

Filling the Lacuna: Recent Developments in Atlantic Canadian Literary Biography

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Kings”, and “central Queens” could be added for greater precision. As well as being easily linked to virtually any map of the Island, these terms conform to local usage. The author gives reasons for his choice of federal labels (p. xvii), but they are of questionable weight.

Comparisons with the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* are inevitable.⁶² Both dictionaries have “citations”, or concrete, authentic examples of usages of words which constitute compendia of information on the details of local working life, migration patterns, values, and attitudes. As such, they help to establish the distinctiveness of the respective traditional societies. Pratt’s is a much smaller volume, as one would expect. In the first place, Prince Edward Island has been less isolated historically than Newfoundland. But this project was also begun much later than the work on Newfoundland, and long after Prince Edward Island’s cultural integration with the outside world could be considered virtually complete. In all probability, a similar study begun 35 years ago would have yielded a substantially richer harvest. But Pratt is not to be blamed — just the opposite, for he is retrieving what there is to be retrieved, and doing so with scholarly rigour and sophistication. He closes the book with the opinion that Island proverbs deserve a book in their own right. He is probably the person to do it, for he has already published an article on the subject.⁶³ This reviewer is waiting anxiously.

For the future of Island historiography in general, it is obvious that there is a need for additional research on the 20th century, but it is equally important that syntheses of the research on the earlier period be undertaken. With Bumsted’s landmark monograph, this task has begun for the 18th century. The 19th century beckons.

IAN ROSS ROBERTSON

Filling the Lacuna: Recent Developments in Atlantic Canadian Literary Biography

FOR YEARS CANADIAN SCHOLARSHIP HAS LACKED the basic critical tool of sound biographies of important literary figures. This shortcoming has been rectified in part in the last decade or so by several important studies of writers who had their origin in the Atlantic region. While these biographies differ in

62 G.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin, and J.D.A. Widdowson, eds., *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Toronto, 1982).

63 See “The Proverbial Islander”, *The Island Magazine*, no. 10 (Fall-Winter 1981), pp. 8-11. Also see Pratt, “Island English: The Case of the Disappearing Dialect”, in Smitheram *et al.*, eds., *The Garden Transformed*, pp. 231-43.

quality and approach, they all contain valuable and important research that will facilitate further critical study. As well, several of the biographies are models of the high standards that we will expect of literary biography in this country in the future.

Perhaps the most fascinating biography in this collection, because of the character of its subject and because of the departure it makes from the previous biography of Roberts, by Elsie Pomeroy, is John Coldwell Adams' *Sir Charles God Damn* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1986). As the title suggests, Adams has dared to present Roberts "warts and all", deliberately eschewing Pomeroy's highly adulatory approach to the "Father of Canadian Literature", as Roberts was proclaimed to be in the 1920s.¹ For years those of us who have made a study of Roberts have been aware of the two personas of the man: the formal, dignified public figure, Loyalist descendant, son of the rectory, classical scholar, man of letters, professor, literary editor, celebrated Canadian; and his more shadowy double, the private man about whom one heard stories of his love of ribald jokes, his collection of nude photographs, his flirtations with his children's governess or young literary protégés, and his escapades at Muskoka or on train trips to meetings of the Canadian Authors' Association. Articles by David Bentley, Fred Cogswell and W.J. Keith among others have noted the complexity of the man who was at home in the bush and the salon,² who loved the idyllic Tantramar — from New York — and who from the mid-1890s until her death in 1930 could never quite bring himself to tell his wife that he would not be home to live a regular family life again. Roberts himself was aware of the contradictions in his character, as his poem "Two Rivers" attests.

Adams has done a very nice job indeed of confronting the public and the private aspects of Roberts and distinguishing the fact from the fiction. In the process he reveals a much more approachable, human and compelling character than the one discovered in the earlier biography which was written at Roberts' suggestion and partly dictated and closely supervised by the poet. It is a credit to Adams too that he does not dismiss Pomeroy's labour of love, but gives her credit for many of the details of Roberts' long and eventful life. In fact, Adams acknowledges that he met and became friends with Pomeroy in Toronto in the 1960s and that it is largely as a result of their discussions of the poet that he became interested in Roberts and came to write this study. Fortunately Adams

1 E.M. Pomeroy, *Sir Charles G.D. Roberts: A Bibliography* (Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1943).

2 The ambiguity and dualism of Roberts are explored in Dr. Cogswell's paper "Charles G.D. Roberts: The Critical Years" and Dr. Bentley's "The Poetics of Roberts' Tantramar Space", both of which were published in Carrie MacMillan, ed. *The Proceedings of the Sir Charles G.D. Roberts Symposium* (Halifax, Nimbus, 1984). In response to the excitement stirred by these papers, Dr. Keith wrote his poem, "Charles G.D. Roberts", published in the same *Proceedings*, which captures the complexity of the man.

brings critical balance and judgement to the writer's life and, unhampered by questions of delicacy, emotional involvement and hero worship that had impeded the maiden lady in her work, he is able to provide a much tighter and more accurate portrait of Roberts.

Adams' biography follows the progress of the poet, born in the decade of Confederation, educated at his father's knee in the Anglican rectory in Westcock, further educated in the classical tradition at Fredericton Collegiate and the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, briefly editor of *The Week* in Toronto, Professor at King's College, Windsor, where he wrote his finest poetry, free-lance writer of fiction and verse and editor in New York and London, soldier and traveler during and after the Great War and finally celebrated man of letters and recipient of honours in Canada in the 1920s and 30s, operating out of his apartment at the Ernescliffe in Toronto. Adams succeeds admirably in presenting Roberts in the context of his place and time: Westcock in the 1860s, Fredericton in the 1870s, Toronto and Windsor in the 1880s and 90s, bohemian New York at the turn of the century, London and Europe during and after the Great War, and literary Toronto in the 1920s and 30s. Adams also illuminates the literary world and times with which Roberts' life intersects: the Confederation period; the literary Roberts family; cultural life in late 19th century Fredericton, Toronto and Windsor; the literary significance of *The Week*; the Haliburton Club at King's; New England-Maritime literary connections in the late 19th century; the relationship of the literary cousins, Roberts and Carman; Canadian writers and editors in turn-of-the-century New York; the relationship between the writers of the Confederation and the modernists; the origins and activities of the Canadian Authors' Association; literary figures like Lorne Pierce and William Arthur Deacon; and the lively, optimistic literary spirit in Canada in the 1920s.

The real value of the biography, however, is that Adams goes far in understanding his subject. Roberts' restlessness, his extra-marital philandering and his wandering existence after 1895, none of which Pomeroy confronted, are explained in terms of an early and unsuitable marriage to the pretty but totally incompatible May Fenety of Fredericton who did not share Roberts' literary interests. The business of supporting and raising a young family precluded graduate study at Oxford and the position at a prominent Canadian or American university that eluded Roberts all his life. It also meant that Roberts missed the fun, travel and enjoyment of erotic pleasures that might have been his lot as a young man, a vacuum that had to be filled later in life. Roberts' departure from his family is explained too in terms of the general "international" climate of the time, when many Canadian writers pursued their careers outside their country, and in terms of the need to be near publishers and literary activity. Finally, the decadent, *fin de siècle* manner of the later 19th century operative in the literary world played its part.

While Adams clearly finds his subject for the most part to be attractive and worthy, he does not avoid certain hard truths about Roberts' life and work. Rightly, Adams places Roberts' animal stories and early poetry ahead of the popular romance novels and the later poetry. He notes the tragic consequences (possibly) of Roberts leaving his family in Fredericton in 1896, to pursue his career in New York, in a house with poor drainage: Athelstan's death from typhoid fever and Ethel's falling ill and being left an invalid. Roberts' inability to confront unpleasantness is also revealed. He was never able after 1896 to tell May he would not establish a regular domestic arrangement with the family again and he avoided her totally in the last years of her life. There apparently never was a reconciliation. (But, in fairness, Adams notes that Roberts probably did not know in 1896 that he would not go home to live again.) Similarly, Roberts advised his great friend and constant companion of his later years, Elsie Pomeroy, who devoted years of her life to promoting his career and writing his biography, and who clearly worshiped him, of his marriage to a woman 50 years his junior three weeks before his death at 83 years, by letter. He kept his relationships with other women completely secret from May and Elsie. Adams has done some sleuthing, largely through the Carman letters, to determine the identity of most of the women with whom Roberts dallied. A great fascination is the names Roberts gives them in order to protect their anonymity: "The Queen of Bohemia", and "She Whose Name is writ in Music" are examples. Although Roberts' moral cowardice in his treatment of his wife and his biographer may not be attractive, it makes the man human, a quality we want in our public figures and it does add drama and tension to the biography.

There are certainly attractive qualities to Roberts' character as well. He did take an interest in his children's lives, having Lloyd to live with him in New York for a period and showing England to Ethel. Although he was the butt of the wit and humour of the modernists in the 1920s, Roberts never expressed a bitter or spiteful word about their work. In fact, a hallmark of his literary career from the beginning as editor of *The Week*, and throughout the American and English years, was his support and promotion of fellow Canadian writers. He did earn the title Father of Canadian Literature.

One should not go to Adams' biography for detailed critical literary analysis of Roberts' writing. This Adams has left to the literary critics. However, he does provide a sound study of Roberts' general intellectual and literary development, the literary influences and environment, and brief, accurate descriptions of the thematic and stylistic essence of each work. Adams' style is clear and readable, his pace and selection of materials conducive to very enjoyable reading. The book is attractive as well, containing 18 pages of photographs and clear, legible print. Sources are well cited and the index is useful. There is no bibliography.

There is a curious intersection between the biography of Roberts' cousin, *Bliss Carman: Quest and Revolt* (St. John's, Jespersion Press, 1985), and Roberts' life. Carman's biographer, Muriel Miller, was responsible in 1934 for introducing

Roberts to Joan Montgomery, the young woman who would become his second wife. Miller and Montgomery had been college friends together at the University of Toronto when Miller had written an M.A. thesis on Bliss Carman in consultation with Roberts. And there is a nice sense of appropriateness that at almost the same time as the publication of the Adams biography of Charles G.D. Roberts, a biography of his cousin and soul mate, Bliss Carman, should appear. Carman and Roberts were very close during the Fredericton and Kingscroft years, when they shared the inspiration imparted by their beloved teacher, George Parkin, at the Fredericton Collegiate, canoed and hiked the northern and interior woods of New Brunswick, challenged each other to verse in Roberts' King's College study and exchanged letters and visits between Nova Scotia and New England. It is in his letters to Carman that Roberts shares his innermost turmoil during the later King's years before he strikes out for New York and literary freedom. No doubt Carman's bachelor, vagabondian life which included winters of writing and editing in Boston and New York and summers hiking the New England to New York coast and tenting with literary companions on the Saint John river or at Kingscroft, contributed to luring Roberts from hearth and home. The two cousins sang each other's praises among their literary coterie in Toronto, Boston and New York and published each other's work in their various editorial positions. Only for a period did their closeness wane, during the ascendancy of the possessive Mary Perry King, who succeeded in cutting Carman off from a variety of friends, particularly women, and was probably a factor in Carman's writing inferior prose and verse after 1900. However, the old friendship was resumed in the Toronto years, in the 1920s, as the two grand old men of Canadian letters (to all but the modernists) enjoyed awards, cross-country readings and summers at literary Chautauquas on Lake Rousseau.

Unfortunately the Carman biography is not quite as compelling as that of Roberts, partly due to the nature of the subject, and partly for technical and stylistic reasons. The smaller and less bold type of the Jespersen publication, combined with very full pages and long sections containing a great quantity of detail, results in rather dense reading at times. This, along with the repetitious nature of Carman's life, makes it difficult occasionally to distinguish years, events and people. The Maudes, Louisas, Annies, Nancys and Minnies tend to get a little confused for the reader, particularly as we are not reminded who they are between their appearances, and their original descriptions have not always made them emerge distinctly. Shorter chapters, a clearer style and a more discriminating selection and control of the material would have provided a more readable and enjoyable text.

The reader is frustrated too on occasion that there are not more notes to identify sources. For example, the author states on page 75 that *Harper's Monthly* and *The Century* published articles on Canadian writers within the last six months (and one has to do some backtracking to be reminded five pages earlier what the year is) but does not cite the issues or dates. The reader can find

these sources, but only after searching through several issues of each periodical. The Index, while for the most part very helpful, does have some omissions, such as the Salmungundi Club, an exclusive New York art association to which Carman was elected in the 1980s.

These are relatively minor cavils. Of greater concern is the problem that, although the biography contains a prodigious amount of research and details of Carman's life, and contains a wealth of valuable information establishing the context of the writing, somehow the subject himself does not emerge as distinctly as one would have hoped. In fact, the quantity of information is not presented so as to reveal the author, but instead sometimes gets in the way of him. One has the impression that Miller has not seen clearly to the essential pattern or structure that lies at the heart of Carman: that she has not glimpsed the man, his life and work, as a whole. This raises an interesting question, of course, about what it is we require of biographies. Traditionally we have expected studies of this kind to present a clear portrait. But is a human life ever this simple, and have biographies traditionally simply provided expedient, neat constructs, creations of the biographer's vision rather than a representation of the original? How possible is it ever to present a person accurately and completely? Probably not very, but part of the art of the biographer is to present a study that convinces the reader that, yes, this is the way he or she was, a study in which all of the parts — the influences, the environment, the motives, the action and the work — present a convincing picture.

Regardless of these speculations, there are problems in this study of Carman. Miller does miss the opportunity at times to explain or speculate on certain events in Carman's life, which leads to some unsatisfying and unanswered questions which in turn leave us in doubt as to how to judge the man. For example, one of the most important relationships in Carman's life is that with Julie Plant, his first love, a Fredericton girl to whom he was engaged for nine years before she married someone else. Miller reveals that, in the eighth year of the engagement, Julie announced at the last minute that she would not attend the marriage of Carman's sister, apparently a dramatic slight which Miller does not attempt to explain or interpret. In fact, the announcement is imparted only through a quotation from a letter from Julie, containing other matters. What is the reader to make of this? Was the refusal to attend a deliberate slight, a warning of the deteriorating state of the relationship with Carman? Did Carman care that Julie was not coming; what was his feeling about the relationship at this time? At another point in the biography, after Julie's marriage, Carman is informed that she is dying in childbirth. This does elicit an emotional response, a very important poem which is admirably analysed. A few pages later Julie is described as turning up hale and hearty at Carman's door — with no intervening narrative to inform us of her recovery. These kinds of weaknesses in the text make it difficult at times both to follow and to interpret the life.

Despite Miller's assertion that Carman is not the indecisive man portrayed by

earlier critics, Carman does emerge here as a rather frustrating character, one who never quite seems to take control of his life. The one thing Carman could do, and do very well at times, was write poems. This would be all well and good, except that it took Carman a great deal of time to decide what he wanted to do beyond being a poet. His failed attempts at getting graduate degrees at Oxford, Edinburgh and Harvard; his long and then broken engagements to or relationships with women; his attempts and failure at various financial or business schemes; his general inability to get along in the practical sphere become a little tedious for the reader. Or at least they do in this study, where there is not quite enough analysis of and speculation about the reasons for these patterns. The die is cast in his first love affair, that with Julie Plant, with whom he fell in love while still a student at the University of New Brunswick. Julie enjoyed a nine-year engagement to Carman which she spent waiting for him to take graduate degrees at various universities, to establish himself in the legal world and finally to take an editorial position that would support a family — none of which, perhaps with unconscious deliberateness, ever worked out. Yet when Julie finally broke the engagement and eventually married an American businessman, Carman was filled with bitterness and disillusionment and suffered a great depression. No doubt the over hasty marriage of his cousin Roberts illustrated for Carman the dangers inherent in the marrying route for the impecunious writer, and no doubt too, as Miller speculates, it may have been unconsciously hard to marry Julie after Carman met such interesting and accomplished women artists and writers as the Prat sisters of Wolfville and Louise Guiney of New York. In any case, it is hard to sympathise entirely with Carman's reaction to the broken engagement, as it is hard to sympathise with his similar reaction every time a relationship comes to an end throughout his life.

Carman's dilemma was that he was a poet, first and foremost, but that he drew his poetry from the beauty he found in the world around him — from nature and from women. Throughout his life relationships with women would follow the pattern of early idealistic and euphoric love accompanied by ecstatic letters and poems, succeeded by practical problems, often of a financial nature (a periodical fails or an investment goes awry), evasion of the situation by travel and finally the inevitable separation, often with pain and depression and poems on these themes. This is all well and good for providing material for the poetry, but it does become a little tedious for the reader. Again, perhaps if Miller had focussed more on analysing Carman's apparent need to make his life suit his art, the biography would have been more intriguing.

Only the relationship with Mary Perry King lasted over a very prolonged period of time, probably because Perry King was conveniently married and did not exert too much pressure to change Carman's bohemian, vagabondian lifestyle, particularly after the early passion of the relationship was spent and the couple settled down to a routine of collaboration on their Delsartian ideals. The jealous Perry King had an uncanny knack for seeing when Carman was in

danger of surrendering his defences to a young worshiper (Carman had an enormous attraction for women of a poetic/idealistic cast of mind, even in his later years), and finding ways of circumventing the relationship. Again, one cannot help but speculate that subconsciously Carman welcomed the protection she offered from the complications and commitment that inevitably were involved in his relations with other, younger women. This way he could enjoy the excitement of being pursued by beauty and youth and the emotional spectrum of love and loss which was the material of his poetry but not threaten the peace and freedom that were necessary for his writing. It is Mary Perry King who had Carman cremated after his death in 1929 and only very reluctantly allowed his ashes to be sent to Fredericton for interment. One cannot help speculating whether the ashes buried in Forest Hill Cemetery are in fact those of the poet, or of a New England oak, a question Professor Fred Cogswell was fond of posing in undergraduate Canadian literature classes at the University of New Brunswick in the mid-60s.

A pattern that establishes itself early in the biography is Carman's many experiences, from an early age, of the death of people close to him, including his parents and several contemporary cousins and friends. These experiences had a profound effect on Carman which does not come to the fore in the biography as much as it might. Carman's obsession with and fear of death may be a large factor in the paralysis in practical matters that sometimes overcame him and certainly is an important influence on the spiritual nature of his poetry.

Miller's biography does contain a vast amount of scholarly material that will be invaluable to future researchers. There is also much intelligent discussion and elucidation of Carman's poetry, no easy task given its often abstruse quality. Miller discusses the poetry in the context of Carman's influences, reading and thought, particularly the influences of Emersonian-Hegelian idealism, Santayanan ethics and Delsartian-Unitrinian theory. She also follows Carman's response to the various landscapes that had an impact on his poetry: the beloved "Down East" in the early years, the Catskills and Connecticut in the middle years, and the mountains and desert of California in the later years. Oddly Miller, who had access, of course, to the Roberts-Carman correspondence, makes no mention of the "dark side" of the poet that is revealed there and that demonstrates the closeness of the two cousins. The biography does reveal the figures, groups, networks and theories of the literary life of the eastern seaboard that figured in Carman's world: Richard Hovey, Louise Guiney, the Prat sisters, Charles G.D. Roberts, Henry Bowen, Josiah Royce, F.A. Day, Harvard's 20th Century Visionists Club, Canadian expatriate communities in Boston and New York, bohemian New York, *The Independent*, *Current Literature*, *The Chap Book*, and numerous idealist philosophies. Carman has not survived as well as his cousin in the 20th century, largely because his idealism is at odds with our more cynical times, and because he did not diversify into forms more compatible with our age, but his life does provide an important angle from which to view

literary life on the eastern seaboard during the *fin de siècle*. Contributing to the interest of the biography are eleven pages of photographs and a bibliography of Carman's collections of poetry as well as the very useful locations of the Carman letter collections.

One seldom finds a biographer more in tune with his subject than is Professor David Pitt with E.J. Pratt. Raised like Pratt in outport Newfoundland, the son of the methodist manse and also a professor of English literature, Pitt seems ideally suited to this study. But it is more than the happy coincidence of shared experience that makes *E.J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882-1927* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984) such a fine biography. The book is a model of painstaking scholarly research, a richly impeccable prose style and intelligent, sound judgement of the author and his work. Pitt's biography is one of the finest literary biographies to have been written in Canada.

E.J. Pratt is not an entirely easy man to discover. He was a person to whom anecdotes stuck "like barnacles to a barge". In the course of time the tales of Pratt's various exploits and debacles were embellished and exaggerated, usually by Pratt himself, who loved telling a good story. His character invited humorous anecdotes, for he was notoriously absent-minded about extraneous articles of dress like coats and hats and was continually losing things or coming home in someone else's outer garments. This, combined with his generally unkempt appearance and his exotic Newfoundland background and accent inspired much affectionate raillery among his friends and colleagues at the University of Toronto.

Pratt was also a very "clubbable" man who loved to get together with other men to share stories and discussions. He frequently invited people (usually unannounced to his wife, Viola) back to the house for a "sumptuous repast" and had people visit his summer home on the Kawartha Lakes. Golf was another passion. When, having been recently appointed to the Department of English at the University of Toronto, he made his first trip to Britain, he visited the obligatory literary sites, but appears to have spent more time enjoying their golf courses than ruminating on literary lives. His character and his passions not surprisingly made him a person who took on a "larger than life", legendary or mythic quality, especially after the passage of years. However Pitt, with seeming ease, carefully builds a clear image of the man and the persona he helped to create. Pitt also intelligently defines the intersection between the man and his work: Pratt's love of story, humour and epic and the centrality of these to his poetry.

Pitt demonstrates a remarkable ability to show rather than tell Pratt's life. The account of the Newfoundland childhood conveys a felt sense of outport life in the late 19th century and what it was to be the parson's son. In Pratt's severe Yorkshire bred miner-turned-Methodist preacher father Pitt finds the embodiment of the spiritual and imaginative constraints against which Pratt would write in such bacchanalian poems as *The Witches' Brew*. Pitt also traces the

origins of Pratt's gargantuan images to the Bible and sermons of his youth as well as to the large ocean by which he grew up. And of course the love of story, hyperbole and humour finds its inception in the colourful stories of his outport childhood.

The first volume of the biography contains the rather long 40-year formative and apprenticeship period during which Pratt found his poetic voice. He was a slow starter, an undistinguished student in the Newfoundland school system who spent three years working in a dry goods establishment in St. John's before he realized he wanted a higher education. His father would only finance his education if he would study for the ministry; thus began Pratt's rather reluctant career as Methodist minister. After graduating from the Methodist College in St. John's Pratt resisted the desire of the local Conference that he attend Mount Allison University, preferring instead to go to the more theologically liberal Wesleyan College, McGill (hence the term "truant" in Pitt's title). When the Conference absolutely forbade this step, Pratt and the two like-minded friends who pursued the same goal were given permission to attend a compromise institution, Victoria College, University of Toronto. So compatible would Toronto prove that it would become Pratt's home for the rest of his life.

At Toronto Pratt continued to come to literature via an oblique course, doing his master's and doctoral degrees in philosophy and psychology. While Pratt's pursuit of the "New Psychology" and the faith he put in science to arrive at "the Truth" (a reconciliation of reason and faith) may seem tangential to his becoming a poet, they were not, for they helped him to probe the nature of man and to arrive at his own clear vision. As a poet Pratt would never turn his back on science and human progress, but would often use scientific images and concepts with wit and vigour to pursue his large imaginative themes.

As he pursued his formal education Pratt also discovered the informal evening discussions of poetry offered by Professor Pelham Edgar of the English Department, and out of the friendship and encouragement offered by this kind man developed the path that Pratt would ultimately take. Although he completed the Ph.D. and lectured and did research in psychology, the "visionary-idealist-humanist side" of Pratt became increasingly unhappy with the impersonal, clinical approach of his discipline. Concurrently, he was writing more and more poetry which was being published in the undergraduate journal *Acta Victoriana* as well as in more "radical" post-war magazines like *The Rebel*. The tension that resulted found a happy resolution in the offer of an appointment in the English Department, Victoria College, in 1920.

Pratt's later distinguished career as an English teacher did not have an auspicious start. Lacking formal training in the discipline, he did not at first contribute to scholarship, nor did he read much literary criticism. His approach in class instead was to read from the author under discussion and to impart his enjoyment of the work, an approach probably not atypical in many English departments in the early 20th century. However, his appointment at Victoria

College provided the poet with an ideal environment in which to pursue his Muse. Pitt follows the development of the poetry from the undistinguished and largely autobiographical *Rachel* and the often conventional war poems through to the large epic poems of the 1920s in which Pratt begins to find his matter and his manner: *The Witches' Brew*, *The Cachelot* and *The Great Feud*. Pitt analyses the origins of the poems, their critical reception and Pratt's growing reputation. Literary relations with contemporaries like Pelham Edgar, Lorne Pierce, William Arthur Deacon, Arthur Phelps and Hugh Eayrs are also explored. By the end of the first volume of the biography Pratt is launched in his literary career, a poet with a national reputation and a distinct voice. Critics recognized his "vigorous, red-blooded verse", "delightfully daring diction", "exuberant descriptions" and "Aristophanic humour". Pitt chooses 1927 as the cut-off point for the first volume because it is in this year that Pratt's mother, his last strong tie with Newfoundland, died. At this point Pratt has been in Toronto for 20 years and only returned to visit Newfoundland once. Clearly Pratt had chosen the social, intellectual and literary environment of Toronto and its university for his future course.

The concluding volume of Pitt's biographical study, *E.J. Pratt: The Master Years 1927-1964* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987) maintains the high standards of the first volume. The book resumes Pratt's life in middle age, after he has achieved national prominence with *The Witches' Brew* and *Titans* and presents the years of Pratt's greatest accomplishments, during which he wrote *The Roosevelt and the Antenoe* (1930) *The Titanic* (1946) *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (1940) and *Towards the Last Spike* (1952); edited the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*; served the Canadian Authors' Association in various useful capacities; became "Senior Professor of English" at Victoria College; won several Governor General's awards; was awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal; and made reading and lectures tours across Canada and to several areas of the United States. Pratt continues to be the compelling *bon vivant*, now developing eclectic and enthusiastic interests in such things as spiritualism, Arctic exploration and naval strategy, although a shadow is cast over the second half of his life by his anxiety over the recurrent illness of his daughter Claire, who suffered all her life from the after effects of one of her corrective operations for polio.

Once again, Pitt brings to life not only the poet, but also his literary world: the sources, writing and reception of his poetry and the literary relations with such important writers, critics and publishers as A.J.M. Smith, Lorne Pierce, E.K. Brown, Northrop Frye, Earle Birney and Desmond Pacey. Pitt continues to provide a useful discussion of Pratt's writing, particularly where the biographical context provides illumination. The last ten years or so of Pratt's life are lived at a slower and quieter pace, as disease encroaches and old friends die. Perhaps wisely, Pratt, for all intents and purposes, ceased writing in the early 1950s with the critical acclaim of *The Last Spike* still sounding loudly. He sensed that his epic themes and traditional style were out of tune with these more angst-ridden

and technically innovative times. However, there were still occasional "celebrations", family reunions and many honours that provided him with great pleasure. Although his body failed, his mind remained alert until his death in 1964. And Pratt has certainly been fortunate in his biographer, whose high standards of biography and critical appreciation of Pratt's work add to the poet's stature today. The biography contains a useful index, a selected bibliography and a valuable listing of sources.

Pitt begins the first volume of his biography with a Preface in which he modestly proclaims that he is out to discover Pratt the man, not Pratt the poet. Although of course Pitt cannot within the compass of a biography provide a thorough analysis of the work, he does a magnificent job of discussing it. His clear elucidation displays his mastery of the material. In the biography, step by careful step, Pitt leads the reader through the relationship between the poet, his influences and thought, and his writing, its style and themes. A very vivid and clear portrait of Pratt, the man and the poet is the result.

The quality of Pitt's biography, however, which pushes it into a realm beyond most, is the rich style of the prose. In its confident, vigorous rhythms, its absolute clarity and its wealthy use of imagery, the prose (which may be described as Prattean) both suits the subject, E.J. Pratt, and sets high literary standards. Newfoundland, at the time of Pratt's birth in the 1880s, is "still the Cinderella of the Empire, among the ashes where she was to languish untransformed, for the next seventy years" (p. 14). Notre Dame Bay, the isolated outpost where Fanny Knight, Pratt's mother, lived during her childhood in the 1860s, is a place where "the heart of life beat close to the ribs of nature" and Pratt's first poem, completed in 1909, is "a single shot in the pre-dawn darkness" (pp. 92, 93). In its rich prose, in the clarity with which the subject emerges, in the control of the material, in the balance with which Pitt both "gets inside" yet objectively judges his subject, in its general excellence, the biography of E.J. Pratt makes a very important contribution to Canadian letters.

Allison Feder's *Margaret Duley: Newfoundland Novelist, A Biographical and Critical Study* (St. John's, Harry Cuff Publications, 1983) is very welcome. Although Duley's novels received a flurry of attention when they appeared between 1936 and 1942, they quickly went out of print and her reputation declined until they were reprinted in the mid-70s. Once again, however, her novels are no longer available (I, for example have had to delete *Highway to Valour* [1941] from my course in Canadian Literature to 1945) and she is in danger of being lost to the canon. Feder's book is a timely reminder that we must preserve a place for one of the most imaginative writers of Newfoundland and an important feminist voice.

Feder's biography is certainly less impressive at first glance than the others noted here, for it is a modest paper-bound book of 158 pages, not a handsome hard-bound larger volume like the others. Also, there are unfortunate publishing and editorial flaws, including the use of glossy paper at the middle of the

book for several pages of text as well as for the photographs, numerous glaring typographical errors and the lack of a note to describe a very interesting photograph on the back cover that appears to include Margaret Duley, her mother, several women in riding veils and men in military dress enjoying an outing at about the time of the First World War.

A reading of the book does result in some disappointment at the gaps in the biography. Feder refers at one point to Duley's "affairs" with men (p. 30) but their nature and number as well as the identity of the men is not made clear. She declines to give the reader much information about Duley's life and education during the time she studied at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, because records of that institution were destroyed during the Second World War, but surely the curriculum, teaching staff and the goals of the Academy would be extant in contemporary advertisements and one could get an idea of the training, calibre and regimen of the school from former pupils. Surely too there must be shipping records which would reveal whether Duley returned to Newfoundland from her English studies in 1913 or whether it was in 1917, a question Feder poses because of conflicting evidence, but does not answer. One would like to know more about Duley's relationship with her sister Gladys whom she visited in the United States regularly. Was she supportive of Margaret's writing and did they discuss their ideas on Newfoundland, male-female relations, and so on? It would be very useful to know at which American university Duley's niece Margot Duley Morrow, a very key source of biographical material, teaches. Lastly, while there are details of time and place which document Duley's life, they are not so much brought to life as presented factually.

The biographer has some difficulty in presenting a clear picture of Duley but this is in large part due to the intractability of her subject. Margaret Duley did not yield much of her personal life and feelings to the outside world. She was a proud person who no doubt, as Feder acutely observes, harbored feelings of inadequacy. A denizen of the elite colonial St. John's society which gravitated around Government House, Duley was known for her impeccable grooming and witty repartee. The somewhat rehearsed persona she adopted, however, masked the artist, the imaginative and creative Duley who bristled at the dry, conventional tedium of a little world which seemed at times to be dedicated to hierarchy, form and smugness.

Feder is up against another problem, one inherent in the writing of many biographies of women. This is the scant documentation and limited resources available on people who occupy a domestic world, who have little post-secondary education and communication with the informal intellectual and artistic networks or "clubs" largely made up of men. Those documents and facts there are relating to the lives and creativity of women tend not to be preserved, as women artists are not judged to be as important as men.

Although one can find weaknesses in Feder's presentation of Duley's life, she

has gone far in discovering many of the facts pertaining to Duley's family, her upbringing in colonial St. John's, her education, reading and influences, the development of her thought, and her travels. The real strength of the study, however, is in Feder's discussion of the novels, which is intelligent and sensitive and goes far beyond the previously existing criticism, and in which one comes closest to finding the inner life of Margaret Duley.

Duley's life is fascinating for its paradoxes and tensions, particularly the tension between the external persona and the inner woman. Feder traces Duley's development from a fairly conventional product of St. John's upper-class society, attuned to England as "the Great Good Place" in all things, to one who came, largely as a result of the First World War, which tragically debilitated her brother, and the Depression, which deprived her of her life of privilege, to look more critically, even bitterly at contemporary world events and seats of power and to find solace and strength in an imaginative, even mythic idea of her country and its folk. She came to find much to criticize too in the small elite of merchants, professionals and colonial administrators who ruled St. John's and the outport communities and of whom she was a member. As her sensibilities developed, she came to abhor the convention-ridden lives of her set and to put faith in the intuition and spontaneity she found in ordinary Newfoundlanders. She also admired their ability to survive for centuries in a barren, harsh environment, for this seemed to her to build character and nobility. This is a gradual development, which Feder traces with skill and care in the novels. While Duley never came to feel perfectly at ease with her native land (the author's note which prefaces *Highway to Valour* declares that "this book is dedicated to Newfoundland, a country which the author loves and hates"), it did provide the inspiration and images for her quite remarkable novels. As Feder analyses the life and the novels she discovers the thread of artistic unity that contributes to the overall satisfaction one derives from the biography.

Perhaps the most fascinating discussion in Feder's study is that of *Novelty on Earth* (1942), Duley's urbane, ironic novel which has received little critical attention. In it she reveals herself as a "derisive feminist" (p. 91) who makes Adam, Milton and Blair (the last a character in the novel), look foolish.³ The book focuses on an adulterous relationship, a shocking enough departure for a Canadian novelist of the time, and presents the woman as courageous and honest while the man is the opposite. As Feder observes, Duley derives much irony and drama from rewriting the Adam and Eve story as a modern love affair. In addition to its technical qualities (strong, convincing characters, impeccable control of the structure, sharp irony and wit), the book reveals an original and critical mind, obviously that of a feminist and free-thinker. It plummets the

3 By this term Feder seems to mean that Duley lacked the due respect traditionally given to men.

hypocrisy and deceit of contemporary social and moral codes and questions conventional theological and ethical thought.

The overall sense one takes away from this study of Margaret Duley is of the author's remarkable isolation; it is not just the isolation of the distancing the writer must have from his or her society, but the isolation from any like-minded individuals who might share intellectual or creative interests. There is no sense whatsoever of an environment in which Duley might be able to test her ideas or discuss her craft. When she does come in middle age to find people who take an interest in her work, her editors at MacMillan, she feels threatened by their suggestions and becomes defensive. Duley's plight is that of the intelligent and independent-minded woman in colonial society, caught between society's demands for convention and decorum and her inner need for vision and expression.

In writing *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981) Elspeth Cameron has the mixed blessing of a living subject who can comment on his life and work: mixed because Cameron can confirm details of his life and literary intent that might otherwise remain obscure or speculative but also because of the difficulty of maintaining a critical distance from a writer who clearly has become a fellow collaborator and friend. Happily, Cameron manages admirably to take advantage of MacLennan's proffered assistance without allowing it to weaken her judgement. While finding much to praise in MacLennan's life and work, she includes criticism of weaknesses in his writing and reveals idiosyncrasies in his character without trying to justify or apologize. The result is the portrait of a fallible but attractive, accomplished and dignified figure in our literary tradition.

Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life reveals Cameron to be a natural biographer. In 421 pages she masterfully brings order and pattern to MacLennan's life and copious work. The biography is tightly structured and controlled, the initial four chapters providing the formative years in Cape Breton, Oxford, Princeton and Montreal, and the succeeding chapters each devoted to a novel, while carrying on the biography. Included is *Voices in Time* (1980), published not long before the biography (1981). Cameron's selection of cogent details from her plethora of excellent and painstakingly researched sources, including interviews with MacLennan, family members, fellow authors, editors and friends and their letters, reveals an intelligent and discerning mind. Her style is clear, authoritative, literate and highly readable. In her description of the years leading up to the publication of MacLennan's first published novel, *Barometer Rising* (1941), Cameron economically and graphically recreates the spirit of the times and places that shaped the author, including early 20th century Glace Bay, where, as the doctor's son, MacLennan grew up apart from the coal miner's children; Halifax during the Great War, where, as a result of the Halifax Explosion of 1917, MacLennan experienced the full horror of the death and destruction wreaked by war, a theme that would be important in his writing;

Oxford University in the 1920s where MacLennan's preparation in the classics was not up to English standards, but where he enjoyed athletics and travel; and Princeton in the 1930s which MacLennan hated as an example of American wealth and philistinism. Cameron has done some nice scholarly sleuthing to get just the right "scent" of time and place; for example, she has used Gertrude Tratt's *The Centennial History of Tower Road School* (1975) to capture the Halifax school days.

Cameron never allows her sources to overwhelm her subject, however, and it is MacLennan's intellectual and literary development that holds center stage throughout the biography. She traces the development of MacLennan's mind and personality from the early influence of his dour, Calvinistic father, Doctor Sam, who desired his son to be a classical scholar, and his more spontaneous, fun-loving mother who helped him to appreciate poetry and novels, to his childhood reading of Stevenson, Roberts, Henty, *Chums* and *The Boys of the Empire* and his more mature reading in the 1920s and 30s of modernist literary figures like Joyce, Eliot and Hemingway as well as social thinkers like Marx and Freud. Cameron notes that his essentially conservative and moralistic upbringing would determine his style and themes. For all he claimed to know the modernists, MacLennan would employ a very traditional literary method in his novels and eschew the pessimism and relativism of his age, insisting on themes and plots that elevated men above the mire and very clear notions of right and wrong.

Cameron presents the life and the writing as part of an organic whole, the novels coming from and elucidating the man. The discussion of the novels is very valuable in literary terms, including details of their composition (sources, germination, intent, length of time taken to write them, editorial involvement, revisions), publication (sales, percentages, profits) and reception. Cameron also offers tight, intelligent literary analysis of the novels. She notes MacLennan's tendency to be a thesis novelist who sometimes lacks emotional impact, his serious, moralistic nature and the importance of his historical vision. She gives him an important place in the development of the Canadian novel (as do most of MacLennan's critics) as a writer who has presented the Canadian psyche and made us aware of what it is to be Canadian at a time (after the Second World War) when we were most vulnerable to American influence. The discussion of the literary reception of the novels comprehensively includes Canadian, American and English as well as occasional other reviews. It is a credit to Cameron's mastery of the vast amount of material with which she worked that she is able to discuss the novels so intelligently and relate them so convincingly to the life in such a short space.

In her Preface to the book, Cameron admits the impossibility of complete accuracy and truth in biography, the fact that any recreation of a person's life, no matter how faithful to the sources, is at best relative. However, the test by which Cameron measures biography, that the life, sources and work are cut from the

same cloth, is successfully passed in her study. The reader is convinced by her portrait of Hugh MacLennan who happily emerges as a humane humanist who cares passionately for literature, for his country and for human dignity. Those who have had the opportunity to meet MacLennan have found these qualities to be true to the original. The biography is also a tribute to a writer who persevered against the difficult odds in the 1940s and 50s of a country with an immature reading audience and publishing industry. It is a study of what it was to be a writer in Canada before the Canada Council, Expo '67 and Canadian literature in the classroom. It documents too the literary context of Canada for the writer from the early 1940s to the present: authors, editors, publishers, reviewers; the creative, intellectual and publishing climate. It provides notes on sources that will be valuable for further studies of Hugh MacLennan and includes a very useful index as well as several interesting pages of photographs.

While all the writers presented in these biographies, with the exception of Margaret Duley, would leave the Atlantic region to pursue their literary careers elsewhere, in Ontario, Quebec and the United States, their lives and their work are a testimony to the significance of the Atlantic region in the literary life of this country. Eastern Canada nurtured several important colonial literary movements as well as key figures in the Confederation period. Individual writers in the region continue to this day to offer strong and important voices. While the writers studied here may not have had the opportunity or the desire to remain in the region, they took with them the raw material of their later vision and expression: Roberts and Carman the classical training of the University of New Brunswick and a response to the Maritime landscape; E.J. Pratt the elemental world of rock and sea that would inspire his epic themes and leviathan characters; Margaret Duley the critical eye and wit sharpened in colonial St. John's; and Hugh MacLennan the strong moral vision of Scottish Cape Breton. It is appropriate that these important Atlantic Canadian literary figures should be the focus of recent scholarly enquiry.

CARRIE MACMILLAN

The Irish in North America New Perspectives

ACCORDING TO AN OLD STORY, the basic differences among North Americans, Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics can be illustrated by their reactions to a door that opens the wrong way. The North American, imbued with a sense of initiative and getting things done, will find the necessary tools and fix it without delay. The Irish Protestant, dour and stoical, will put up with the inconvenience, since it is part of God's design to test strength of character. And the Irish