.19.

²⁸

Editorial in Canadian Methodist Magazine(1880),
quoted by C. Berger, A Sense of Power, p.155.

aware of this subdue-and-transpose syndrome, has pointed out the wrong attitudes of the transplanted Europeans who assumed that "always there were the things to be got" out of the land, despite the "[disruptions] of the forest in his monetary enterprise" and the "[stealing] of natives like curios"³³ .

The seeming lack of concern by the Canadian settlers to develop a sincere understanding of the "soul"³⁴ of Canada is an aspect of what Northrop Frye has characterized as the "garrison mentality"³⁵ . The transplanted European, awed to the point of terror by the vast wilderness surrounding him, knew only to exploit the land and to cling more closely to traditional and accepted Old World attitudes and reactions. The figure of the Indian in poetry often begins to represent the sinister qualities of the terrifying unknown wilderness; in effect, it is the "vitality of the land [that] becomes demonic because suppressed and not understood"³⁶ . Hence the Indian as savage terror acts as a barrier to the creation of a genuine "feeling of being at home", that is, a Canadian nationalism rooted not in empty words or in superficial political unity but in a sincere emotional attachment to the

³³ Poem on Canada, in The White Centre, pp.32,33.

³⁴ Ibid., p.37.

³⁵ The Bush Garden, p.226.

³⁶ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.37.

dallying around the nerves to halt a quick despatch"⁴³ . The Canadian imagination appears to view nation-building as a process of ceaseless struggle in which "man[is] a beautiful but frail creature encompassed by forces beyond his ability to control which strike out repeatedly and blindly to destroy him"⁴⁴ .

This terror has led to an inordinate stress upon order and authority in the history of the development of the Canadian nation and mentality, hence the necessity of battling against the seemingly unordered, irrational Indian brave. Margaret Atwood has pointed out that the settlers believed it their job to build a replica of the Old World order in the New, something much harder to sustain than the "eighteenth-century American version of 'freedom' in which man is supposedly free to shape his own destiny"⁴⁵ . Therefore, it was all the more important to subdue the Indian savages who represented a severe threat to this order, tradition and self-restraint. W.L.Morton has, in fact, characterized the "basic rhythm of Canadian life" as an "alternate penetration of the wilderness and return of

⁴³
Brebeuf and His Brethren, N. Frye, The Collected Works of E.J.Pratt, p.261.

⁴⁴
R. M'Dougall, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk", in E.Mandel, ed., Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p.220.

⁴⁵
Survival, p.120.

civilization . . . , the violence necessary to contend with the wilderness, the restraint necessary to preserve civilization from the wilderness violence, and the puritanism which is the offspring of the wedding of violence to restraint"⁴⁶ . By this process, the Canadian in the nineteenth century created a complacent little world whose "centre is the Canadian home, its middle distance the loved landscape of Canada, its protecting wall the circle of British institutions"⁴⁷ . Yet a constant in the Canadian mind remains the "fear-haunted . . . imagination"⁴⁸ which tends to undercut movements toward an optimistic patriotism. Charles Mair is guilty of these perhaps unconscious forces at work in the patriotic poet who looked into nature to find those things which characterize his nation and thus give him an identity. But, in this search to find reassurance, the poet also found what he saw as a menacing nature that worked against the achievement of a sense of comfort and security. The figure of Tecumseh, in "Prologue to Tecumseh", becomes the noble savage, an integral part of the natural world but it is a world in which the "mighty bosom of wood" swallows "wild fowl" and a beautiful "tiny flow'r in blue and white . . .

⁴⁶ Quoted by E. Mandel, "Introduction" to his Contexts of Canadian Criticism, pp.7,8.

⁴⁷ N. Frye, The Bush Garden, p.241.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.141.

[allures] the rav'nous kine which largely feed, /Then quick return with nostrils all ableed and milk that curdles sudden in the pail"⁴⁹ . Such fear lingers to the present. Patrick Anderson, for example, pointing out that European man could not understand the mythology offered by the land, ironically betrays his own remnants of fear. At one point he can visualize the Iroquois as capable of looking into the land simply "for a priest to fry - - a string of red hot hatchets about his neck"⁵⁰ . Yet these savages are part of what Anderson himself called potential "ikons . . . [whose] red eyes burned unlit by any priest"⁵¹ . Urging the Canadian to understand these "ikons", Anderson himself appears to present them in a "fear-haunted" way.

The Indian becomes not only a representation of the savagery in nature but also of the savagery possible within man himself, a characteristic which Canadians as a people are painfully aware of because of their experience in the wilderness and which becomes perhaps an aspect of the Canadian mentality and its concerns. D.G.Jones, in fact, points out that "the images of the wilderness, of an Indian and other figures related to the land, provide natural symbols

⁴⁹

Dreamland and Other Poems, p. 107.

⁵⁰

Poem on Canada, in The White Centre, p.37.

⁵¹

Ibid., p.38.

for the dark world of the psyche"⁵². This can more fully explain, perhaps, why nineteenth-century Canadians so feared the savagery that they felt surrounded them; they, too, could possibly find themselves giving in to the dark side of human nature that could upset the carefully ordered human society that they were attempting to build. Charles Mair, for example, stressed the need for man to control his potentially unruly nature that could lead to "vile and selfish schemes . . . that yet enact the tyrant's part"⁵³. In this new nation "insensate man" must not "spurn his own right to be controlled"⁵⁴. D.C.Scott recognized, as well, according to D.G.Jones, the "two poles of human experience"⁵⁵ and that the European-tainted Canadian mind attempts to suppress one pole, that of the irrational. In "At Gull Lake: August, 1810", for example, Keejigo, a figure offering unrestricted passion, is rejected by Nairne, the Orkney trader, who was ostensibly "afraid of the venom of Tabashaw"⁵⁶; yet there is also something of the materialist and exploiter who could give himself up neither to the passionate Keejigo

⁵²

Butterfly on Rock, p.52.

⁵³

"Kanata", Tecumseh: A Drama and Canadian Poems, p.166.

⁵⁴

Ibid., p.166.

⁵⁵

Butterfly on Rock, p.102.

⁵⁶

The Green Cloister, p.56.

nor to the land which she, "clad in the skins of antelopes
 . . . and coloured with vivid dyes"⁵⁷, represents. E.J.
 Pratt in the twentieth century continues the concern for
 control; the figure of Brebeuf, born out of a "rationalistic
 emphasis on higher intellect and moral training"⁵⁸, remains
 spiritually superior to the taunting and undisciplined
 Indian savages. Pratt, in fact, praises the "strange
 nimbus of authority"⁵⁹ which keeps man under the restraint
 necessary to guard him from uncontrolled and destructive
 impulses. Indeed, the torture provided by the Indians
 approximates ironically enough in many ways the "cunning
 of an ancient Roman triumph . . . [or] the torment of a
 Medici confession"⁶⁰. All men are capable of reverting
 to the Indian savage stage and hence require guiding forces.
 According to Desmond Pacey, "the Iroquois objectify the
 savagery, cunning and cruelty which lurks in the hearts
 of all men and which, though they win temporary triumph,
 yield at the poem's end to the ultimate victory of the forces
 of light"⁶¹.

⁵⁷
The Green Cloister, p.56.

⁵⁸
 D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.59.

⁵⁹
Brébeuf and His Brethren, N.Frye, ed., The Collected Works of E.J.Pratt, p.270.

⁶⁰
Ibid., p.260.

⁶¹
 Quoted by E.Birney, "E.J.Pratt and His Critics", in
 A.J.M.Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p.84.

It is man himself who must come to terms with this savagery in the nature around and in him before he can truly feel at terms with the land. Only then can nationalism include a sincere emotional attachment to the land, to both its beauty and its danger, and move beyond the sentiments of that patriotic verse which was "clever but heavy, pompous, perhaps more of the tongue [than] the heart"⁶². Margaret Atwood contends that the Canadian imagination, in order to understand totally its environment, must see Nature "as a living process which includes opposites: life and death, 'gentleness' and 'hostility'"⁶³ for "the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely, and in parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders. This country is something that must be chosen -- it is so easy to leave -- and if we do choose it we are still choosing a violent duality"⁶⁴. Ironically it becomes the figure of the Indian who best understands and accepts the savagery inherent in the wilderness. D.C.Scott in "The Forsaken" depicts a Chippewa woman always "valiant, unshaken"⁶⁵ despite the storm and the wolves of her environment -- and ultimately the

62

A. Lampman, "Two Canadian Poets: A Lecture, 1891" in A.J.M.Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p.26.

63

Survival, p.63.

64

Quoted by E. Mandel, "Introduction", Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p.24.

65

The Poems of D.C.Scott, p.30.

storm brings not terror but "a beautiful crystal shroud"⁶⁶
 to comfort her. Keejigo, in "At Gull Lake: August, 1810",
 too becomes one with the land; "only the midnight moon knew
 where she felt her way, /Only the leaves of autumn, the
 snows of winter knew where she lay"⁶⁷. This perhaps
 represents the result of her acceptance of the savagery
 around her -- "Keejigo held her face to the fury and made no
 sound"⁶⁸. Scott's concept of the need to face the terror
 suggests that it is not enough to place simply an authority
 or order upon it; unless the world of the passions is
 understood and accepted an an elemental aspect of the
 environment, it will, as D.G.Jones suggests, "erupt into
 violence"⁶⁹, simply increase the attitude of terror towards
 the land or even, in fact, destroy the very nation which
 order and rationality have tried to build.

The twentieth century more openly vocalizes the
 need to come to grips with all aspects of the land. Douglas
 Le Pan, for example, in "Canoe-Trip", undergoes an experience
 suggestive of a spiritual rebirth through marvelling at
 wonders he had seen in "this fabulous country"⁷⁰ and which

66

The Poems of D.C.Scott, p.31.

67

The Green Cloister, p.58.

68

Ibid., p.57.

69

Butterfly on Rock, p.49.

70

The Wounded Prince and Other Poems, p.13.

once were sources of "nightmare" and terror.

We think of the eagles, of the fawns at
the river bend,
The storms, the sudden sun, the clouds
sheered downwards.
O so to move! With such immaculate 71
decision!

He, in fact, encourages a symbolic journey into the heart
of terror in "Coureurs de Bois".

You hesitate. The trees are tangled with
menace.
The voyage is perilous into the dark
interior.
But then your hands go to the thwarts.
You smile. And so 72
I watch you vanish in a wood of heroes.

George Grant, too, sees the necessity of a change of
attitude on the part of the Canadian mentality. He suggests
that "perhaps we are lacking the recognition that our
responses to the whole should not most deeply be that of
doing, nor even that of terror and anguish, but that of
wondering or marvelling at what is, being amazed or astonished
by it, or perhaps best, in a discarded English usage,
admiring it"⁷³. Viewed with such an attitude, the Indian,
representative of the "nightmares of a people", could possibly
emerge from the dark corner of the mind and the government

71

The Wounded Prince and Other Poems, p.13.

72

Ibid., p.9.

73

Technology and Empire , p.35.

reservation in order to assume a position in the Canadian mythology, understood and accepted by the nation itself.

CONCLUSION

In both nationalistic periods under consideration, the Indian has been represented as a symbol of the land, as one "who says that he is responsible to these hills, in him they shall move"¹. And in these hills, the Canadian mentality, in its search for a national identity, has seen both "nightmare" and "dream". Indeed, as H. Kreisl points out, the land becomes "at once willing and unwilling mistress, accepting and rejecting her seducer, the cause of his frustration and fulfilment, and either way the shaper and controller of his mind, exacting servitude"². The figure of the Indian in poetry comes to represent, in both periods, the paradoxical "glory and terror of the environment"³. More important, he also represents a figure that has learned to understand and accept both the savagery and the innocence and hence find peace in his land. To achieve this "feeling of being at home"⁴, the Canadian

¹ Patrick Anderson, quoted by D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.71.

² "The Prairie: A State of Mind", E. Mandel, Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p.261.

³ Desmond Pacey, Essays in Canadian Criticism: 1938-63, p.235.

⁴ D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock, p.5.

mentality, too, must learn the lessons of the Indian and escape what Northrop Frye has called its "garrison mentality"⁵, a clinging to Old World moral and social modes of life that work ultimately to exploit or even to destroy the vital energy of the land. Poets, through the use of the Indian figure who can find "the beauty of terror, the beauty of peace"⁶, have attempted in the late nineteenth century and even more insistently today to bring the Canadian mentality to the point of recognizing that the natural world can provide a home, not just a source of fear or sentimental reveries of an irretrievable pastoral world. D.G.Jones points out in fact that now "more than ever before we have arrived at a point where we recognize, not only that the land is ours, but that we are the land's"⁷. The importance of all of this to nationalistic feeling can readily be seen. A sense of peace and security in one's homeland can come about through an understanding of what lies surrounding the inhabitant. The "articulation of a more profound and inclusive communication between man and the universe he lives in"⁸ can provide the basis for a

⁵
The Bush Garden, p.226.

⁶
D.C.Scott, "At Gull Lake: August, 1810", The Green Cloister, p.58.

⁷
Butterfly on Rock, p.3.

⁸
Ibid., p.11.

genuine sense of nationality.

Themes have recurred in both the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries as I have attempted to point out in my thesis. The Indian, for example, functions as a white man's hero and potential source of national unity in both periods. As well, the Indian and his symbolic link with the land crops up time and again. A difference between the periods perhaps involves the fact that writers today appear eager to point out what was wrong with the attitude of our nineteenth-century forefathers. The latter's⁹ emphasis upon the necessity of perpetuating a system of imperialism in which patriotic allegiance would be divided between Canada and Britain becomes essentially a handicap to the development of a unique Canadian identity and literature. A.J.M. Smith saw it in the final analysis as a first step yet one in which existed "a spirit that . . . looks elsewhere for its standards of excellence and is content to imitate with a modest and timid conservatism the products of a parent tradition"⁹. The mid twentieth-century nationalistic period decries the need for the strengthening of a British tie and through the vehicle of the Indian figure invites Canadians to look more closely into their land. For it is the Indian culture which

⁹

The Book of Canadian Poetry, p.12.

has grown out of the Canadian environment. James Reaney points out that such things as "the idea expressed in the Indian lyrics that a raven is the spirit of creation seems so right for this country and the way it often looks"¹⁰.

Warren Tallman, too, envisions that to repossess "old mother North America with . . . her vague head of old Indian memories" requires the symbolic returning and acceptance of the gods, "snow gods, dust gods, wind gods, wolf gods -- but life gods too. And life is the value"¹¹. Only then can the land be truly possessed. The attitude remains from the late nineteenth century, however, that, although we may be beginning to feel like a nation, that sentiment must be further consolidated if we are to repel successfully the American cultural threat. Critics have seen that Canadians are still troubled by the fact that they are uncertain who they actually are. W.P. Wilgar calls it the "divided mind, . . . the inability of the Canadian to decide what he is or, more dangerous, what he wants to be"¹². James Reaney, even more recently, suggested that the solution calls for the Canadian to be "some sort of poltergeist, . . . in the

¹⁰

"The Canadian Poet's Predicament", in A.J.M. Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p. 112.

¹¹

"Wolf in the Snow", in E. Mandel, ed., Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p. 233.

¹²

"Poetry and the Divided Mind in Canada", in A.J.M. Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p. 69.

country and at the same time . . . as if he weren't in
¹³
 it" .

The concern continues. And yet there is room for optimism. Poets tend to believe that it is the Indian who can help the Canadian find out exactly who he is. Northrop Frye applauds the fact that some poets have begun to "unconsciously bridge the gap with the Indians"¹⁴, recognizing the value of the Indian culture and attempting to understand and assimilate the Indian sensibility into their own work. In effect, it approximates a "withdrawing from what Douglas Le Pan calls a country without a mythology,¹⁵ ending where the Indians began" . Yet we can see this same attempt to recover and to imitate the Indian rhythms and views of life in the works of D.C.Scott and Isabella Valancy Crawford in the late nineteenth century, reason enough to study this period for the lessons it can offer to the present. The study of the Indian and how he functions for nationalistic purposes is a useful one for it reveals how Canadian poets work and have worked to discover and name "the obscure features we possess, the silent heart that is

¹³
 "The Canadian Poet's Predicament" in A.J.M.Smith, ed., Masks of Poetry, p.120.

¹⁴
The Bush Garden, p.45.

¹⁵
Ibid., p.238.

our own, all the land that extends before us waiting to be
inhabited and possessed, and the confused words that issue
in the night"¹⁶ -- in effect, the Canadian identity.

¹⁶
p.10. Anne Hebert, quoted by D.G.Jones, Butterfly on Rock,

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