

The Unity of Two Solitudes

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THE structure of Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* reveals division overlying identity. That is to say, the sense of disunity arising from the near cleavage between the two halves of the book, superficially appearing as problem and solution, is only the manifestation of a stage in national understanding where the existent deep unity has not yet been realized. Like Canada itself, the novel is "point and counterpoint" of a subtle harmony already in existence.¹ Thus, in a way that transcends the symbolic impact of characterization — of seeing the Canada of 1945 in Athanase, of seeing the new Canada in Paul — the novel itself symbolizes Canada.

The heart of the book's unity lies in symbolism which is apocalyptic to characters sensitive to deep human reality appearing in nature, the larger expression of ongoing creation. Water, darkness, and minimal light are the recurrent essences of the central cavern motif and the symbolic use of the sea. Yardley, who is "just a natural man" (p. 304), is the human embodiment of these values. Whole complexes of imagery carry the impact of these basic symbols to the surface of the novel. As their meaning denotes greater distance from the natural, they indicate progressively less life, less growth, less hope; in their association with and incorporation by particular characters of the novels, they show forth varying degrees of human wholeness as these characters approximate or differ from Yardley.

On one side, then, are such motifs as "not spilling what matters," of being at home, of adhering to facts in Paul's sense. The accent is on a keenly aware sense of smell, on sensitivity of touch; on leisure, silence, stillness, as opposed

to noise and violence of action — of voice, of manner. On the other side are images of distortion arising from shortsightedness, of arrested development, of frustration of movement, of vision. Mathematical images, game images, architectural images reveal views dissociated from healthy vitality. Fine sounding slogans illuminate the vulnerability of man's judgment and will, while patterns of staleness and of emptiness reflect their paralysis. Finally, the motifs of the frontier, the tundra, and the mountain move the psychological concerns of the novel to the allegorical level.

Such motifs supply the figurative basis for the study of the two race legends which are analyzed in Part I of the novel. MacLennan skilfully juxtaposes these legends in such a way as to bring out the irony of their likeness while in no way rejecting either French or English as people. He questions sharply, rejects sardonically; but where the issues are not completely subject to scrutiny, he always gives the benefit of the doubt. There is compassion here as he discriminates between appearance and reality, as he ultimately generates throughout the book the knowledge growing out of the insight upon which his thesis rests: every man experiences a solitude with its peculiar loneliness — the man at one with his own nature, and the man separated from his own nature. There are thus two kinds of solitude. The only bridge between any two solitudes is love — between those which are antithetic, as well as between those which are congenial. The essence which safely and effectively breaks a solitude is understanding:

Love consists in this,
that two solitudes protect,
and touch, and greet each other.

RAINER MARIA RILKE (Epigraph to *Two Solitudes*)

In Part I MacLennan emphasizes aspects of the solitude removed from reality, exploring its degrees, while from Chapter 3 on he subtly develops the possibilities of the natural solitude in terms of Yardley's outlook, a development already begun on the allegorical level in Chapter 1.

The Canadian French-English polarity is presented in microcosm in Montreal where, like Quebec among the English provinces of Canada, the French and English live side by side, each in their own section, separated by the frontier, Bleury Street (p. 119):

Two old races and religions meet here and live their separate legends, side by side. If this sprawling half-continent has a heart, here it is. Its pulse throbs out along the rivers and railroads; slow, reluctant and rarely simple, a double beat, a self-moved reciprication. (p. 2)

Racial separation is thus seen to be real in Montreal; yet, paradoxically and significantly, it symbolically operates like a natural heartbeat. Life, howsoever qualified, is undeniably there. However, Canadian polarity is real. Its feel is generated in the novel primarily through the accurate recreation of the spirit of a Quebec village in Saint-Marc-des-Érables as opposed to the contrasting temper of the places of English power. We shall look at each in turn.

As presented in the novel, the French spirit is basically simple, natural, full of faith in God as He is known through the land. But this faith is completely shaped in all dedication and devotion by the parish priest. MacLennan catches beautifully the situation of a people very much alive, but too circumscribed through the closed vision and legalism of so many of its leaders. Athanase says to Yardley:

. . . this is just like any other parish in Quebec. The priest keeps a tight hold. Myself, I'm Catholic. But I still thinks the priests hold the people too tightly. . . . Here the Church and the people are almost one and the same thing, and the Church is more than any individual priest's idea of it. You will never understand Quebec unless you know that. The Church, the people and the land. Don't expect anything else in a rural parish. (p. 28)

Here is an example of MacLennan's use of ambiguity which ultimately reserves judgment while recording facts. In breaking from one priest's autocracy to an emphasis on the larger context (again seen in the difference of outlook

between Father Beaubien and his bishop, between Father Beaubien and Father Arnaud), he makes room for a living faith — open, trusting, growing — as is seen in Madame Rocheleau, whose name underlines her function in this respect, and whom Paul implies is typical of another and truer kind of French-Canadian. But, in the novel, Saint-Marc is typical, and so is Father Beaubien.

An insight into this parish priest occurs at the beginning of the narrative:

He felt both humble and proud that God had permitted a man like himself to build Him such a monument. It was larger even than the largest Protestant church in Montreal where millionaires were among the parishioners. And Saint-Marc numbered less than a hundred and thirty families. (p. 5)

The priest's faith in real. But, so is an insidious and unconscious pride in power. The irony and vulnerability of such a mentality assume a quasi-historical perspective in Father Beaubien's meditation on the acorn:

This nut was like his own parish of Saint-Marc-des-Érables. It was perfect. You could not change or improve it, you could not graft it to anything else. But you put it into the earth, and you left it to God, and through God's miracle it became another oak. His mind moving slowly, cautiously as always, the priest visioned the whole of French-Canada as a seed-bed for God, a seminary of French parishes speaking the plain old French of their Norman forefathers, continuing the battle of the Counter-Reformation. Everyone in the parish knew the name of every father and grandfather and uncle and cousin and sister and brother and aunt, remembered the few who had married into neighbouring parishes, and the many young men and women who had married the Church itself. Let the rest of the world murder itself through war, cheat itself in business, destroy its peace with new inventions and the frantic American rush after money. Quebec remembered God and her own soul, and these were all she needed. (p. 6)

The validity and commitment of the priest's reasoning are thus shown to be intertwined with a subtle quest for power which MacLennan presents ambiguously. Justified or not, it makes for separation. It is vulnerable to delusion, to fanatic extremes, as seen in Marius, and in Marie-Adèle.

In marked contrast is the gentle, leisured simplicity of the village folk who are company to one another in the silence of Drouin's store. Their devotions completed, they relaxed, "for now the crops were in the hands of God" (p. 136). There is a closeness to nature here that means life, as seen in Blanchard: "An impression of well-being, almost of goodness, emanated from Blanchard along with the smell of stable and sweat" (p. 95). But the great life really present does not expand and grow as it should. Although in this novel natural creation is at the core of reality, "The land chained them [the French] and held them down, it turned their walk into a plodding and their hands into gnarled tools. It made them innocent of almost everything that existed beyond their own horizon" (p. 77). A distortion is present. Work is in some way overemphasized to the stunting of human growth; through it, under the paternalism of the parish priest, personal autonomy of the mature human being is out of reach. As a result, the French villagers of Saint-Marc appear like obedient children, rigidly bound to a way of life which is closed to the outside world, suspicious of it. A high degree of conformity thus emerges, enabling MacLennan to juxtapose ironically the worlds of the French parish and of the English elite, and to find them similar to their rigidity, closed thinking, in their greater or lesser dehumanization through limitation — by lack of experiential and intellectual education in the French, by lack of contact with the springs of reality in the English.

Because of their greater separation from the life standard in the novel, the English elite are handled less gently than the French. The tone becomes increasingly more satirical as the pictures of Huntly McQueen and the funeral of Sir Rupert Irons are presented in Parts III and IV. MacLennan satirically associates an aura of religion with Huntly, who communes daily with the spirit of his mother (p. 116). There seems a subtle parallelism made here with the devotion of the French, which is ambiguous,

hardly flattering, but highly useful to a thesis which leans strongly away from emphasis on institutional religion. The implication merely hovers about references to the mother's portrait, dwindling appreciably in the picture of Huntly's night prayers which bear no reference to a conduct of life centred only in the power acumen of the man. However, the idea of a religion separated from life is kept alive in the ambivalence of his appearance, again, in a way that is derisive. Somehow this religion shades just too easily into "devout" pursuit of perfection in the business and social rituals, which leads inevitably to the hollow spectacle of Irons' funeral. It is the "religion" of the city, opposed to the religion of the land.

Each great city had some special way of demonstrating its communal spirit and showing its face to the world. London used the Lord Mayor's Show, New York the procession of a hero up Broadway, the French section of Montreal the parade on the day of Saint-Jean Baptiste. But in McQueen's opinion, his own Montreal reserved itself for an occasion more personal and significant. Only on the death of one of their own number did the real controllers of the nation, the businessmen who were as unobtrusive as a hierarchy, gather in force before the public eye. (pp. 392-93)

The quietly barbed intensity of "personal and significant" in this context defines the long distance McQueen's opinion is from personality and life and genuine significance. Terrifyingly, he is at home in this solitude of living death. In contrast to the "deep split" within Athanase (p. 79), experience has been for him satisfactorily absorbed. His rise from obscurity was straight and satisfying — and, most condemnatory in terms of the book.

Reminders of French devotion in connection with Huntly, the many points of similarity (not denying more explicit and more weighty differences) between Huntly's regimen and Father Beaubien's, between aspects of Huntly's affectivity and that of Marius, bring difficult and sensitive areas into a juxtaposition that reveals with discernment possibilities of delusion, of self-bankruptcy that can be embraced in all righteousness. Janet Methuen

provides a purer example of such delusion. She is separated from Yardley by a barrier which, pathetically, she tries to break, but where she has "not the slightest chance of succeeding" (p. 348) because she is irrevocably closed by her real commitment to unreality. Since she is Yardley's daughter, the potential for a full life is present. But the deadening effect of Methuen protocol has done its work. The woman who can sacrifice herself in the cause of feeling worthy of the British (p. 112) cannot shed a tear at her husband's death and funeral, is a painful cause of tears to her serene father, can encourage tears of unjustified self-pity (p. 398). The gargoyles of the "Methuen" mansions are apt symbols.

The conformity which is the hallmark of this English colony is insisted upon repeatedly — in the proper dress and decorum of the business giants, in the code of behaviour of the Methuens, in the repeated observation on the part of the narrator. Perhaps the utter sterility is best summed up in Heather's projection of married life with Alan Farquhar. It is a way of life which, properly adjusted to income, would seem typical of that of many Canadians — a unity in one kind of solitude! Apparently no depth, no real life; just, ironically, an ordered way of "moving almost accidentally . . . between darkness and darkness" (p. 200), between birth and death. But this is Athanase's insight, one which came to him as a result of encountering the real though transient life-power of Kathleen, an encounter which drew him unwittingly and ineffectively toward the explanation of the deep split within his personality. He had tried unsuccessfully to bridge the solitudes between the English and French. He ended up in the impossible situation of being by nature rooted in the creative spirit at the basis of French life, but being by choice and by practical reality in the removed world of the English elite:

His nature had always demanded a new idea of itself,
and when he had his vigour, women had provided it.
Now no woman could satisfy him, nor he a woman.

Nothing was left him but principles and ideas. 'God,' he thought, 'is that all there is to it?' And then it occurred to him that perhaps all wars and revolutions and movements of history started from sources just as trivial and undignified. He saw the people in their churches and nationalisms huddling together under flags and banners in desperate attempts to escape the knowledge of their own predicament. They were all silhouettes moving almost accidentally for seventy years or so over the ridge of the world between darkness and darkness. Among them he saw himself. (p. 200)

Athanase had always desired a vital, growing awareness of truth, of reality. Here he perceives the unconscious delusion of, seemingly, the majority of men; and, tragically, he who sees is one of the number. The potential of a Yardley has been frustrated in Athanase, just as it has been frustrated somehow in all lives caught in the predicament of having nothing but "principles and ideas."

Athanase Tallard remains basically throughout the novel a true French-Canadian. His problem with authority (p. 79) measures a perception that is not only of the head, but of the heart. He cares to the extent that he risks his political future in the attempt to cushion the shock of conscription for Quebec. And because, ironically, he does not function with the cold logic of McQueen, he fails to perceive the futility of his vote. Clever enough, perceptive, Athanase presents the sad spectacle of arrested development. His plight merely extends and projects the inevitable failure which, good will or no, attends the attempt to compel rather than to invite. For, again ironically, Athanase is only another Father Beaubien in another area, wielding authority, despite professed intention of the common good, in a way which amounts to flag-waving in Yardley's terms (pp. 69, 46). His artificial solitude is in existence long before the cold realization quoted above, long before he tastes something of the agonized bewilderment of Lear on the heath as he gyrates in Saint James Street (p. 217).

Athanase's relation to women is at once life-giving and abortive. It partakes of the character of Denis Morey's

attitude — appreciative enjoyment of beauty, a reverence which is continually amazed at and thrills to the harmony, the music, found in a Kathleen. But she too is of the moment, unproductive of strong, rooted growth of a whole being, finally inducing restlessness, rootlessness, wandering; she is of the city, not of the land. Athanase handled the memories of the women he had known "like a collector caressing old glass" (p. 75). In his attempt to readjust his life after the final encounter with Huntly, he again seeks refuge in his dreams, which come at this time to his shocked sensibility as a vision:

Then the door in his brain seemed to swing wide open on hinges to disclose what looked like the atrium of an enormous museum. With dreamlike speed the corridor filled with men and women he had once known. God, had he known all those women? Where were they now? What were their names? But it is unreasonable, it is highly fantastic, that I could have known this woman so well and not be able to tell you her name The people moved silently about in the atrium: children, teachers, priests, farmers, lawyers, politicians, judges, soldiers, and among them the women. But it is not correct, they are all dressed the same way, their clothes are all of the same fashion and some of these women are surely dead, they must be, for it is not reasonable they should all have lived as long as I have, that is not reasonable at all. . . . (p. 226)

The impersonality, the desire for dominance or power (the real goal of the Montreal elite), for selfishly using others to attain his own ends, clear in the vision, do not become clear to Athanase. In this negative use of the dominant cavern motif is revealed his frustration of life.

Nevertheless, Athanase is seen to possess a half-way kind of communication with nature. This is shown also by his quick and appreciative enjoyment of the land through the sense of smell, through his ability to feel "the communion close" between Blanchard and himself (p. 98). It is seen particularly after he relives the experience of his healing, life-giving encounter with Kathleen on the night of Marie-Adèle's death. On the original night, significantly, "he had swum upward out of death" (p. 169).

On the night of reliving the experience he spoke words from the depths of his being: "From somewhere out of his subconscious a new set of words came. They were quite unpremeditated. 'No one should be frightened of God'" (p. 171). A similar though less profound occurrence took place earlier when, in talking to Yardley, he sensed "the loneliness in the man" (p. 25), and, respecting it, became opened to the extent that he, with Yardley, was "conscious of a real pleasure in the discovery of the other" (p. 31). Again, just before the museum vision, he articulated a related insight: "Incredible, that for most of a lifetime a man could imagine that beauty was enough, or that women could satisfy the ultimate solitude" (p. 200). The ultimate solitude — the depths out of which he had swum the night of Marie-Adèle's death, which he had sensed and respected in Yardley, out of which he had formed "a new set of words." This is the stuff of reality in the novel. It is a foreshadowing of the common experience, the carefully guarded inner darkness Paul fears to spill, out of which wells up truth from dark creativity. It is projected in the novel through water as a symbol of life, appearing centrally as sea and river, sustained through the cavern and darkness motifs used positively, carried forward primarily in three central episodes which concentrate the main lines of what is the internal backbone of the novel, which unifies it and justifies its form: (1) Yardley's vision at the end of Chapter 7 in Part I, (2) the boathouse episode in Chapter 38 of Part III, and (3) Chapter 42 of Part IV where Paul's words connect the theme to a clarification of "facts" as felt knowledge. Extending the meaning of these central sections are the complexes of symbol and image mentioned early in this paper. The whole central theme is comprehensively dramatized in the analysis of art — of Heather's painting and of literature in Paul's two novels. Finally, by enclosing the novel, Chapters 2 and 52 initiate and conclude this central theme on the allegorical level through geography: Canada, pos-

sessing her own dark unknown, the tundra, wastefully spilling life back into the sea through the wound of her polarity, nevertheless takes steps toward an integrated self-awareness.

The core of the central passages by which the novel is unified describes Yardley's reliving an experience so moving that "he could never forget it" (p. 69). It is obscure, welling up from a deeper obscurity:

As a sailor, and then as ship's master, he had known solitude in strange places. He was persuaded that all knowledge is like a painted curtain hung across the door of the mind to conceal it from a mystery so darkly suggestive that no one can face it for long. Of ultimate solitude he had no fear, for he never let himself think about it. But he knew that if he once started, fear would be there.

Once in the tropics he had moored his ship in the lee of a promontory hundreds of miles from any charted habitation. Through a whole afternoon he had waited while some of the crew went ashore under the second mate to look for water. Leaning over the taffrail he had watched the fish gliding through ten fathoms of sunlit water below. Sharks and barracuda moved in their three-dimensional element, self-centred, beautiful, dangerous and completely aimless, coming out from the water-filled cavern hidden beneath the promontory and slipping under the ship's keel, fanning themselves for seconds under the rudder, then circling back into the cavern again. A moment he saw them in the golden water and then they were gone, and the water was as if they had never been there. The first mate had come to him for an order and had broken his contemplation, but the memory of the hour never left him. Self-centred, beautiful, dangerous and aimless: that was how they had been, and he could never forget it. (pp. 68-69)

There are many key words and allusions here which reverberate throughout the whole novel: in terms of the sea as a symbol of life, the fact that Yardley as sailor, and later as ship's master, had known *solitude* in *strange* places; his theory of knowledge as a *painted* curtain in relation to the discussion of art and Paul's use of "facts"; the function and placement of *mind* in relation to this solitude; the uncharted nature of the situation, the fact that an individual is contemplating, the seeking of water elsewhere when there is present another "water-filled" source,

the presence of danger allied to beauty, beauty which has not yet received an orientation; the ambiguity of "self-centred." The whole passage has deeply suggestive affinities for the story and meaning of the encounter of Jesus with the woman of Samaria (John 4:1-42).

Strikingly, in this conspicuous passage the fish claim first attention. However, on a level which illuminates the structure of the book, unifying it, and projecting solution while at the same time preserving the polarity of the Canadian situation, the cavern, not the fish, is of central importance. It may be taken as a symbol of the generative darkness in every man out of which insights well up. These insights in being brought to the surface of consciousness are the broken bits of reality experienced by the returning soldiers (p. 204), are elements of the inner tension of Paul which he and others like him choose to lock inside "to prevent what mattered from *spilling out*" (p. 297 — italics mine, here and throughout this paper). These insights, when brought to consciousness, form the content of utterances of men like Yardley. When fixed in right form in line, shape, colour, word, sound, they are art. Furthermore, in this vision of Yardley we have a symbolic representation of the central insight on which the book is posited. It suggests a view of life quite in contrast to the mental fabrications which produce Huntly's "logical feel" (p. 107), for it objectifies Yardley's standard of "felt knowledge" (pp. 204, 356, 411).

The central vision is Yardley's, through whom the obscure meaning is clarified and diffused by his very being. He is the sailor, the master of his ship, the one who never loses contact with the sea, as is figured by his use of the spyglass (p. 137). He is the resonator of the Odysseus theme in the book. He is a perfect embodiment of the truth individually learned later by Heather and Paul — that "home" is in people, in experiencing the common reality at the depths of being — reality dark and obscure, fraught with danger and beauty, that induces loneliness

and fear. In the novel's terms this reality alone is the only real ground for integration; and, always, integration is in some form the expression of love. As Yardley tells Athanase on their first meeting as friends:

A sea-faring man keeps himself steady by thinking he's got a home some place ashore. But when he goes ashore for good, he generally finds the only home he's got is the friends he's made. And man, they're as like as not scattered all over the world. (p. 15)

Thus Yardley, the citizen of the world, is the only kind of Englishman who can enter the typical French village, Saint-Marc, and be at home. Where Athanase fails both here and in Ottawa, he, by his receptive understanding and tolerance, effectively breaks down prejudice which henceforth exists only in the French mind:

If he [Yardley] lived in Saint-Marc for the rest of his life he would always be regarded as a foreigner, but there was no doubt that those who met him wanted to feel free to like him. (p. 22)

He lives what we recognize as understanding. But this is a free recognition on a deeper level of the tense fear which Athanase saw as futile, the fear causing people to huddle together in churches and nationalisms under flags and banners (p. 200). On this deeper level is a sensing of the darkness of the cavern, which, while holding life, inspires fear because of the unknown, the uncharted, the unpainted truth which makes demands moment by moment on naked vulnerability. It is the kind of living experienced by Heather and Paul after their marriage — which resists the mathematics and planning which are possible at the level of the mind.

Perhaps the best episode to draw to itself all these pre-suppositions, which explains the pain that causes Yardley's tears and prevents his daughter from crying, is that where he goes to confirm Janet's informing on Marius. The whole of Chapter 24 is deeply relevant, containing Yardley's judgment of the reason for her action: "You don't understand these people here. You never tried to"

(p. 186). The final paragraphs give the basis for such needed understanding, explain Yardley's behaviour toward Janet, and reveal his own painful learning. They also give the essence of the central theme of the book:

Yardley removed his glasses and wiped his eyes. Then he rubbed the glasses slowly on the end of his necktie. His voice was soft and sad. 'It wasn't right, Janet, what you did. It wasn't a natural thing to do. Not all the wars in the world could make a thing like that right.'

He put on his glasses again, slowly hooking them behind his big ears. Janet continued to look at her father severely, her face not so much angry as stubbornly uncomprehending and righteous. Realizing that there was no sense in talking to her any more, he got up and limped to the door, closed it behind him and went downstairs. The tears were still in his eyes, and as he went out into the hot air of the afternoon he felt more empty than he could ever remember having felt before. He had lost something he had always assumed to be his. (p. 187)

Obviously, something that matters has been spilled. Consequently, Yardley sees vaguely that some solitudes cannot be bridged. He begins to sense the barrier neither he nor Janet can remove without basic change in her — because she is closed in righteousness. She does not understand and does not try to (p. 186). Janet seems like rock. The situation forcibly recalls the description where the effect of water is negated in the book's second paragraph when a half-continent is wounded in its heart:

Nowhere has nature wasted herself as she has here. There is enough water in the Saint Lawrence alone to irrigate half of Europe, but the river pours right out of the continent into the sea. No amount of water can irrigate stones, and most of Quebec is solid rock. It is as though millions of years back in geologic time a sword had been plunged through the rock from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes and savagely wrenched out again, and the pure water of the continental reservoir, unclouded and almost useless to farmers, drains untouched away. In summer the cloud packs pass over it in soft, cumulus, pacific towers, endlessly forming and dissolving to make a welter of movement about the sun. In winter when there is no storm the sky is generally empty, blue and glittering over the ice and snow, and the sun stares out of it like a cyclops' eye. (p. 1)

Here, and wherever the tom-tom or drum-beat occurs throughout the novel, would seem to be a reminder that civilization has barely begun for Canada. This tart appraisal appears again in Paul's insight: "Both traditions [the French and the English] were so mature they had become almost decadent, while Canada herself was still raw" (p. 365).

The situation also brings to mind the way the water motif is carried through all those passages which relate to the apprehension of reality; or, as the novel says it, to understanding, to touching. We have noted the word "spilling" used to mean misunderstanding; that is, a loss of felt knowledge freely proffered, but either rejected or not valued, as in the Yardley-Janet confrontation above. In such a situation we read of Paul:

The tension rose to his throat and he got up and began pacing the room. It was impossible to sit still any longer and watch her. She made him want to talk about himself, for a few minutes to break the solitude. To change the subject, he told her that he'd been given a berth on a ship that was sailing in a week from Halifax. He stood looking down at her, and then *it overwhelmed him like a bursting wave*, the quality he had always found in Yardley, the quality that had permitted his nature to unfold without being struck back, without spilling. She met his glance and held it . . . (p. 311)

And, shortly after, with a continuation of the eye motif — where there is no staring, as with the cyclops' eye (p. 2), no hardness nor distance as with Huntly (p. 213), no isolation as with Daphne (p. 259) — he checked out the above insight: "Paul returned to the sofa, and when he sat down he looked into her grey eyes. Had he intruded himself on her? Had he lost anything? Searching her face, he knew it was all right" (p. 314). Athanase's mind is likened, appropriately, to "water coloured by changing weather" (p. 235). Paul let the sensations which came to him as he stood on the deck of the departing freighter "fall into his mind like rain" (p. 236). Heather's recall of Marius comes "swimming vaguely out of her memory" (p. 304). Yardley realizes the fragility of

beauty when the knowledge "broke over him in a wave" (p. 68). When "the artificial pulling of the two races within [Paul] ceased, the sediment settled in his mind" (p. 331).

In terms of this water symbol and of the generative darkness figured basically by the cavern, MacLennan gathers through Books I, II, and III the various strands of calm, receptivity, peace, felt awareness, genuine respect, trust, choice of action and word within the felt knowledge of one's own nature and the rightness of the situation, to a kind of culminating reflector of all these aspects in the second central episode of the basic theme. Here, within the womblike darkness of the boathouse, where the sea-medium is sustained through the comparison of the canoes to "mammal-fish" (p 323), is conceived a new awareness of the meaning of life:

He stepped forward and came against her. Then she was in his arms, her face straining up to his, her lips soft under his own. Everything else was blotted out. He had never known this before, this sense of life in a girl, *the essence of life stirring under him in a darkness so deep there was nothing else there*, except her rich, generous self a part of him. (p. 322)

Here sexual union becomes the most perfect expression of the central theme, revealing the positive character of the solitude that encompasses reality, the sense of depths yet unknown, the sense of wonderful mystery from which life springs. But fear, allied to the element of danger which Yardley envisioned in the depths, is present. It is suggested not only in Heather's reaction, but also in Paul's: "His *mind groped* out of the darkness like a diver *struggling* to the surface" (p. 322). However, the experience, though complete for the moment, is merely a beginning. When Heather and Paul issue from the boathouse, from "the nothingness" (p. 323), like newly created beings, "They stood still, side by side, looking up to a sky *swimming* with stars" (p. 323). The life within partakes of the life without; the possibilities are endless. The solitude of the individual has been bridged.

There are several important points here: (1) the use of sex as a symbol of the positive attitude necessary for any communication which is enduring, productive of growth, expansive; (2) the idea that such felt knowledge has to be attained individually, as is shown in the final scene of Chapter 38 where Paul reminds Heather of his inability at that time to commit himself; (3) as a consequence of both these points, that a more peaceful awareness of self precedes greater understanding; (4) the picturing of the mind as having descended into the depths. Therefore, the insights that we shall see defined by Paul as facts are not impulses of the emotions, as was Athanase's predominant behaviour pattern. They are, rather, emanations of truth from the deepest self (self-centred, as in Yardley's vision), products of the whole human being, associated with natural, ongoing creation, as it is here.

All these points are operative in Chapter 42, which functions primarily to clarify the meaning of the key words "facts," "knowledge," and "learning." First of all, Heather is seen happily, peaceful in a felt awareness of personal growth. It is like being reborn (p. 354). Ironically, though, the reader is aware that she has much to learn: that the past does not drain away, as she thinks, but like Paul's past (p. 331) has to be healed when confrontation becomes possible, as it does in the Maine episode; that a time-shell is not really possible; that learning is ongoing. Paul perceptively reveals a similar problem when he says of his sense of finally being at home: "It's a dangerous illusion . . . I still have a long way to go" (p. 358). Secondly, despite the growth in their relationship, the joy they find in bridging their personal solitudes, they still experience separation. The idea is dramatized in the imagery characteristic of the central theme, bringing out the allegorical implications in the mountain image:

Suddenly she felt frightened. Did all girls feel the same after they had committed themselves to a man and then realized how easily he could forget them? For nearly an hour he stood on the beach using his other language,

sharing something with these men she could watch only from the outside. She was terribly conscious of their different races and languages then. But after a time he returned. Joy ran through her nerves like electricity as she saw him coming back over the stones to her. He took her hand, and the moment he touched her no differences existed. They began to climb the Pic de l'Aurore, moving up through a meadow foaming with the largest daisies she had ever seen, the cliff sheer on their right, and overhead huge clouds sailing in a high wind, gulls poised in the air-slip over the land's edge. When she tried to sing, the wind blew her voice down her throat. (p. 355)

Impressionistically the scene recovers and activates Yardley's vision of the cavern and fish. The situation is inverted. There is a mere suggestion of the continuity between sea and air, as there was when the sky was "swimming with stars" (p. 323). The gulls, described as "beautiful," "aloof," and "cruelly impotent," take the place of the fish. Heather and Paul gradually emerge from the sea, while still being in it, to make their way to the mountain top. Here, then, in miniature, is an abstract of the solution of Canadian polarity as it is dramatized in the novel.

But perhaps the central point of the chapter is contained in the rather too obvious and awkward attempt to clarify the meaning of "fact." This term assumes progressively more importance as the novel goes to its conclusion. In the distinction lies the guarantee of truth, of stability, of freedom; for, in essence, each "fact," if rightly understood, is a bit of the greater truth figured in the dark mystery of the cavern. In the following passage the fact of Paul's love is given in the language of "knowing":

'I woke up knowing something,' he said. 'I'd better tell you.'

'What?'

He paused a moment. 'I'm in love with you.'

It was strange how he said it. The statement was utterly factual, made in the tone he always saved for what came out of his bones. He had never said it before. She had known he was in love with her, but she had been left to wonder how much he realized it. (p. 356)

'For always,' he said slowly. 'That's what I woke up knowing. I'd never believed it possible but it is. I know I'm in love with you for always, no matter what happens, and that I'm not just myself but you too, and I thought I'd better tell you.'

After a long silence she whispered, 'Are you sorry?'
'Not about facts.' (p. 357)

Although the process is one that has been noted many times already in this paper, here, and in the rest of the novel, there is a greater insistence on accepting finally only what has come to consciousness as being true. Other implications are present. The whole context projects the likelihood of misunderstanding despite deep unity, of separation in the face of a real desire for complete understanding. As presented, the underlying cause of such division is a difference in personal growth, again an element which is very much part of the central theme. In this connection also, attention is drawn to Canada's sense of inferiority (p. 357), as it has been before (pp. 205, 323).

Yardley's theory that all knowledge is like a painted curtain extends naturally into the discussion of art in painting and literature. Facts and knowledge in the sense implied above form the basis of Paul's criticism of Heather's work. He brings out in context the need for factual content from within, not, as Heather has it, from information gleaned mainly by hearsay. Paul speaks in several passages words which are but another way of saying what has been seen in the three central episodes:

If she wanted to paint, he said, she must look inside herself. If the mess of the world had crawled inside, paint it, because then it was hers. But never pretend it was there when she knew damn well it wasn't She had one source to draw from, herself. An artist had nothing worth offering the world, absolutely nothing, except distilled parts of himself.

.....
'But it takes time,' he added. 'It's got to grow inside first.' (p. 310)

Ironically, Paul needs the complementary lesson. Where Heather had to learn to paint only the content that welled up from the depths of her being, he

had to learn that the form of his writing had the same source. It was not until he was touched by Heather's insight that a novel is a celebration of life (p. 364) that his difficulty with form surfaced. When that form took shape later, the description of the process and of the product is in perfect agreement with the same process we have been noting:

Out of Marius, out of his own life, out of the feeling he had in his bones for his own province and the others surrounding it, the theme of his new book began to emerge . . . Its material and symbols lay ready in his subconscious: the dilemma that had nearly strangled him all his life and which at last he had managed to escape. He could view it now as though it belonged to another person; with pity, with some tenderness, but clearly and at a distance. Outlines of scenes he would later create followed each other inevitably, one by one out of his subconscious. He picked up ten pages covered with scrawled notes, and as he reread them he found that each scene had retained in his mind the transparent clarity of still water. (pp. 375-76)

And in the process of writing, where the water image shades into the land, just as within himself the water image had shaded into bones, Paul knows he is writing a good novel. By the same token MacLennan projects a picture of Canada that recalls the characterization of Athanase, even to the repetition of the final paragraph of Book I where Frenette's song was "more than Frenette, for both music and words were racial memories" (p. 201):

Out of the society which had produced and frustrated him, which in his own way he had learned to accept, he knew that he was at last beating out a harmony. His fingers seemed to be feeling down through the surface of character and action to the roots of the country itself. In all his life, he had never seen an English-Canadian and a French-Canadian hostile to each other face to face. When they disliked, they disliked entirely in the group. And the result of these two group-legends was a Canada oddly naive, so far without any real villains, without overt cruelty or criminal memories, a country strangely innocent in its groping individual common sense, intent on doing the right thing in the way some children are, tongue-tied because it felt others would not be interested in what it had to say; loyal, skilled and proud, race-memories lonely in great spaces. (p. 377)

And so, through Paul, MacLennan projects a hope that corrects and supports Athanase's basic vision. Fulfillment requires time on the part of Canada, where understanding of the deep self that is symbolized by the tundra (p. 2), by the uncharted spaces that are not sensed at Montreal where is found the heartbeat, has yet to surface. Canada has to realize this space, just as Heather has to, in order to make a well-drawn painting right (p. 307). And this, despite the howling, the cracking, the roaring (p. 2), the signal of the danger that attends the attainment of facts, as is repeatedly presented in the novel by the motif of the keening wind, the howling dog or wolf. Solitude, loneliness, are part of human nature, individual and collective.

As has been seen in the discussion of Saint-Marc and of the English power centres, particularly as related to Huntly McQueen, religion has been subtly associated with the central position of the novel. We have seen the central symbol linked with Genesis Creation in Chapters 38 and 42. Significantly, the perversion of Genesis Creation in the McQueen and Irons society is part of Paul's vision (p. 339). A further indication of the nature and function of religion within the novel is seen where Yardley describes his life as being religious, again in the context of sea and cave imagery:

One time I was shipwrecked. Not much older than you, Paul, I guess I was. We foundered off the ledges of Halifax County in a January gale and all the crew went down with the ship except me and the dog. He was a big Newfoundland, and he swam ashore with me hanging on to his hair. Me being a little fella then, it wasn't so hard to do. He dragged me out of the water across the ice claspers and the rocks into a sort of cave, and then he lay there in the mouth of it stopping the wind, and when fishermen who'd seen the mast head sticking above water came around in a dory a day later looking for us, he barked till they could hear him. Been kind of a religious man ever since that day, Paul! (p. 242)

So the existence of superior power, of direction of man's life beyond and outside of himself, is recognized by the novel's spokesman, Yardley. An interesting and basic implication of the novel's projection of reality is suggested

when quotations from Yardley's reflections on life just before his death are juxtaposed to two others — Father Beaubien's sense of God, and Athanase's new set of words. The basis for such juxtaposition lies in the association of all examples with the central thematic symbolism and related imagery:

. . . and the whole church shadow-haunted, and so still he could hear his own blood pulsing in his ears: the sound of God. (p. 4)

From somewhere out of his unconscious a new set of words came. They were quite unpremeditated. 'No one should be afraid of God.' (p. 171)

But the wonder was before him [Yardley] now, it was around him everywhere, it was within him, and he wished without any pain or regret that he could have just a little more time with it. (p. 351)

. . . life everywhere and in all things and in such infinite manifestation that the brain reeled unless the harmony of the whole entered the mind to reconcile you to your own ignorance and to beautify the pattern in which you yourself were a part. (pp. 351-52)

A myriad of motes of light swarmed through a gathering darkness, the pain intensified until he tried to cry out, then faded away out of its own violence. He was conscious of opening his lips to speak, of his tongue feeling a sudden moisture on them, of wanting to tell someone that these motes of light were living organisms and that he was thankful he had been able to see them. His head fell back on the pillow and his breathing stopped. (p. 352)

Again the language is suggestive while preserving an obscurity that emphasizes mystery. Within the context of a reality that finds its only source of life within the person, within people, it would seem to invite the inference that the deepest self is none other than God, Who is greater, above and beyond each man, all men, and all created things. Paul's attention to Genesis Creation in his first novel (p. 339) would support this, as would the whole discussion on art. The apparent contradiction between the association of fear in Yardley's vision and Athanase's new set of words might be resolved by regarding fear in the Yardley context as more the inability of the finite to

sustain for long new and deep contact with the infinite (p. 68). The diction applied to Paul in Chapter 38 seems to warrant such a suggestion: "His mind groped out of the darkness like a diver struggling to the surface" (p. 322).

The neutral tone toward religious persuasion, primarily Roman Catholicism, and Christianity in general, falls into line with the above inferences, as does the balancing emphasis given to Greek culture. When Janet raises the point of Paul's religion, Yardley is concerned only with Paul's living his own truth, with his becoming himself. The religious denomination is not the point with him:

He was a Catholic, and then he was a Protestant, and then he was a Catholic again, and between them they just about made a football out of him. What he is now I don't know because I've never asked him, but I do know he's got a personal religion of his own, and if Heather wants to find out where he goes to church all she's got to do is ask him. (p. 346)

The references to Christianity in Paul's vision (pp. 173-74), in Paul's likening the indifferent magnates of the western world to Pilate (pp. 338-39), and in Yardley's new comprehension of the plea of Jesus for tolerance (p. 350), in no way conflict in the novel with the finding of God within all men. Rather, they strengthen the basic theme of unity while actively rejecting war in all senses. They are drawn together by the many references to Greek culture and poetry, particularly as seeming to culminate, not in actual occurrence, but in Paul's imaginative union with Heather amid the whiteness of the Parthenon (p. 335), which has represented for him a symbolic goal from the days of his boyhood (p. 233). This scene by its universal roots gives a thrust quite above and beyond arguments regarding denominations, symbolically representing victory in whatever path to truth has been chosen. Hence it gathers together all the mountain references found in the novel, substituting for them, inviting to victory.

It is interesting to note at this point a secondary structure of the book whereby both the mountain and water sy-

mbolism, particularly as presented in the thematic abstract (p. 355), are part of the form. First, the ungainly division of the book into Parts draws attention to the massive base of racial prejudice which has to be climbed before the more ethereal position of Paul and Heather can be scaled with the hope of eventual union in moral freedom. Secondly, as the narrative progresses, the component aspects of solution to the Canadian dilemma gradually surface to present a coherent understanding of the deep truths involved. Thus the overall structure of the book not only preserves a representation of Canadian separation overlying deep unity; it also in the form given by the proportion of its parts, as shaped by the development of the plot, mirrors in two ways the main aspects of solution proposed throughout the novel.

Two Solitudes can thus be seen to be strongly unified. Its concept is brilliant in scope, deeply relevant in its realism. The novel *has* to fail to operate as a dynamic unit out of artistic necessity. However, the artistic failure through awkwardness, a failure ironically related to the static quality of Paul's first novel, is undoubtedly true. The cleavage between the two halves of the novel obtrudes in Athanase's way, instead of illuminating in Yardley's. Despite this, though, *Two Solitudes* is rich and provocative. It shares much of the mystery of the cavern.

NOTES

¹Hugh MacLennan, *The Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967; rpt. 1972), p. 153. Subsequent page references in my text are to this edition.